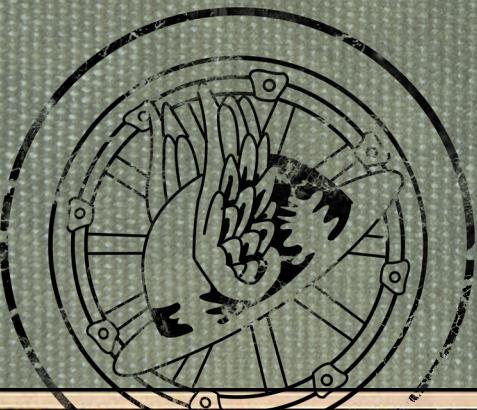


CONVOY

1919



Centennial of the 1919 Transcontinental Motor Convoy



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THURSDAY, AUGUST 29 - SUNDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2019

ARTS AND CULTURE EL DORADO • CONFIDENCE LAB • PLACERVILLE, CALIFORNIA

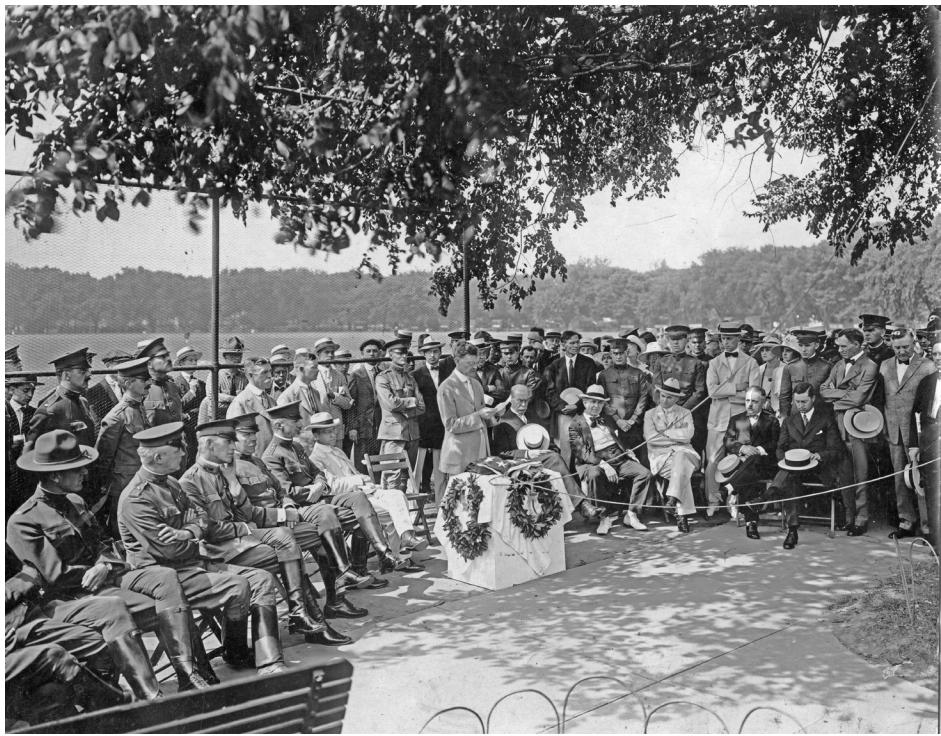
INTRODUCTION

If you have ever taken a road trip, it is hard to believe that the United States freeway system hasn't always been in place, that we haven't always had long stretches of continuous, maintained and uniformly level asphalt connecting all major cities and towns. It is difficult to imagine that there used to be no double-yellow or dashed white lines painted on that blacktop to keep drivers in their lanes, let them know when it is safe to pass, or warn of merging traffic. Roads are integral to life in America – from vacationing, to work, to the transportation of goods such as food, raw materials, and, yes, even more cars. Roads have literally paved the way for the current American lifestyle.

But they haven't always been here. What must life have been like before all this? Back when a road was simply a glorified dirt trail, which might have gotten you to your destination, or might have claimed your vehicle as its own in a patch of particularly thick mud. Back in 1919, Major Dwight D. Eisenhower found out first-hand when he and the Motor Transport Corps took what was possibly the world's worst road trip across America after the end of the First World War. The purpose of the 1919 transcontinental Army convoy was to test vehicles and dramatize the need for improved roads in the nation. Because of the sorry state of the nation's roads, the convoy averaged only five miles per hour from Washington, D.C., to San Francisco, California. When Eisenhower became president, the improvement of highways became a signature issue for his presidential term.

One hundred years later, *Convoy 1919* celebrates and explores what Eisenhower and many others faced during that journey. The exhibition includes photographs taken by Motor Transport Corps members from the personal collection of President Eisenhower, and treasured photos lent by the Celio Family, one of the oldest families in El Dorado County. They show how the road system wasn't a carefully planned network, but actually loosely connected dirt and gravel paths. You can see the challenges caused by such primitive roads, from getting stuck in the mud almost daily, to long stretches with no amenities, and sheer cliff sides without any railing to keep a vehicle from tumbling down. But there are also the happy receptions greeting "the boys" as they roll into one town after another across America.

So come, take a step back in time to before Highway 50 was built, to when a band of military vehicles passed across the United States and through our own backyard here in Placerville. Come celebrate the centennial of the 1919 Transcontinental Motor Convoy – and maybe a few potholes won't seem so bad.



Zero Mile Marker at Start of Convoy, 1919
Photograph
Image Courtesy of Eisenhower
Presidential Library



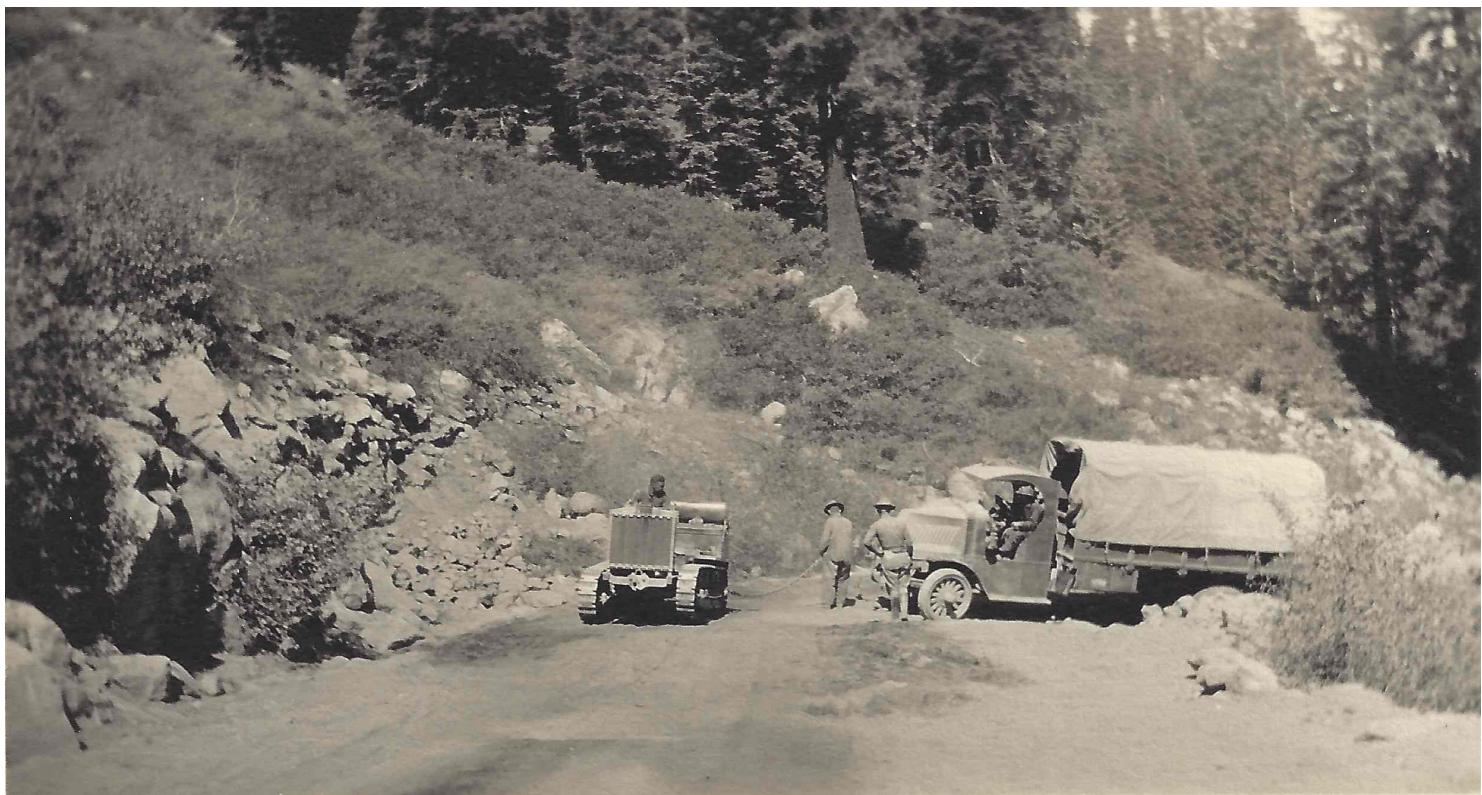
Start of Trans-Continental Tour, General Wright, 1919
Photograph
Image Courtesy of Library of Congress Prints
and Photographs Division



Disabled Convoy Truck Towed into Meyers, 1919
Photograph by Camilla Giamboni Celio
Image Courtesy of the Celio Family



Convoy Vehicle Being Towed Up Grade, 1919
Photograph by Camilla Giamboni Celio
Image Courtesy of the Celio Family



Convoy Troops Greeted in Meyers, 1919
Photograph by Camilla Giamboni Celio
Image Courtesy of the Celio Family



The Worst of It, 1919

Photograph

Convoy Personnel in Meyers, 1919

Photograph by Camilla

Giamboni Celio

Image Courtesy of the Celio Family

Image Courtesy of Eisenhower
Presidential Library



Another Day on the Road, 1919

Photograph

Image Courtesy of Eisenhower Presidential Library

THE TRANSCONTINENTAL MOTOR CONVOY

As American doughboys returned to the United States from Europe at the end of World War I, the U.S. was focusing attention on the Japanese occupation of several Pacific islands, putting them closer to American shores. Fearful they could sabotage railroad lines in advance of an attack, military planners needed alternative means for moving troops and supplies to the vulnerable West Coast. The motorized movement of personnel and materials seemed the best solution, but it would present numerous challenges. Men and machines needed to be tested to see what was possible.

The military's interest in testing its capabilities coincided with increasing public and commercial demands for better roads in the United States. It was at this nexus of needs that the idea for the Transcontinental Motor Convoy of 1919 took hold and prompted the organization of its transcontinental journey.

The objectives were:

- To show War Department support for construction of high-quality roads for economic and military purposes.
- To create recruitment opportunities for the U.S. Army's Motor Transport Corps.
- To celebrate the country's war victory.
- To study U.S. road conditions and to evaluate the performance of military equipment and personnel in a variety of environmental conditions.

The Transcontinental Motor Convoy – or “truck train” as it was called – was led by Lt. Col. Charles W. McClure, Expedition Commander; Capt. Bernard H. McMahon, Train Commander; and civilian Henry C. Ostermann of the Lincoln Highway Association, who was named the convoy’s pilot and would lead the expedition in his Packard touring car. Trailing behind would be 39 officers and 258 enlisted men in 81 vehicles. Among their number were Harley-Davidson motorcycles whose riders would scout road conditions, “Trailmobile” kitchens outfitted to feed troops, a rolling medical clinic staffed by doctors and dentists, and numerous Mack trucks that hauled everything from innertube patches to spare engines.

The convoy began its journey from Camp Meigs, Washington, D.C., on the morning of July 7, 1919. First stop was Frederick, Maryland, where the troops spent the night in tents that would be their homes for the duration. The 46-mile trip took just over seven hours to complete. Anyone dismayed at the slow progress would see worse as the convoy moved west and road conditions deteriorated.

By the time the convoy reached East Palestine, Ohio, on July 12, problems had already begun to plague the expedition. Halts by vehicles were commonplace, as drivers pulled out of line to make carburetor adjustments, clean sparkplugs, and address other issues. It was discovered that tools supplied for the convoy were of inferior quality, and drivers had begun complaining that vehicles had not been properly tested prior to departure.

Arriving in Chicago Heights, Illinois, at 3:00 p.m. on July 19, Capt. McMahon called for a rest period, hoping, perhaps, that it would settle the enlisted men, most of whom were raw recruits. Officers were having trouble maintaining

discipline, which was leading to such infractions as “unseemly conduct” and the “excessive speeding of trucks.”

Through Illinois and Indiana road conditions were good but dusty, and major problems were few, nothing more serious than one of the motorcycle riders suffering minor injuries when his bike went down.

In Denison, Iowa, where the convoy arrived on July 26, the expedition members discovered that a temporary shower had been set up. The convoy’s engines had yet to cool before the troops were lined up to take their turn.

In Nebraska the convoy encountered its first major delay. On August 2, outside of Lexington, heavy rains began to fall, and vehicles were soon driving through axle-deep “gumbo mud.” Twenty-five trucks skidded into ditches and had to be extracted, but they pushed on, finally making an unscheduled 24-hour stopover in North Platte on August 4 to regroup.

On August 8, upon arriving in Cheyenne, Wyoming, expedition members were invited to a rodeo. Such invitations were common as the convoy arrived in even the smallest towns. They made for welcome breaks from the exhausting work and monotony of the road that often exerted a “depressing influence on personnel.”

In Utah’s Great Salt Lake Desert, the road became almost impassable. Conditions were little better heading to Carson City, Nevada, where the road was “one succession of dust, ruts, pits, and holes.”

With expedition members nearing total exhaustion, the convoy began its climb into the Sierra Nevada. Only the most experienced were allowed to drive; vehicles were spaced at 100 yard intervals to minimize losses in the event of a runaway; a “Trailmobile” kitchen overturned; a Mack Truck was disabled when a connecting rod broke; and a few vehicles, unable to make the grade, had to be towed.

At 8:30 p.m. on September 1, 1919, the convoy arrived in Meyers, California, where expedition members were guests at a Meyer’s Ranch party and treated to “movies and smokes” by members of the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company.

Engines began to rev at dawn the next morning, and at 6:30 a.m. the convoy was on the road, “downgrade through the beautiful American River Canyon.” Arriving in Placerville at 6:30 p.m. on September 2, the convoy was escorted to the old racetrack grounds, where it encamped. That night Main Street was blocked off between Coloma Street and the Post Office, and an orchestra played dance music into the night. If any of the “army boys did not dance, it was not because he could not get a partner,” the *El Dorado Republican* reported.

From Placerville it was on to Oakland, where the convoy arrived on September 5, and then it was off to San Francisco by ferry on September 6. A parade through San Francisco’s city streets took the convoy to Lincoln Park, where it was greeted by a cheering crowd. In 62 days, it had covered 3,251 miles. It was, by most measures, a success, an extraordinary journey in which Brevet Lt. Colonel Dwight D. Eisenhower participated and that would later contribute to his enthusiasm for the establishment of the Interstate Highway System, when he became President of the United States.

Weston DeWalt, Exhibition Curator



The Whole Convoy, Utah, 1919
Photograph
Image Courtesy of Eisenhower
Presidential Library



Brett & I.

Brett & I., 1919
(Dwight D. Eisenhower on left)
Photograph
Image Courtesy of Eisenhower Presidential Library



Accident to Dodge

Accident to Dodge, 1919
Photograph
Image Courtesy of Eisenhower Presidential Library



Another Fine Example of Modern Engineering, 1919

Photograph

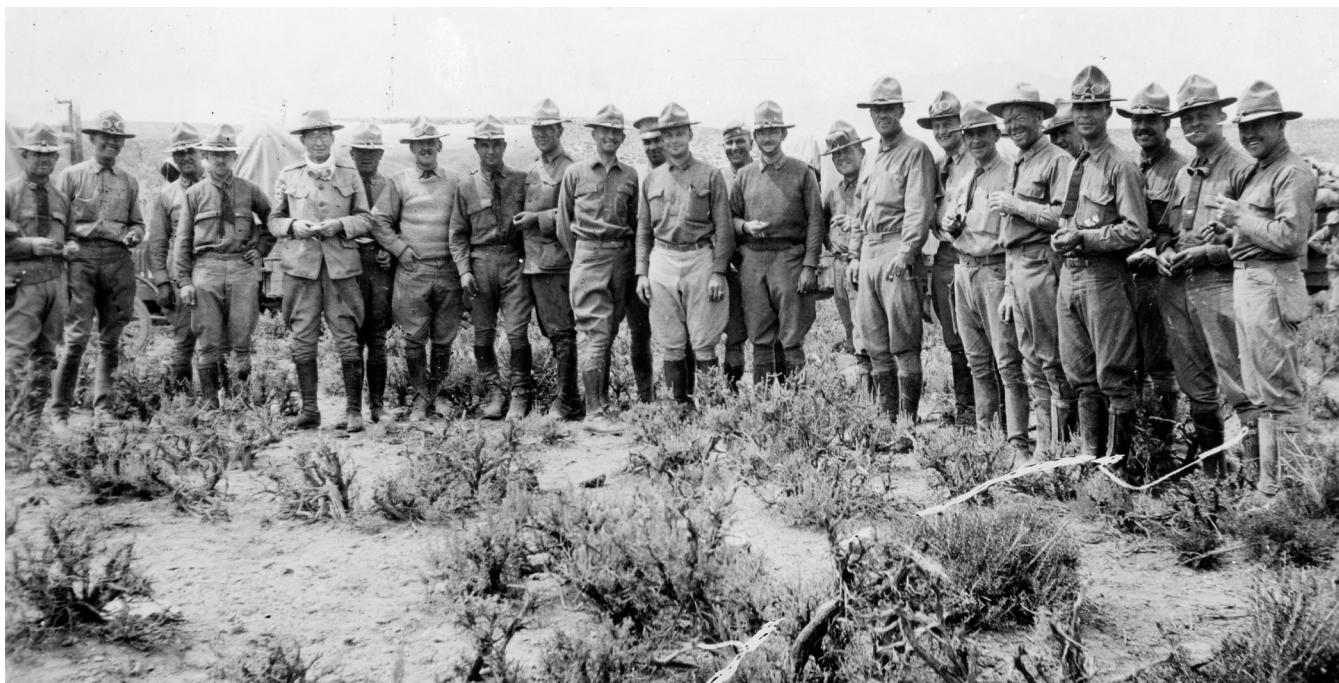
Image Courtesy of Eisenhower Presidential Library



Hoping it Will Hold, 1919

Photograph

Image Courtesy of Eisenhower Presidential Library



Dwight D. Eisenhower with 39 Officers in Carson City, Nevada, 1919

(Dwight D. Eisenhower 13th from right)

Photograph

Image Courtesy of Eisenhower Presidential Library



Convoy in the Sierra Nevada, 1919

Photograph

Image Courtesy of Eisenhower Presidential Library



Lucky to get on road like this.

Lucky to Get on Road Like This, 1919

Photograph

Image Courtesy of Eisenhower Presidential Library



west nebraska.

West Nebraska, 1919

Photograph

Image Courtesy of Eisenhower Presidential Library



"B" - Off the Road, 1919

Photograph

Image Courtesy of Eisenhower Presidential Library



Helping Along a "B", 1919

Photograph

Image Courtesy of Eisenhower Presidential Library



Lemonade-gratis, 1919

Photograph

Image Courtesy of Eisenhower
Presidential Library

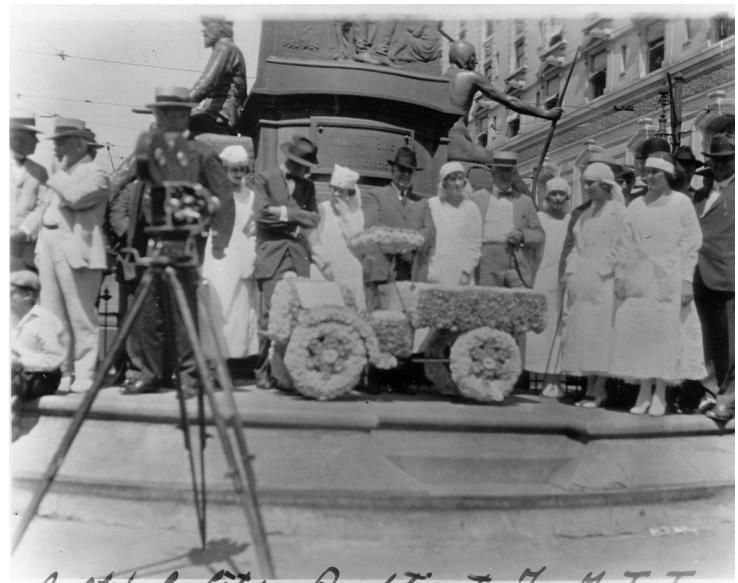


Salt Lake City

Salt Lake City, 1919

Photograph

Image Courtesy of Eisenhower Presidential Library



Salt Lake City - Reception to T-M-T-T.

Convoy Reception Committee, Salt Lake City, 1919

Photograph

Image Courtesy of Eisenhower Presidential Library



Again the Packard 1½ ton



Sheridan's Ranch - Utah-Nevada Line.

Harrington Mounted on Harley, 1919

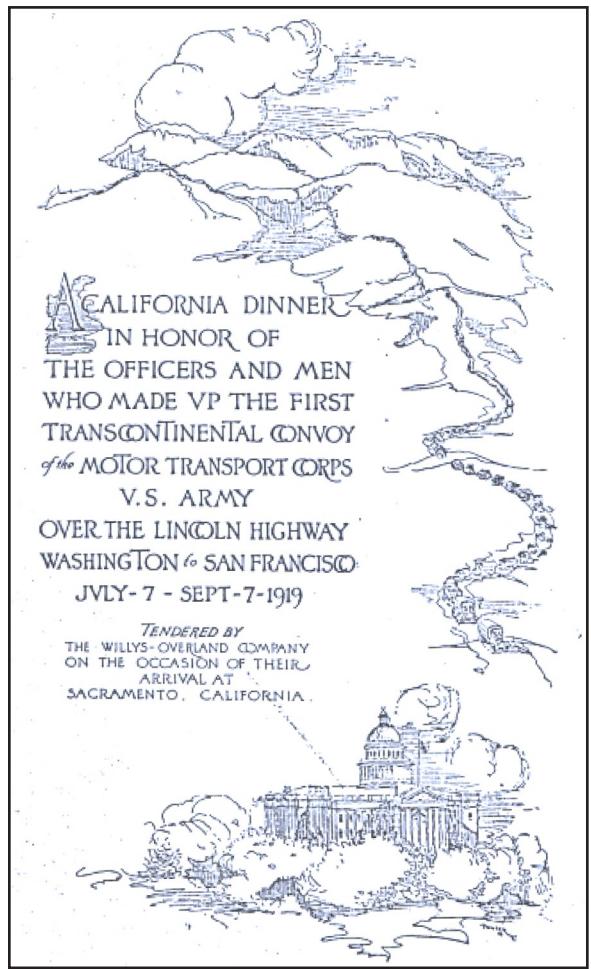
Photograph

Image Courtesy of Eisenhower Presidential Library

Commemorative Program, San Francisco, 1919

Document

Image Courtesy of Eisenhower Presidential Library



Convoy in Meyers, 1919

Photograph by Camilla Giamboni Celio

Image Courtesy of the Celio Family



Celio Family of Meyers Watching Arrival of Convoy, 1919
Photograph by Camilla Giamboni Celio
Image Courtesy of the Celio Family

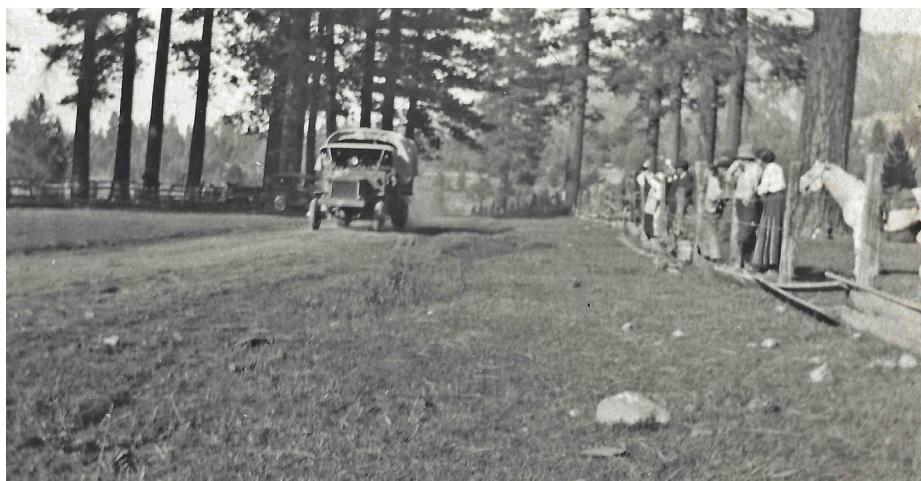
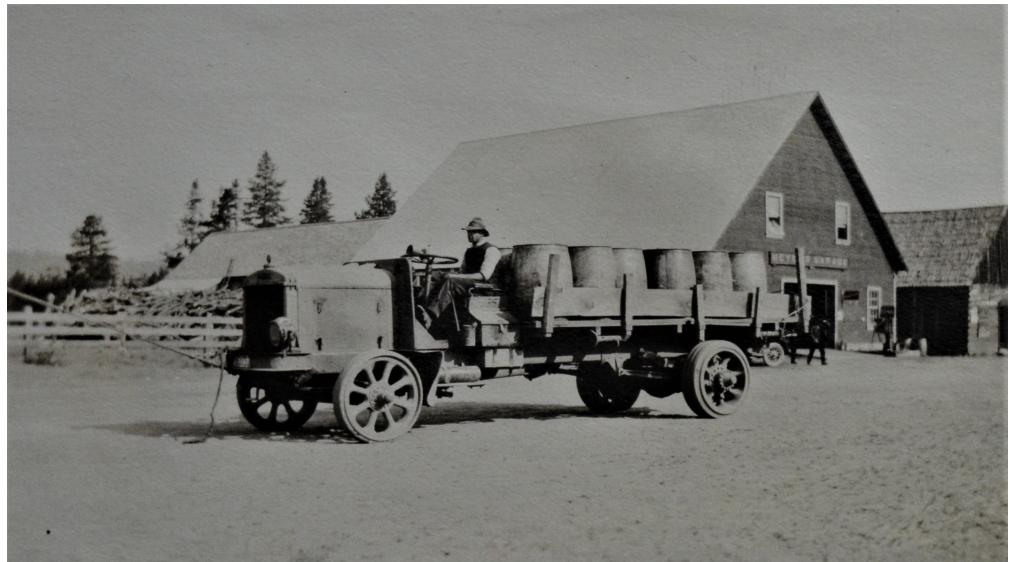


Convoy Setting Up Camp in Meyers, 1919
Photograph by Camilla Giamboni Celio
Image Courtesy of the Celio Family



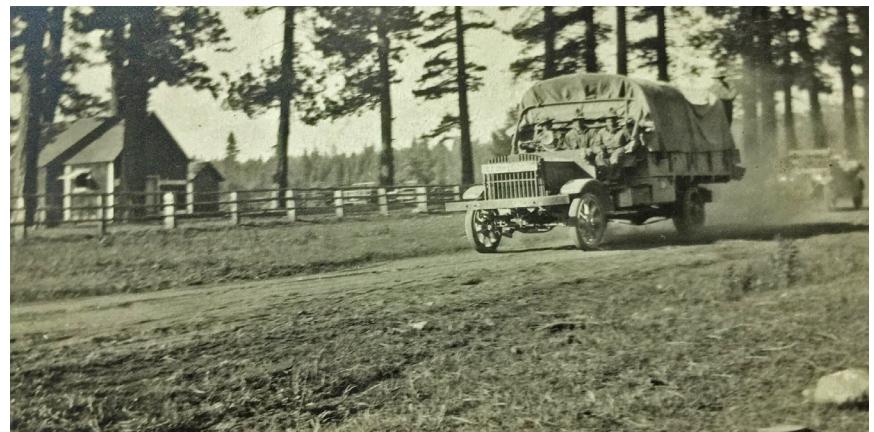
Convoy Welcome Sign in Meyers, 1919
Photograph by Camilla Giamboni Celio, Image Courtesy of the Celio Family

*Fuel and Oil Supplies in Meyers for Convoy,
1919*
Photograph by Camilla Giamboni Celio
Image Courtesy of the Celio Family



Convoy Arriving, Sierra House, 1919
Photograph by Camilla Giamboni Celio
Image Courtesy of the Celio Family

Convoy Truck in Meyers, 1919
Photograph by Camilla Giamboni Celio
Image Courtesy of the Celio Family





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Eisenhower Presidential Library

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