

BACK IN SERVICE

“I was raised in a military family, so I had 20 years before I enlisted,” Bruce Morgan says dryly.

During his childhood in Utah, “My father insisted that we all know how to change oil, lubricate our vehicles, and minor things like that. And we could take a part off that was bad and replace it with a new part,” he continued. “It was just part and parcel of growing up.”

Following in the footsteps of his grandfather, a World War I veteran, and his father, a World War II veteran, Morgan served six years in the Air Force—two years each in San Francisco, Taiwan and Texas.

In the early 1980s, at the suggestion of his wife, the Salt Lake City, UT Branch 111 member took the postal exam. He delivered mail until his retirement in 2004.

Morgan liked attending air shows and, because he was interested in the history of WWI and WWII, he began spending more and more time looking at the vehicles on display from those eras at the shows.

He joined the Utah Military Vehicle Club even though he didn’t own a military vehicle, but he was already making plans to fix that.

“As a member of the organization, you would assist other people when

you needed an extra pair of hands,” he said. “We worked together on other people’s vehicles.”

The Utah club is one of 100 international affiliates of the Military Vehicle Preservation Association, which has 8,000 members worldwide.

One day in the late 1980s while taking photos in the mountains east of Salt Lake City, Morgan followed a deer into a farm field and noticed a WWII-era truck, an M3A1 armored scout car weighing almost 5 tons.

He found out that a farmer had bought it after the war ended and kept it going, using it every so often for farm work. Morgan soon bought it.

The vehicle, made in 1941 by the White Truck Co., was in good shape but missing many pieces—but that was no problem, he said, adding: “Vehicles can be brought up to speed.”

The M3A1 was produced from 1940 until 1944, with nearly 21,000 vehicles built, and was used in military roles such as scouting and observation, and as an armored command vehicle that offers protection to a convoy.

“I was pretty lucky, because [after] WWII, they were sold to the public as excess vehicles,” he said.

To acquire the antique auto parts needed, Morgan put the word out through his club and scoured military vehicle magazines, and other magazines like farming publications, that he subscribes to.

“We have contacts all throughout the farming community, because that’s where the vehicles are,” he explained.

Because civilian automotive production stopped in early 1942 to concentrate on producing for the war effort, there were no farm vehicles to replace worn-out ones, particularly in the western states. There was a five-year

backup for the supply to catch up with demand for new cars and trucks following WWII, so during that time many farmers turned to the surplus of war vehicles, which was the only source of like-new equipment.

Even the Postal Service was no stranger to military vehicles. Half-track vehicles were used by USPS in rural areas during the winter months.

“I had it for over 15 years,” he said of the M3A1. “And I was able, little by little, to restore a part, or rebuild, or else get a system going. I had fun with it.”

The M3A1 was fully operational and he got it licensed. It had four-wheel drive, gasoline mileage was about 8 miles per gallon, and he could drive it on the freeway at 45 mph.

Morgan restored the M3A1 to replicate a vehicle from the Scots Guard of the Guards Armored Division in the British Army. When he acquired it, the armor had been removed, so he picked up a skate rail, which two replica machine guns (one .50 and one .30) sat on and rotated around the vehicle on an armored plate.

“The guns were, of course, as phony as \$3 bills,” he said, explaining that, for display purposes, “I worked the system [to] where I could fire the .50 machine gun with a propane oxygen system so the gun would actually speak.

“You have to put in the time, the effort and the money for the parts,” Morgan said, adding that although he had a lot of fun with it, “it was just a toy and for the hobby.”

Working on his vehicle was never an issue with his Postal Service career; he always made sure he was able to take off work when he wanted to attend an event, such as a parade.

One day, he was heading to a postal event and, lo and behold, “my civilian



Morgan found this M3A1 in a farmer’s field.

Morgan's restored M3A1 in a parade through downtown Salt Lake City, UT



truck wouldn't start," he recounted. Unruffled, he jumped in his armored military vehicle and drove to the post office.

Branch 111 President **Mike Wahlquist** came out of the post office, surprised and amused to see the vehicle. He told Morgan he'd give him a lift to the union hall instead.

But Morgan didn't regard driving his military vehicle as a big deal. "It didn't mean a thing to me," he says. "It was just another vehicle."

Wahlquist says Morgan is "a wealth of information" about military vehicles. Morgan is known to talk authoritatively and at length about military vehicles of all sorts.

Over the years, Morgan used the vehicle for display in Utah (as well as Idaho and Nevada) for educational events at his children's schools, car

shows, air shows, military events, holiday parades and occasional filming. He was always ready to speak to people and answer questions about his automobiles, and his kids' teachers were impressed with the knowledge of military history that he was able to share with the students.

When the Morgans ran into a small family emergency, they sold the vehicle. "It being a toy, you sell toys. You don't keep them," Morgan said. "And this is what I did. I let it go."

Six months later, an opportunity arose to pick up another vehicle in east Utah—an Army 1943 WC-52 ¾-ton cargo truck. The vehicle, developed at a Dodge subsidiary, the Fargo Motor Corp., was used mostly to haul personnel and ammunition during World War II, and more than 255,000 of this

variant and others were produced from 1942 to 1945.

"I got the vehicle going and was able to fire it up so I could put it in parades and things," Morgan said. "It was my pleasure to put it out there so people could look at the parade and say, 'Oh, yeah, that's an Army vehicle.'"

Though Morgan also sold that vehicle in the early 2000s, "I'm still a member of the club," he says. "If I should decide to do it again, and if my wife will let me, then we can go into it again. But at the moment, there are some other things that the family needs."

He added that he regularly attends club meetings, helps others restore their vehicles, and goes to car shows with members to lend a hand with their military half-tracks, jeeps, trucks and anti-tanks.

Morgan says he loves these vehicles so much because they're part of history.

"It's very much like an antique car, it's just a particular style, make and purpose," he said. "Because of my military history upraising, I found it very easy to continue on the history, and I liked that immensely." **PR**



Morgan's WC-52