

Travels in the Corps Truck

Peter Bagnall-Oakeley, Robert Knight, Simon Whitaker, Felix Jones, Adrian Shooter and Trevor Webster journey back down memory lane

Peter Bagnall-Oakeley

(Hart-Smith & Granville 1946-52)

I remember this well because I was appointed the first official driver. In February 1951, I reached the age of 17 and promptly passed my driving test at the first attempt. There came the summer term and this strange vehicle appeared by the sheds next to the Cricket pavilion. Then a notice went up, signed by John Poulton in his capacity as Officer i/c Transport CCF, inviting any boys holding a full driving licence to meet one day at the shed.

As I remember, there were some five or six of us, and each in turn was invited to drive the thing around the grounds. A total absence of synchro-mesh in the gearbox was a problem which defeated the others, but since I had been driving many different vehicles, quite illegally, since I was 12, I could cope and so began an adventure with a challenging but ultimately entertaining bit of automotive history.

It had many eccentricities but together with many different passengers it and I travelled far and wide, mostly in connection with CCF Field Days and Medical Sixth field trips. It was very high off the ground and John once told me, in the middle of Epsom High Street, that, in making a second line of traffic at the lights, I was overlapping the car beside me!

It also had an interesting combined vacuum and gravity feed method for getting petrol from the tank to the carburettor which utterly defeated Bernard Nash who found himself asking advice from me, his

head of house. Sadly I have no photographs of the monster, just a load of amusing memories.

Robert Knight (Crawfurd 1956-61)

I think the Corps truck was a Chevrolet replaced by a Bedford in around 1959. Both had canvas sides and bench seats. Its garage was next to the Scout Hut, down the farm track behind the tuck shop block. It was driven by Messrs Poulton and Goldstraw to tow the Blue Peter boat to the Thames in Kingston on Thames where we used the facilities of the Sea Scouts on an island.

I remember we once had to lean through the front canvass to knock on the roof of the driver's cab to stop the vehicle as the lashings on the mast, which was lying in the bottom of the boat, had come undone and it was in danger of being bounced out of the hull!

Simon Whitaker (Propert 1947-52)

Unfortunately I know nothing of the Corps truck's technical details, but my diary tells me that on Monday July 28, 1952, four of us set off after lunch in the truck to the corps camp at Pirbright. The four were: Charles Gallannaugh (driving), Conway Allen, John Townshend, and myself. I cannot remember if the lorry was unreliable but my diary tells me that we arrived late, whereupon we had to fill 65 palliasses.

On Tuesday morning Gallannaugh and

Allen set off back to Epsom whilst Townshend and I prepared the tents. The rest of the contingent arrived at 11.30. At some ungodly hour during the night Gallannaugh and Allen were awoken in order that they could go to the sergeants' mess with the lorry and take a load of drunken sergeants to their homes.

I cannot remember the name of our sergeant, my diary merely says 'Arry's party. On the Sunday, I went home in the evening, taking Gallannaugh, Allen and Townshend with me for a meal. I assume we went in the lorry. On the following Tuesday, Mr Parker, Mr Goddard and Mr Hogarth took the leavers out for a drink. We were up at 4.30am and packed up camp. Gallannaugh drove back via Guildford and dropped me off at home.

R.G.H. 'Felix' Jones (Hart-Smith & Granville 1948-54)

I well remember the Corps truck. I can't be certain it was the exact model in the picture on page 47 of the 2010 *OE magazine*, but it was certainly remarkably like it. Having passed my driving test (in a Ford Prefect) I was dying to drive it. At the time it was the responsibility of Corps officer and Chemistry Master J W Poulton.

He took me for a spin over the Downs and cursed me roundly for crashing the gears (no synchromesh, of course) but I somehow managed to persuade him to pass me.

I don't think I actually had many opportunities to use my new qualification, but I do remember sailing through Epsom with Eric ('Wilf') Radcliffe, Head of History pre-Alan Parker, up beside me, and a posse of fellow post-A-level historians in the back on an afternoon jaunt to a

stately home. I recall that the truck had previously spent some time in intensive care because no-one had thought to put anti-freeze in it before the winter set in.

Adrian Shooter (Rosebery 1961-66)

With reference to the article on the Corps Truck on page 47 of the 2010 *OE magazine* I can offer the following information.

The Corps Truck from when I joined Epsom in 1961 until about 1965 was a Bedford OY truck which was registered 150JPE. It was one of 72,000 built at Luton by Vauxhall Motors for the Army in WW2 .

The OY was adapted from the immediately pre-war civilian 3-ton truck that Vauxhall produced. OYs were used throughout the war in all theatres. Most, like the CCF truck, had a flatbed body which could be used for transporting all kinds of stores or, if the hinged benches down each side of the body were folded down, soldiers or boys could be carried. The Corps truck was mostly used for this purpose, thus avoiding the cost of hiring a coach.

Judging from the registration number I would estimate that the truck would have been sold by the MOD in about 1958. I think it left Epsom in 1965. It was looked after by Biology Master Mr Poulton, who was one of several masters who helped run the CCF. He roped me and one or two others in to remove rust from the front wings and to paint them. As a reward he let me drive it within school boundaries.

Like most lorries of its period it was noisy, slow and rather ponderous. Having said that, they made a very important contribution to the war, even being used by the Germans who acquired a substantial number at Dunkirk.

Trevor Webster (Holman 1944-47)

Reading the article about the Corps truck in the 2010 *OE magazine*, clearly I know nothing about the actual vehicle – it was a bit after my time... probably still on His Majesty's Service when I was at Epsom!! But I do know something about Second World War military vehicles of that era.

The photo in the *OE magazine* is a Canadian Chev 15 cwt 4x4 with some specialised body – possibly an artillery gun tractor. The unit markings look a bit like Royal Artillery. But obviously if the Corps truck was used to shift furniture it must have had a GS (General Service) wagon body. There were also 30 cwt and 3 tonner versions of it but I should think the Corps would have had a 15 cwt (usual issue to infantry units).

These Chevies were quite popular with M.T. drivers – good gearbox and hydraulic brakes; I have driven a few myself. As you will note, several versions were produced by GM Canada, but the ones with the forward sloping windscreen (windshield) are the Canadian Military Pattern with No.

13 Cab. They had one 'interesting' feature (not unknown on American cars in the 1930s) – the accelerator pedal was in the centre with the brake on the right hand side! It required some 'clarity of mind' if you had to change down and brake in a bit of a hurry!

Ford of Canada did produce almost identical looking vehicles to the Canadian standard, but they were nowhere near as good a vehicle – mechanical brakes and a rather poorly matched engine/gearbox. Not that popular! Most of General Motors' offerings in the Second World War were superior to Ford's production – luckily it also apparently applied to what was produced in Germany for the Wehrmacht!

I am told that a captured Canadian Chev was the 'vehicle of choice' for Afrika Corps soldaten – and they did manage to get their hands on quite a few at one stage! The British GM production (Bedfords) was all pretty sound too. But Ford USA did manage to produce a lot of Jeeps – to a Willys design of course. Not to mention B17s to a Boeing design!
