

WWII US VEHICLE MARKINGS Part 1

on October 16, 2012 at 17:00

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The subject of WW2 US Army Vehicle markings has been extensively written about both in books dedicated to the subject and articles in military vehicle collectors' magazines around the world. However, despite this fact they are still largely misunderstood or misinterpreted by vehicle owners and re-enactors alike. I hope that through this two-part study of bumper markings and other vehicle markings, I can offer a concise and comprehensible guide to marking up your military vehicle with accurate markings. Nothing frustrates me more than to see a Jeep loaded with immaculately uniformed and equipped personnel with some spurious markings that have either been copied from a film, or which have been taken from other restored vehicles. I know that to some this might seem petty or knit-picking, but one wouldn't dream of wearing the incorrect shoulder sleeve insignia for his portrayal, so why should his vehicle markings be any different?

Unfortunately, the subject is rather extensive, and as I've already stated there are entire books which explain the bumper markings, as well as numerous other vehicle markings. I hope that this two-part series will be sufficient to provide the reader with the adequate knowledge for them to mark their vehicle to represent almost any unit. By offering generic examples as opposed to more specific ones for each unit, I will try and provide an overview and explanation of the markings,

Along with samples of correct markings for good measure.

Army Regulations No. 850-5 governed "Markings of Clothing, Equipment, Vehicles, and Property".

Specific paragraphs covered a variety of subjects, such as registration markings, unit markings, tactical markings, special markings, markings for animal-drawn vehicles, and markings for tractors and tanks. The very first Army regulations specifically dealing with "Markings of Vehicles" came out September 15, 1936, and covered prototype jeeps and early production Willys and Ford .-Ton Trucks. Since most of the early Regulations do not really apply to E.T.O. WW2 Military Vehicles, we will restrict ourselves to **Unit Markings** and **Special Markings** related to vehicles used and / or operated in this particular Theatre. This implies that the article will include elements from basic AR, including Changes dated August 5, 1942, October 15, 1942, March 25, 1944, and February 15, 1945.

The Basics:

Understanding bumper markings can be extremely difficult without the correct research resources. When I first started re-enacting, I found it very confusing to not only interpret the markings, but also to understand how vehicles were assigned to units within the US Army. This latter point is one

of the key points to understanding the markings that should be applied to a vehicle at any given time.

The bumper marking system was designed such that it could be used to represent a vehicle from Corps level, right down to individual Weapons Batteries (in the case of Coastal, Field and Anti-Aircraft Artillery units) or indeed Platoons (Military Police units, for example). Bumper markings were divided into four 'groups', with each one being used to represent and uniquely identify that vehicle within the unit to which it pertained. By combining the unit's number with a series of letters and abbreviations, all possible combinations could be achieved. The illustration below shows an example bumper, with all four groups.

The first group designates the smallest appropriate unit listed below in accordance with the following code:

The second group designates a separate Regiment, separate Brigades, Groups, Battalions or Companies and similar units. The units identified in this group are indicated by appropriate number of symbol, followed by Arm or Service in accordance with the abbreviations listed in the table below. When indicating Headquarters and Headquarters Companies or special Companies of units identified in the first group, the second group consisted only of the letter "X", and when indicating Brigades, the numeral was underlined:

The third group designated Companies and similar organisations by letters in accordance with the following abbreviations:

The fourth and final group designates the serial number of the vehicle in normal order of march within the organisation to which it is assigned. Vehicles assigned to any Headquarters were combined for purposes of numbering with those vehicles of the appropriate Headquarters Company or similar organisation and were therefore given the smaller serial numbers used therein.

Examples:

The above should offer a general introduction to the numerous groups which were used for the identification of WW2 US Army vehicles. In order to better illustrate this point, I think that it would be prudent to offer some examples of markings, with a brief explanation of their meaning and designation. I have tried to select examples that, while being specific to a unit, can be easily modified with the information contained in this article (and of course knowledge about the desired

unit's composition [i.e. its Order of Battle]) to represent any unit that the reader may wish. Please note that for the purposes of disambiguation, I have excluded the nationality symbol (5-pointed star) which was also added to the bumper of US Army vehicles:

Summary

Well, that's about all I have space for in this article. I hope that the second and concluding part of this series of articles will be a little more informative. Having identified the basics and laid down a lot of the fundamental information in this first part, I am confident that part two will consist of a little more substance. I am hoping to look into the finer intricacies of the bumper marking system, in particular looking at markings for Airborne Vehicles (which were slightly different to the method and regulations laid out here), Medical Vehicles (again which followed a slightly different regulation to those outlined here) and other oddities. If space permits, I'd also like to try and include some contemporaneous photographs and illustrations showing regulation and non-standard of vehicle markings to show the wide variety markings seen in the field.

Just a quick note to say that in my previous article, it seems the website address for our WW2 US Medical Research Centre was misprinted. The web address is www.med-dept.com

As usual, if anyone has any questions or queries about the content or subject of this article, please feel free to send me an email (ben@med-dept.com) and I'll try and be as helpful as I can.

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