



It just makes good sense for the Army to get the most out of its machines and people. Both are valuable assets. This is a story about how unserviceable vehicles are reconditioned by

HEROES IN COVERALLS

Story by Capt. Gardner M. Nason Photos by Sp5 Gary L. Kieffer

HEROES aren't always the flamboyant pilots, the glamorous cavalry, the invincible armor, the daring infantry or the steelraining artillery. Real heroes are found in some of the most unlikely, damnable places doing the most ordinary things. Their accomplishments aren't often recognized the way we ordinarily salute heroes — with medals and that sort of stuff. Many remain unsung heroes, as the saying goes. But one thing is for sure. Any army will grind to a halt if unsung heroes are not doing their jobs and doing them well.

Take, for instance, the 88th General Support Maintenance Company located at Grossauheim Kaserne in Hanau, Germany. They're part of the 8th Maintenance Battalion. The battalion reconditions vehicles and vehicle components, such as engines, transmissions and trans-

fers. When a piece of equipment arrives at the 88th Maintenance Company, it's described as Class "P" ("P" meaning Poor). That's a nice way of calling it junk.

"Junk is an unserviceable asset," says Capt. Charles Weston, commander of the 88th. "Our mission is to return it to Code B standards. That means repair it so that the piece of equipment, whatever it is, is able to perform its mission just as well as a new piece."

Weston says that his unit repairs 49 components from a wide variety of vehicles. The work is done in maintenance bays as opposed to a production line set-up.

"We have a quota, or production goal, set for us by the 3d Support Command," Weston says. "The name of the game is to get equipment back into the system.

"Inspection is a key part of

the operation. That's where everything begins and ends," Weston says.

For example, when an unserviceable 5-ton truck comes to the 88th Maintenance Company for reconditioning to Code B standards, it goes through stages. First, the truck is inspected. Parts requirements are determined. Then, it goes through its automotive repair. After it's automotively sound, body work is done. At this point an in-progress inspection is done and the remaining "gigs," or deficiencies, are worked off. Then the truck gets a new paint job and goes for a Ready For Issue (RFI) inspection.

From beginning to end, 500 to 1,000 manhours might be invested in reconditioning one vehicle. That's a lot of time, and time is money. But, it's worth it.

"In Fiscal Year 1979, we

figured the 8th Maintenance Battalion saved the Army almost \$3 million over the cost of purchasing brand new vehicles," says Maj. Patrick Curry, materiel officer for the battalion.

One of the unsung heroes who contributed to the savings Curry talks about is Sp4 Lawrence Rooney, who has been in Germany for 2½ years.

"We rebuild 5-ton, M818s. I get off on building this stuff. I could build a 5-ton from the ground up," Rooney says matter-of-factly.

"We have five squads in the shop and each squad works on its own vehicle," Rooney says. "Usually there are two trucks, sometimes three, in the shop for each squad.

"Sometimes we have the whole squad work on a truck; sometimes just one or two people.

"Everybody learns everything," Rooney explains. "Normally, we put new people on the brakes because it's a simpler but major job to do. After that, we put them on whatever needs to be done."

Rooney gets satisfaction when a truck rolls out of his shop.

"I just feel good," he says. "We shipped a truck today to get painted. It was here quite a while. Most aren't here long enough to get attached to them," Rooney says. "But I do have a certain affection for one type of truck — wreckers. They're more of a challenge. There are more things to do because of hydraulics."

Unserviceable equipment seems to arrive at the 88th's yard as frequently as Rooney's squad and the others are able to move them in to their maintenance shops for reconditioning. It's a rare day when business is slow.

"One time in the 24 months I've been here, we ran out of trucks to repair," Rooney says. "We were bored silly. We cleaned up our shop and helped out in other shops."

Now Rooney is getting short and it's decision time. "I've enjoyed my tour here," he says. "I have no major gripes. All in all, things have been pretty good for me. I was sent

back to Aberdeen Proving Grounds to the 63H20 course. I learned quite a bit about automotive transmissions. The Army got its money's worth by sending me."

But Rooney says that he misses his hometown of Farmingdale, N.Y.

"I haven't made up my mind about staying in or getting out of the Army," Rooney says. "It depends on what state/duty is like. If it's like this, I'll probably stay."

While Rooney's platoon reconditions 5-ton, other platoons work on other vehicles and their components.

For example, the 2d platoon reconditions engines, transmissions, fuel pumps and starters for quarter-ton, five-quarters, deuce-and-a-halfs and five-ton trucks.

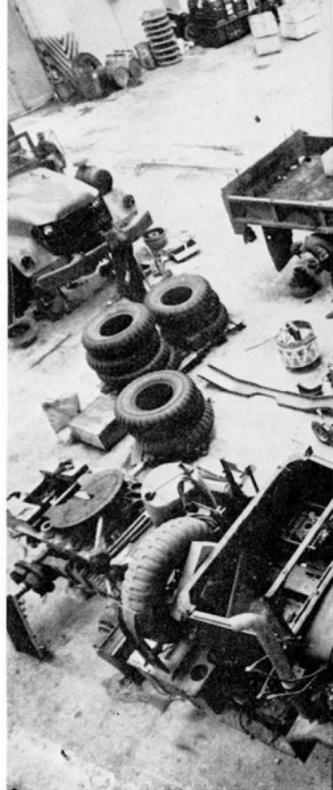
"We try to use as many of the old parts as possible," says SFC Archie Freeman, platoon sergeant and shop NCOIC. "When we recondition an un-serviceable engine, we'll pull the head and clean it. If the valves are reusable, we regrind, reface and reseat them."

Members of Freeman's platoon know a lot. They have to. Tearing down and repairing engines, transmissions and other components isn't something they can bluff their way through. Soldiers arrive at the 8th Maintenance Battalion trained in their MOS but they require more training for the job that's expected here.

"When a new soldier comes in, I'll put him or her with one of my older, more experienced mechanics," Freeman says. "Every 90 days, I try to rotate people among the different vehicles and components.

"When I put someone on an engine, that person works it from beginning to end — from bringing it into the shop and tearing it down to rebuilding it to a runnable engine. That includes painting it.

"We guarantee that when a customer picks up a piece of equipment — like an engine or transmission — and puts it into a vehicle, it will run," Freeman says. "If it doesn't, we have two working days



to get a contact team from my platoon to the unit to check it out.

"When units complain that an engine or transmission doesn't work right, it's often due to improper installation or a faulty part."

According to Freeman, if his platoon falls behind their quota for a month, they work nights. Occasionally, quotas are adjusted when the demand for a particular component changes.

"Recently, the demand for quarter-ton truck engines and transmissions has dropped off while the requirement for five-quarters has doubled," Freeman says. "Based on that, I shift people around."

"When another squad needs



Left, 88th Maintenance Company Automotive Maintenance Platoon reconditions 5-ton trucks in open bays. Each of the five squads work on two or three trucks at a time. Below, soldier uses a cutting torch to free a stuck tow pintle. Below center, Sp4 Dana Howe spray paints a truck as one of the final steps. Bottom, Sp4 Gloria Maynard overhauls a vehicle transmission.



some help, I don't mind going over there and helping out, so long as they help us when we need it," says PFC Calvin Robinson, a member of Freeman's platoon.

Robinson's section repairs quarter-ton engines.

"Our goal is usually 40 a month," he says. "This month our goal is 20 because we've been in the field, and right now some of our people are at adventure training in Garmisch."

"I love it," Robinson says about his work. "I put in an extension to stay another year."

He says that he likes being in Germany because of the chance to go places and make friends. Among those friends, Robinson claims to





SSgt. Terry McDonald inspects a truck reconditioned by the 88th Maintenance Company to insure it is repaired properly and able to perform its mission.

have two girlfriends.

But most of all, he just likes being a mechanic and this assignment gives him an opportunity to do just that. He takes pride in it.

"After you've cracked your knuckles a few times, you're a mechanic," Robinson says showing off his working man's hands with measurable pride.

Another shop within the 88th Maintenance Company does body work, "cosmetics" they call it. That covers cutting glass, radiator repair, body work, welding and painting.

"It's a small section, but we're tight," Sp4 Dana Howe, a 44B, says about his fellow welders and machinists who do the cosmetic job in their shop.

"Sometimes there is a problem with trucks getting held up in the automotive shop waiting for parts," Howe says. "However, if we get a truck here, we'll get it out on time to meet the production goal deadline no matter what.

"If we don't have the part, we'll make it," he says.

After the body work and new coats of paint, vehicles go to the inspection section for their RFI inspection.

"Our relationship with the shop is very good because the criteria for acceptable standards are written down in black and white in

the technical manuals," says SSgt. Terry McDonald, one of three NCOs who are specially schooled in inspection procedures.

As a vehicle or component is reconditioned, it is monitored by the shop office. The shop office makes everything come together. It manages the production of the shops, keeps records on the vehicles and components being reconditioned, and makes sure the right people and parts are in the right place to get the job done.

"The shop office is the nerve center for me," Weston says. "It's the driving force. If the shop office doesn't function properly, then the rest of the company doesn't function properly."

The soldiers assigned to the 88th Maintenance perform their miracles under conditions that wouldn't be described as heavenly. For one thing, Grossauheim Kaserne isn't one of the garden spots of Germany. It's buried among smoke stacks and a giant cooling tower of Hanau's heavy industrial section along the Main River east of Frankfurt.

The buildings the battalion occupies are giant pre-war sheds where locomotives and other heavy equipment were made. Lighting is poor in many places where there are no skylights to let in the natural

light. Florescent lights have been installed over work benches but that doesn't help much when working on trucks in the big bays. The shops are drafty and cold in the winter.

Except for Headquarters Detachment, which has billets at Grossauheim, the rest of the single soldiers in the battalion live at Pioneer Kaserne, about two miles away. Weston says his billets are in fair condition but are too crowded.

Members of the 88th Maintenance Battalion, like soldiers in other types of units, go to the field from time-to-time.

"When we are out in the field, some people pull perimeter guard," says Sp4 Edward Gosmeyer, a 63G. "Meanwhile the others continue the mission of overhauling engines. We just pack them up and take 'em with us. It's the same engine whether you fix it in the shop or in the field."

As you might imagine, mechanics stay happy by fixing things. Many of the mechanics in the 88th like working on their own cars and cars of their friends. Some even pick up a little extra money servicing cars for people around the Hanau area.

"It's no secret that if you're going to be happy here, stay away from the billets and keep occupied," Howe says. "I keep busy at the auto craft shop."

So day in, day out, the work of overhauling unserviceable equipment goes on by little known people at a little known installation near Frankfurt. The mechanics don't go around sporting berets, fancy tanker boots, flight jackets or badges. Greasy coveralls and dirty hands are signs of the work they do. They don't particularly care about impressing anyone.

In a way, they have it made over soldiers in the more glamorous jobs of the Army. There is always a demand for their work. They know they do it well and it's important. For some mechanics their job is also their hobby.

"When you get paid for doing something that's also your hobby, you can't beat that," Howe says. □