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Title: Interview with COL Robert B. Hutchins – Sicilian Campaign and Initial Phases of the Italian Campaign: Automotive Section, Part 3.

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Abstract: This report is an interview by COL Robert B. Hutchins on the Sicilian Campaign and the initial phases of the Italian Campaign. This is Part 3 titled: The Automotive Section.

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Interview with Col. Hutchins.

Part 3

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AUTOMOTIVE SECTION

INTERVIEW WITH COL. ROBERT B. HUTCHINS

(Sicilian Campaign and Initial
Phases of the Italian Campaign)

4 April, 1944.

- Q. What were the general failures of motor transportation over there?
- A. (The worst failure we had was the amphibious jeep, which didn't function at all. It won't go on roads that are rough, and caused us much motor trouble. We had more trouble with this jeep than anything else.) The 2½ ton truck was excellent. It would go anywhere, and was the best vehicle in the whole combat area - British, German or our own. It suited our purpose better than anything else we had. When you carry supplies in it, you can carry a lot. We had trouble with broken axles, due to overloading, because we didn't have enough transportation in the infantry regiment. We need additional transportation.
- Q. Did you have T/O transportation?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Do you have any idea what causes most of the failures that prevented use of the vehicles - tires, motors, chassis?
- A. I can't answer that exactly. I was amazed at how well they performed; whether that was because of my maintenance section, I don't know - they did a magnificent job and we seldom had vehicles on the deadline.
- Q. Undoubtedly your maintenance section gets credit for that?
- A. We did insist on frequent checks and had inspecting officers devoting a lot of time and trouble to the vehicles. Most of the troubles were small. Nothing radically wrong.
- Q. Then you had very little requirement for replacement parts?
- A. We had some, but I couldn't say what they were. The normal result of wear and tear mostly. The vehicles were used all the time.
- Q. Overloaded all the time?
- A. Yes.
- Q. That's about the best news I've heard.
- A. We had excellent support from our vehicles.
- Q. Did you say that when you went in, each time you had a full complement of vehicles?
- A. No, not a full complement, due to shipping space. We took approximately 70% of our vehicles to Sicily. When we went to Italy we carried 60% of the vehicles.

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- Q. Did you say you lost a lot of vehicles due to actual combat?
- A. Not a lot, but we did lose some by shell fire and in some instances from running over the side of a road.
- Q. Were replacements of vehicles available for that type of accident?
- A. I can't answer that, but we did receive them about a month after we put in a request. Sometimes we didn't get them quite so soon.
- Q. You have indicated that your drivers were operating practically twenty-four hours a day; what system did you use?
- A. We established the practice of having an extra driver for each truck.
- Q. Where did he come from?
- A. We went over 15% over-strength in officers and men and I took some of our over-strength to add to the service company for extra drivers. Any replacements came in, we used them too.
- Q. You didn't attempt to operate on T/O's?
- A. No, I doubt if you can. The men drove twenty-four hours a day. In our case we were moving very rapidly.
- Q. Actually then, the vehicles in your regiment were apt to be serving some other regiment?
- A. Yes; lots of times. Not only that, we had equipment (A and B bags) while we moved forward. We tried to keep equipment in warehouses close by so we could give it to the men. That meant an extra 20 or 30 miles of hauling; and a constant use of vehicles.
- Q. What type of security did you use on bivouac?
- A. I had an SOP drawn up with bivouac area in the shape of a hub of a wheel in which vehicles came in about 75 yards apart. They used the extra personnel and drivers for protection. We followed that system throughout.
- Q. Did you indicate the direction of the enemy from this bivouac?
- A. That was left up to the service company commander. He always did that.
- Q. Did you have any monthly or semi-annual inspection?
- A. Yes, as near as we could. We made a 1000 mile check. The maintenance officer was constantly working on checks. Usually at the end of an operation the division motor officer inspected the vehicles, checked up parts needed and condition of vehicles. Maintenance officers made frequent spot checks of their vehicles.
- Q. When vehicles are going twenty-four hours a day, how often would they get service?
- A. The only way we could do this was to have the drivers inspect their vehicles and report anything wrong to the maintenance officer.

- Q. In your driver-training, is there anything in particular that the drivers are weak in or negligent in - anything that should be emphasized to improve their maintenance of the vehicles?
- A. No. I think they need constant checking and supervision. I think the first echelon setup is the thing. There's where your trouble starts, your first echelon maintenance. It's letting something go too far. If you have good first echelon maintenance, you save a lot of trouble.
- Q. It might be interesting to you, Colonel, that we emphasize that here more than anything else.
- A. I'm certainly glad to hear that.
- Q. In reference to convoy movements, did you make most of them at night, and did you use blackout lights?
- A. At night. Blackout lights entirely.
- Q. Did you have sufficient maps?
- A. We had excellent maps, both in Sicily and Italy. I believe we got them through the British. They had the maps and we reproduced them. They were very good and very accurate.
- Q. What was the smallest unit they got down to?
- A. We had enough to get down to the company commander and in some instances down to the platoon leader.
- Q. Did you make use of strip maps for drivers?
- A. Yes, we issued strip maps usually on every move we had to make.
- Q. Does the Intelligence Section produce them within regiment?
- A. Yes. The S-2 would make them up.
- Q. The army maintenance as set up in echelon - from information we have available here, there are some indications that in some units 2d echelon is doing 3d echelon's work and in some instances 3d echelon is assisting - encroaching on work in other units, how did that work out in your organization?
- A. You are right; there is quite a question between 2d and 3d echelon maintenance. As soon as a vehicle gets back to 3d echelon there's always delay in getting it back; therefore, your maintenance sections in order to save delay will do some of 3d echelon's maintenance. They shouldn't but it does save time and where maintenance sections have tools they are doing the repairs.
- Q. In reports from Africa there was quite a lot of dismantling of vehicles there. The vehicles go along and are deadlined and another organization takes everything, if they have to employ a vehicle; did you see any indications of that?
- A. Lots of it in Sicily. We had quite a lot of difficulty after the Sicilian campaign in getting our vehicles and equipment back again. In Italy they had taken steps to correct this and we did not have this trouble.
- Q. Did you find drivers in the maintenance section had to do much combat work or did they stick to driving and maintenance work?

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- A. They did not in my organization. I think this was true throughout the division. We used them for guards only in train bivouac area.
- Q. What system did you use in refueling?
- A. We had five gallon cans and carried an extra ten gallons of gas at all times. When necessary drivers would stop at filling dumps and replace empty cans with full ones. That worked very nicely.
- Q. In regard to tools for maintenance work, did you have them throughout?
- A. We used the kit as issued, the mechanic's set. I couldn't say whether it was supplemented or not. I never heard any complaints about lack of tools.
- Q. Any patrolling forward?
- A. Yes, by vehicle and foot.
- Q. You spoke of losing vehicles. Was an account kept and did it come back after action was over?
- A. Anything lost in combat, of course, wasn't accounted for. We did keep a record of our vehicles on a form provided. If we lost one, we reported it by number; if one was destroyed by shell fire, we just asked for replacement and there wasn't any accountability.
- Q. When your trucks were used for hauling other than for your own organization, did your drivers go with the trucks?
- A. Yes. The driver went with the vehicle. On all occasions we sent a motor officer along too.
- Q. Did you have any use for the wrist compass?
- A. No, we did not. We gave the drivers strip maps. When possible we had guides along the way too.
- Q. Did you see any use of the 2½-ton amphibious truck?
- A. They are excellent for amphibious operations.
- Q. Do they go along as part of the infantry?
- A. Yes. They serve an excellent purpose in unloading supplies from ships to shore.
- Q. Did you have occasion to completely motorize each battalion for quick movement?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Did you have enough in your regiment to do that?
- A. No.
- Q. Did you have any trouble in division?
- A. We had difficulty in getting the number of trucks required at one time for our movement.

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- Q. When you left this country and went to the P/E, did they give you new vehicles? Or did you use training vehicles?
- A. They gave us all new vehicles. Our training vehicles had had an excessive amount of use in amphibious training at Newport News.
- Q. Did that stand you in good stead?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Did they clear the beaches when they landed? In the Solomons they had a conglomeration of everything on the beach; is it still the same way?
- A. Yes. You can't help it. They did pretty well though, in spite of German bombing and anti-aircraft.
- Q. But you do think that training was worthwhile?
- A. Absolutely. I don't think an amphibious landing should be made unless the troops have had such training. You can't conceive of the innumerable problems that go into an amphibious operation.
- Q. I was talking with Major Collier this morning and we were wondering in actual combat whether the infantry is responsible in loading the vehicles.
- A. We had to load our own vehicles on the two amphibious landings I made.
- Q. Were they treated for amphibious landing?
- A. All vehicles were waterproofed. I am sure you are familiar with how this is done. We took along chargers for batteries. We found the batteries would go down. The day before we landed we checked all batteries in vehicles and those that were down were charged.
- Q. Did you have sufficient gas?
- A. All vehicles went over fully gassed, and several days' extra supply of gas was taken.
- Q. A question on location of your supply installations at night, were they marked?
- A. Yes, they had signs on the road.
- Q. How could the drivers find the location?
- A. Ordinarily there was a guard or guide on the road.
- Q. There weren't any tin can markers with lights burning inside?
- A. No. We didn't use them.
- Q. You mentioned that you had an SOP for security of the bivouac area. Did you have occasion to use that? Did your bivouac area ever become attacked?
- A. No, never. It was bombed but never attacked by any patrols. I kept it back around five miles from the front. I wouldn't want it any closer than that.

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- Q. Did you operate at all times as a part of the division or were you detached?
- A. We worked as a division at all times.
- Q. As part of our instructions we teach day and night driving, convoys, organization of bivouac area, defense of forward area, etc. We also teach drivers first aid, map reading, etc., along that point, is there anything you would emphasize that would call for specialized training?
- A. The men should be well grounded in map reading. Also, they should have anti-aircraft fire - know how to fire the 50 caliber for protection against air attack. Mines and tanks aren't so essential.
- Q. Do you feel that with the infantry division there is a need for a transportation corps or an additional truck unit, which could supplement movements and be directly under the division commander?
- A. I think it would be a big help. They have a quartermaster truck company now. That isn't nearly sufficient, so much is moved by vehicle and on such short notice. An additional truck company for that purpose I feel would enhance the operations of the present division.
- Q. Perhaps a battalion with a few companies under division control when you had to make shuttle movements and movements of that kind would be a very flexible unit.
- A. I agree with you. As it is now it is not sufficient. The division calls on the regiments too much.
- Q. You have to sacrifice and an unit of this kind can back up and help them out on their hauls and shuttle work.
- A. I agree.
- Q. I believe you mentioned that you had radio communication from your regimental CP back to the bivouac area. Was that a radio car?
- A. No. It was the 284 set. As I remember, that isn't normal. We found the radio somehow. Some communications with the train bivouac, I found, was absolutely necessary.
- Q. That was the trouble we found and I wondered if anyone had done anything to help the situation.
- A. I don't know whether that applied in the rest of the regiments in the division. I think it did. I think our signal officer made arrangements for that.
- Q. There is now a radio in the T/E for the service company.
- A. That's very important.
- Q. Did you have any occasion for a driver as an individual to demolish his own truck?
- A. No, I didn't.

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- Q. You didn't have a demolition kit?
- A. I don't think we did. We gave them instructions on how to demolish it, such as firing or breaking it up.
- Q. On a large march by motors, you used only the 50 caliber as protection?
- A. Yes.
- Q. A movement by one vehicle, did that have any protection?
- A. Not unless it happened to have a 50 caliber. We had an extra driver and I think he carried an M1 or BAR.
- Q. You wouldn't try to pick a vehicle with a 50 caliber - it would be anyone?
- A. Yes, anyone that happened to be there.
- Q. Do they still have BAR for protection?
- A. I think they do.
- Q. We have heard a lot of good reports of the 45th and their high morale. Can you give us any contributing factors to that?
- A. They are rather an old unit (a National Guard unit) and when they came in most of the officer personnel knew one another through association at the summer camps and in that way built up a certain tie among themselves. They did do well in the Louisiana maneuvers, which puffed them up a little bit, and that probably added to their morale. Generally, the officers knew each other well from associations either in business or some other way, which seemed to help.
- Q. In connection with that, do you think that the boys of the 45th, being from the West and being outdoor men and knowing how to live in woods, had anything to do with it?
- A. No, I don't. We only had 33-1/3% of the old men left in our outfit.
- Q. Didn't they break the other boys in pretty well? They know all the tricks.
- A. Yes, that's true. This division spent a lot of time in the field, and had a lot of indians among them. They, of course, are at home in the woods. In fact I think they can see at night in the woods. Their direction is so good you could never lose them.
- Q. Did you have occasion to practice sandbagging of vehicles?
- A. Yes, we used sandbags in jeeps - usually four - two in back and two in front. A jeep is not very good against a German Teller Mine. Ordinarily you are a "dead duck" when you hit a mine with a jeep; with a command car, 99 times out of 100 you are only wounded. It seems to be higher off the ground and as a result it doesn't get the full effect that the jeep does, which is lower down.

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- Q. Sandbagging is effective then?
- A. I would say it helps.
- Q. Does the weight of the sandbag slow it down? Cut down its power?
- A. I don't think it does. If we needed speed we seemed to make it without trouble with the sandbags in the jeep.
- Q. I'd like to ask a question about the defense of the bivouac area. Did you have sentries walking or were they dug in?
- A. They dug in. They had foxholes and they were more or less scattered to observe around the perimeter. They didn't actually walk their post.
- Q. Were there usually two in a foxhole?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Were there any times when aircraft took a single vehicle on the road?
- A. Yes. The Germans would attack anything. We had innumerable cases where they did sweep down and strafe a single vehicle. I wouldn't say it was the ordinary thing but we had to be on the alert at all times.
- Q. Did you bring your kitchen trucks up every night?
- A. No, we didn't. We lived mostly off K and G rations and the men heated coffee with the stoves issued. I brought the kitchens up every time it was possible. I think we can get them up closer. Any time we can, we should do it. It makes a great difference.
- Q. When actually engaged, you didn't make any attempt did you?
- A. No. Men were so scattered out in front it would be an impossibility.
- Q. Did you run into any road traps that the Germans are putting out now where they camouflage them?
- A. No, we never ran into any traps - we did run into lots of mines. Every bridge that the German withdrew over, they blew up, so it was a continual job for the engineers to keep the bypasses open.
- Q. You mentioned something about replacements. Did you have difficulty in getting replacements for the men lost?
- A. Replacements came irregularly. Sometimes you would get them when you were actually in the front lines.
- Q. You had to take what you got at face value?
- A. That's right.
- Q. Speaking of night movements, what provision was made in the way of guides other than traffic guides?
- A. Wherever possible we always established guides along the route of movement, using MP detachment and members of the band.

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- Q. You had a regimental motor officer, did you? Did everybody know that you backed them 100%?
- A. Yes. I placed full responsibility on him for the regimental vehicles.
- Q. In other words, you kept your motor transportation through your motor officer?
- A. Yes. I operated with him as a special service officer.
- Q. We find on maneuvers so many commanders don't know how to use him and he doesn't do his job of keeping the commander informed, which is bad.
- A. I believe he should operate directly under the regimental commander.
- Q. What weapons did you find that didn't seem to live up to the duty they were made for?
- A. My officers didn't like the Tommy gun. I think that has been taken out now. They didn't like it because it was too difficult to carry; also, they weren't sure of its accuracy.) They were the main complaints. They liked the BAR and the M1. The heavy machine gun is by far the best weapon over there, but it is difficult for cross-country movement. It's too heavy to move across the Italian hills. We supplemented them with light machine guns when we went off carry and operated them until we could get the heavies in position. They were easier to carry and not as fatiguing on the men.
- Q. Did you use the bazooka?
- A. Yes we did, but I think the ammunition they gave us was defective and the men lost confidence in it entirely. In Italy we got better bazooka ammunition and the men liked the bazooka. We found a good use for it against snipers.
- Q. What type of vehicle did the Germans use?
- A. They had halftrack, 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ -ton Ford trucks, lighter 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ -ton reconnaissance vehicles and motorcycles.
- Q. Did you see any of the halftrack motorcycles they are supposed to have?
- A. No, I didn't see any of them.
- Q. In sending up trucks, about how far forward in a normal attack would you feel is the safety factor for your trucks?
- A. We tried to move them where they were out of small arms range and artillery fire if possible.
- Q. Your weapons carrier?
- A. They would go as far forward as they could go. The larger trucks I kept back at all times.
- Q. Did you have any booby traps and if so, were they effective?

A. We ran into a lot of booby traps, especially if there was any vehicle the Germans left. It is better to leave their vehicles alone. In one instance the Germans left a few vehicles in a garage and a civilian, in opening the door of the garage, was killed. Our engineers went in to inspect the vehicles later and found all of them booby trapped. Not just one, but several on each vehicle. The Germans use a lot of booby traps and trip wires. We lost a lot of men by hitting trip wires. The Germans would put mines any place where they thought you would go, on the shoulders of the roads and likely CP locations. They are very clever at it.

Q. What would you say the American soldier's outstanding qualities and faults are from the viewpoint of what we should do?

A. I think the American soldier is as good as any over there. In my opinion, he can hold his own against the German; he's just as smart and as good a fighter. He's not as finished a fighter as the German - anything we can do to improve the finish of our soldiers we should do. The German has had four years of combat - they know all the tricks of the trade - they know how to take advantage of terrain; better than that, they are past masters in the use of mortars. Our soldier isn't imbued with that fighting spirit, consequently he is not as hard-boiled or as cruel. It just isn't our nature. I don't say we should be that way but we should teach him he's up against a dirty fighter who will kill at the first opportunity and won't hesitate to kill, and he shouldn't take anything for granted with him. In Sicily the Germans came forward with a white flag and when they got within a short distance they dropped it and started firing, killing a lot of men in the first division. I think our soldier has all the guts in the world and does a fine job, but whatever we can do to instill in him that he is against an excellent fighting man in the German will improve him and keep him from being a sucker.

Q. One colonel made a statement that stayed with me - he said the American soldier is lazy, especially when it comes to doing things he doesn't like to do.

A. I didn't find it that way. I think you have to set a standard. If the men are accustomed to that standard they will follow it. I had very little trouble with them digging foxholes; they were always cleaning their rifles, and it was amazing how much pride they did take in them. I wouldn't say they were lazy, not after seeing how they came through in my regiment. I feel very proud of them. They did everything I asked them to do, and they had a lot to do. We should stress to them that it isn't a light matter and that they must be prepared in every way - physically and otherwise - to survive. The man who is prepared and is on his guard is the one who is going to come out alive.

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