



**The Column
of Liberation**

**2012
A HMMV and
Reenacting
Event in Italy**

**By Filippo Spadi, #24493
Scarperia, Florence, Italy**

**Some of the
Convoy of
Liberation
2012
vehicles
at Piazza
Libertà in
Cesena (F).**

For several years, Italian MHV enthusiasts have been arguing in favor of one of two points of view about HMV events. Some value the technical perfection of a restoration project and are fond of their preserved vehicles mostly as examples of past technologies to be valued as such. Others share this attitude to a certain extent, but feel HMV events should use these occasions for their HMVs to further the knowledge and remembrance of one's country's history rather than just show individual vehicles with a special eye for technical prowess at restorations.

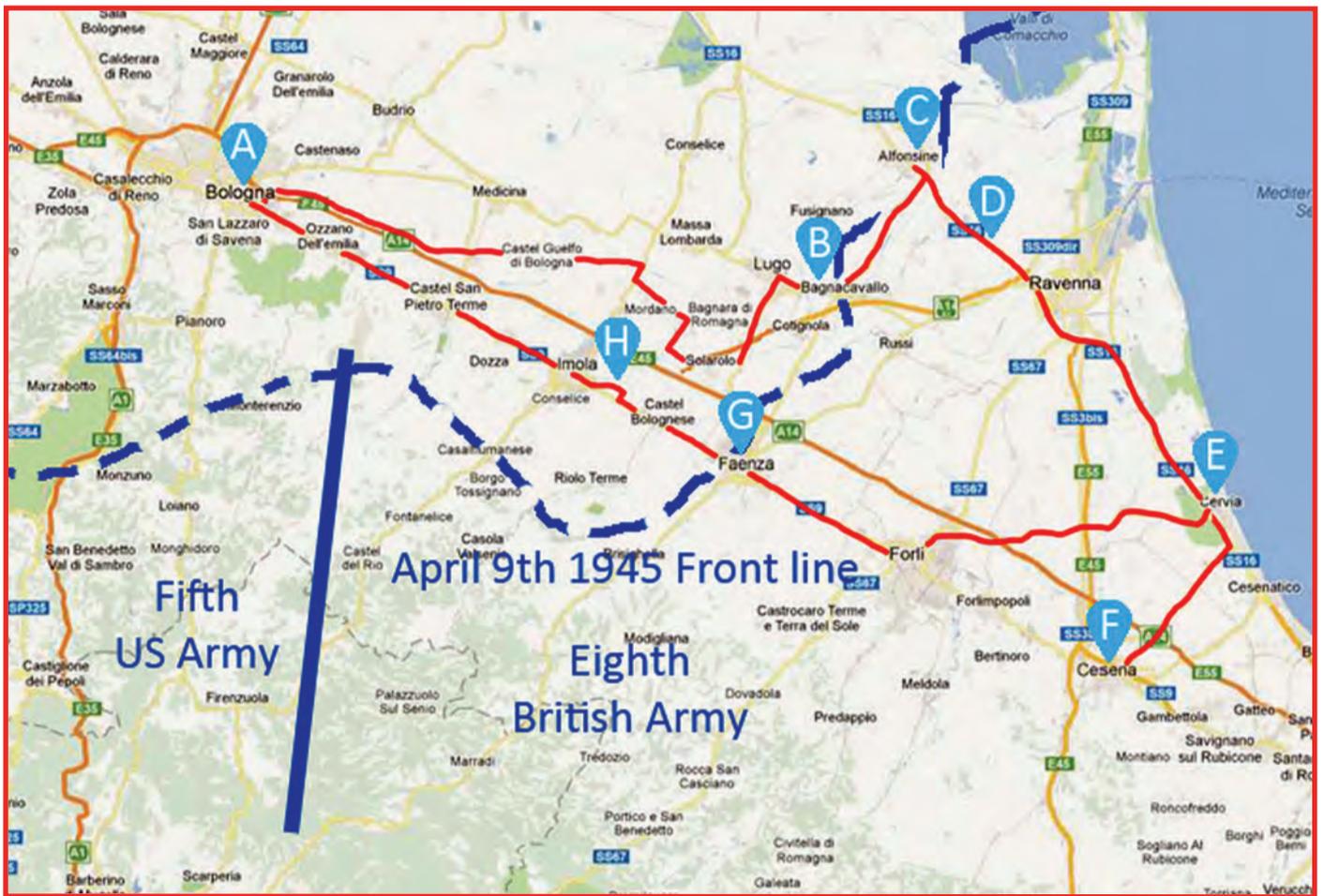
In between these two points of view, as far as WWII era HMVs are concerned, the marrying of restored HMVs to uniformed reenactors - or drivers/owners - proves to be a very contentious issue. The first group strongly object to what they see as little more than clowning around; the other stresses the importance of these type of events both in terms of historical consciousness for the younger generations as well as for promoting HMV's collecting itself.

The debate is not going to end soon and the issue is also common in other countries. And, while some of our

best friends in the hobby belong to the first group of collectors let it be said the *Column of Liberation* was conceived several years ago specifically as an event to celebrate, in ways capable of getting the attention of a broad range of the Italian population, the concluding phase of WWII in Italy. This phase saw Allied armies completing the liberation of our country, as well as the whole of Western Europe, from Nazi and Fascist dictatorship, thus paving the way to the new era of postwar democracy and the birth of a new Europe.

The idea of organizing a mass event bringing together HMV collectors and Italian reenactors, gathered together in a route column traversing specific areas in Italy, was conceived by several associations, museums and research centers, which form together the *North Apennines Po Valley Park* <www.napv.it>.

The *Column of Liberation 2012*, the fourth edition of the event, took place in Emilia Romagna, starting in the Bologna (A) suburban area of San Lazzaro di Savena, where the *Museo Memoriale della Libertà* <www.museomemorale.com> is located. Then progressed to the Adriatic seacoast towns of Cervia (E)



The route taken by the *Convoy of Liberation 2012*. It crossed from west to east the 1944/45 American and British Commonwealth sectors and covered more than 200 road miles.



WWII German BMW R75 and Zundapp sidecars parked in front of the Alfonsine Senio River Battles Museum (C).



Umberto Masola's WC57 Dodge Command Car photographed in Cervia (E) and ready to roll on the convoy. Umbert has never missed an edition of the 'Convoy.'

and Cesena (F) and back to Bologna, covering more than two hundred miles in three days.

The economic climate prevailing in Europe notwithstanding, the *Column of Liberation 2012* confirmed its appeal with Italian HMV collectors and reenactors, with more than 130 registered vehicles and 370 individual participants. More important, it also confirmed the spirit bringing together so many people in sharing a unique experience, one that left behind our everyday cars and civilian clothing to join a community of like-minded people aboard our beloved HMVs traveling in a unified column across places where Italian history was made seventy years ago. It was indeed a unique experience, taxing our stamina and endurance but worth every bit the weariness one feels in the end.

April 25 (National Liberation Day in Italy) was spent in Bologna (A) welcoming the early arriving collectors to the event scheduled to start on 27 April 2012. That morning was a busy one, with more people coming, vehicles undergoing last minute checks, and the usual challenge of assembling a column fit for travelling long-distances on public roads. Luckily, fair weather had taken the place of the previous bad spells and we moved on schedule with the capable escort of the *Sermide Motorbikes Club* riders and the city police of the several towns we went through. The Po valley is sometimes monotonous with its flat terrain, but it made it easier for a column such as ours to proceed in good order, even with the busy workday traffic. We followed our planned route through Lugo di Romagna and Bagnacavallo (B) where we stopped for a midday aperitif followed by a hearty lunch at the 'Two Roosters' restaurant, welcomed there by our friends of the *Romagna Air Finders* - an association devoted to the recovering of air crash relics from WWII.

After lunch we started the second leg of our route, heading towards Alfonsine (C), a town almost completely destroyed during the opening phase of the Po valley campaign in the British 8th Army sector and was liberated in 1945 by Italian troops fighting alongside the Allies. Alfonsine is also the seat of an excellent museum on the Senio River battles, and we stopped for a very interesting visit parking our vehicles in the spacious square in front of the museum. Two half-tracks and an M8 armored car were already part of our column, but for obvious reasons the tanks waited for us in Cervia (E). We left Alfonsine heading towards Ravenna and after a few miles stopped again at the Camerlona WWII memorial honoring the Italian soldiers of the Cremona Battle Group who gave their lives for the liberation of Northern Italy in 1945. There a short ceremony took place where a few reenactors of *The Black Watch* association paid homage.



From left to right, Luca Bambagiotti, Filippo Spadi and Simone Guidorzi from the North Apennines and Po Valley Park <www.napv.it> photographed before entering Cesena (F).

We left the memorial and proceeded directly towards Cervia (E), for dinner at the 'Casa delle Aie' restaurant lodged in a beautiful villa set in the countryside. We arrived there on time, thanks to the able escort provided by our *Sermide* bikers, which we had learned to trust during our previous events. The column was now more than two-miles long, but the biker's presence at intersections and traffic lights assured our safe passage and allowed the column to stay united during the long route. Our long day was almost over and we were tired but the first leg of our trip was enough to produce the right atmosphere of sharing which characterizes these events. A delicious meal served at the restaurant enhanced this feelings even more.

As the day was over we locked up our vehicles for the night at a secure parking lot provided by the Municipality of Cervia. A shuttle bus brought all the participants to our hotels; only a few who had enough energy to be tempted by the nightlife, which is as lively as ever at the summer resorts in the area.

While mechanical troubles prevented two jeeps leaving Bologna only one other MB had a breakdown during our trip, suffering a broken radiator. What is the chance of finding a Willys radiator late at night in Italy? Apparently none at all. With no previous notice we had in our midst our friends Rota and Fucci. Rumor had it the jeep owner was extremely glad to offer a heartily breakfast to the two night-shift mechanics who made the needed repairs under the midnight sky.

We assembled early again on Saturday 28 April at the vehicle compound and found many more vehicles and members who had arrived in Cervia (E) for the second day of the event. Our program for the day took us to



Maschieri Marco and Leonardo Schiavetti portraying US Navy sailors in Schiavetti's early Ford GPW, in USN markings, at Corso Garibaldi in Cesena (F).



The Tracce di Storia Association's nicely equipped M3 half-track personnel carrier in Piazza Libertà, Cesena.

Cesena (F) during the morning and a noon lunch. We then went back to Cervia where we rendezvoused with the tanks for the official parade through town.

British and Commonwealth vehicles led our column, as during WWII they were the first Allied troops to enter Cesena. We followed Corso Garibaldi to Piazza della Libertà, where we were welcomed by the town mayor, Mr. Paolo Lucchi, the Alderman for cultural affairs Ms. Elena Baredi, Dr. Lodovici of the local *Center for the History of the Resistance Movement* and other notables. After a short welcoming speech and presentation of commemorating plaques, we were honored to listen to an address given by Lodovici, who as a young man fought with the Partisans. His words,

meant for the younger members, were also meaningful to all of us. He told a story of people who made difficult and dangerous choices at a time when they could have waited in safety for others to fight and die for their freedom. His final comment "Go to the woods where people fought, suffered, and walk the ground where young people like you died. Try to understand, and do not forget."

We stopped in Cesena for a couple of hours, among a large crowd in the square admiring our vehicles, and saw an exhibition of historical photos of wartime Cesena on display for our visit. Nearby was an exhibition of military radios owned by the *Rover Joe* association headed by Alberto Campanini, who convoyed with us. Here we carried out any necessary repairs to ensure all our vehicles ran safely for the rest of the event.

We were about to leave when an old lady approached on her bicycle, got in front of my vehicle and came closer. After I introduced myself and explained the purpose and intent of our event she said she wanted to



Various convoy vehicles in Cesena, Piazza Libertà.

congratulate all of us for what we are doing. She then told of being a young girl during the war in Cesena, about her most beloved possession, an overcoat. It was received as a present, which comforted her through a hard and hungry winter, until the day foreign soldiers wearing the same uniforms as us, riding similar vehicles, reached her town and put an end to the war. With a final look she bade farewell and left.

After a hearty lunch we started back to Cervia where two Sherman tanks, a Hellcat TD, and a rare Italian AB41 armored car, awaited us already attracting a large crowd. Our program for the afternoon included a demonstration where German reenactors played the part of a military garrison abandoning the square before our arrival – complete with mining the place. Hence, the German vehicles in our column left in advance from our collection point at the outskirts of Cervia so they could pick up the German troops thus leaving Piazza Garibaldi open for our entry. Thus, while we re-formed our column by integrating the tanks, our would-be occupiers followed a prepared script in the town square, until the moment when the German vehicles arrived and took them away. Their departure was timed with our arrival. Heralded by the sound of Scottish pipers, the *Allies* entered Cervia, guided by the *Partisans*.

Filippo Spadi and Michele Vernieri's 1941 Chevrolet 1-1/2 ton cargo truck in Cesena.



Photographed in Cesena, the Gotica Romagna Association's GMC CCKW towed a US 75 mm anti-tank cannon.



Some of the 'Convoy' vehicles parked in Cesena. The Ford GPW (center) was the jeep involved in the accident during the 2010 convoy and has since been well-restored.



Museo Memoriale della Libertà's M4 Sherman and crew ready to enter Cervia (E).

The roar of the tank engines resounded in the narrow streets and our vehicles overflowed the square, far too small to accept all of them. The town mayor welcomed us with a short speech and introduced the event organizers. We then thanked all participants who contributed to the organization of the event. With us at the mike was Edo Ansaloni, dean of the Italian HVM collectors' scene, witness to the liberation of his native Bologna as a young boy in 1945, and founder of the *Museo Memoriale della Libertà*. He couldn't hide his emotions when the mayor presented him with a plaque celebrating the occasion. Edo then explained his point of what we stand for and what we have accomplished over decades of collecting and developing the MV hobby in Italy.

A national TV network also covered the event in the square on their evening news; a great public relations coup for enhancing the hobby. We had passed the midpoint in the event and both people and vehicles had become a well-unified force.



Paolo Baldissara's M18 Hellcat tank destroyer moving to Cervia with the armored convoy.

On Sunday 28 April 2012, our last day together, we returned to Bologna (A) by way of Faenza (G), which we reached on schedule. The historic downtown is very nice, our vehicles attracted the usual crowds of admiring people, and we took time for group photographs on the church stairs. We resumed our movement and reached our lunchtime destination at Zello, near Imola, on time (H). We easily crossed Imola as the local police escorted us through the many intersections enroute and reached



Alberto Campanini's Canadian Chevrolet C8A, with full radio equipment, moving to Cervia with the British and Canadian Convoy.

Zello right on time. Zello is a small town in the countryside, hardly more than a name on the map, and getting there is like getting home, such is the family atmosphere that surrounded us when the locals welcomed us. The smell of a huge barbecue fire boded well for our hungry appetites and when the roasting began we didn't need any urgings to assemble in the large fairground where we were served lunch.

Being our last meal together during the event this was an appropriate occasion to extend our final thanks to all who helped us and to give our warmest farewells to everybody. A special enthusiastic roar greeted our German hosts Raphael and Melanie who traveled from Berlin in their WC51 Dodge on a very special honeymoon.

We felt it proper to extend again our deepest thanks to the North Apennines Po Valley Park staff, and particularly to Simone Guidorzi and Luca Bambagiotti, for their outstanding job in organizing the event. We also thanked the newly born HMV Italia <www.hmvitalia.it> collectors club, the Italian MVPA affiliate branch, which contributed officially to the event. Obviously, we thanked the authorities and staff of the Municipalities of Cervia and Cesena, without whose support the event would not have taken place, as well as the local 'Partisans'

Top. HMV Italian President Senio Moscadelli's Kubelwagen enters Cervia with the German convoy prior to the arrival of the Allied troops. Middle. Moscadelli's BMW R75 (left) accompanied by Fabio Temeroli's (right) with Italian Bersagliero tropical uniform riding a BMW 250 in Cervia. Bottom. Fabio Temeroli's Italian AB41 armored car, a well-restored and very rare vehicle, moving to Cervia with the axis convoy. German troops used AB41s in Italy during 1944/45.

Photographs courtesy of Roberto Gardella Photography © 2012.





Tanks parked in Piazza Garibaldi in Cervia.



Edo Ansaloni (left), witness to the liberation of his native Bologna, confers with Filippo Spadi regarding the informative interpretation aspect of the convoy. The Convoy of Liberation 2012 was a tribute to Edo, the most important WWII historian in Italy.



Simone Guidorzi's just restored 1941 Matchless G3L. It started WWII in Egypt, saw action in North Africa and finally Italy traveling from Taranto to Bologna where it's been since 2011.



Gnocchi Corrado's Willys MB an uncommon Fire Department vehicle in Cervia.



A well turned out DUKW crewmen patiently awaits the next movement of the convoy.

Cervia is a town and municipally in the province of Emilia-Romagna in central Italy. The town square provided an excellent location for displaying our vehicles.



Valeria Baldissara and son enter in Faenza (G) in their M8 armored Greyhound.



The *Convoy of Liberation 2012* parked in Faenza (G).

associations, and finally the several reenactors groups that participated – such as The Black Watch, Progetto 900, Stella Tricolore Partisan Reenactors Group and the Great Generation Airborne Reenactors Group. We thanked all those who assured our safety during our long trip, as well as the Sermide Motor Bikers Association members who acted as our escort.

Finally, we wish to thank all associations which supported the event and contributed in many ways to its success: the Gotica Romagna Association and our friend Marco Alsini from Milano Marittima; the Tracce di Storia Association, the Rover Joe Association, 92nd Buffalo Association from Sarzana, the Highway Six Club

from central Italy, the Historica Club, the Raggruppamento SPA Association, and the Linea Gotica della Lucchesia Association. And, of course thanked each and every one of those who participated in the event; Italians, mostly, but also those from Brazil, who paid their tribute to the history of the BEF, from the USA, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France.

I hope I haven't forgotten anybody, and I wish to close by picking out two photographs which, for me, epitomize the taste of our days together and stand in tribute to those who fought for our freedom so many years ago. Thanks all, and I hope to see you on our next adventure!



The Black Watch reenactors onboard Tracce di Storia Canadian Ford T60 in Camerlona (D).



Melanie, dressed in a British Army Women's Branch Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) uniform, and her husband arrived in Bologna (A) from Berlin in their Dodge WC51.

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