

DUSTY DOUGHBOYS ON THE LINCOLN HIGHWAY: THE 1919 ARMY CONVOY IN IOWA

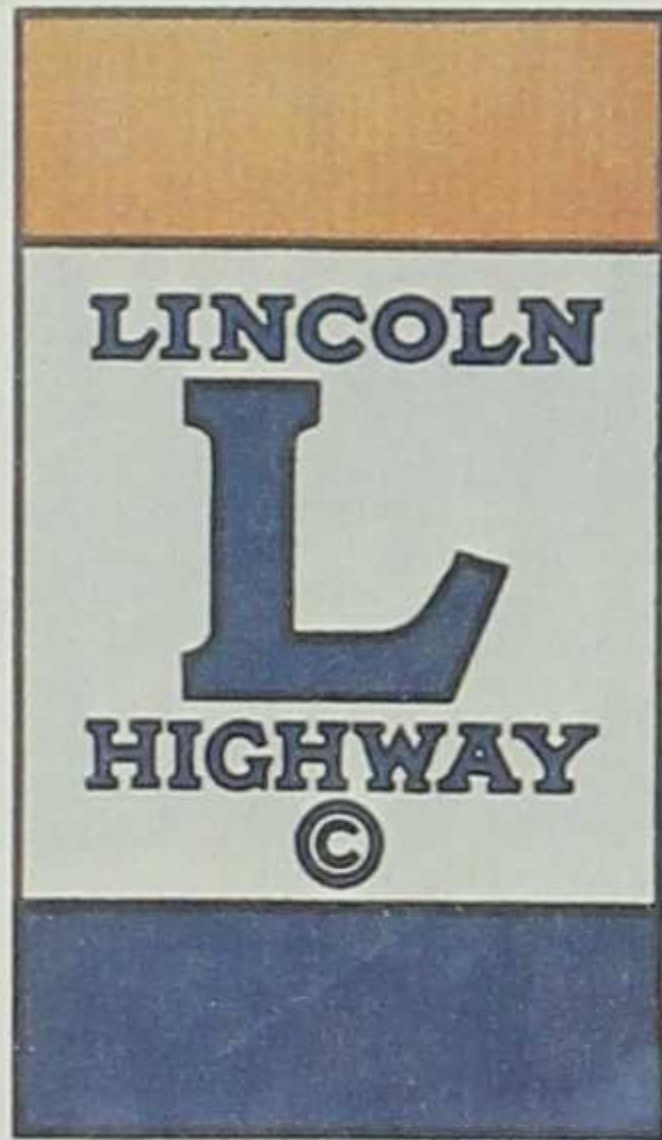
by Peter T. Harstad
and Diana J. Fox

During World War I, Iowa prospered. Quick to take advantage of good times, automobile salesmen convinced one farmer after another of the utility of motor vehicles. But the same fertile, well-watered topsoil that brought prosperity to the Hawkeye state caused serious problems for cars and trucks. One bright summer day in 1915, Henry B. Joy, President of the Packard Motor Company, mired down hub deep in the main street of an Iowa town — with chains on the wheels of his new Packard! Because of Iowa's crucial location with respect to national travel, the state's "vicious and viscous and generally impassable brand of mud" gained a nationwide reputation. Nevertheless, "gumbo" did not deter Iowans from buying cars. In 1919, Iowa shared with Nebraska the distinction among states of having the highest number of automobiles per capita — one to every seven people. The need for better roads in Iowa and the nation was becoming more and more apparent.

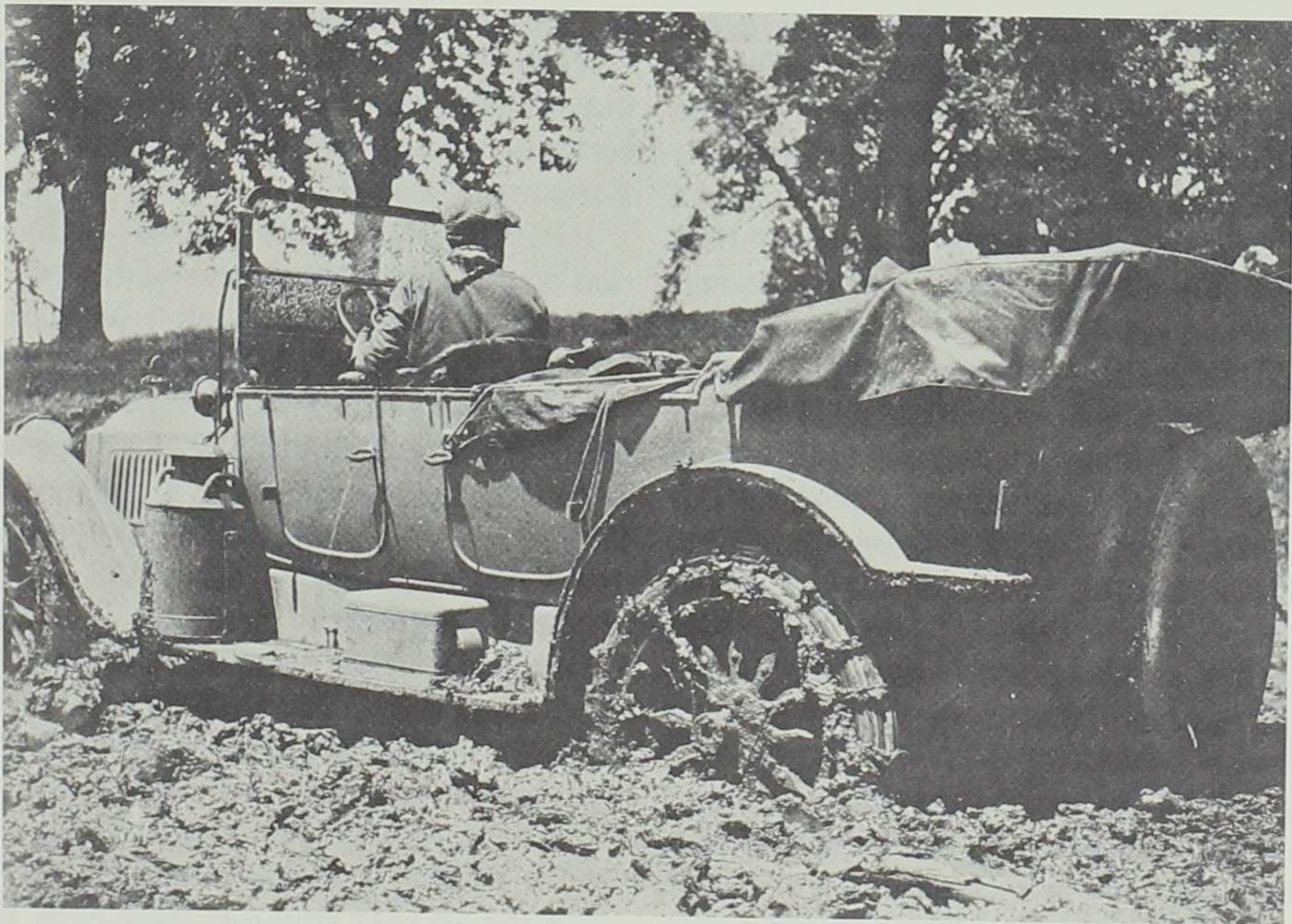
Shortly after Armistice Day, the United States Army, in conjunction with the Lincoln Highway Association, began organizing the First Army Transcontinental Motor Convoy for purposes of proving the practicability of motorized truck transportation and demonstrating the need for national highways. "In those days, we were not sure it could be accomplished at all," wrote Dwight David Eisenhower, a young Lieutenant Colonel destined to make the trip. Secretary of War Newton D. Baker dispatched the convoy from "Zero Milestone" in Washington, D.C. on July 7, 1919, with instructions to travel "by way of the Lincoln Highway overland to San Francisco without delay" At the send-off ceremonies speech followed upon speech, but "luck was running" for Eisenhower and his friend Major Sereno Brett, the two tank officers belatedly assigned to the convoy; "we missed the ceremony," recalled Ike.

To understand the story of the trek across the United States, with emphasis upon the Iowa part of the tale, it is helpful to know some basics about the Lincoln Highway. This highway was the result of much hard work by a group of eager citizens banded together into the Lincoln Highway Association. Members of this organization incorporated in Michigan in 1913:

To procure the establishment of a continuous improved highway from the Atlantic to the Pacific, open to lawful traffic of all description without toll charges: such highway to be known, in memory of Abraham Lincoln, as "The Lincoln Highway."



The emblem of the Lincoln Highway, used to mark the route and as a logotype for the Highway Association.



Henry B. Joy, President of the Lincoln Highway Association, shown mired down in the mud of the Lincoln route near Tama, Iowa, in 1915. Joy's Packard could barely negotiate the Highway, even with chains. Such experiences convinced Association officials that the Army convoy would promote better road construction and hard-surfacing.



The concrete "Seedling Mile" under construction in Linn County near Cedar Rapids in 1918. The Portland Cement Association provided materials free of charge (Lincoln Highway Association photo).

The first president of the Association, Henry B. Joy, knew firsthand the hardships of transcontinental travel. Early in the century, Joy drove a test car to Omaha and asked the local Packard distributor for directions to the road west. "There isn't any," the man replied. "Then how do I go?" The dealer replied, "Follow me and I'll show you." They drove out of town until they came to a wire fence. "Just take down the fence and drive on," he was told, "and when you come to the next fence, take that down and go on again." Further along, Joy found no fences, no fields — just ruts; still further he found the scattered mementoes of the wagon trains that had carried people overland until the railroads made that form of long distance travel obsolete.

Joy was convinced that American ingenuity, hard work, and organizational skill could get Iowa out of the mud and ease many of the problems he and other brave souls encountered in their cross-country motor travels. National business and civic leaders agreed and put money and effort

into the Lincoln Highway Association. The list of officers and donors reads like a "Who's Who" of the automobile and cement industries of that day except for the conspicuous absence of the name Henry Ford.

By 1919, the Lincoln Highway Association had accomplished several important objectives, and its structure was sound. Its leadership had established a route from New York to San Francisco via Iowa (basically the present route of U.S. 30). Each of the 12 states through which the Lincoln Highway passed reported to the national organization through a State Consul. As did his counterparts in other states, the Consul for Iowa in 1919, David E. Goodell, a Tama banker, worked through county and community consuls to maintain communications with the membership at the local level. With an eye to trade and tourism, progressive merchants in towns along the Lincoln Highway frequently became consuls and promoted membership. Sustaining members paid \$5.00 annual dues and in return received a member-

ship card, maps and travel publications, news bulletins, and "a handsome red, white and blue enameled radiator emblem" for their cars. Both before and after the 1919 expedition, Iowa towns frequently exceeded membership quotas established by the national organization—which made good copy for the Association's magazine, *The Lincoln Highway Forum*.

By publishing communications from the field, the *Forum* told readers of current highway conditions and, simultaneously, bolstered the morale of consuls and members. For example, in the June 4, 1919 issue, Consul Goodell cautioned drivers not to attempt to cross Iowa prior to June 10, but promised that after the rainy season the Lincoln Highway across Iowa would be in "boulevard condition" (meaning a passable dirt road). From such evidence it is understandable why the *Forum* consistently publicized the Association's foremost objective, a federally financed coast to coast concrete highway.

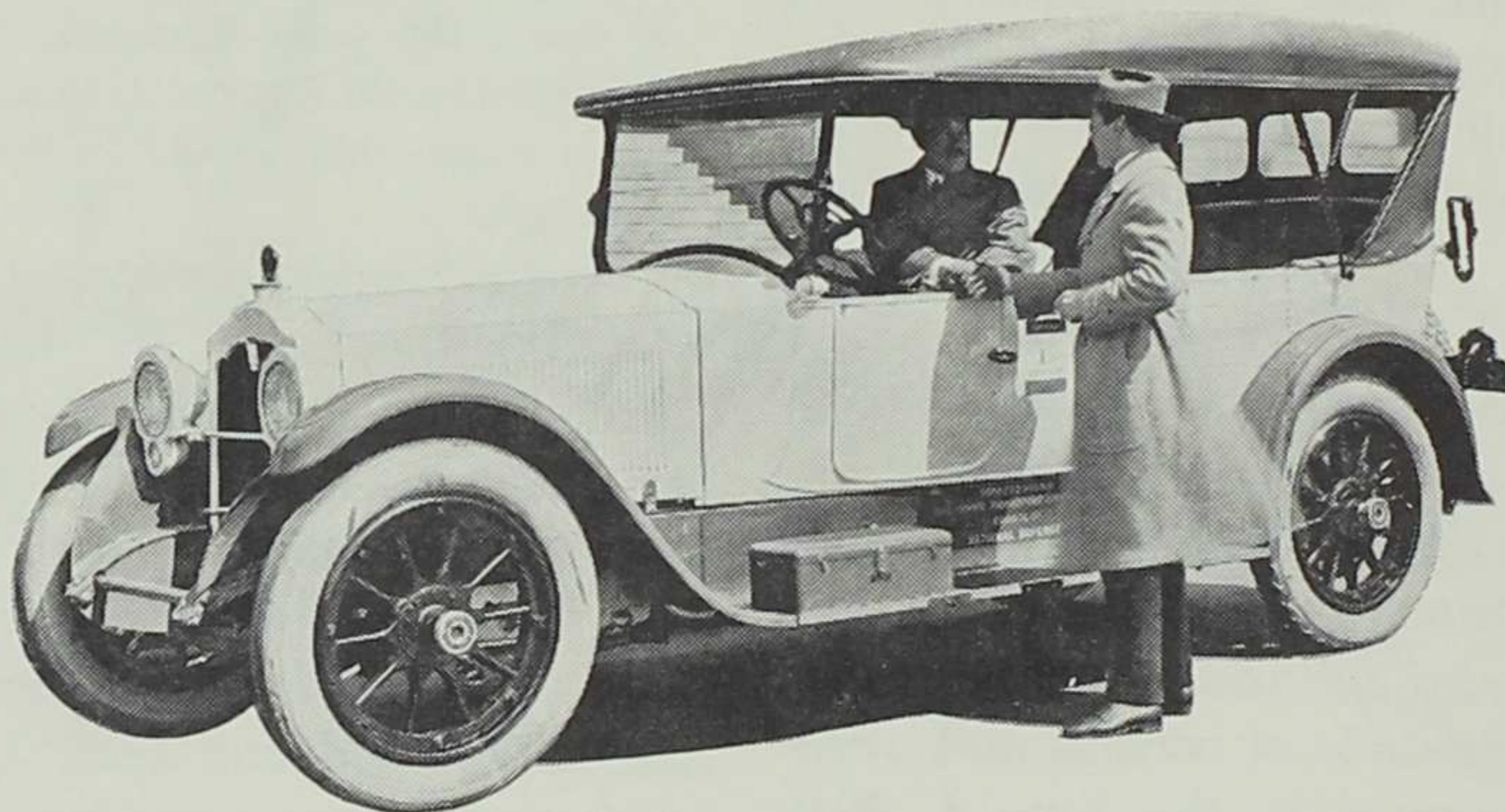
The effectiveness of the Lincoln Highway Association impressed Eisenhower even after his military career and his presidency. In 1967 he wrote: "The beginnings of construction on the first modern transcontinental highway were marked by a faith in community initiative that is rare today." What particularly struck Ike was the "Seedling Mile" idea to encourage the building of concrete highways especially in the "mud states" where road improvement was so desperately needed. The policy was:

Any such community along the Lincoln Highway desiring to construct a Seedling Mile can, by making proper application to the Lincoln Highway Association and securing its approval, secure sufficient cement for the construction of the standard 16-foot road. The only condition is that satisfactory

sub-grade and drainage must be provided at the expense of the community, the labor cost of doing the work financed, and adequate provision made for maintenance of the road for a reasonable period following its construction.

Cement for the demonstration areas was offered without cost by the nation-wide Portland Cement Association. Work on the first Seedling Mile in the country began near Malta, Illinois, in 1914. Edward Kilian, Cedar Rapids merchant and Linn County Consul for the Lincoln Highway Association, did not delay in making arrangements for a Seedling Mile midway between Mt. Vernon and Marion, Iowa. Because of war-time inflation, the cement pledged to the project in 1914 had more than doubled in value by the summer of 1918 when the Linn County Supervisors progressed far enough with the "permanent grading" and other preparations to need the cement. The *Forum* of July 1918 commended the Northwestern States Portland Cement Company of Mason City for "holding to its original promise, without question" and shipping the 3,000 barrels of cement then worth \$6,800. No federal or state dollars were spent on this first stretch of paved highway in Iowa, confirming Eisenhower's point about "community initiative."

The one individual perhaps most responsible for the 1919 military convoy was Henry C. Ostermann, Field Secretary of the Lincoln Highway Association and a folk hero of early motoring in the United States. Born in Indiana in 1876, Harry was supporting himself as a newsboy in New York City by the age of six. At 14, he joined the Navy for a three-year hitch and thereafter drifted around the United States as orange picker, employee of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, rancher, railroad work-



Henry C. Ostermann in his white Packard touring car as he leaves on one of his trans-continental journeys. A. F. Bement, an Association official, sees him off (Lincoln Highway Association photo).

er, inventor, and businessman. Crank case oil was in Harry's blood. From early in the century he enjoyed long distance travel and thought nothing of being stuck in a mud hole for 24 hours. After a business setback, Ostermann accepted employment with the Lincoln Highway Association in 1914. In small groups or large audiences, in country store caucuses or board meetings with industrial magnates, Harry held a mystic power when it came to the promotion and improvement of the Lincoln Highway. He kept abreast of the latest automotive and highway technology and offered sound advice with tact and geniality. At least twice a year, Field Secretary Ostermann endeavored to contact every Lincoln Highway Consul in person, which required 500 personal visits and 15,000 miles behind the wheel. But Harry loved driving. A certain aura followed him as he drove the latest equipment, usually an open Packard touring car, through the towns and across the countryside of America in the cause of better roads.

During the winter of 1917, when the

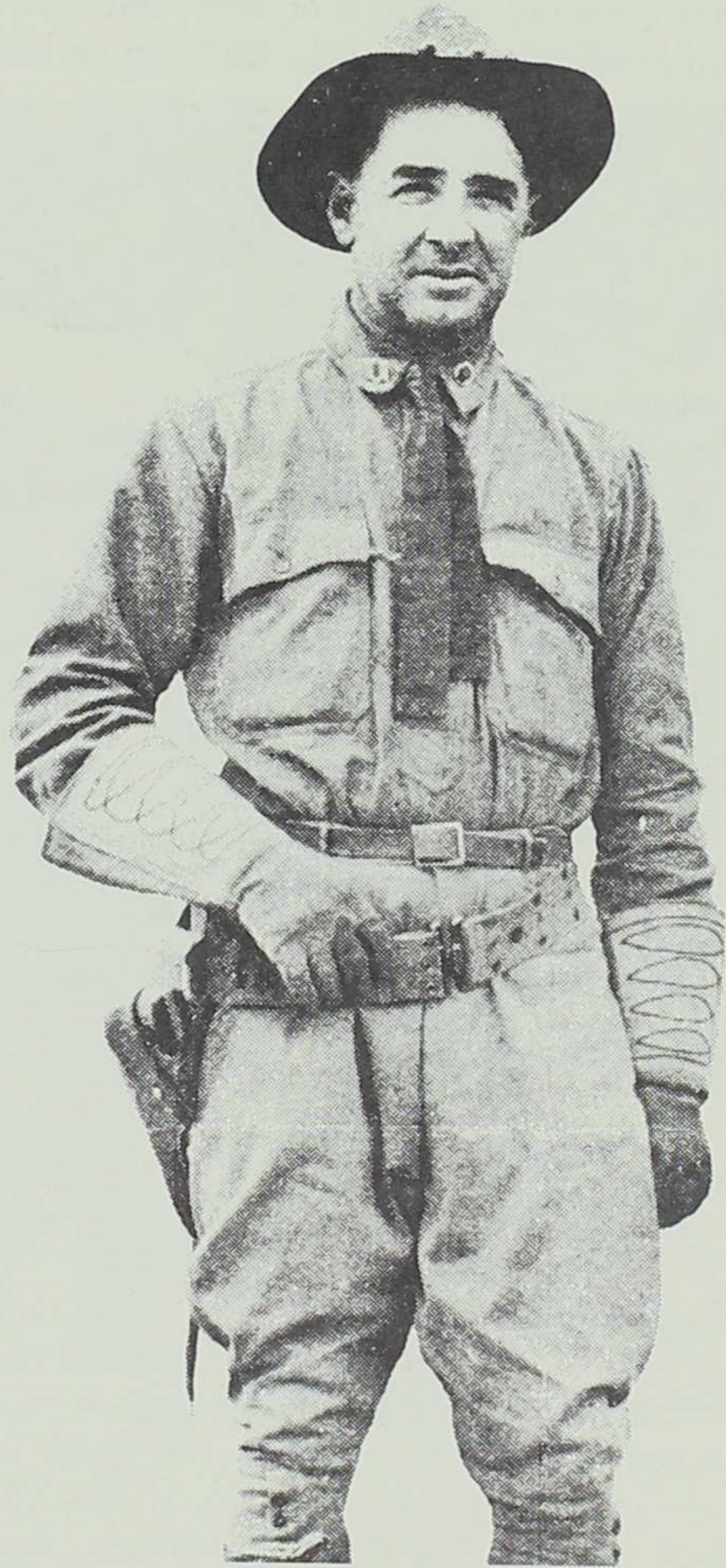
United States strained its transportation facilities to move men and supplies to the east coast for shipment to France, Ostermann helped alleviate railroad congestion by piloting convoys of government trucks along the eastern section of the Lincoln Highway. Piloting was necessary because roads were marked poorly, if at all, and it was easy to get lost or mired. During this service Ostermann conceived the idea of sending a military convoy over the entire length of the Lincoln Highway and discussed the matter with military officials. With the end of World War I the United States Army was eager to participate.

When the generals and politicians finished talking at Zero Milestone near the White House on July 7, 1919, Harry Ostermann cranked up his Packard and pointed its gleaming Lincoln Highway radiator emblem northward toward the route he knew well. Wheeled equipment of many descriptions rolled into position behind Ostermann's lead car: standard army vehicles ranging in size from a motor-

cycle to a 14-ton truck; units adapted from standard models into ambulances, an officers' work truck, searchlight and tank trailers; pieces made for special purposes such as a mobile kitchen, an engineering shop, and a tank truck. Colonel Charles W. McClure commanded the 56 military vehicles and 209 officers and men of the expedition. To the military were added the civilian vehicles containing representatives of three tire manufacturers and several automobile companies, reporters, and good road boosters, bringing the total to 72 vehicles and 297 men. In military formation the procession stretched out impressively over two miles of roadway.

In order to subject the army equipment to a vigorous test, McClure desired to maintain an average speed of 18 miles per hour on the road, eight miles per hour faster than the speed limit for heavy trucks in Iowa. In addition to recording data on the performance of the equipment, the Army also desired information which might be useful in training programs for officers and men. On this score, young Eisenhower immediately detected, upon joining the convoy, that the vocabulary of the supposedly experienced drivers suggested "a longer association with teams of horses than with internal combustion engines." Dear to the heart of Ostermann and members of the Lincoln Highway Association were the objectives of demonstrating the practicability of long-distance, commercial motor transportation and the necessity for federal appropriations to improve the Lincoln Highway and other through routes.

Frequent problems with equipment, inexperienced mechanics and drivers, as well as poor roads and bridges prevented the convoy from covering more than 165 miles during the first three days of travel—a



Colonel Charles W. McClure, commander of the convoy (Lincoln Highway Association photo).

disappointing average of five and two-thirds miles for each of the 29 hours on the road!

Although the Lincoln Highway began in New York City, the convoy drove onto it at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, where the Emancipator himself had dedicated a portion of a Civil War battlefield "as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that the nation might live." Was it fitting or sacrilege that 50 years after the Gettysburg Address some pragmatic industrialists would promote a motor road by naming it after America's first martyred president? And what thoughts did Lieutenant Colonel Eisenhower harbor about the coalition of industrial and military leaders who jointly sponsored the 1919 convoy? During the waning days of his presidency in 1961 he would warn his fellow Americans about the dangers of the "military industrial complex," then retire to his Gettysburg farm.

As the convoy rolled westward from Gettysburg, activities fell into a pattern, and fortunately, the pace accelerated. General Charles B. Drake, chief of the Motor Transport Corps, had written ahead to the governors of the appropriate states, informing them of the itinerary and approximate schedule, and urging that the road be groomed into prime condition for the heavy equipment headed their direction. In some towns promoters posted huge maps in conspicuous downtown spots and plotted the convoy's daily advance. With Harry Ostermann in the pilot car was Lieutenant William B. Doran of Cedar Rapids, publicity officer for the convoy.

In those instances where elaborate doings and throngs of people were likely, Ostermann and Doran traveled as much as two days ahead of the heavy equipment to work out final arrangements. For the cause of good roads Harry drew on the promotional techniques he had learned from that master showman, Buffalo Bill.

The excitement of a circus parade and the patriotism of a Fourth of July celebration attended the arrival of the convoy in a community. Mechanical equipment, recently used to defeat Germany, naturally drew crowds in 1919. So did the soldiers now home from the continent—victorious. Mayors proclaimed holidays, and towns suspended business for Motor Convoy Day. At Pittsburgh, it seemed that the entire city came out to see the procession through the streets. Private individuals also extended their hospitality. Near Columbiana, Ohio, Harvey F. Firestone, a staunch Lincoln Highway backer, treated the entire party to a lavish banquet at his country home. He also sent his son, Harvey Jr., with the convoy to promote the Firestone "Ship by Truck" campaign.

Wherever they had opportunities, civilians and officers connected with the convoy spoke to the crowds about the necessity for hard surface roads. Local dignitaries chimed in. Ostermann, the most sought after speaker, was excellent at "warming up" an audience. Dr. S. M. Johnson, representative of the National Highway Association, traveled with the entourage and lectured frequently. The Army officers carried instructions to back legislation pending in Congress to provide fed-



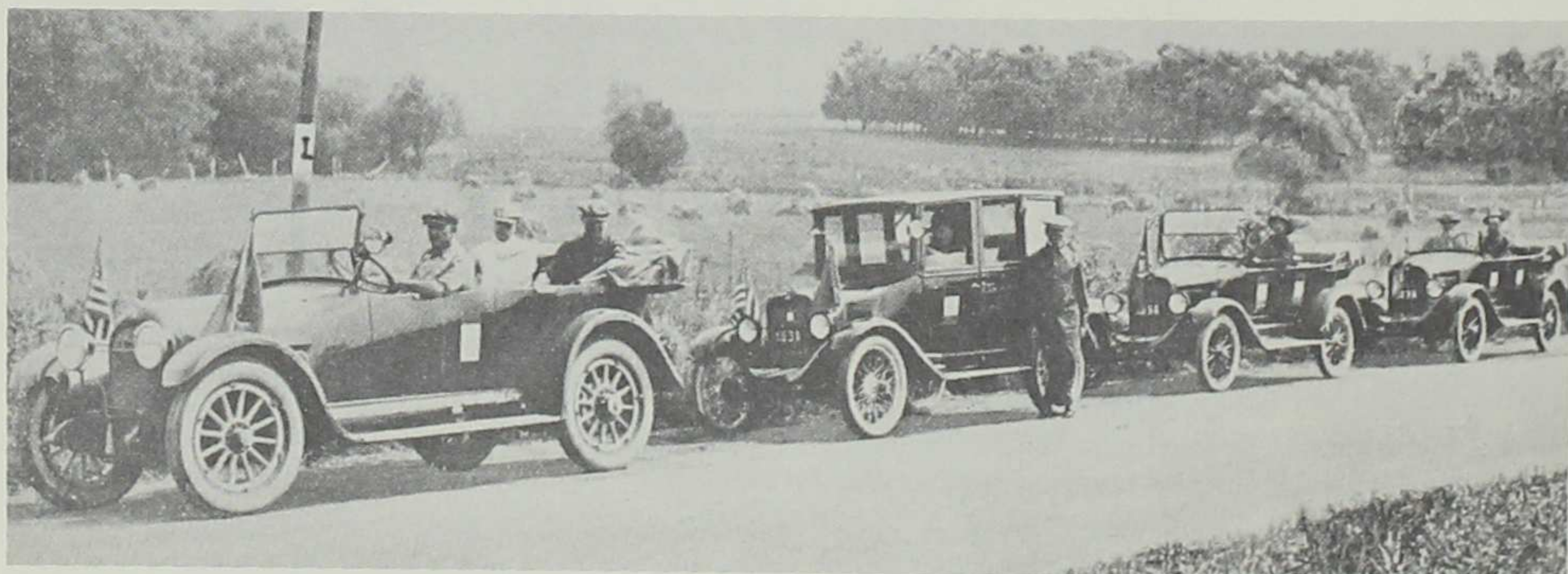
Harvey F. Firestone (far left) entertained the officers and men of the convoy at his home "Harbel Manor" near Columbiana, Ohio. The jaunty figure at the far right is, of course, Dwight David Eisenhower (courtesy of the Firestone Archives).

eral funds for cross-country roads. An improved Lincoln Highway would free the army from dependence upon the four transcontinental railroads in transporting men and supplies from coast to coast. Colonel McClure, a veteran with service in the Philippines, Mexico, and France, presented the position of the U.S. Army with conviction. With Henry Ford democratizing motor travel with his Model T, and the military men stressing defense needs, it was not difficult to convince a crowd that self-interest and patriotism demanded federal financing for national highways.

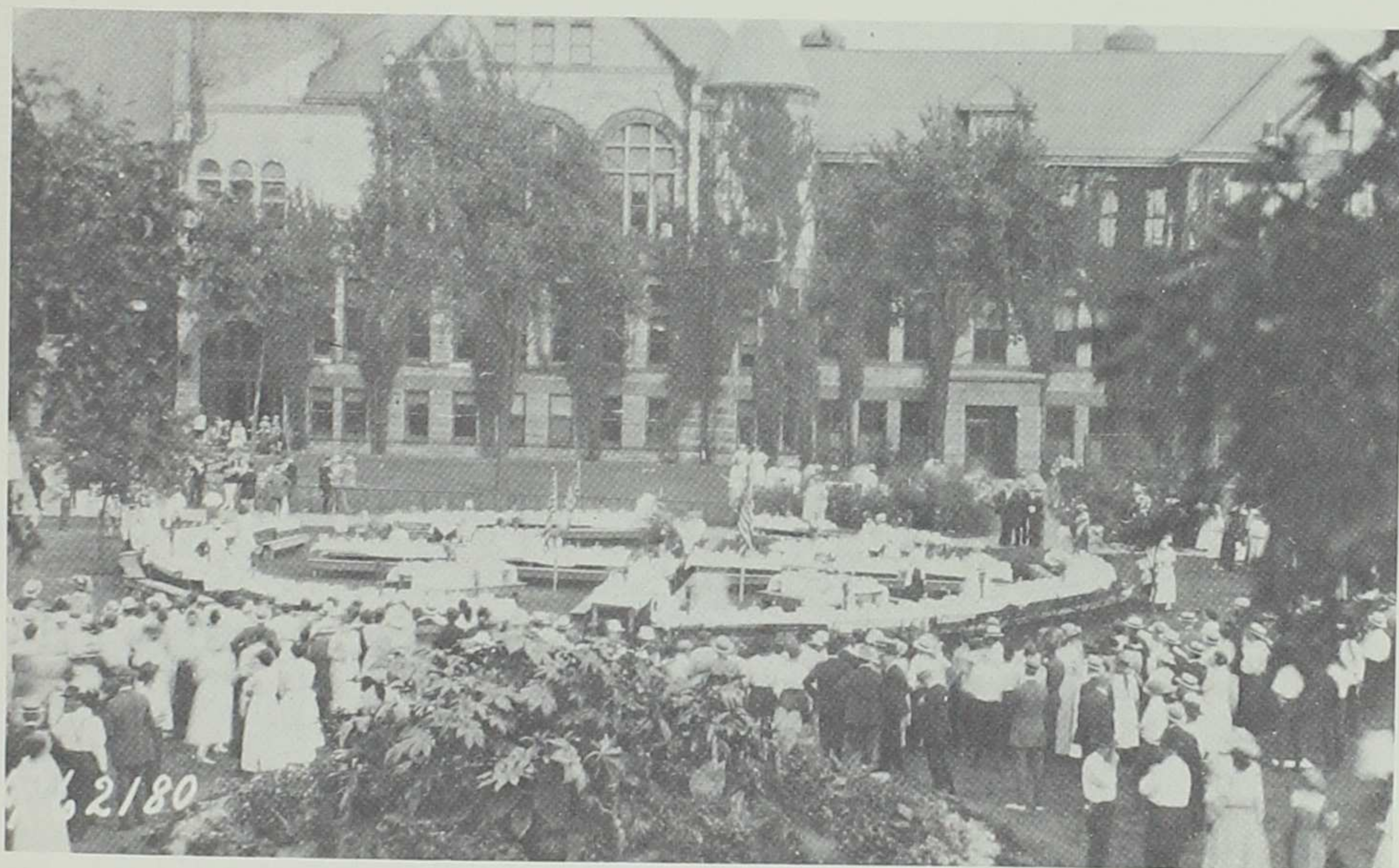
The convoy crossed the Mississippi and entered Iowa at Clinton late in the afternoon of July 22. The over-night stop provided the first chance for Iowans to express their hospitality and gave the soldiers an opportunity for showing Iowans their equipment. The 1920 census enumerated a Clinton population of 24,000. Newspapers reported fifteen to twenty thousand people in attendance for the festivities—obviously a heavy turnout. The evening meal did not prove to be a gastronomic success for the soldiers although its preparation in mobile kitchens and con-

sumption in mess tents provided a visual spectacle for the Iowans. One Clintonian—a former doughboy—lingered near the victuals, but declined a dinner invitation from the friendly soldiers saying “they could have their slum—he was getting regular eats now.” In the days ahead, the Army food compared so badly with what Iowans served that a demand for a new mess crew passed through official channels.

During a long Tuesday evening, eastern Iowans viewed almost every type of motorized vehicle then in use by the Army. One unit which particularly interested the parents of soldiers was the medical corps truck. Several young men, incapacitated by their first typhoid shots the previous day, lay on cots in considerable discomfort. The major in charge commented that they required no sympathy—until after their second shots. In addition to a ball game, band concert, and the inevitable round of speeches, the Clintonians and the troops enjoyed a dance at the Coliseum which lasted into the early hours of the morning. The two best crowd pleasers were nocturnal—Jeff the raccoon, who traveled as mascot, and the three-million candle



Official cars of the Lincoln Highway Association (note the emblems) which accompanied the convoy. Cars and drivers were provided by the Willys-Overland Company (Lincoln Highway Association photo).



The wheel-shaped banquet table, laid out and waiting for the convoy contingent and their hosts, in Greene Square in Cedar Rapids (U.S. Signal Corps photo).

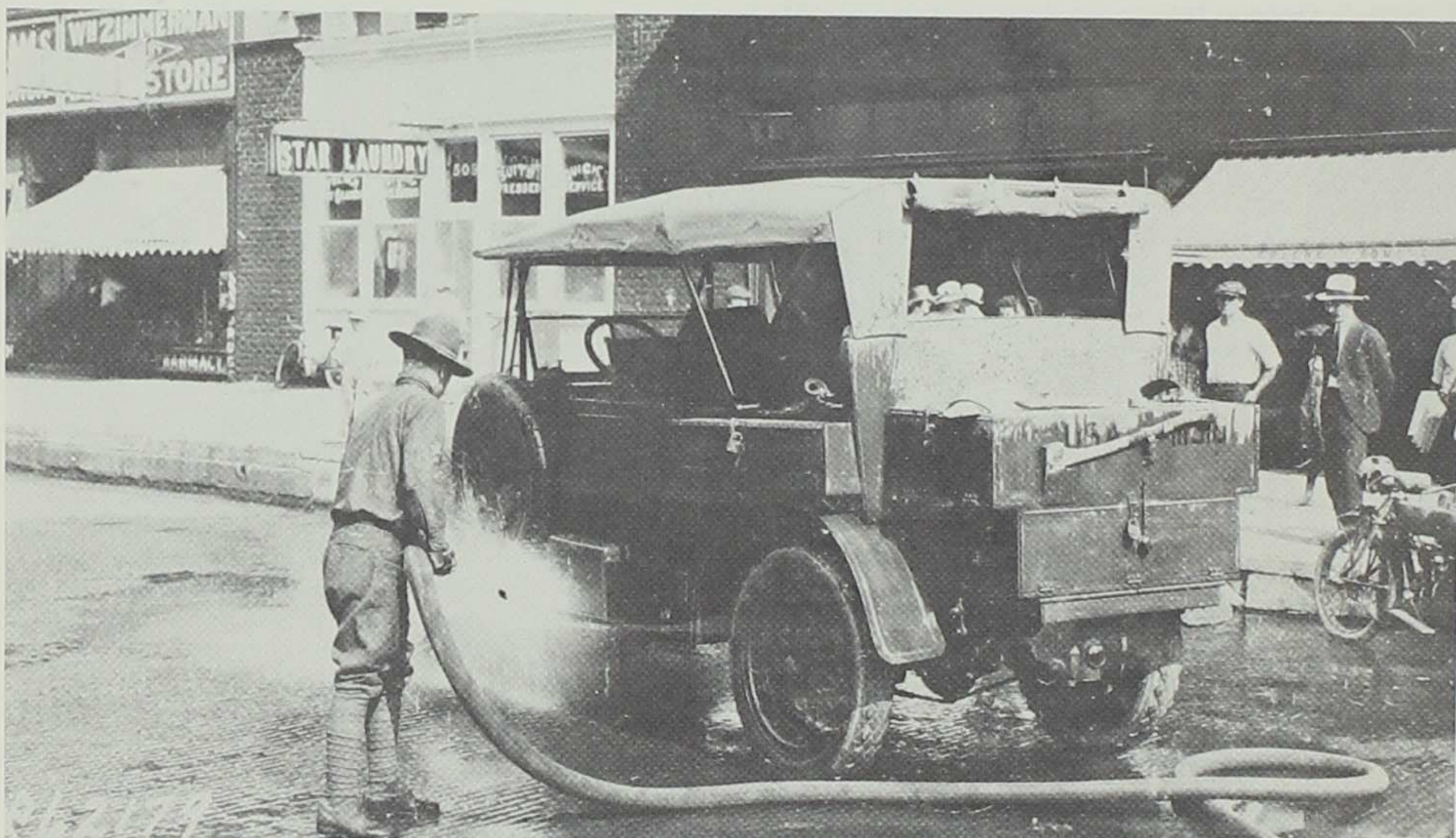
power searchlight. Former members of the American Expeditionary Forces interspersed their demonstration of the light with tales from "over there" about combat between powered aircraft — the first in history.

At 6:30 AM the next day the trucks started out for Cedar Rapids. Although no planned stops along the way interrupted the pace, several hundred people lined the streets of the smaller towns to watch the trucks roll past. The Seedling Mile must have offered momentary relief from the oppressive road dust, but the official journal is silent on that matter. After a routine day of cracked spark plugs and dust-clogged gas lines the convoy arrived in Cedar Rapids at about 5 PM.

Following a parade through the downtown streets, the soldiers set up their camp on several tree-lined blocks roped off for

that purpose. Edward Killian, local Consul for the Lincoln Highway Association, provided the staff from the Killian Company tea room who prepared and served a chicken dinner for 350 soldiers and city officials in Greene Square. The table arrangements formed a huge wheel with the soldiers sitting at the rim and the officers and townspeople along the spokes. After eating, the guests saw a promotional film about the Lincoln Highway, then listened to a round of speeches. All went well until a defiant train came through on nearby tracks while Lieutenant Governor E. R. Moore attempted to speak.

Perhaps publicity officer Doran outdid himself to provide recreation for the men in his native city. Some soldiers swam and exercised at the Y.M.C.A. building; others attended a dance on another roped off street. Each man from Cedar Rapids



The Iowa dust settled thickly on both men and vehicles. Here a trooper washes down his car in Cedar Rapids, but this scene was undoubtedly re-enacted throughout the journey (U.S. Signal Corps photo).

was encouraged to bring two girls to the dance so there would be enough for the soldiers. While these events progressed, a surprise birthday celebration for Colonel McClure took place at the Montrose Hotel. As part of this festivity Harry Ostermann presented the officer with a purse containing \$50 in gold. "The farther west we come the better we are treated," remarked one eastern soldier to a reporter. "In the east we were frozen; in Pennsylvania they almost shouldered us off the sidewalks. But in Cedar Rapids tonight we have been treated like friends and brothers."

For the local people, the greatest excitement of the night occurred when a squadron of airplanes "invaded" Cedar Rapids. The searchlight quickly spotted them and forced their retreat, demonstrating the efficiency of the light in wartime. (As it turned out, a local airline company had furnished the planes.)

Early in the morning of July 24, the convoy left for Marshalltown with one of the trucks sporting a new banner: "Cedar Rapids extends best wishes to the Motor Transport and to all points on the Lincoln Highway." The road proved hard and dry but extremely dusty, especially at the end of the train. Even though rain meant trouble in the mud states, the soldiers prayed for at least enough precipitation to settle the dust. But fair weather continued and the convoy fought the dust all the way across the Hawkeye state. Ironically, the dust forced Governor William L. Harding (elected on a mud road platform in 1916) to cancel his plans to travel with the convoy from Clinton to Council Bluffs.

Not all of the celebrations in honor of the convoy were the result of elaborate planning. Residents of Tama learned on the evening of July 23 that the convoy

would stop there for noon lunch the next day. The Red Cross and members of the Commercial Club went to work and prepared food for 300 men. Several thousand people from Tama, the neighboring towns, and the countryside came to view the equipment during the noon hour. David E. Goodell, Iowa Consul for the Lincoln Highway Association, had good reason to be proud of his friends and neighbors.

The convoy also attracted sight-seers between stops. Farmers and villagers, wide-eyed boys and girls, women whose lovers had not come back from the trenches gazed at the procession, waved to the drivers, and saluted the flag as it passed by. One soldier remarked that the convoy traveled from coast to coast between two lines of cameras. The convoy passed through LeGrande without stopping but the *Reporter* of that town asserted: "The passing of the Convoy was an eye opener and will surely lead to results." — meaning improved roads.

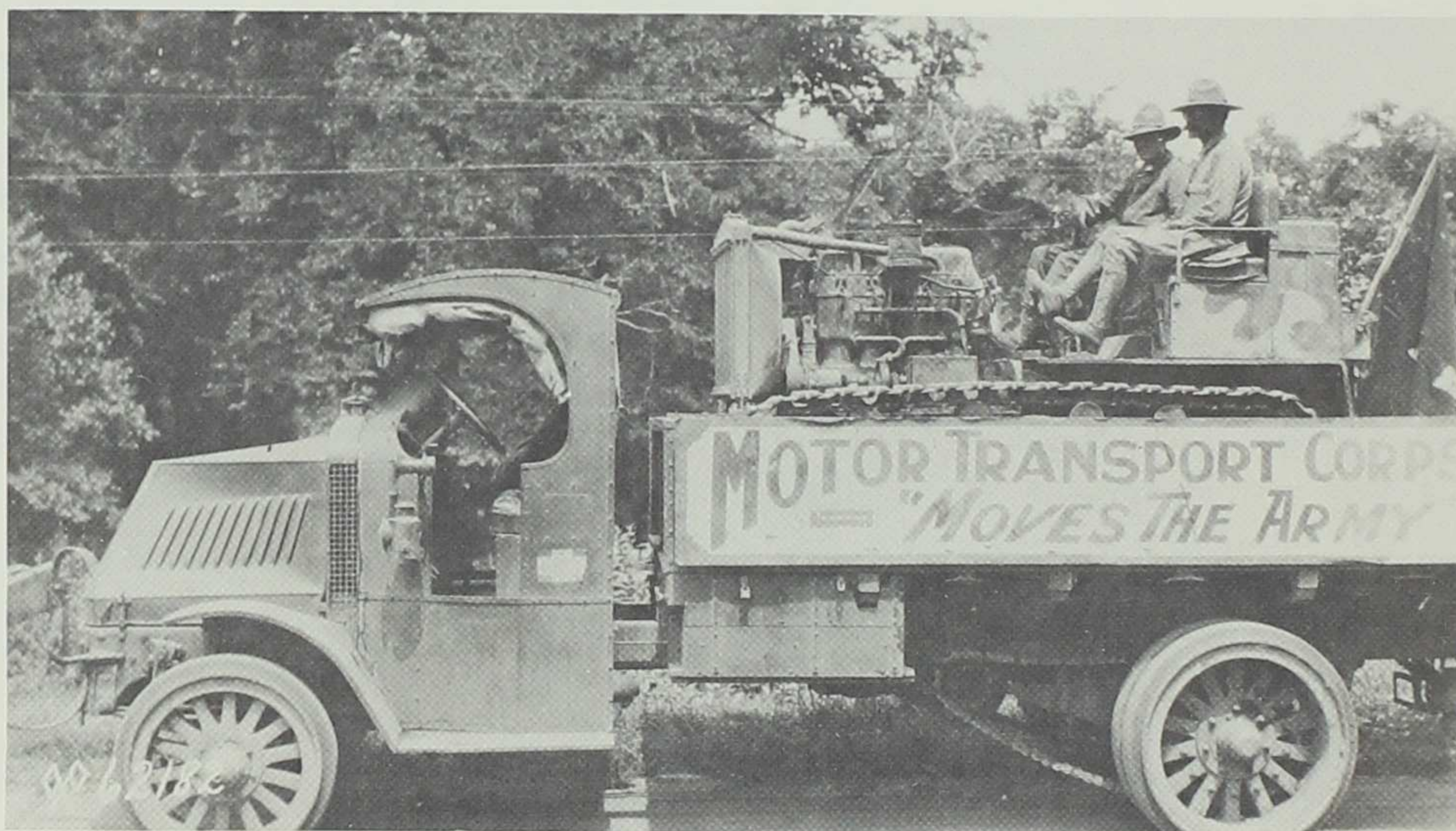
The convoy entered Marshalltown late in the afternoon liberally covered with road dust which the town residents called "War Paint." The trucks stopped at River-view Park where the men ate a home-cooked meal of meatloaf and potato salad. Visitors were held back while the men attended to their tasks. Reports had to be written, telegrams answered, orders given; equipment was inspected, cleaned, fueled, greased, and repaired. Then the visitors streamed in. The convoy's own band, consisting of factory workers of the Goodyear Tire Company, began the evening's musical program, and the local Soldier's Home Band continued the concert until 10 PM.

Confusion reigned near Ames the next day, and some curious Iowans were deprived of their due. Army orders allowed

minor deviations from the Lincoln Highway if approved in advance by proper authority, and, somehow, those in charge of local arrangements at Ames believed that the convoy would pass through the main business district on the way to Boone and Jefferson. But nobody bothered to clear the matter with McClure. So the entourage proceeded down the marked route at the edge of town. Likely the motorcycle couriers scurried, but nobody could authorize the last minute change. Therefore, the U.S. Army bypassed the downtown crowd, leaving Harry Ostermann with a formidable public relations task for his next visit to Ames.

The *Boone News Republican* began printing stories about the convoy more than a week before the brief stop in that city. After all, one of the tank officers was married to a former Boone girl named Doud, but Mamie was in Denver tending her baby and preparing to meet her husband. Therefore, Ike's hosts in Boone were his aunt and uncle, Miss Eda, and Joel E. Carlson. Perhaps because of the local connection, the Boone newspaper interviewed Ike. "I can't say too much on the condition of the Lincoln Highway," he remarked. "Imagine a great truck convoy of this kind out over 1,200 miles, practically ahead of its schedule. We lost one truck in Pennsylvania. The hill was slippery and the truck slid over the mountain side and crashed to the bottom. No one was hurt and the damage to the truck will not be over \$200. This is the only accident we have had." During the hour in Boone, business ceased while soldiers and citizens mingled, and the Red Cross distributed ice cream to the dusty travelers.

While speakers addressed the assemblage, the convoy left for points west. For



once, Ostermann stayed behind. Fully aware of a dangerous wooden bridge ahead, he praised the condition of the Lincoln Highway through Iowa, particularly some of the concrete bridges. A few miles west of Ogden, Dr. Johnson put in some good words about the width and quality of the grade, then stated diplomatically: "If the time comes that you do hard surface a grade of the kind you have . . . you will find that you have acted wisely in your grade construction." Even when tired and dusty, Ostermann and Johnson remembered what reformers too often forget — people like to hear positive things about their endeavors and respond best not when denigrated but when treated with respect.

Jefferson provided a unique experience for the men. Fifty cars drove the soldiers from the Fair Grounds, where camp was set up, to the Country Club for a dinner provided by the Red Cross and the Woman's Club. Thereafter came the usual

round of evening activities at the town square. All of the major speakers with the convoy spoke with urgency in Jefferson because voters would settle a vital question regarding hard surfacing in Greene County in just three days.

A portion of Saturday, July 26, was devoted to reflection. The convoy swung north of the Lincoln Highway to visit Glidden, home of Merle D. Hay, the first member of the American Expeditionary Forces killed during World War I. Records of the convoy show no complaints resulting from the detour or the added miles.

Carroll was not a scheduled stop but some enterprising citizens of that town had driven to Jefferson on Friday to make the necessary arrangements with Colonel McClure. The road was hard and dry, rain did not threaten, cross breezes whisked away the dust, so McClure could expect a good rate of speed. Since the schedule only demanded that he make Denison by Saturday night, the commander gave in.

No foul-ups occurred (as in Ames) so the people of Carroll viewed the trucks at rest, listened to some rhetoric about good roads, and tapped their feet to the music of the Goodyear Band.

Several cities, including Omaha, vied for the honor of hosting the convoy for the Sunday rest. Finally, McClure bluntly told the Omaha delegation: "The train is an official Army affair and not out for entertainment and advertisement." So Denison retained the honor of having the convoy for two nights and a full day. The equipment filled Washington Park, and the men appreciated Saturday night showers in facilities provided by the city. Inevitably, the convoy drew a crowd. Soon the Iowans were listening to good roads speeches in the Court House square. Governor Harding again disappointed his supporters by wiring that pressing business prevented him from meeting his scheduled appearance in Denison that weekend.

With one exception, the Saturday night fare did not differ significantly from what Clinton, Cedar Rapids, Marshalltown, and Jefferson offered earlier in the week. The Denison Federation of Women's Clubs served fresh cantaloupe at the dance, thus signaling the season. Whether the Denison girls held the attention of the soldiers at the dance was signaled in another way. The local Opera House billed a moving picture, *The Unpardonable Sin*, which the soldiers attended in large numbers.

Several Denison institutions beckoned sinners on Sunday morning. In fact, the churches outdid the cinema by dispatching cars to pick up any men who wished to attend services.

Fearful heat plagued the Sunday afternoon activities, and the soldiers played



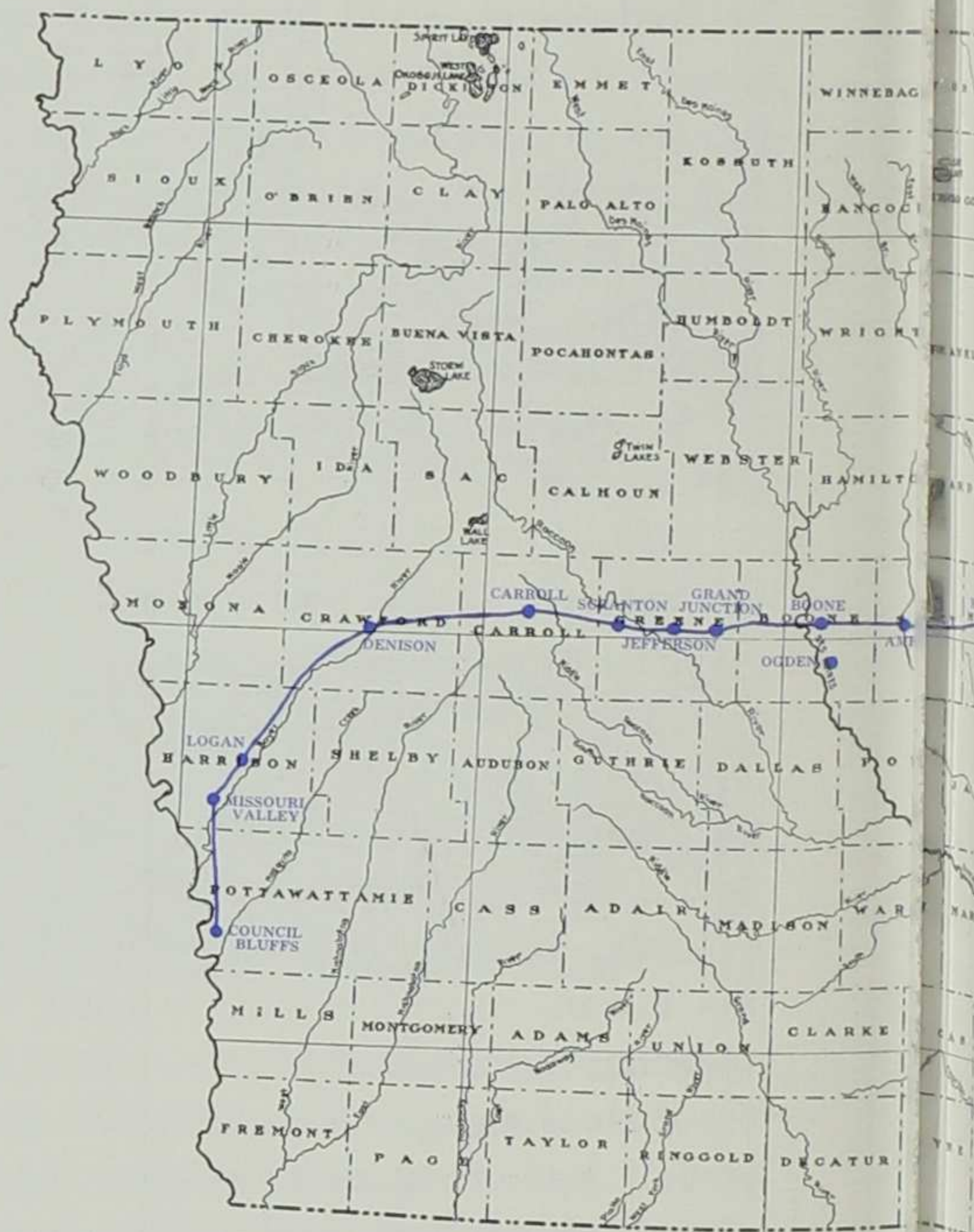
Romance was probably fleeting for doughboys and local girls—a circumstance illustrated here with a postcard view from 1918.

poorly in a baseball contest against the Denison nine. The U.S. Army supplied an element of comic relief of the Mutt and Jeff variety during the game. Rumor had it that the tallest and shortest soldiers in the Army were with the convoy, so the Army fielded a 6'6" catcher and a 4'9" pitcher. The game ended after six innings because of heat and "lack of interest" with a score overwhelmingly in favor of Denison.

According to one Omaha paper, a near riot occurred while the convoy camped in Denison. A local resident, Ike Mentor, referred to the soldiers as "a lot of bums." Unfortunately for Mentor, he was within hearing distance of a dozen of the motor men. Mentor made his escape, but not before one man registered his displeasure with a punch in the nose. A local acquaintance helped Mentor hide in a building a few blocks from the scene of the insult. The troops discovered this and posted a picket around the area. Mentor and his friend, John Hilton, stayed out of sight until officers came to dispel the picket. The Denison *Herald* chided the Omaha paper: "everyone against one does not constitute a riot . . ." If Mentor had any local men on his side in addition to Hilton "he didn't need an adding machine to count them."

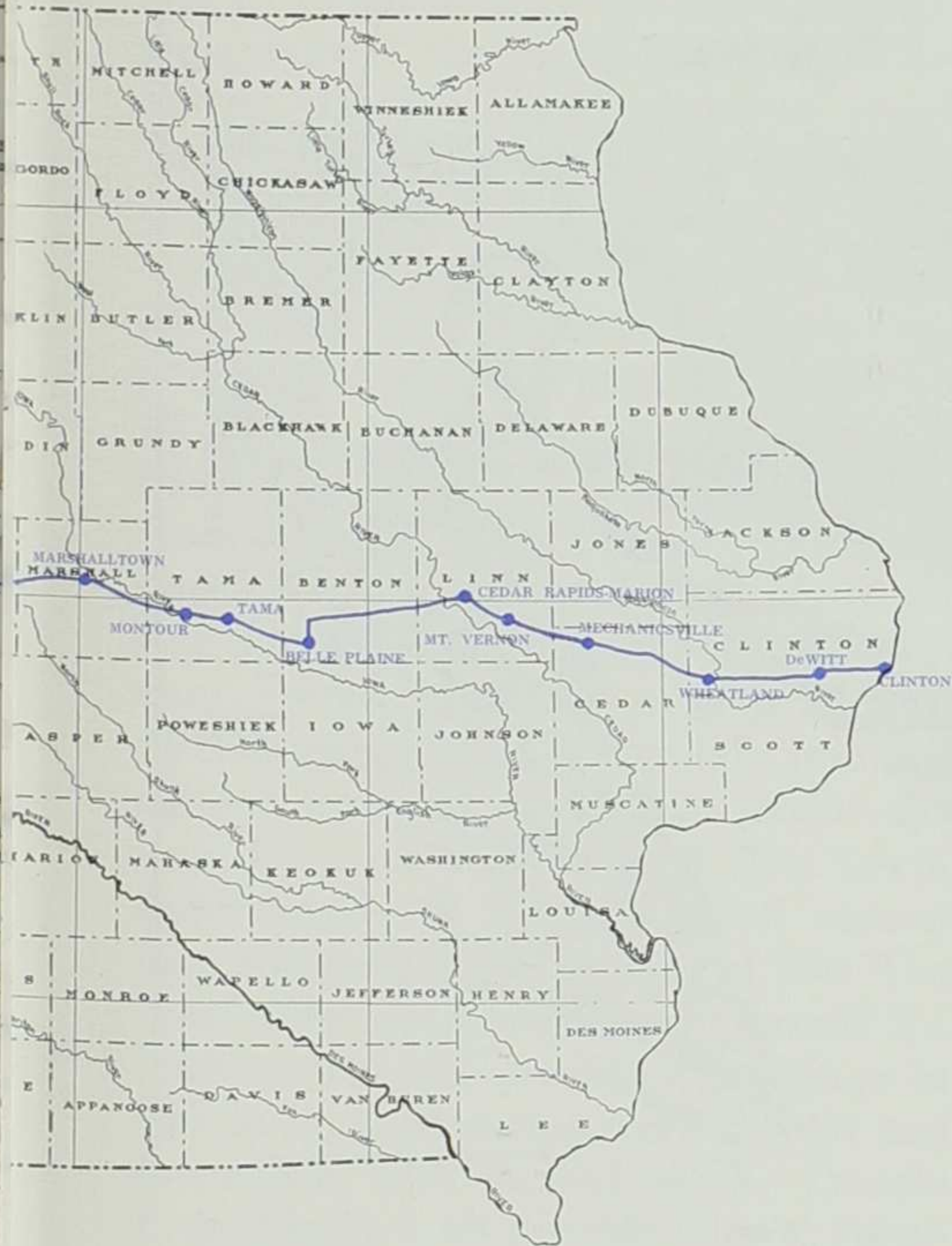
On Sunday, the Federation of Women's Clubs again bustled with activity to feed the men. The evening brought the usual activities, capped off with a searchlight demonstration. A Denison newspaper added the detail that the army provided dark glasses for people who wished to look into the great light to see the carbon points.

The trucks set out Monday morning for the final leg of the journey through Iowa.



Logan residents treated the men to lemonade and cigars as the trucks stopped there. The account in this town's newspaper specifically mentioned the one-man tank which the convoy carried on a trailer and occasionally demonstrated. Although unarmed, this unit gave many Iowans their first look at this type of military hardware. Eisenhower and his friend Sereno Brett demonstrated the tank and answered questions from the curious. Although Ike had commanded a tank training center during the war, he had no combat experience to relate at this stage of his career. However, his friend, Major Brett, could narrate experiences as a combat veteran and distinguished tank commander in France.

Missouri Valley provided lunch and a



short rest, then the vehicles set out for Council Bluffs and straggled into that destination throughout the afternoon. After eating, many of the soldiers went to Lake Manawa for a swim. Publicity officer Doran urged a final extravagance for departure from his native state the next morning—crossing the Missouri River on a pontoon bridge. The absence of a tugboat and the shifting channel prevented this scheme, so the convoy left Iowa and entered Omaha July 29 conventionally, by the Douglas Street Bridge.

As the convoy moved westward, it symbolized technological triumph in a thoroughly American way. Motor vehicles promised mobility to millions if only the nation could provide decent highways. On

September 7, 1919, the convoy reached the end of the road at Lincoln Park in San Francisco near the Golden Gate. Every piece of equipment, except the truck lost in Pennsylvania, reached the destination under its own power. The distance from Washington, D.C. to San Francisco totaled 3310 miles and took 62 days to travel, four days more than the predetermined schedule. The convoy broke, and repaired, nearly 100 bridges. Thanks to clear skies in Iowa, the greatest difficulties occurred later, between the Missouri River and the California border. Even on California's good roads the average speed amounted to less than ten miles an hour.

In reporting on the convoy, General Drake communicated five major conclusions to the Secretary of War. First, the nation required a national highway system for commercial and defensive reasons. Second, existing roads and bridges, particularly in the middle and western states, could not bear existing traffic. Third, road problems of the same states "are national rather than local problems. . . ." Drake's fourth point did not allow for the possibility that fuel supply might some day limit travel: "utility . . . of the motor vehicles is limited only by the conditions of the roads . . ." Finally, "the types of motor vehicles . . . should be coordinated with road conditions."

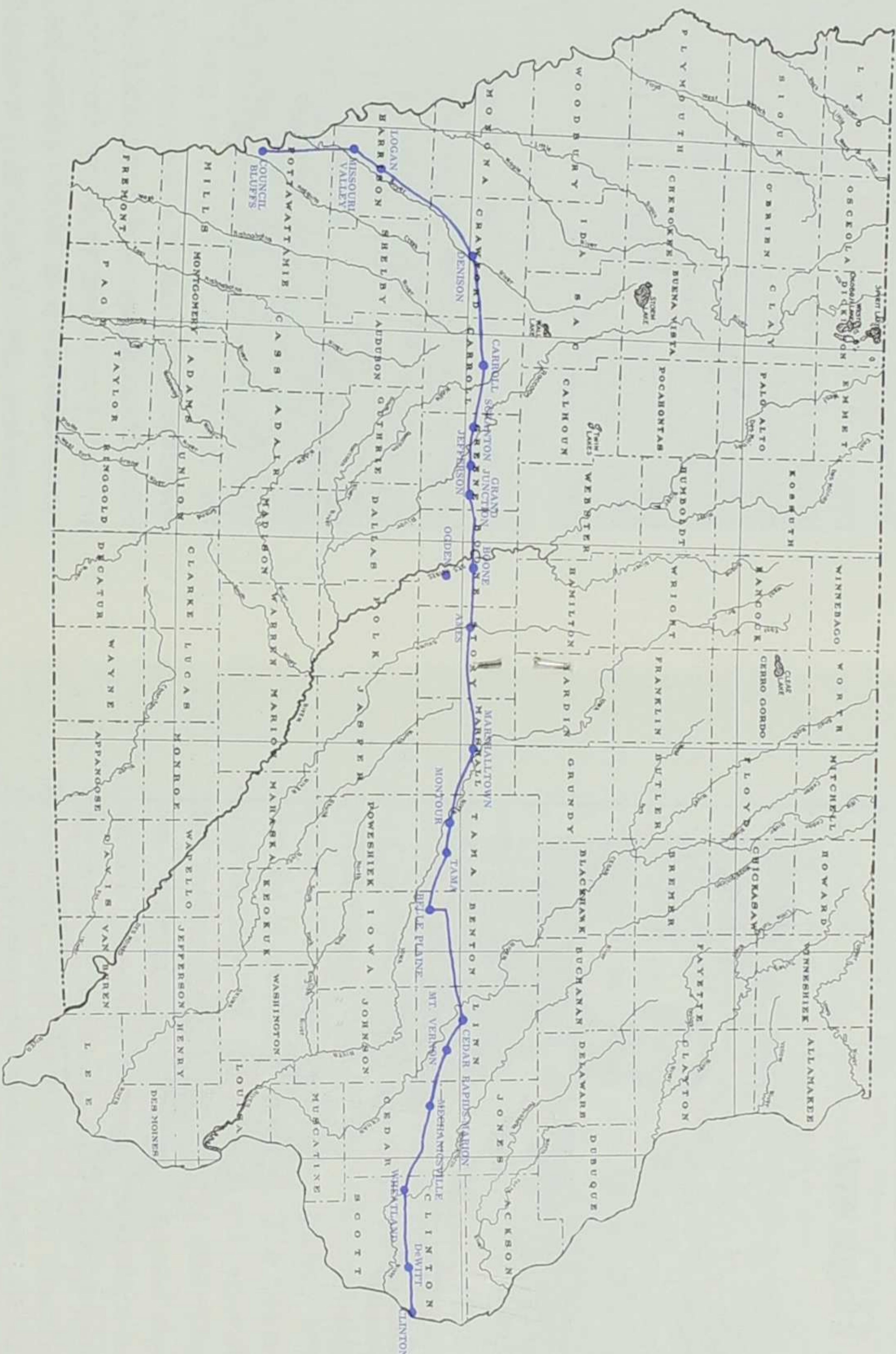
In addition to supplying grist for government reports, what were some of the other consequences of the 1919 military convoy across Iowa and the United States? The leadership of the Lincoln Highway Association asserted emphatically that the trip established the "correctness" of the route "both from the standpoint of strategic utility and of efficiency and directness." A substantial number of Iowans

poorly in a baseball contest against the Denison nine. The U.S. Army supplied an element of comic relief of the Mutt and Jeff variety during the game. Runnor had it that the tallest and shortest soldiers in the Army were with the convoy, so the Army fielded a 6'6" catcher and a 4'9" pitcher. The game ended after six innings because of heat and "lack of interest" with a score overwhelmingly in favor of Denison.

According to one Omaha paper, a near riot occurred while the convoy camped in Denison. A local resident, Ike Mentor, referred to the soldiers as "a lot of bums." Unfortunately for Mentor, he was within hearing distance of a dozen of the motor men. Mentor made his escape, but not before one man registered his displeasure with a punch in the nose. A local acquaintance helped Mentor hide in a building a few blocks from the scene of the insult. The troops discovered this and posted a picket around the area. Mentor and his friend, John Hilton, stayed out of sight until officers came to dispel the picket. The Denison *Herald* chided the Omaha paper: "everyone against one does not constitute a riot . . ." If Mentor had any local men on his side in addition to Hilton "he didn't need an adding machine to count them."

On Sunday, the Federation of Women's Clubs again bustled with activity to feed the men. The evening brought the usual activities, capped off with a searchlight demonstration. A Denison newspaper added the detail that the army provided dark glasses for people who wished to look into the great light to see the carbon points.

The trucks set out Monday morning for the final leg of the journey through Iowa.



Logan residents treated the men to lemonade and cigars as the trucks stopped there.

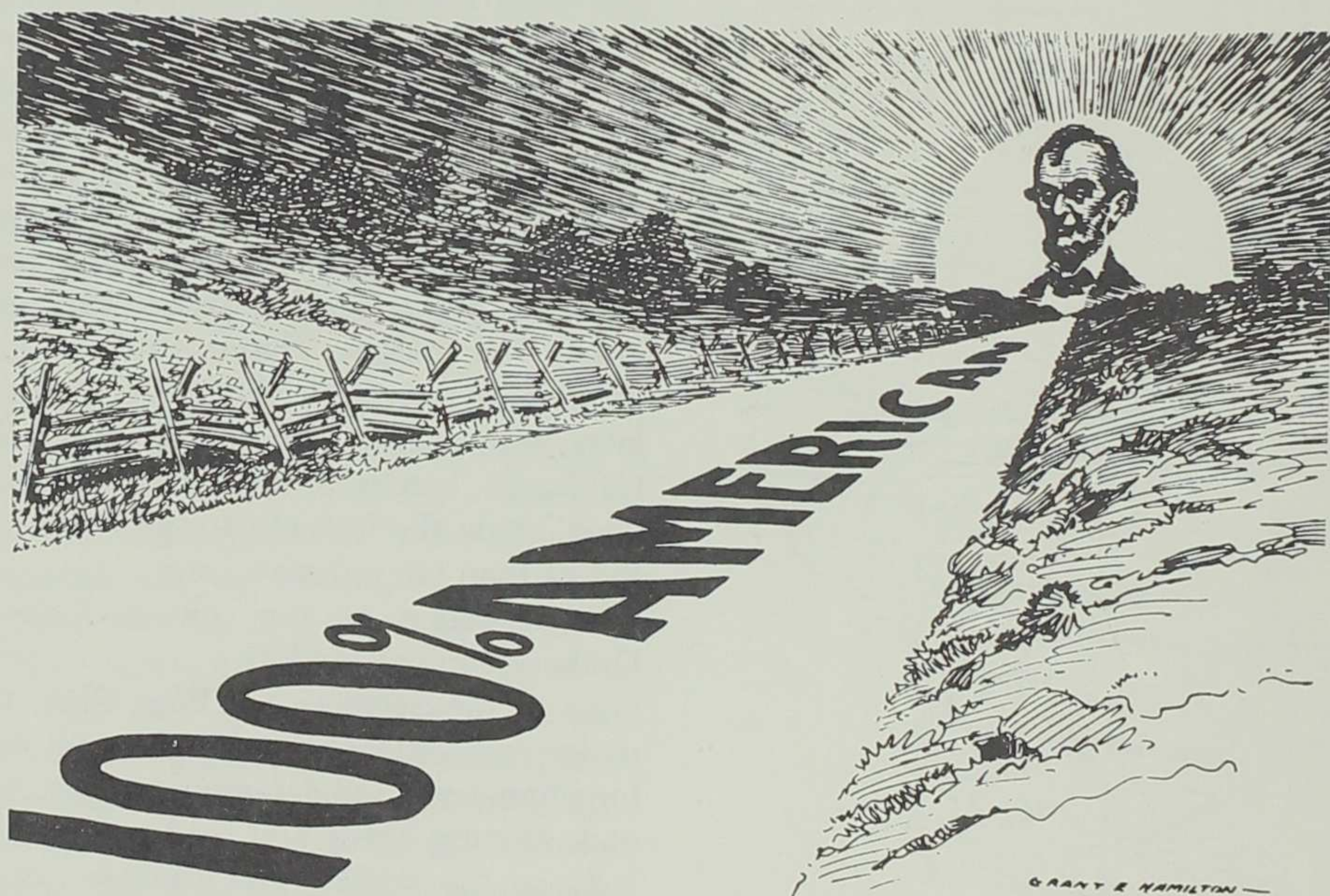
The account in this town's newspaper specifically mentioned the one-man tank which the convoy carried on a trailer and occasionally demonstrated. Although unarmed, this unit gave many Iowans their first look at this type of military hardware. Eisenhower and his friend Sereno Brett demonstrated the tank and answered questions from the curious. Although Ike had commanded a tank training center during the war, he had no combat experience to relate at this stage of his career. However, his friend, Major Brett, could narrate experiences as a combat veteran and distinguished tank commander in France. Missouri Valley provided lunch and a

September 7, 1919, the convoy reached the end of the road at Lincoln Park in San Francisco near the Golden Gate. Every piece of equipment, except the truck lost in Pennsylvania, reached the destination under its own power. The distance from Washington, D.C. to San Francisco totaled 3310 miles and took 62 days to travel, four days more than the predetermined schedule. The convoy broke, and repaired, nearly 100 bridges. Thanks to clear skies in Iowa, the greatest difficulties occurred later, between the Missouri River and the California border. Even on California's good roads the average speed amounted to less than ten miles an hour.

In reporting on the convoy, General Drake communicated five major conclusions to the Secretary of War. First, the nation required a national highway system for commercial and defensive reasons. Second, existing roads and bridges, particularly in the middle and western states, could not bear existing traffic. Third, road problems of the same states "are national rather than local problems. . . ." Drake's fourth point did not allow for the possibility that fuel supply might some day limit travel: "utility . . . of the motor vehicles is limited only by the conditions of the roads . . ." Finally, "the types of motor vehicles . . . should be coordinated with road conditions."

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The Lincoln Highway



This political cartoon which originally appeared in Leslie's Weekly celebrated the connection of the Highway with the Great Emancipator. It also evoked the "100% American" slogan of the 1919-1920 crusade against immigrants and foreign influence in the United States, a crusade which led to an hysterical "Red Scare" and, eventually, immigration-restriction laws. This was a heavy weight of ideas for the Lincoln Highway to bear. What had been a simple movement for better roads became in this case a tool of some of the nation's most unpleasant tendencies.

favored a Davenport, Des Moines, Council Bluffs line. The convoy brought this issue into the limelight in the summer of 1919 when Des Moines boosters tried desperately to pull both the convoy and the permanent route of the Lincoln Highway southward to the capital city—much to the chagrin of the editor of the *Boone News Republican* and many others.

Because of impact and timing, the route of the convoy and the location of the Lincoln Highway entered into debates over hard surfacing in Iowa. A law passed by the Iowa General Assembly in April 1919

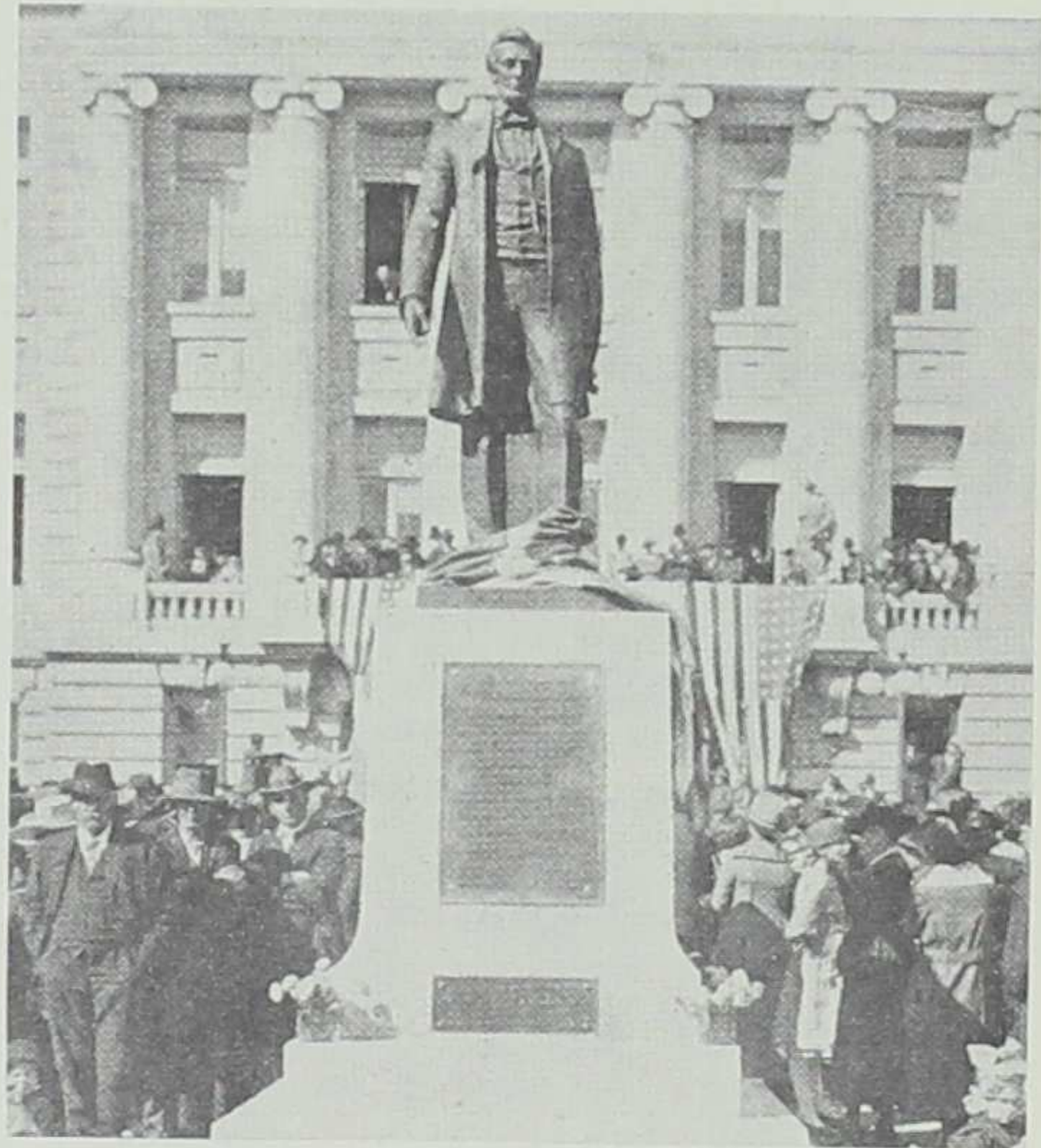
allowed counties to pave primary roads if the voters approved. Story and Tama, rural counties traversed by the Lincoln Highway, rejected hard surfacing within a month and a half before the arrival of the convoy. This provided fresh ammunition for the campaign by the Des Moines Chamber of Commerce. Mud was not an appropriate surface for the major highway through the great state of Iowa, went the rhetoric. During the summer of 1919, articles appeared in the newspapers of the Lincoln Highway towns warning of the Des Moines scheme. Often, these warn-

ings came out in the same issues containing details of the impending visit of the convoy. Hard surface advocates urged "yea" votes to "save" the Lincoln Highway for the counties it served.

Linn, Marshall, and Benton counties (all crossed by the Lincoln Highway) approved hard surfacing plans between June 16 and the arrival of the convoy. The heaviest votes in favor of hard surfacing came from the cities but the rural townships along the route of the Lincoln Highway also generated strong support. Clinton County which voted in favor of hard surfacing September 3, also falls into this pattern. The city of Clinton passed the issue by a majority of 2176. The townships outside of the city voted against hard surfacing by a majority of 956. The "yea" vote of Clinton clearly passed the measure. The only two rural townships to vote in favor of paving were DeWitt and Camanche, both located on the Lincoln Highway.

In most counties served by the Lincoln Highway few residents questioned the fact that the highway would be the first paved road. But in Tama County a feud developed between those who wanted to pave the highway and those in the northern part of the county who felt that other primary roads should be paved first. The paving issue went down to defeat June 30, an embarrassment to State Consul Goodell. By law this prevented another vote on the issue for two years.

The passage of the convoy over the northerly route did lend credence to that line for the Lincoln Highway. The military officers carried orders not to deviate from the route Ostermann had established prior to the summer of 1919. Despite pressures from Des Moines, and furor over the



The memorial to Lincoln in Jefferson, Iowa.

paving question, McClure stayed on course and quieted the controversy over the location of the Lincoln Highway in Iowa.

The situation in Greene County heartened the leadership of the Lincoln Highway Association and good roads people generally. Greene, a rural county, passed the paving issue by the largest majority in the state—three days after the convoy departed. Newspaper accounts credited the convoy with winning over many of the farmers and bearing directly upon the positive vote. But the sentiment for road improvement was apparently rooted more deeply in the county. Jefferson, the county seat, had long been a center of activity for the promotion and development of the Lincoln Highway. A large bronze statue of Lincoln still stands in front of the Court House, a 1918 gift of E. B. Wilson, the Western State District Consul of the Association.

This type of generosity and memorializing of the president and the highway

was not rare in Greene County. One farmer whose land fronted on the Lincoln Highway placed emblems of the Emancipator on the corners of his property. But most touching of all was the 1921 letter of J. E. Moss to the Detroit office of the Lincoln Highway Association:

Enclosed you will find my check for five dollars—I think my fourth payment of dues as a Sustaining Member. I am glad to be able to pay it as the Lincoln Highway will be the greatest memorial in the world in memory of one of our greatest citizens, and of the greatest world power. I am one of the Civil War soldiers. Lost a foot at Mission Ridge—glad to be yet alive. Will be one, if not the heaviest tax payer towards paving the Lincoln Highway, having two miles of the route through my farm in Greene County, Iowa.

Moss's last point is consistent with the state law requiring that one quarter of the cost of paving must come from assessments on benefited property within one and a half miles of the improvement. Thus rural voters such as Moss whose property fronted on the Lincoln Highway virtually asked for substantial assessments when they voted "yea" on hard surfacing.

In addition to those already mentioned, two more Lincoln Highway counties voted on hardsurfacing. Within four months of the convoy's departure Carroll and Boone, both rural counties, voted "nay." However, the issues were not as crucial as they were in July 1919. The route of the Lincoln Highway was settled so the vote would make no difference on that score. Many people also thought that a national highway act was on the verge of passage. Why impose local assessments if the federal government would pave the Lincoln Highway?

Throughout the nation, publicity gen-

erated by the convoy did much to define transcontinental motor travel as within the scope of the national welfare and a hard-surfaced coast to coast highway as a national necessity. Military men who believed that France was "saved" during the Great War by its network of hard-surfaced roads needed no convincing. Nor did the members of the Lincoln Highway Association who urged federal funding for the construction of a concrete highway from New York City to San Francisco. The national press gave excellent coverage to people like Colonel McClure who stated flatly that few stretches of road between the eastern borders of Iowa and California met even minimal standards. "The Illinois, Iowa and Nebraska dirt roads are practically impassable for motor trucks in wet weather." Growing numbers of Americans were convinced, as was Colonel McClure, that a national highway system was too important to "be left to local whims and prejudices." Even the most stubborn Iowans would have to admit a deficiency on those all too frequent days when the only way to get to the Seedling Mile near Cedar Rapids was "to take an interurban [train] to a point 2½ miles from the pavement and walk over."

During the early decades of the American republic, federal funds helped build interstate roads. Again, during the middle of the 19th century the Department of Interior spent modest funds on improvements to cross-country wagon roads. Since the arrival of the automobile, however, the only federal highway funding worth mentioning was the minuscule sum allocated under terms of the rural post roads act of 1916. At the very time the convoy was traveling west, Senator Charles H. Townsend of Michigan, at the urging of



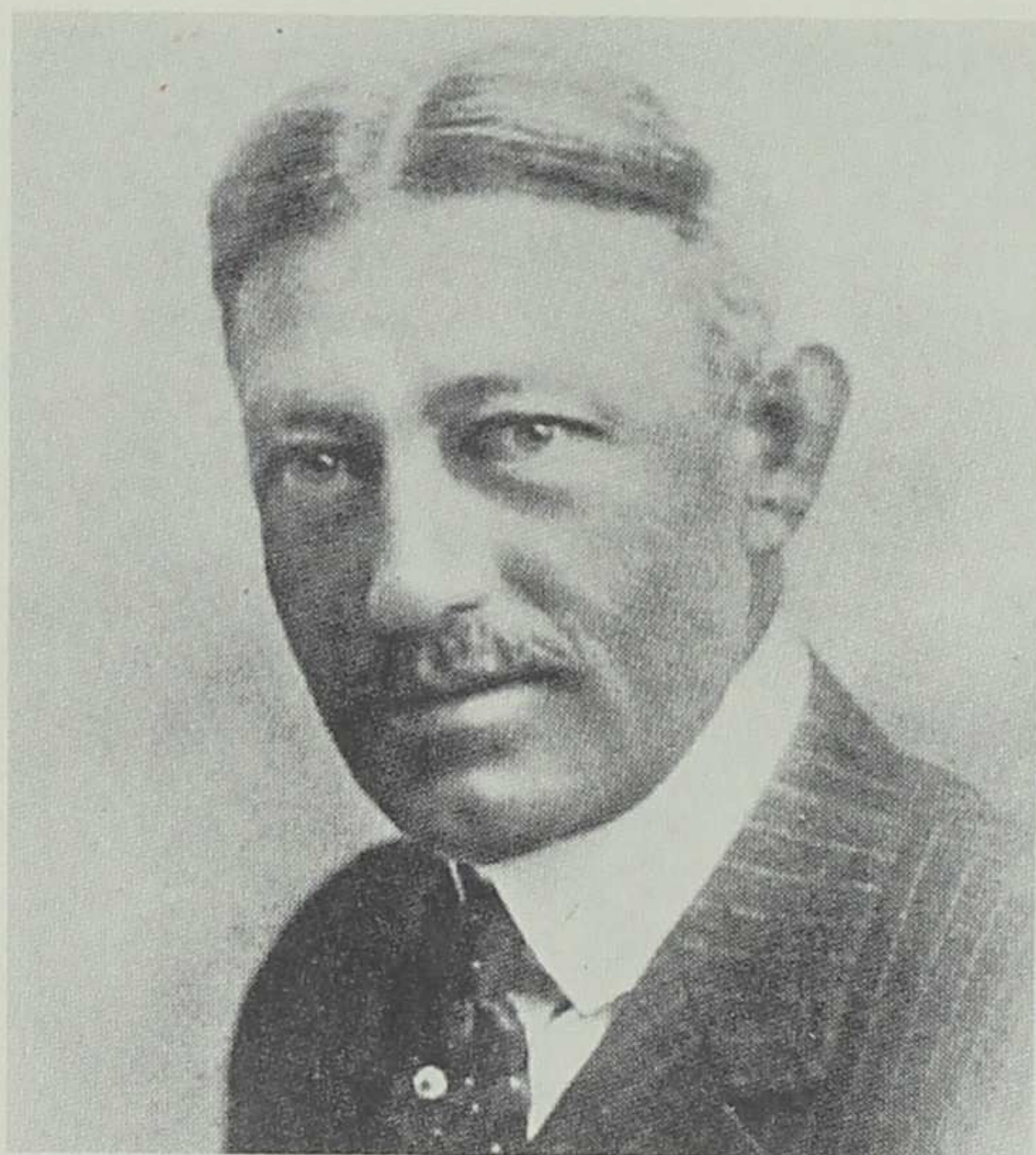
The Lincoln Highway receives prominent attention in this recently-acquired photo. The negative was discovered in a Tama, Iowa pharmacy. The people are obviously Mesquakies from the nearby Settlement, and they are posed conspicuously with the Highway emblem. The clothes and cars are appropriate for 1919 (courtesy of Edward A. Rosheim).

the Lincoln Highway Association, was pushing legislation to create a federal highway commission. This was the rallying point of Ostermann and the Army officers assigned to the convoy. But the bill failed in Congress, largely because it violated too many congressmen's concepts of states' rights. The Federal Highway Act that became law in 1921 at last channeled federal funds to state highway commissions under terms that brought into being an embryonic federal highway system, and established the precedent for modern highway funding. "Not in verbiage, but in results, it was exactly the federal highway legislation which the Association had always sought," concluded the historian of the Lincoln Highway Association.

For at least two of the *dramatis personae* there is a distinct culmination to our story.

Less than a year after piloting the military convoy across the country, Harry Ostermann set out on his twenty-first trans-continental drive. With him in his white, powerful Packard "Twin Six" was his bride of seven months. Headed west and keeping a hectic schedule, the Ostermanns dined with Iowa Consul Goodell and other friends at Tama on the evening of June 7, 1920. Undoubtedly, Harry was at his genial best that evening, talking about the convoy of the previous summer, introducing his new wife to numerous friends, sharing stories about the early days of motor travel, dreaming of the Lincoln Highway as a model for a vast network of hard-surfaced national highways.

After the evening's festivities, Harry left his wife with friends at Tama, with the understanding that she would join him the next day at Marshalltown. He took Mr.



Harry Ostermann

and Mrs. Goodell to their home, then drove on alone through the darkness toward Marshalltown to pick up dispatches from headquarters and to meet his engagements there the next day. Making good time on the "good graded dirt" of the Lincoln Highway Ostermann gained on a solitary Ford on "what is locally known as Rock Hill, just east of Montour," shortly after 4 AM June 8. Traveling in excess of 50 miles per hour (the legal limit was 30) Harry pulled out to pass, "but in the excitement of the little brush of speed," slipped on the dewy grass at the edge of the road. The big Packard skidded 200 feet, "turned turtle" twice, then righted itself. Except for a broken windshield the Packard sustained little damage. But, by the time the driver of the Ford, Ted Gadbury of Tama, got to Ostermann, Harry lay dead on the Lincoln Highway, his head crushed beyond recognition by the steering wheel during the first revolution of the soft-topped car.

Harry lies buried in East Liverpool, Ohio near the Lincoln Highway, "the great transcontinental road which he loved to travel and in the development of which he had had so prominent a part." Henry B. Joy wrote of the man who by the age of 43 had piloted motor cars of every make for more than 350,000 miles, "Yes, he's gone on ahead."

For the youthful Eisenhower, the 1919 trip proved alternately "difficult, tiring, and fun." For the American people and for Ike personally some long range consequences occurred, unanticipated by anyone as the convoy inched its way westward. While campaigning for the presidency in 1952, Ike used to good effect his

Note on Sources

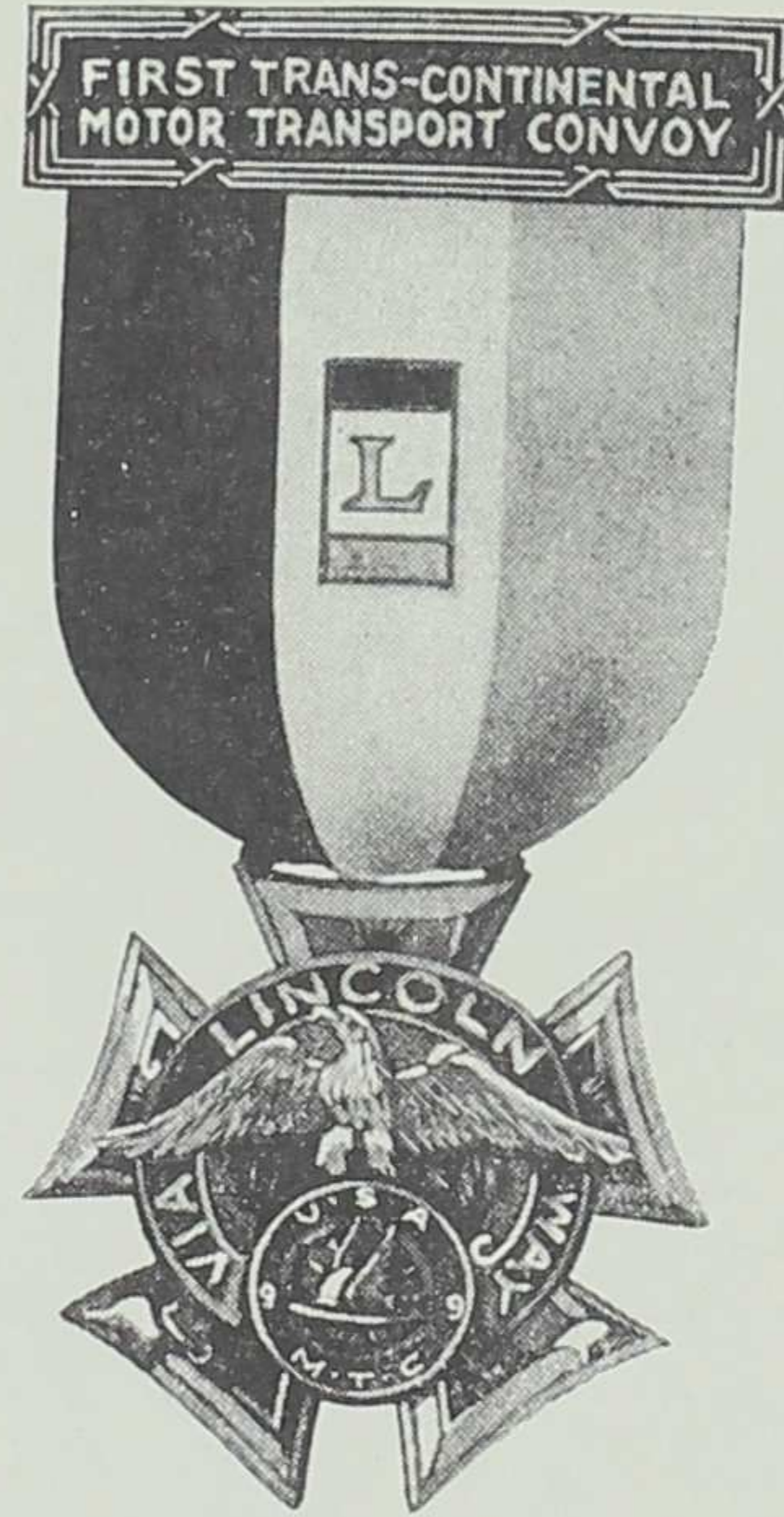
The authors thank Nancy and Howard McMinimie of rural Denison for getting them interested in the Lincoln Highway, and for introducing them to two knowledgeable and interesting people: Dr. J. K. Johnson of Jefferson (President of the Iowa Highway 30 Association) and Dr. Alan D. Hathaway of Davenport (Chairman of the Lincoln Highway Rediscovery Committee).

Basic information about the Lincoln Highway is found in such publications of the Lincoln Highway Association as: *The Lincoln Highway* (New York, 1935); *A Picture of Progress on the Lincoln Highway* (Detroit, 1920); *Achievement on the Lincoln Highway, 1920* (Detroit, 1921); and *Lincoln Highway Forum* (Detroit, 1918-1921). The *Service Bulletin and Annual Report* of the Iowa State Highway Commission document the fascinating and largely unstudied story of road improvement in the nation's leading "mud state." Accounts of Eisenhower's affiliation with the convoy appear in two of the General's books, *At Ease* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1967) and *In Review* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1969); also in *Constructor Magazine* (Washington, D.C.: Associated General Contractors of America, August 1973). Activities and celebrations during the convoy's trip are documented in records in the National Archives and in the newspapers of the numerous towns along the Lincoln Highway. The official report of the convoy is contained in *War Department Annual Reports, 1920 vol. 1* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1921).

Other sources that proved helpful in the preparation of this article are: Alfred Lief, *The Firestone Story* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1951) and *The Road-Maker* (Chicago: International Trade Press, Inc., November 1918).

acquaintance "with the face and character of many towns and cities across the east-west axis of the country." One man from Indiana insisted that Ike must have been briefed about local matters shortly before coming to town. Actually, he was recalling what he had observed a third of a century earlier. But the dust, mud, curves, and grade of 1919 (and perhaps the speeches of McClure, Johnson, and Ostermann) left impressions in Eisenhower's mind that came into sharper focus after seeing the German *autobahns* and learning the importance of good highways. "The old convoy had started me thinking about good, two-lane highways, but Germany had made me see the wisdom of broader ribbons across the land." As President, Eisenhower secured congressional approval for 41,000 miles of four-lane interstate highway.

Thus a thread of historical continuity connects the 1919 military convoy with Interstate 80, which spans Iowa and the nation at a latitude close to that of the Old Lincoln Highway but pulled southward to accommodate the population centers of Des Moines in central Iowa and Davenport on the Mississippi. The convoy was a major event in the emergence of a sound highway system sorely needed by the growing nation. □



A special medal, awarded to members of the convoy by the Lincoln Highway Association (Lincoln Highway Association photo).