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FARM COLLECTOR

Dedicated to the Preservation
of Vintage Farm Equipment

November 2012

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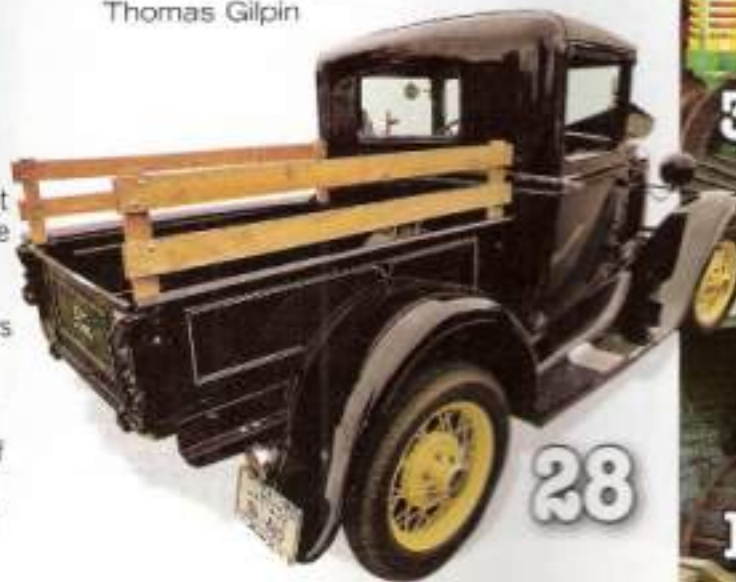
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ON THE COVER:
The Rust 'N Dust
100-mile antique
tractor caravan,
made up of
nearly 50 tractors
manned by
adults and kids,
spread out over
a mile and a half
along Michigan
roadways. *Photo*
by *Thomas*
Gilpin.



Case SI AIRBORNE

GLIDER-BORNE TRACTOR MADE ITS MARK IN WORLD WAR II BATTLES

By Leslie C. McManus

A certain irony existed during World War II, when American industry shifted its energies from production of durable goods to wartime materiel. In the mid-1940s, the American farmer couldn't get a new tractor for love or money — but the Army could, and did. J.I. Case was among several manufacturers that built tractors for wartime use, converting its popular Model SC into the Case SI Airborne tractor.

The Case SI, equipped with a Hough loader built by Frank G. Hough Co., Libertyville, Ill., was one of several pieces of construction equipment developed for transport by WACO CG-4A gliders and cargo planes. Other pieces included a Clarkair CA-1 bulldozer developed by Clark Equipment Co., Michigan; a scraper built by LaPlant-Choate, Cedar Rapids, Iowa; and an 11-S towed grader manufactured by J.D. Adams & Co., Indianapolis. The four units (and similar pieces) were used to maintain and repair aircraft runways and perform other construction jobs in battle zones.

These units are highly prized collectibles today, partly because they were produced in small numbers and partly because very few of them returned home after the war ended. "Probably 99 percent of the material manufactured for the war effort never made it back to the U.S.," says Ken Cerra, Indianapolis. "It was typically abandoned or just given to our allies as part of the redevelopment effort after the war."

If Ken sounds well versed in the World War II airborne equipment, it's because he is. He owns examples of the four pieces of airborne construction equipment listed above. Each of his four restored pieces is historic, but the Case is clearly at the head of the pack.

"It is very unique," Ken admits. "Very few of these were made with a front loader. From my experience in military vehicle preservation circles, I only know of one other with a Hough loader. The other tractors were used to pull the scraper or grader."

The Case SI, a leaner version of the popular Case SC, was designed to fit into WACO gliders during World War II.



A working loader tractor

Ken tracked down his 1943 SI in Montana. The previous owner had bought it from a nearby U.S. Air Force base. "He didn't know what he had," Ken says. "He bought it to use." The nearly complete tractor probably never saw battle. "I tend to think it never made it overseas," he says.

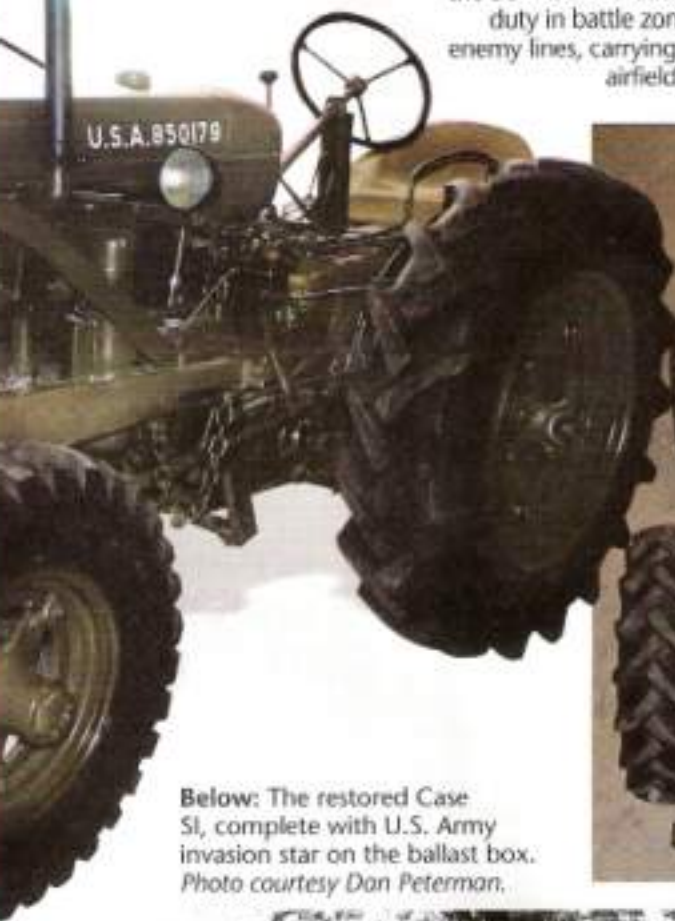
The SI (Ken's is serial no. 4801986 SI) appears to have been produced from about 1942 to about 1948. Production estimates vary; Ken's best guess is that fewer than 500 were built. The tractor measures 9 feet, 11 inches long and 59 inches wide. It weighs 3,188 pounds, well under the 4,000-pound cap for glider-transported equipment.

The SI was restored by Dan Peterman, Webster City, Iowa. When Dan got it, the tractor ran and the sheet metal was in excellent shape, but the loader was inoperable. Replacement parts came from a parts tractor Ken found in Kansas. "Mechanically, the tractor was in pretty decent shape," Dan says. "It had a cracked block and it just needed a lot of TLC. The loader was in pretty bad shape, and we had the ballast box fabricated from original blueprints."

Unique design considerations

A knock-off of the Case SC, the SI was downsized for glider transport. "Gliders were not very big, so Case made the SI narrower, smaller and lighter," Dan says. "The SI has different fenders and a different front end and rear end." The tractor has hydraulics, but the loader is raised and lowered with cables.

Right: Sand or rocks were loaded into this box as ballast when the loader tackled big jobs, lending stability to the downsized tractor. **Below:** The Case SI saw active duty in battle zones. "Gliders could get in behind enemy lines, carrying equipment to construct a small airfield," says tractor owner Ken Cerra.



Below: The restored Case SI, complete with U.S. Army invasion star on the ballast box. Photo courtesy Dan Peterman.



Right: The Case SI was outfitted with hydraulics, but the Hough loader was operated with cables.



CASE SI AIRBORNE BY THE NUMBERS

LENGTH:	9 feet, 11 inches
WIDTH:	59 inches
HEIGHT TO TOP OF STEERING WHEEL:	56 inches
WHEELBASE:	56 inches
TURNING RADIUS:	11-1/2 feet
OPERATING WEIGHT WITH FLUIDS:	3,188 pounds



This 1945 BSA W-M20 military motorcycle makes a fitting companion piece for the Case SI at Heartland Acres Agribition Center. On loan from the National Motorcycle Museum, Anamosa, Iowa, the single-cylinder 4-stroke, 496-cc engine was rated 13 hp at 4,200 rpm.

GLIDERS PLAYED VITAL ROLE IN WORLD WAR II BATTLEFIELD LOGISTICS

Editor's note: The 900th Airborne Engineer Aviation Company made more landings than any other glider-borne unit in World War II. The following excerpt describes work made possible by a glider-borne unit in Burma on the night of March 5, 1944, when more than 30 gliders carrying troops, pack animals, equipment and construction equipment landed in a jungle clearing. The amount of work done in a very short time in a hostile environment is almost incomprehensible. Within 24 hours, airborne engineers prepared a landing strip measuring 300 by 5,000 feet, custom-designed for use by gliders and C-47 troop carriers. The report is authored by Maj. Mark P. Zaitsoff, U.S. Army Reserve.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' 900th Airborne Engineer Aviation Company, attached to a U.S. Army Air Corps Air Commando Group, was formed to provide a force that could be delivered by glider or transport plane and was capable of building or repairing airstrips.

From an account by 2nd Lt. Robert C. Brackett: "At 0600 hours (on March 6, after landings late on March 5) while Col. Allison and I were on reconnaissance, grading was begun in the general direction of the flight strip. When the direction had been determined, we ran a base line with the jeep and grader the length of the field, missing as many buffalo-wallows as possible. At this time there was one grader, one jeep, two bulldozers and a carry-all in operation. The glider carrying the third dozer was damaged, but parts salvaged from the fourth dozer (which had gone through the trees and turned over on its back) were utilized. At 1000 hours Col. Allison informed us that light planes would arrive in one hour - redoubling our efforts, the light planes were able to land on a runway 2,000 feet by 300 feet at 1100 hours! During this period British troops helped to level the grass and ground with bayonets and kukri knives, and the (Royal Engineers) blew up a tree standing in the middle of the field.

"We continued on the other 2,400 feet of runway, making it 150 feet wide to ensure sufficient area for landings that night. The main job consisted of filling in the log ruts caused by elephants hauling logs to the river in the wet season. Now hard as stone, some 16 inches deep and 2 to 4 feet wide, they accounted for much of the damage to the gliders on the previous night. Grading was kept to a minimum, to keep as much grass as possible on the runway, taking off only those dikes over 3 inches high. At 1910 hours the first transport landed. The next morning we continued work on the strip and unloading area. By that evening we had a 2,400-foot by 300-foot runway and unloading areas for eight planes on both sides of the runway."

At first light Cpl. Walter J. Hybarger was up on a dozer pulling logs and wrecked gliders off the landing zone and starting on the airstrip. Sgt. William W. Geider and Pfc. Paul F. Johnson worked to repair the third dozer. Brackett didn't want to disturb the clay soil of the landing zone so he cleared a minimum of the elephant grass, made a few cuts and filled the ruts to level the airstrip. He soon had an airstrip 5,000 feet long and 300 feet wide.

"On the night of March 6, 63 C-47s landed on an airstrip with a fully lit runway and tower radio. The fly-in of the 77th and half of the 111th Brigades continued until March 11. The Chindits immediately moved out on missions to attack the Japanese. The 77th Brigade moved southwest toward Mawlu and established the White City roadblock. The 111th Brigade marched farther west to Pinlebu and eventually north to establish the Blackpool roadblock." -From *Glider-borne Engineers during Operation Thursday* by Maj. Mark P. Zaitsoff, online at www.burmastar.org.uk/900th_engineers.htm.

To boost the tractor's stability, a ballast box was added under the operator's seat. "If they were going to use the loader to pick up heavy materials, they'd fill the box with sand or rock to balance out the weight," Ken explains. "When they didn't need the ballast, it could be released through a trap-door."

Loops on each axle were used to secure the tractor during flight. In cases where landing was impossible or impractical, a parachute was connected to the loops and the tractor could be airdropped.

Information on colors, stencils and other details were provided through the Military Vehicle Preservation Association (MVPA) and a January 1944 War Department Technical Manual. "That manual is about an inch thick," Ken says, "and has pretty well everything you'd want to know about that tractor."

Other military vehicles

Although Ken's primary interest is antique arcade games, he has extensive experience with military vehicles. Three years ago he restored a pair of rare Willys jeeps dating to 1941.

"The first jeeps made had slat-front grilles," he says. "When the U.S. entered World War II and Willys and Ford geared up for mass production, the slat-front was too expensive so they came out with a stamped grille."

His next project will be restoration of a very rare World War II 2-1/2-ton truck. "During the war years they called it a 'deuce-and-a-half,'" he says. Although more than 570,000 2-1/2-ton trucks were produced for the war effort, only a small number - perhaps 500 - were produced as "air portable" models - and that is the model Ken has his eye on.

"Back then, there was no plane big enough to hold an intact truck. Air portable trucks were designed to be disassembled to four sections," Ken explains, "cab, rear end, and body in two pieces. Then it was small enough to load into cargo planes. The components would be flown to a remote airfield where U.S. troops removed the sections and bolted them together to create a functional 2-1/2 ton truck."

World War I exhibit

Ken's interest in military vehicles extends back to World War I. For the 2012 MVPA convention, he put together a display that included two original 95-year-old gun and ammunition carts made of wood. Based on a scene captured in an archival photo, his display included an original World War I English Vickers water-cooled machine gun for the gun cart and an original World War I ammunition box for the ammunition cart. He obtained a pair of full-size molded plastic mules painted in authentic colors and outfitted them with original leather military harness true to the era – as well as with original gas masks typical of those used on horses and mules during World War I.

"It was a completely original display," he says, "extraordinarily difficult to find and source." But that kind of thing is right down Ken's alley. "I get kind of bored doing the same thing," he says. "I like the rare and unique; I enjoy the thrill of the hunt. I like to research something very unique and learn as much as possible. Then I can design and develop an exhibit that communicates that information." **FC**

For more information:

–Ken Cerra, 11030 Tenacious Dr., Indianapolis, IN 46236; 2400 NW 110th Ave., Ocala, FL 34482; (732) 915-2183; email: bluebluejays@aol.com

–Dan Peterman, 1057 180th St., Webster City, IA 50595; (515) 571-1027; email: rstyrest@wccta.net

Leslie C. McManus is the editor of *Farm Collector* and the daughter of Maj. John E. Chandler, 14th Tank Battalion, 9th Armored Division, U.S. Army, 1941-45.



Above: The Case SI, torn down for restoration. Photos courtesy Dan Peterman.

Right: The Case SI, before restoration.



At Heartland Acres Agribition Center, it's not all antique farm relics. Muscle cars share space with the earliest examples of automobiles, including a 1905 Cadillac.

Heartland Acres also offers more than 30 hands-on activities, a "Hall of Time" illustrating a period from the 1830s to the present, a fine collection of restored antique cars and trucks, and live farm animals. They've even found a spot for Big Bud 16V-747, billed as "the world's largest farm tractor."

The Clarkair bulldozer and LaPlant-Choate scraper are on loan to the Heartland Museum in Clarion, Iowa; the restored Adams grader is on loan to the Historical Military Armor Museum, Anderson, Ind. All four pieces are expected to be on display through much of 2013, but visitors should call ahead to verify dates and hours. –Leslie C. McManus

Museum displays include airborne units and more

If you want a close look at Ken Cerra's collection of airborne construction equipment, you'll have to plan a road trip: The pieces are spread among three museums in two states.

The Case SI occupies center stage at the Heartland Acres Agribition Center in Independence, Iowa. Located on 16 acres, the museum showcases agriculture – past, present and future – and traditional rural life. Housed in a building that gives a nod to the barn of yesteryear, the museum is a state-of-the-art facility every bit as sophisticated as many more urban museums.

Here you'll find stars of the antique tractor world like a John Deere Waterloo Boy tractor and a Minneapolis-Moline UDLX. Located just a short stroll away are a machine shed packed with antique tractors and vintage signs and a faithfully restored and furnished one-room schoolhouse.

For more information:

–Heartland Acres Agribition Center, 2600 Swan Lake Blvd., Independence, IA 50644; (319) 332-0123; email: info@heartlandacresusa.com; www.heartlandacresusa.com

–Heartland Museum, 119 9th St., Clarion, IA 50525; phone (515) 602-6000; www.HeartlandMuseum.org

–Historical Military Armor Museum, 2330 Crystal St., Anderson, IN 46012; phone (765) 649-8265

