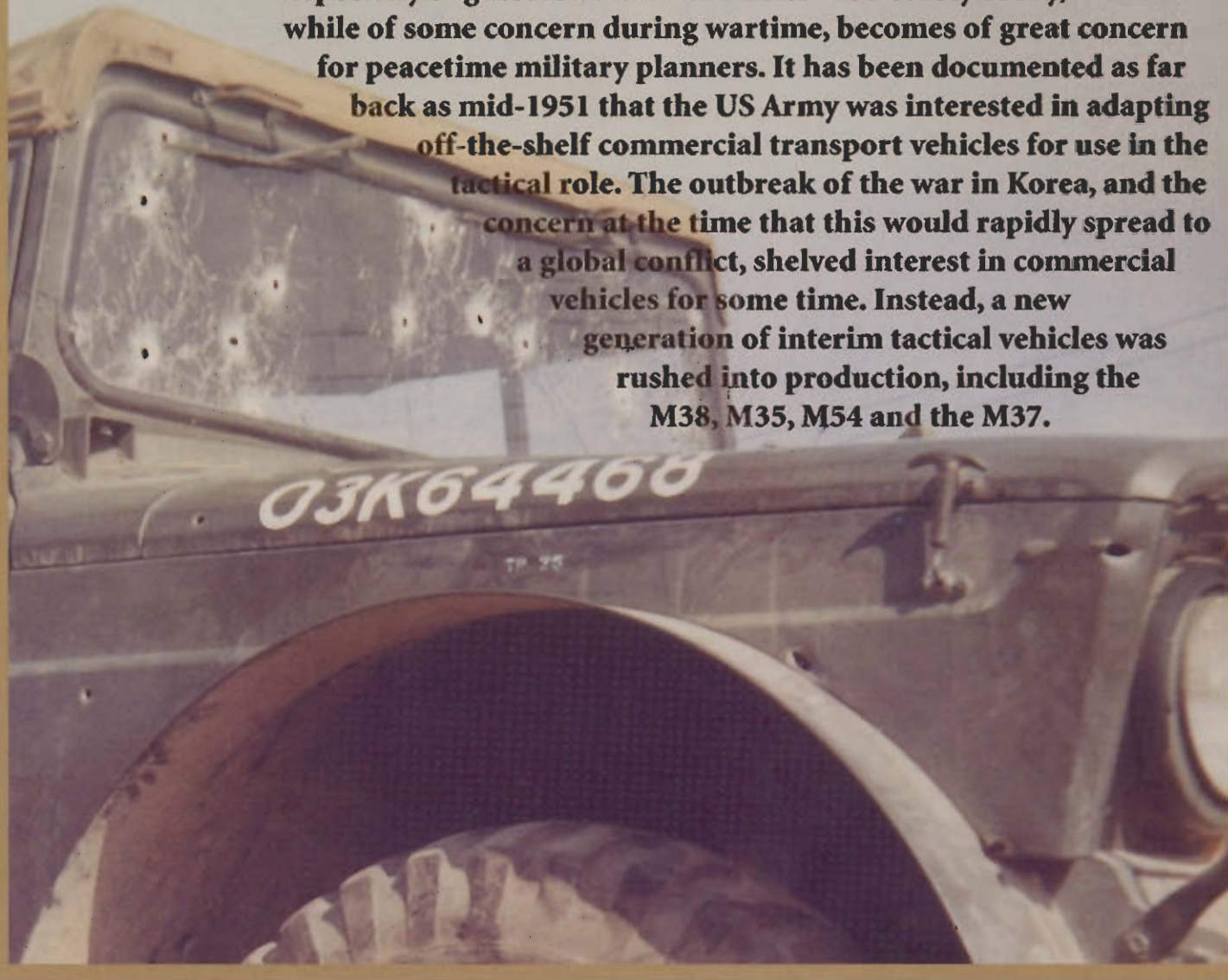


A Civilian Puts On A Uniform the M715 series trucks

By David Doyle, #14849, Memphis, Tennessee

Especially engineered tactical vehicles are notably costly, which while of some concern during wartime, becomes of great concern for peacetime military planners. It has been documented as far back as mid-1951 that the US Army was interested in adapting off-the-shelf commercial transport vehicles for use in the tactical role. The outbreak of the war in Korea, and the concern at the time that this would rapidly spread to a global conflict, shelved interest in commercial vehicles for some time. Instead, a new generation of interim tactical vehicles was rushed into production, including the M38, M35, M54 and the M37.



These interim vehicles, while originally envisioned to have a seven to ten year life, filled the army's motor pools for years beyond this. However, a decade later as American troop levels increased in Vietnam and the Soviet threat was increasing, the army found itself short on tactical utility vehicles.

The Dodge G741 series of vehicles, typified by the M37, continued to meet the army's requirements, and after a four-year break in production the type returned to the assembly line in 1958 as the M37B1. These modestly improved vehicles stayed in production for ten more years. However, by the mid-1960s the per-unit cost was becoming significant, particularly for an army deploying in both Southeast Asia and Europe.

Once again, the concept of adapting a commercial vehicle surfaced. A 1-1/4 ton variation of the Kaiser-Jeep 'Gladiator' pickup was tested. The big jeep had a price advantage such that five of these vehicles could be purchased for the same price as four of the venerable Dodges. Part of this economy was a result of Kaiser's mass production of the Gladiator for the civilian market.

On March 31 of 1966 a contract was awarded to Kaiser for 20,680 trucks, which were assigned the Standard Nomenclature List number G-890. This series, which included the M715 pickup, was the army's first 'M' series tactical vehicle to be built chiefly with civilian commercial components. The initial contract included M715 cargo trucks and M725 ambulances. The trucks began rolling off the Kaiser-Jeep assembly line in Toledo during January 1967.



While to some all M-series vehicles look alike, there is no mistaking the unique appearance of the M715, and the rest of the G890 family. Based on the civilian Gladiator pickup, the trucks have a rugged but refined appearance.

Additional contracts brought the production total to over 30,500 M715 series trucks by the time production ceased in 1969.

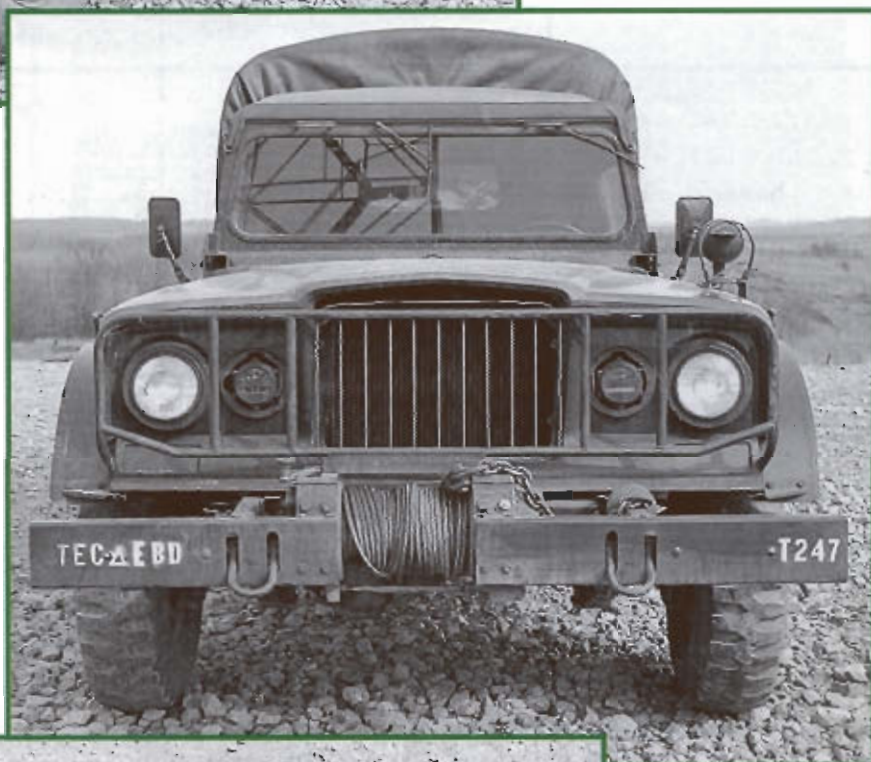
The Gladiator tooling was used to create the grill, fenders, hood, doors, and cab of the M715 family. Changes to the sheet metal stampings included opening up the upper part of the cab and doors to accommodate the military canvas cab top. Also, the front fenders were cut out to clear the military 9.00-16 tires. The new fold-down windshield resembled the one used on the M38A1. The cargo bed was an all-new one unlike that of any other vehicle, military or civilian.

The M715 was the base vehicle of the series, and was intended to fulfill the same role as the more expensive Dodge M37B1. The initial contract was issued in March of 1966, and stipulated that deliveries were to begin within ten months. Photo courtesy of the Patton Museum.

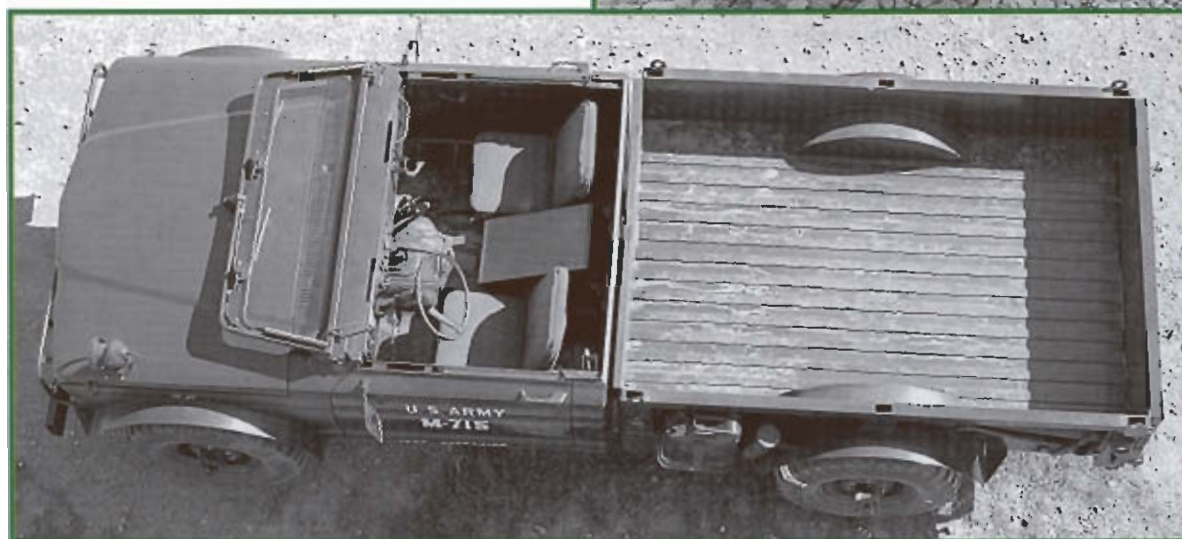


The trucks were also built with PTO-driven Braden front winches - the same 7500-pound capacity winch as used on the 3/4-ton M-series Dodge trucks. In the view of many, the frame of the M715 is too rigid, impairing off-road performance. Photo courtesy of the Patton Museum.

Middle: The front bumper of winch-equipped trucks was split at the winch. The winch drum holds 150 feet of 7/16-inch wire rope. The front shackles extend through the bumper, but to lift the truck via crane the shackles are to be relocated to the axles. Photo courtesy of the Patton Museum.



A large battery box was located between the front seats of the M715. The military windshield differed from that of the civilian Gladiator in that it could folded down, as seen here. Notice that the blackout headlight was mounted on top of the hood. Photo courtesy of the Patton Museum.



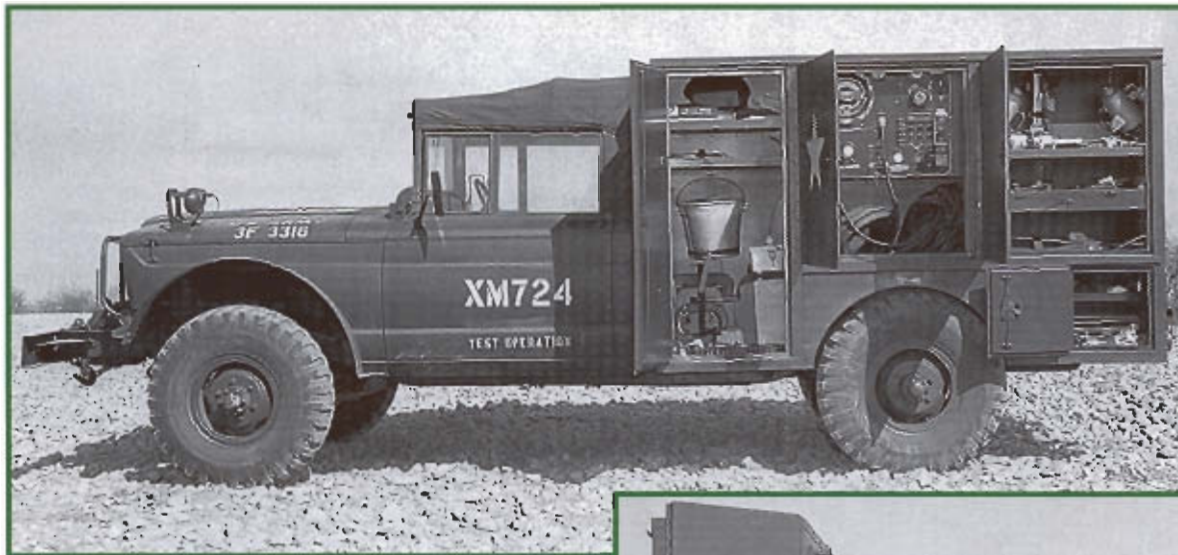
When used in cold climates the M715 was modified using a variety of kits some of which are visible in this photo. These modifications included the use of a metal crew compartment enclosure, a crew compartment heater kit, a power plant heater kit, an insulated cargo closure and the cargo closure heater kit. Photo courtesy of TACOM LCMC History Office.



The M724 cab and chassis was the basis for the more obscure variants of the series, such as the ambulance and contact maintenance trucks. The entire M715 series used full floating axles, and a two-speed transfer case was mounted remotely. Photo courtesy of TACOM LCMC History Office.

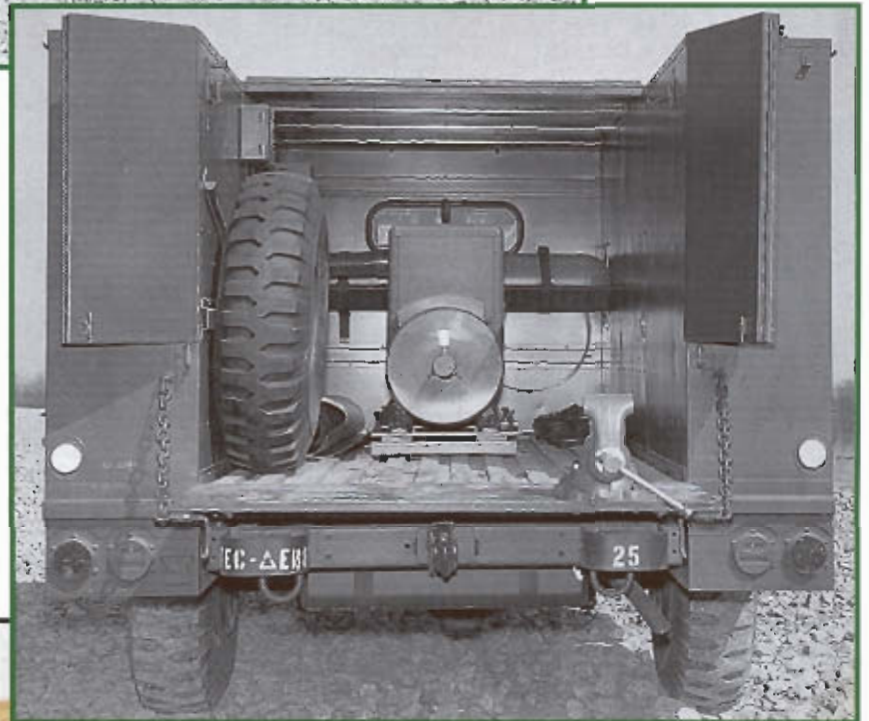
The M715 Cargo Truck could be fitted with an S-250/G Electrical Equipment Shelter; it was made of aluminum and designed to house various communication equipment. The shelter itself weighed 630 pounds and had a payload of 1,900 pounds. This M715, photographed near Seoul, Korea, in November 1968, is laden with a shelter housing an AN/GRC-122 radio teletypewriter system. National Archives photo.





Although marked XM724 on the door, as mentioned earlier, that was the designation of the cab and chassis upon which this contact maintenance truck was built. Typical of contact maintenance vehicles of all chassis types, these trucks were each equipped with a winch. Photo courtesy of the Patton Museum.

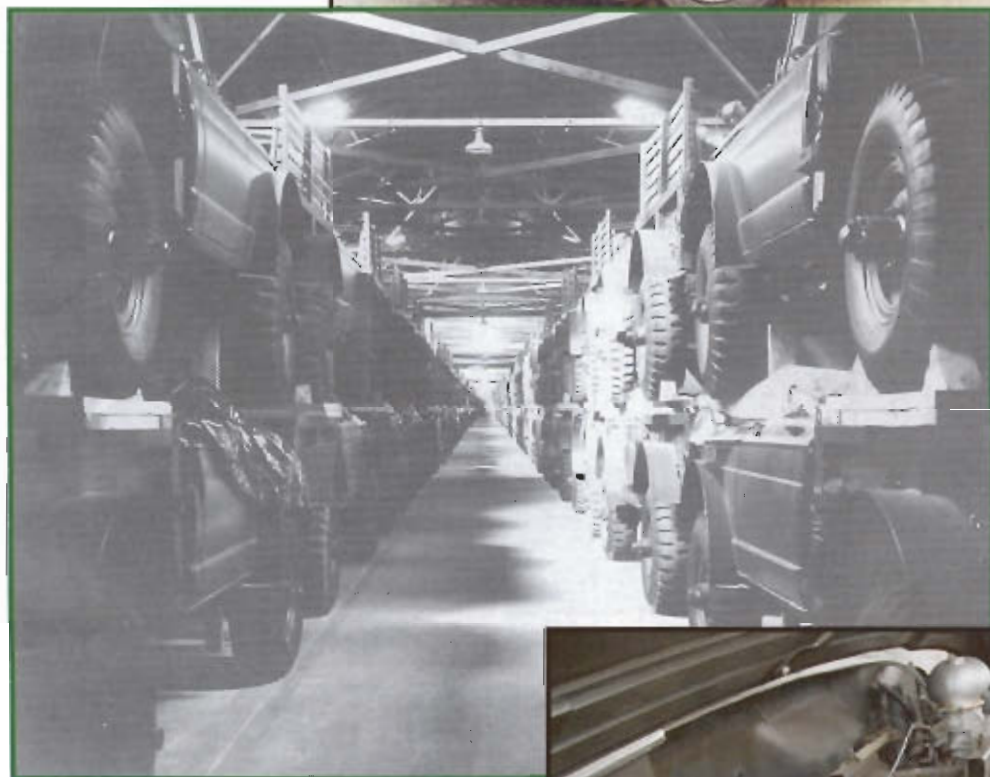
The aluminum contact maintenance body, which was produced by Stewart Avionics, and given their model number 6217, housed a combination welder and generator as well as a host of tools. As Corps of Engineers equipment, contact maintenance trucks did not receive 'M' designations. Photo courtesy of the Patton Museum.



Often confused with the contact maintenance truck, the scarce M726 was a telephone maintenance truck. As a quick spotting guide, the body of the M726 was lower than that of the contact maintenance truck, and lacked the cover and welder/generator. In fact, the rear bed was totally different. The steel, cable splicer body was especially designed for stowage of telephone maintenance work. Two outward-facing banks of drawer and closet type compartments with recessed door locks flanked the open cargo space. A rear tailgate was provided to close the rear cargo area. The rear body was also equipped with a ladder rack, utility hooks, furnace and solder potholder, wire reel and three-gallon water can. Photo courtesy of TACOM LCMC History Office.



A bulkhead with a sliding access door separates the cab and patient compartment of the M725 Ambulance. The steel body was completely insulated, and a set of double doors at the rear of the vehicle provided access to the patient compartment. The ambulance had a seating capacity for eight patients and one attendant, or it will accommodate five litter patients. Photo courtesy of TACOM LCMC History Office.



The M715 series of vehicles were built in Kaiser-Jeep's Toledo facility. Production of the vehicles there ended in 1969, after over 30,000 of these largely civilian trucks in military uniform had been produced. Here dozens of the M715s are stacked and ready for shipment.

The power plant used in the vehicles was Kaiser-Jeep's own 230 cubic-inch displacement 6-cylinder engine. The engine developed 200 pound-feet of torque at 2000 rpm and just over 130 gross horsepower at its 4000 rpm limit.





The final variant of the series built was the AM715. These 1978-built trucks were also the only ones of the series to be built by AM General at their South Bend, Indiana, facility. Only a handful of prototypes were built but the firm could find no buyers for the vehicle. Notice the difference in the front fenders - less noticeable was the difference in wheel-base. Photo courtesy of TACOM LCMC History Office.

The M715 was powered by an overhead cam, overhead valve, six-cylinder inline, gasoline engine. Though possessing high thermal and mechanical efficiency this engine was one of the weaknesses of the vehicle for both the military and collectors. The engine was prone to both vapor lock and engine compartment fires. Today internal engine components are becoming very scarce. The engine features 'spheroidal' combustion chambers and rigid valve gear operated from a single cam lobe through stamped type spherical seated rocker arms for both intake and exhaust valves. A 10-1/2 inch nine-spring pressure plate actuated the single plate-dry disc type clutch connecting the engine to the four-speed manual synchromesh transmission. Four tie-down shackles, two each front and rear, were provided with each truck. To lift the vehicle for rail or ship loading, these shackles were moved to special lugs on each axle end.

The last of the M715 series to be built in Toledo were 43 prototypes ordered by the army in December 1969. These M715s were slightly improved and intended for



comparison tests against the Chevrolet XM705 1-1/4 ton truck design. Unfortunately for Kaiser-Jeep and Chevrolet, neither model was accepted. Army procurements of light trucks stopped briefly. During this time the famous *WHEELS* (Special Analysis of Wheeled Vehicles) report was produced. One of the conclusions of this report was that slightly modified commercial vehicles could fill many of the army's mission requirements.

Accordingly, in May 1975 a contract was awarded to Dodge for a militarized version of their commercial W200 series pickups. This truck, which was designated the M880 series, was issued to replace both the M715 family and the M37 family, but unlike them (and the XM705), wasn't truly a tactical vehicle, rather, an economical vehicle.

In 1978 AM General (successor firm to Kaiser-Jeep) attempted to reenter this market by offering the AM715, which at first glance looked identical to the M715. These were the only trucks in this family to have been assembled in South Bend, but sadly for the builder, no buyers were found.

The most obvious differences between the M715 and the AM715 were a longer 131-inch wheel base (versus the earlier 126-inch wheel base), civilian front fenders (without the flares of the M715), drop center wheels, a modified brush guard, and a smaller fuel filler.

This photo is a somber reminder that despite some critics in the collector community, the M715 is indeed a military vehicle. There can be little argument with this photo of a M715 in which four GIs were killed by North Koreans in October 1969 ambush near Panmunjon. (There is also some evidence a small number of the G-890 series vehicles were used in Vietnam). National Archives photo.

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