

The GJG and the New York Guard

As mentioned in a previous article, the New York Guard began...and endured...their service during WWI in good spirits, with high hopes and absolute commitment, but little else indeed. The amount of equipment allotted them by the state was insufficient, and the quality outdated or downright poor. The officers did their best to commandeer food clothing and shelter for their troops. In this, they were largely successful, tapping friends in the private sector, and appealing to New York City, (who concluded that after all, as the protection of the Aqueduct was largely to their benefit, perhaps they *could* approve a line item for supplies in their budget for the First Provisional Regiment.)

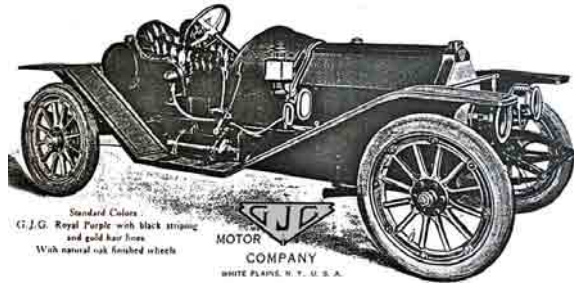
WWI is recognized as the world's first mechanized war; it was the one and single war that was fully poised between the past and the future. In the not too distant Second Boer War, (1899 - 1902) the cavalry ruled, and an unimaginable 300,000 horses were killed. Come 1914, a mere dozen years later, assault now came from land, sea and air. Though every army still relied on cavalry units, and sturdy draft horses were conscripted to pull heavy artillery, for the first time in history, airplanes and tanks and even submarines were used to great effect. Staff cars and ambulances rolled across the battlefields; the heroics of ace fighter pilots dazzled the public.

The New York National Guard was called out in February 1917 to guard the Aqueduct that ran into New York City. When The NYNG was federalized in July of 1917, the New York Guard were formed by State mandate in order that the Aqueduct, rail lines, the Niagara Falls dam, and major power utilities would be guarded.

The New York National Guard had 3200 soldiers posted along the Aqueduct. Under the command of Colonel John B. Rose, the First Provisional regiment of the New York Guard would perform the same job with a vastly reduced number of only 1200 soldiers. The line would be no less ably though rather more thinly guarded. Already under-equipped, a few of the officers had their own personal automobiles to get themselves up and down the line, and to and from Headquarters. Colonel Rose tirelessly managed his line inspections in his yellow 'Pathfinder' (Motor Car Manufacturing Company, 1912-1917), and Captain De Garmo tore about the roads in his red Stutz (arguably America's first sports car). However, this would in no way be adequate in making certain that supplies and food would be daily available to outposts. The Aqueduct stretched at almost 100 miles, added to another 156 miles of roads where posts and outposts were located. Inspections had to be made as well, and in the event of a soldier becoming ill or injured, a rapid means of getting him immediate medical attention was vital. On 15 August, 1917, Special orders No.6 decreed Lieutenant H. Pushae Williams V.C.A. in charge of transportation at Regimental Headquarters. New York City had been most adamant that the Aqueduct be guarded from possible terrorist attacks, so it was to the City of New York that a formal request to provide transportation was made by Colonel Rose and Lieutenant Williams.

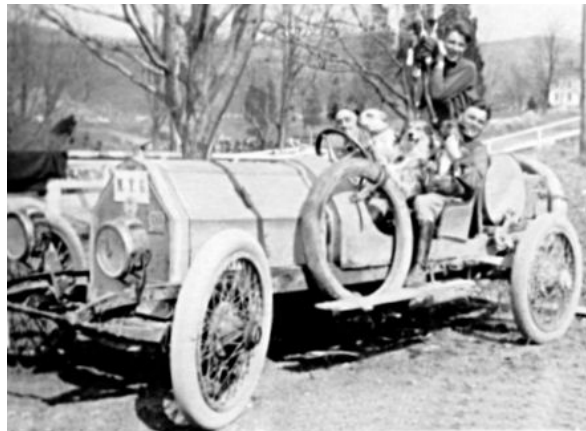
The order was not filled immediately; more letters went back and forth between the Commander and the Mayor's staff, and the City finally acquiesced to 'give' (it was a loan, the City wanted their property back) the New York Guard 8 large touring cars, 18 light touring cars, 18 light trucks, 25 motorcycles, and 80 bicycles. The trucks and the motorcycles, which were Harley-Davidsons, had already been discarded by the NYC Police Department for new vehicles. (The bicycles were almost certainly from the Police Department as well, as there were 1200 'bicycle cops' spread throughout all five boroughs.) In fact every vehicle donated, including the bicycles, was second-hand, and all were decrepit, in near tatters. Within days of their delivery, it was clear that transportation was nowhere near a settled issue. Favoring inertia, the motorcycles needed daily coaxing to move, then promptly fell to pieces with little effort. The trucks, clearly inspired, followed suit.

Soldiers, NCO's and officers solved much of the problem on their own. Born in Kinderhook, New York in 1893, Lewis Van Alstyne volunteered for the New York Guard in 1917, entering as a Private. He volunteered again to serve with the First Provisional Regiment, and he was stationed at Fort Orange, New Paltz. PVT. In the phrase of the day, Van Alstyne 'did his bit', and brought his own car with him to camp, a G.J.G. In 1917, half the automobiles rolling along American streets were Ford Model T's; dozens of manufacturers made up the other half. The G.J.G. car company, though, was perhaps a sliver of that percentage...it was a rare car indeed. Felicitously, the car was assembled in Westchester County, at the Mammoth Garage in White Plains, New York. Now long gone, the Mammoth Garage served as the main base for the Isotta-Fraschini racing team during the legendary Briarcliff Trophy Race in 1908. Very likely inspired by the Italian mechanics, drivers and their cars, George John Grossman (G.J.G.) was eager to build his own vehicle. Less than two years later, he had succeeded. His car was available in two lines...the 'Senior' line with five models, the most expensive of which was \$2750.00; and with top price at \$1250.00, was the less expensive 'Junior' line, with four models. (This more affordable 'Junior' line was still three times more expensive than the ubiquitous Ford Model T.) It is not known how many of these cars were built; an auto registry from 1914 indicates a GJG registered to Grace M. Shaw at 56 Walter Avenue in White Plains. It was an American car, but incorporated parts from specific imported automobiles, such as a Renault 29 horsepower or 40 hp four cylinder engine. Some G.J.G. models carried very fine Mercedes radiators. With his finances strained to the breaking point, George Grossman closed the company – the last GJG was built in 1914.



Standard Colors
 G.J.G. Royal Purple with black striping
 and gold hair lines
 With natural oak finished wheels
 MOTOR COMPANY
 WHITE PLAINS, N. Y., U. S. A.

In the Heidgerd-Haviland collection at the Elting Library in New Paltz are a series of photographs of the 1st Cavalry, Troop B, First Provisional Regiment, New York Guard at Camp Fort Orange. In three photos are PVT. Van Alstyne and his car. It was a sleek, beautiful and intriguing looking vehicle; PVT Van Alstyne's fellow soldiers seemed to think so as well, as they are piled inside and around it in all three photos. One of these snapshots was sent to Hemmings Motor News, and immediately, a series of e-mails flew back and forth between this historian and Dan Strohl, the Associate Editor of Hemmings...he was equally intrigued about the car and its' identity. When the photo was published in Hemmings on-line magazine, it lit a match. Responses came from all over the country...some thought the mystery car was a Fiat...and prompted an article a couple of weeks later with the announcement that PVT. Van Alstyne's car was positively identified as a GJG. It was a very rare marque, and this particular one was actually a race car (GJG's were so fast that the word went around that 'GJG' really stood for 'Go, Jesus, Go!'). The body was the company's sporty 'Pirate' model;



it was powered not by a Renault, but by a 70 horsepower 4 cylinder T-head Wisconsin race engine. The most extraordinary part...this very automobile still existed. After belonging several owners, Van Alstyne's race car was sold in 1995 to its' present owner Fred Hoch of Schaffer and Lewis, a fine car restoration company. Even more responses followed, as well as photographs of Lewis Van Alstyne's GJG as it looks today, awaiting a complete ground-up restoration. George J. Grossman, his finances strained, closed the GJG company in 1914.



How did Lewis Van Alstyne of the First Provisional Regiment come to own a race car, and a rare one, even for the time? No record yet has been found of him on entrant lists, but he may very well have raced. Perhaps he purchased the car from its original owner, Paul G. Thebaud, who raced the car on track at the White Plains Fairgrounds, sometime between 1910-1912. Van Alstyne had no qualms about pressing into service for his state this thoroughbred vehicle. There is so far only one other known photo of a second, unidentified automobile at Camp Fort Orange, though there remain many photos of beloved 'Peggy' the horse, another horse harnessed to a buckboard (and pulling a sleigh during the winter), and a truck.



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