

The Burma Gleep

Vicky Turner examines the history of the
Ford GTB-622 1.5 Ton Cargo Truck

MAIN IMAGE: Many GTBs survived the war years and continued in service. Some saw action in the Korean War 1950-3. GTBs were only officially declared 'surplus' in 1967

RIGHT: A low profile proving useful. The versatile GTB Cargo Truck was able to tow, came with a front winch and had great load space

FAR RIGHT: A GTB in service on an airfield pulling wheeled trolleys loaded with bombs - note the single rear wheel configuration

Shortly before America joined World War Two, a need was identified for a low silhouette truck, one that could be more easily concealed than its taller counterparts. Various designs, in various weight classes were submitted by notables such as Dodge, Ford, Chevrolet, Corbitt, GMC, Studebaker, International and Reo.

The 1.5ton Ford GTB was the only

one to enter series production and there were five variants on offer; the standard GTB Cargo Truck, the GTBA for the US Navy, a GTBB wrecker, although only around 50 of these were manufactured, the GTBS Bomb Service Truck destined for the US Navy, and the GTBC 'improved' Bomb Service Truck, also for the navy. Collectively, these were known by the truck's Ordnance Standard nomenclature, number G-622. They later became known as 'Burma Jeeps' as they were most commonly

used in the far east and Pacific region.

Many GTBs had factory-fitted front-mounted heavy-duty, PTO-driven, 10,000lb-rated Garwood or Braden winches. The bomb service versions were fitted with a rear-mounted crane, often made by Weaver Hoist Manufacturing and the cargo versions had troop seats and bows for a canvas cover. In all versions, the top of the engine cover divided the cab and so the driver sits alongside part of the engine and to accommodate a passenger, a side facing, folding canvas seat is used. The GTBS alone had single rear wheels, the rest had dual rear wheels. There is some discrepancy around production figures and wheelbases – the axle on the GTBS is marginally different from the other models. There is some





The hoist on top of the crane



The minimalistic passenger seat offers little comfort, unusually it faces the driver's position and folds away when not in use



A portable bomb hoist for loading aircraft



The air filter could be easily accessed and checked daily from the compartment to the right of the grille



Bumperette and retro-looking, new indicator lights within standard US Guide lamps



GTB Trucks were designed to pull trailers too, in bomb service, loaded with live bombs destined for aerial bombardment



Indicators are the only things not originally on this vehicle. They were sympathetically added later to appease the MOT tester and render it road-legal



The engine protrudes into the cabin between the driver and the passenger. Its curved housing comes with an access panel

'The crane was put to use in lifting heavy bombs into the loading bay of the aircraft'



The crane was put to use in lifting heavy bombs into the loading bay of the aircraft and the tow hooks useful in pulling bombs on wheeled trolleys - as illustrated by contemporary photographs. One advantage of the



ABOVE: The GTB was the only low profile truck to enter series production, with 15,000 trucks, across all model types, being produced between 1942-45

BELOW INSET: Note the single rear set up in this model, only seen on the GTBS version, before reverting to the dual wheel set up in the GTBC

SPECIFICATIONS

Make **Ford**
 Model **GTB-622 (GTBC)**
 Nationality **American**
 Year **1943**
 Production Run **15,000**
 (all variants) **between**
1942-1945
 Engine **Ford GTBC 4701**
 Type **Four stroke inline**
six cylinder
 Fuel **Petrol**
 Displacement **3,300cc**
 Power **90bhp @ 3,400rpm**
 Top Speed **45mph**
 Torque **180lbs-ft**
 Transmission Type **Manual**
 Gears **Four speed**
 Transfer Box **Two-speed**
 Fuel Consumption **9mpg**
 Suspension **Leaf Springs**
 Brakes **Hydraulic,**
vacuum assisted
 Wheels **6 stud**
commercial truck
 Tyres **7.50x20,**
dual tyres at rear
 Crew/seats **Two**

Dimensions(overall)

Length **5m**
 Width **2.22m**
 Height **1.37m**
 Weight **1.5tons**

Modifications

Indicators had to be added to be road legal in the UK; they were added sympathetically, but are not authentic.

side-facing passenger seat and open-sided cab was that it was easy to keep an eye on such explosive cargo and make sure nothing went wrong.

The cargo versions were used in the building of the Ledo Road and it is possible that the passenger would lean out keeping an eye on that road's famed treacherous drops.

Many examples of the GTB survived the Second World War and continued doing the job they were designed for, including during the Korean War 1950-1953. Their fitness for purpose is demonstrated by them remaining in service for more than 20 years before all those left were declared officially surplus in 1967.

The Bowens' 1943 Bomb Service GTBC 'Pearl Harbour'

The Bowen family has owned this unusual Ocean Gray vehicle since 2015, when they saw it advertised on Milweb. Few are seen, especially in Europe and even more rarely are seen in such an excellent state of repair. Jacob Rietveld imported it from the USA to Belgium. Before being rescued it had been rusting away in an America breaker's yard having spent its entire working life in the US Navy, although little is known of that stage in its life. The belief is that until recently it never left American soil, ►



THE LEDO ROAD

The Ledo Road project was a major part of the American war effort to recapture Burma from the Japanese and to keep a route to China open; the old Burma Road in southern Burma having been cut by the Japanese in 1942. The Ledo Road was later renamed the Stilwell Road, after the American general charged with its construction. It was built in northern Burma to connect Assam in India, to Yunnan in China and

maintain supplies to China necessary in the fight against the Japanese empire. Around 15,000 American troops as well as 35,000 local labourers were involved in the project which Winston Churchill called 'an immense, laborious task, unlikely to be finished until the need for it has passed'. No doubt about it, it was a mammoth undertaking at an estimated cost of \$150m and with 1,100 American lives lost as well as thousands of locals

killed too.

The road build, situated as it was in rocky mountain terrain, required the removal of 100,000 cubic feet of earth for every mile covered. The road itself was steep and winding with hair-pin bends and sheer drops but it was this backdrop, and engineering projects such as this, which relied upon durable, strong and manoeuvrable American built trucks such as

the GTB to move men and literally, mountains. Here lay the demand that created the supply.

After its opening in early 1945, trucks carried about 130,000 tons of supplies from India to China. Twenty-six thousand trucks that carried that cargo, one-way, were then handed over to the Chinese and GTBs were doubtless among them. After the war the road was quickly reclaimed by jungle.

'It was ground crews on airfields who used bomb service trucks, like this one'



ABOVE: The occupants could be minimally protected against the elements with the open cab closed up with a canvas top and the windshield raised
 OPPOSITE TOP: The Ford G8T four stroke, six cylinder, L-head engine protrudes into the crew compartment to keep the wheelbase short

THE CARGO TRUCK VARIANT

The Bowen family also own a Cargo Truck GTB in Olive Drab.



The Cargo truck variant had benches for troops and could be enclosed for shelter with a canvas hood

On the cargo truck the spare wheel is stored on the underside of the rear bed, in the bomb truck versions it is positioned on the side of the vehicle

BELOW RIGHT: Beautiful period details in this, the Bowens' other GTB model

BELOW LEFT: Rugged and ready, easy to visualise on the Ledo Road; note the pull-out tool box above the tow hitch

BELOW: The front mounted winch was a common accessory on this truck, either a Garwood or a Braden MU-6; both were well-respected





but was used for transporting munitions from the bomb dump to aeroplanes for their onward journey into theatre.

After having been salvaged and brought to Belgium it was then acquired by Steffaan Van Vooren who restored it over a ten-year period, naming it Pearl Harbour. It was mostly intact although it had lost its crane from the back; presumably that was a highly prized tool in a post-war world and had been repurposed during the intervening years. It underwent a complete nut and bolt strip down, shot-blast, rebuild and repaint with various parts being sourced both in Europe and in the USA. Jacob had bought more than one GTB in America, so in effect, more than one vehicle's parts were used in the creation of this single restored GTB.

The brakes were totally overhauled includ-

replaced from the donor vehicle where possible but the wooden floors were re-made as the old ones were rotten. A company in Manchester refabricated the wings, but to retain authenticity, an old pair of wings were found, borrowed and sent to the northwest for patterning. From those were created exact replica wings so that they could be replaced like for like. Even the canvas hood was old new stock, still in its protective wrapping where it had been since its manufacture in the 1940s.

Stephen says that this bomb truck is 99% perfect, correct and as it should be; the only thing missing that he is aware of is a hand winch, which moves part of the crane backwards and forwards, but Stephen trawls the auto jumbles and eBay and continues making contacts ever hopeful that he will eventually find this last component. ◀



Father and son, David and Steven Bowen share a love of military machines and own a few between them

ing linings, cylinders, brake pipes and fuel pipes and a complete rewire was undertaken, including the lights with their blackout system as used in 1943. There is one nod to the modern era; Stephen had to add rear and front indicators for UK law as he intended to use it and drive it on the road. He tried to do this necessary modification as subtly as possible, the solution having a 'peak' to look like a blackout type light, so as not to detract from the character and originality of the vehicle.

Pretty much everything that could be restored was, anything missing or beyond repair was

ADDITIONAL INFO

It is believed to be a GTBC as its registration plate states it is a Mark II, dated 1943. Production of the GTBC began in September of that year but there is no date stamped on the plate. It does sport dual rear wheels and an electric braking system but unusually is does not have a front winch. If anyone knows anything of this truck's early life, (its Ford registration number is 149546 and its US Navy Mark II serial number is 89293) please get in touch. If anyone has the hand winch which Steven seeks, please also contact vicky.turner@keypublishing.com



Various original data plates giving information and instruction to operators



The portable bomb hoist was manufactured in 1942 by The American Chain and Cable Co. Inc.



The Bowens also have an original Maintenance Manual for a Mark II, Model 2 GTBC to complement the vehicle



Original plaque showing both the US Navy Bomb Service serial number and the manufacturer's serial number, confirming it is a Mark II; a GBTC from 1943



The US Navy colour of choice was 'Ocean Grey'. This truck's US Navy Bomb Service serial number is 89293, found during restoration