

# *"A D-Day magique et en musique La parade Américaine a pris un bain de foule"*

**By Filippo Spadi #24493, Scarperia, Florence, Italy**

The French newspapers afterwards so titled the event – "D-Day Magic in Music – The American parade drew a huge crowd."

In fact there is no better way to tell our MVPA members how some Italian collectors and restorers of historic military vehicles gathered to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Normandy landings.

Months before June 6, 2014 that well known anniversary date, Maurizio Beretta was actively involved in planning HMV Italia's participation.

He was in contact with the event organizers, who were debating what would be the most appropriate way to pay tribute to American veterans of that famous day in 1944. The organizers made the decision to stage a musical parade in Sainte-Mère-Église, with hundreds of participants, dozens of bands, and military groups from overseas, all working together to give a giant welcome to the thirty or so returning D-Day veterans.

Arrangements were made to haul the HMV Italia vehicles, needed to accommodate the returning veterans and their families to Normandy (900 miles/1440 km). Included were a GMC DUKW, Ford F60, some Dodges, and the

Walter Secco at the wheel of his Ford GPW. Standing is Maurizio Beretta and seated is his wife Lorenza Francesi, wearing a period USAAF nurse's uniform. Walter is hosting American veteran Herbert Michalk, 22d US Division, 23rd Infantry Regiment, Cannon Company, who landed on Omaha Beach on D+9.





Mayor Marc LeFevre, of Sainte-Mère-Eglise, is greeting American veteran Herbert Michalk and thanking him for returning to Normandy 70 years later.

inevitable jeeps. The *Tracce di Storia* association of Medesano, a supporter of HMV Italia (an MVPA affiliate), transported our vehicles at their expense and hosted the veterans participating in the parade without charge.

On June 6 the column departed for the famous square at Sainte-Mère-Église. There was a huge crowd present on our arrival and the vehicles struggled to get to the meeting place on time.

Under a deep blue sky, traversed overhead by C-47 Dakotas, the veterans arrived one by one, to take their appointed place on the HMV Italia vehicles. Their relatives encircled them with respect and affection and almost shyly entrusted them to our care. Veterans were assigned an American

soldier, who attended to each of their needs. The weather was hot and bottles of fresh water were a necessity.

It was almost four in the afternoon, an hour

before the beginning of the parade, when Earl Hurrey, the excellent parade organizer, sanctioned our move towards the outskirts of the village for the start of the parade.

We parked smartly in a row, while several bands, one after another, from all parts of the United States, marched proudly in front of our group.

Suddenly our moment arrived. The veterans (who until then had been telling us with utmost humility where they were seventy years before) sat upright in our military vehicles and prepared to meet the crowd. 'Crowd'

does not actually describe the sea of faces smiling at us, their hands thrust forward to shake the veterans' hands or to gently touch them, while proffering the most-used French word that afternoon, *Merci*. (Thank you).



American veteran Herbert Michalk, looking with interest at the HMV Italia banner, which also displays the MVPA logo.

American veteran Vernon 'Moon' Miller, Dayton, Ohio, shaking hundreds of hands, of folks from everywhere in the world, who gathered at Sainte-Mère-Eglise for the D-Day parade.



Seven decades have passed since those fateful days in 1944, yet each person in the audience understood the importance of paying tribute to those veterans, proudly parading in our vehicles.

Lorenza, my wife, wearing the uniform of a 'flying nurse,' was unable to stop weeping with emotion all the way. The parade at Sainte-Mère-Église was the most important event in the region (official appointments excepted), and one that our hearts will remember forever.

On that momentous day our MVPA family marched with their veterans to offer our gratitude and respect. HMV Italia is pleased and proud to have been a part of this event.

In a letter to HMV Italia's president, Maurizio Beretta, veteran Vernon 'Moon' Miller's family wrote Moon's comments about the parade.

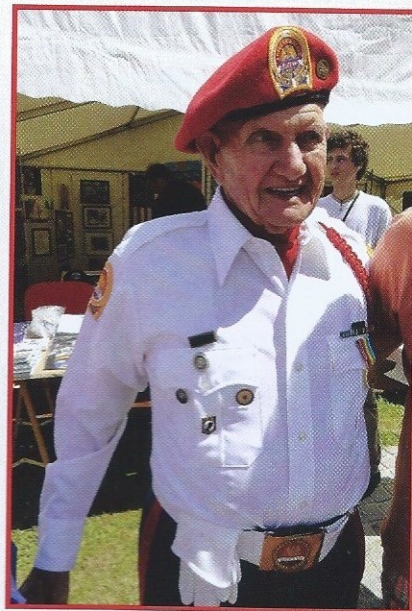
*Hi Maurizio,  
Great to hear from you. You asked about the parade and I say I had a great time but I think I would have had just as good a time or better if I were with you and your group all the time. That's what I was planning on. I thank you for caring and I hope if I live and come back over, maybe I will get another jeep ride with your gang! Everyone that we met, it seemed, went out of their way to accommodate us, or in*

*other ways, and it made us feel like we belonged. Maybe our paths will cross again as it would be my pleasure. A friend, Vernon 'Moon' Miller*

I tried to get more info from him. Here's what he added:

*Being in the parade was awesome and I couldn't believe all of the attention given to us veterans. The people treated us like 'rock stars.' The sheer number of people watching the parade was amazing.*

He told me that this was the best trip he has ever taken and will always remember it.



Vernon 'Moon' Miller at the Sainte-Mère-Eglise D-Day anniversary parade. 'Moon' turned 18 the day after the D-Day landings in 1944.

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