



# Vehicle Registry: 60 Years of History

*By Mr. Robert Szostek*

*The United States Army, Europe (USAREUR) Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2006. Less than one year after D-Day, the RMV was created in the rubble and chaos of postwar Germany. First established in Frankfurt in May 1946, it kept track of the cars that Soldiers acquired or brought into Germany. Today's RMV operates as a nonappropriated fund activity under the operational control of the USAREUR provost marshal and is located at Taylor Barracks in Mannheim. The organization operates around the clock every day of the year and monitors the operations of 24 field registration stations throughout Germany. Its automated system also includes U.S. Army units in Italy.*

Fifty employees keep track of more than 100,000 registered privately owned vehicles (POVs), 240,000 driver's licenses, and nearly 6,000 privately owned firearms (POFs) with its vast database. The RMV also establishes policy and creates the publications that govern driving and registering vehicles as well as owning and registering POFs in Germany. These regulations must conform to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization status of forces agreement and German laws.

"The registry has gone through many changes over the years," said the current registrar, Tom Lorenzini. Ironically, one sign of the times is that in

December 1958, the number of POVs actively registered was 92,044, which is not far from the current total.

In the first years of the RMV, USAREUR license plates were American-style, with a white letter "E" for European Theater of Operations, followed by four numbers on a green background. In those days, only higher-ranking officers were allowed to own a POV overseas. Those first pressed-steel license plates were made locally in Germany. However, the tons of salt dumped on German streets in winter corroded the plates so badly that aluminum plates from the United States were used from 1962 until 2000, when

the RMV itself started buying the blanks locally and making the plates. Later plates featured many different background colors with varying combinations of letters and numbers until white plates with black characters were introduced in 1983. A black stripe across the top and bottom of the plates was added two years later to keep them from standing out so much.

“These plates are still in use today as temporary plates, but their days are numbered as they will be phased out over the next year. Security has often been an issue in the past. In the old days, generals, colonels, warrant officers, sergeants major, chief master sergeants, and master chief petty officers received special plates, but that was changed in 1978 because of the threat from Baader-Meinhof terrorists,” said Lorenzini. The current “look-alike plates” were introduced for security reasons in July 2000 so that the POVs of USAREUR and U.S. Air Force, Europe personnel would be less conspicuous on the road. These plates closely resemble German license plates but have lettering reserved solely for U.S. forces personnel and their family members.

Last year, after many years of negotiations and final approval by German authorities, the RMV began converting its license plates to genuine German plates. When the changeover is fully implemented, all U.S. forces personnel and their family members will receive German license plates from the area where they are stationed. Since the implementation of this program in January 2006, it has expanded to 17 of the 24 registration stations throughout

Germany. The RMV itself makes the license plates used by U.S. forces personnel to ensure positive control and to save money. It is cheaper to make the plates than to purchase them as a manufactured product.

In the early years of the RMV’s existence, the number of U.S. forces personnel and family members involved in traffic offenses was not high. Over the past few years this has changed as German police have intensified traffic enforcement measures. The RMV processes hundreds of thousands of traffic citations worth millions of dollars in fines, as well as suspensions and revocations. The current average is only about one citation per registered car per year but the penalties for violations have increased significantly as German authorities have also stiffened fines for violators.

Recently, the RMV has been taking care of the vehicles of deployed Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors, and Marines to reduce or eliminate vehicle-related problems for them while deployed. This extra service was first offered during Operation Desert Storm in 1991.

From its birth at the end of World War II to its numerous actions in support of the War on Terror, the RMV has carried out its mission and provides a valuable service to USAREUR personnel. The RMV has a comprehensive Web site at <http://rmv.hqusareur.army.mil> with information on all aspects of registering a POV, license requirements, POF registration, and all the forms and regulations associated with its varied missions.