Dear Mr Timmons

Thank you for sending me the copy of your letter of 25 April addressed to Colonel Penn.

I am wondering if the subject of the Rolls Royce cars used in Europe by Montgomery will ever be completely clarified.

Back in 1989 I wrote a manuscript, Cars of the Commanders (as yet unpublished) in which I put together the information available to me at the time. I am enclosing photocopies of the pages concerned with the Rolls Royce cars and those that run on as they relate to correspondence with the late Percy Parker. As you will see, Percy made no reference to your WHC 43 nor the mysterious Phantom III or 'green car'.

Another point which does not tie up is the WD number for WHC 43. You quote M 5109233, whereas my records show M 5109209.

The reason why Cars of the Commanders has not yet been published is the fact that new and conflicting information is still coming to hand.

An article in Soldier magazine may bring some useful feedback, and if you could let me have a photograph of WHC 43 I will gladly ask Chris Horrocks if he will publish such an article.

Yours sincerely

Brian Jewell

Copies to: Colonel C.B. Penn
Lieutenant Colonel E.R. Barrass
It was delivered new to the General in Warsaw in 1938. After the German invasion and conquest, Sikorski drove the Rolls to Paris, France and when France fell he brought it to England.

In the North African and Italian campaigns General Montgomery used two Number Super Snipe open tourers, one of which (M 239459), known as 'Old Faithful', is now exhibited at the Museum of Army Transport, Beverley. The other twin, M 239485, is exhibited in the Coventry Museum. These two cars were the 1941 military version of the civilian Super Snipe tourer, capable of carrying five people in comparative comfort. The military adaptation equipment included a collapsible windscreen fitted over the backs of the front seats and door pockets for maps.

Rolls Royce Wraith limousine, chassis number WMB 40, now at The Museum of Army Transport, Beverley, is another car that was used by Montgomery in the Second World War. This car is a standard 6-light limousine with coachwork by Park Ward, with a conventional retractable division between the driver's and passenger compartments.

The Wraith, in private ownership at the time, with civilian registration plates FLD 99, was damaged in a 1941 air raid and repair work at the Rolls Royce Crewe works was necessary. In 1944 the car was sold to the War Office, given WD number M 5109209, and allocated to General Montgomery on his appointment as Commander-in-Chief 21 Army Group.

On 9 June 1944 (D-Day plus 3) the car was landed on Juno Beach, Normandy. On 6 June 1964, the twentieth anniversary of D-Day, the Army Council presented the Wraith to the RASC Training Centre, then at Buller Barracks, Aldershot, after Viscount Montgomery had riding in it for a final and ceremonial run.

In 1978 the Wraith underwent restoration by Rolls Royce Motors Limited and Hooper & Company (coachbuilders). It remains in black and silver livery and still carries the five-star Field Marshal's insignia.

Many people who served in Germany at the latter part and after the Second World War remember seeing Montgomery's Rolls: Mrs Elizabeth Smurthwaite being one: 'Whilst serving with NAAFI in Germany in 1946, I was out hitch-hiking one afternoon with two colleagues, Christine Barclay and Diane Newton. A magnificent staff car pulled up to give us a lift; smashing after some of the tatty old trucks we had sampled! We learned to our surprise that the car belonged to General Montgomery and his driver
showed us some of the gadgets in the car. I was told that the driver’s instructions were to give anyone who was also British personnel, no matter who, a lift if needed. You can well imagine how thrilled we were to ride in such luxury. I think it was the only time a staff car stopped for me, and I did a fair old bit of sightseeing whilst I was in Germany. We had a very pleasant ride and conversation, and another thrilling experience to our lives.

Colonel D.W. Ronald, Director and Curator of The Museum of Army Transport, has some information on two other Rolls Royce cars used by Montgomery: a Windover bodied limousine, chassis number WHC 43, civilian registration DTX 897, WD number M 5109209, and ‘another Phantom III’ about which nothing is known.

Norman Kirby, a security sergeant at Tac HQ from D-Day onwards and author of 1100 Miles with Monty, and George Butterworth, who was the Major in charge of REME at Tac HQ, recall two Rolls Royce cars: one black and a smaller vehicle painted green. However, as Colonel Ronald comments, ‘Unless the Phantom III is the mysterious “green car” we are no further forward. No one can claim that a Phantom is smaller than a Wraith, so I doubt it’.

Clearly there is more to be discovered about Montgomery’s cars in Europe.

The CIGS Rolls Royce

Sir Alan Brooke (later Lord Alanbrooks) ‘inherited’ Percy Parker, probably the most famous of the Army’s staff car drivers, when he succeeded Lord Ironside as Chief of Imperial General Staff. Both officers had known the driver years before when Colonel Alan Brooke was an instructor at the Staff College, Camberley, and Ironside was the Commandant.

As driver of the CIGS Rolls Royce Phantom III, Parker had many famous passengers. On one occasion he was driving through the East End of London with General Eisenhower in the back when the car was stopped by the police and Parker accused of exceeding the speed limit. Eisenhower opened the window and told the constable in no uncertain terms that ‘nobody ever won a war at 30 mph!’ Historically inaccurate he may have been, but the policeman did not feel in a position to argue.
Another of Percy Parker’s frequent passengers was Winston Churchill, who could sometimes be difficult. Once on a journey on a pitch dark night from London to Chequers, Churchill was in a particularly impatient mood, demanding, ‘Can’t you go any faster?’ This was impossible but Parker had an idea. By changing down into low gear and revving up the engine, he gave the impression that the car was going faster. It seems that the trick worked because Churchill’s next remark was, ‘Do you want to break our bloody necks?’ Parker made a less than polite remark under his breath about some people not being very easy to please, and unfortunately this was overheard. The following morning Parker was summoned to Churchill’s study where he was briefly admonished but sent away with a Churchillian cigar to show there were no hard feelings.

Once, when Churchill and Sir Alan Brooke were inspecting Kent coastal defences, the Prime Minister received an urgent call to return to London. Driving through unfamiliar country with no signposts - a wartime expediency, as it was thought that such signs would aid enemy parachutists - Parker had to use the old Post Office folklore that the cups on telegraph poles are on the side nearest London. It must have worked as there is no record of Churchill being stranded for the night in some Kentish hop garden.

On another occasion in the middle of the war, Percy Parker was driving back to London from Chequers with Sir Alan Brooke and the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound. Both senior officers were asleep in the back of the Rolls as they sped along in the moonlight when, near Northolt, there was ‘a swishing sound as if something was coming up fast behind’, according to Parker. This was followed by a tremendous explosion a few yards away which carried the Rolls on to the roadside grass. The only response from the back was the sleepy voice of the admiral: ‘Who rocked the boat?’ he asked.

The CIGS car was a Rolls Royce Phantom III with remarkable coachwork which is sometimes attributed to Saotchick of Paris. However, this is incorrect as Mr Alan Butler, the car’s original owner, told the author it was definitely built by H.J. Milliner of Chiswick to his own design.

Mr Butler, who in 1939 was Chairman of the de Havilland Aircraft Company, had some fixed ideas if unconventional ideas about aerodynamics, and tested various car windscreens in the company’s wind tunnel before deciding that an inward sloping screen was the most sound from a
streamlining viewpoint, reducing, he claimed, wind resistance by about 15 percent. It also reduced dazzle from oncoming traffic at night.

At this point it is useful to quote Percy Parker who, with his brother Cedric, had long associations with the Phantom III, as well as Montgomery’s Wraith (M 5109209) mentioned earlier.

'Scrambling back from Dunkirk, I was instructed by telegram to report to Kneller Hall, to once again drive General Ironside, who was then C-in-C Home Forces. On arrival at Kneller Hall I was shown the Phantom, DNV 553, by the General, who told me that he had acquired it when he was CIGS. It had, he told me, belonged to Mr A.S. Butler of the de Havilland aircraft firm, who had offered it to the War Office for the duration of the war on three conditions: first, that it was not under any circumstances to be sent abroad; secondly, that a fully qualified Rolls Royce man should drive it; and thirdly, that Messrs Rolls Royce were to do the schedules of inspection and, if necessary, all repairs.

'General Ironside was eventually retired by the Prime Minister and General Sir Alan Brooke was named as his successor, and it’s strange to relate that he was a lieutenant-colonel on the Directing Staff at Camberley in the old days. Sir Alan Brooke willingly accepted the Phantom and my services, and we both remained with him until his retirement in 1946.

'Back in 1944, during our stay at St Paul’s School, Monty paid a visit to the C-in-C and seeing that I had the Phantom, told me he also had been given a Rolls to use - I think he said it had been the property of someone in the Bowater Group - it had suffered bomb damage but was now serviceable, and did I know of a suitable man to drive it for him. I had known Monty was back at the Staff College as a major, and had no hesitation in recommending my younger brother Cedric, who at that time was serving General Paget. As General Paget had been nominated C-in-C Far East, he was not in the least disappointed at the loss of his driver, and that was the commencement of my brother’s association with Monty and his Wraith KEF FLD 99. This car was taken overseas by my brother and he finally returned with it to the War Office after the cessation of hostilities, where he was to await Monty’s return.

'When, in 1946, Lord Alanbrooke announced his retirement, the Phantom III was serviced and offered back to Mr Butler, who said that as the car had then completed about 300,000 miles, he had no further use for it, and
would the War Office make him a reasonable offer. A sum was agreed and
the vehicle was then allocated to Monty as his WD car. When Monty retired
he purchased the Phantom from the authorities, and retained possession
of the car and my brother's services until the latter died in 1962. [It
was in that year that Montgomery sold the Phantom III and it is believed to
be still with the purchaser in the USA.]

'As far as I can remember, the Wraith was not used by Monty after he
became CIGS. I am almost certain that when he retired it was taken down
to the Mill at Islington [Montgomery's home]; I have seen it there on at
least two occasions. When my brother died Monty had some difficulty in
obtaining another chauffeur. He therefore sold the Phantom and gave the
Wraith to the Transport School at Bordon.

'Issue' Staff Cars
The name Humber has become synonomous with British staff cars of the
Second World War, in the same way as Vauxhall and Sunbeam are associated
with the 1914-1918 conflict. Many stories can be told of the Humber
Snipes, such as that recalled by Mr J.A. Daniell, who drove one belonging
to X Corps in the Western Desert shortly after the Battle of El Alamein:
'In spite of many battle scars it was a marvellous old car and rarely got
stuck in the sand. Some months earlier the Corps HQ had been surrounded
by the enemy at Sidi Barani, and most of them were taken prisoner. However,
the driver of the Humber, L/Corporal Duncan of the RASC, decided to "have
a go" by putting his foot down and charging a German machine gun, which
he over-ran. He and the car escaped but the officer beside him was killed.
L/Corporal Duncan was awarded the Military Medal. When I took the car
over there was a dark blood stain on the leather work of the passenger seat
which I tried to remove but never succeeded'.

That the Humber 4086 cc Super Snipe engine served its country well
in the Second World War there can be no doubt. Fitted as it was to 4 x 2
and 4 x 4 chassis with a multitude of bodies from Pullman limousines to
armoured Light Reconnaissance Cars, it proved to be a highly versatile
and willing warhorse, used by the British and other Allied Forces wherever
the need took them.

The Humber 4 x 4 Heavy Utility went into service in the autumn of 1942.
The exact date is difficult to find but the car was written up in an
Autocar article of November 1942.