## American Highways System

In 1919 the U.S. Army set out to cross the country in 62 days—a trip that would change the face of America. The convoy was composed of 81 vehicles, 24 officers, 258 enlisted men and one last-minute member that joined in Maryland. That member was Lt. Col. Dwight D. Eisenhower, who saw the trip as a lark. The trip was from Washington, D.C., to Oakland, California—a distance of 3,251 miles.

The trip was a local celebration as it moved across the country. Cheering crowds would meet the convoy in cities, and in Ohio, the police escorted the convoy across the state. Then, in Wyoming, the men were invited to a dance. It was here that Ike played a joke on the troops that almost backfired on him. Ike told the troops that the convoy was vulnerable to Native Americans and posted sentinels. Then Ike and a few others made yelps in the dark. A rifle was discharged during the night. A message of a raid on the convoy by Native Americans was being readied to be sent to Washington. Ike stopped the message before it was sent, thus preventing a major political crisis.

The convoy averaged six mile per day, slowed by weather and poor road conditions. The trip in Ike's report stated that 88 bridges were damaged and there were 230 road accidents. Furthermore, Ike said that transcontinental movement for the military was impractical until the roads were improved.

Later, during World War II, General Eisenhower viewed the German Autobahn and changed his view of a two-lane road system to a wider road system. His experiences on the road trip and World War II helped shape his view on the need of American highways. As president, he signed the Interstate Highway Act in 1956, creating 46,100 miles of interstate roads. Route 66 and other roads would be replaced by the Dwight D. Eisenhower National System of Interstate and Defense Highways.