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## **Hey, Taxi!!**...by Dave Carr

From New York City, to Portland, Oregon, and all places in between, you may owe your next taxi ride to a veteran. Or more precisely, your parents probably did. Some of today's taxicab fixtures on American streets are there because returning veterans 65 years ago saw, and filled the need.

Becoming a cabbie was a no-brainer in 1946's New York City, where drivers had left the profession; the military draft of the 1940s took most of them, but others left for better-paying munitions work. More volunteered, avoiding the \$10 medallion renewal fee. In all, it left New York City with 7,500 valid taxi medallions, the lowest number since that program was created. But after the war, veterans came back to claim their medallions and the number of drivers was soon back to pre-war levels. Then demand became so strong that the city handed out even more, and by 1946, more than 11,700 taxi medallions were in force, a figure that lasted for decades. Checker cars were a main choice; so were Chrysler's DeSotos when larger vehicles were mandated, and later, Plymouth sedans – along with a Packard model.

Clear across the country, in Portland Oregon, it was not drivers *returning* to work, but combat veterans creating **new** opportunities. In 1946, two groups of veterans sought city council permission to create the Tuxedo Cab Company and the Radio Cab Company. Council rejected both, telling them to get together and work it out. The result was the Radio Tuxedo Cab Company that hit the streets August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1946 with 35 permits. It still operates today as the Radio Cab Company with 136 permits inside Portland City Limits and more in the surrounding area.

The story was the same in San Francisco, where returning veterans were given taxi medallions as part of an economic incentive. One result is today's Veteran' Cab Co. that enjoys a quiet positive reputation among its customers.

Speaking of Veteran's Cab, you'll find so-named taxi companies in Ypsilanti, MI, just outside Detroit; in Latrobe, PA, the Black & White Veterans Cab Co in Kenosha, WI; Medford, OR (actually started by a Vietnam veteran); Oakland, CA; Clarksville, TN -- well, you get the drift. They're everywhere!

And in Chicago Paloma Ott joined the Veterans Flash Cab Co. in 1946, after her brother returned from military service and acquired a cab. She's been with the firm ever since, still is today. That firm was created in 1945 by Arthur Dickholtz as Veterans Livery Cab; he and other vets were finding jobs hard to come by. It became the first in the U.S. to offer two-way radio service with equipment from a young company that would change its name to Motorola. Chicagoans have also known Veterans Flash through the years as Radio Flash Cab; today it is the Flash Cab Co.

So when you want to get from here to there and back again, as with so many things in life, thank a vet!  
*Taxi! A social history of the New York City Cabdriver by Graham Russell Hodges*

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