

The Steel Veteran of All Foreign Wars

By Bob Schmeichel

I think most of the time when people walk up to an old olive drab green military Jeep, they might say it's just another old Army Jeep not really realizing how much of an important role it played in helping America and its allies win WWII. The reality lessons learned with WWI, that hunkering down in trenches to hold an area or riding horses into a jungle were not going to win wars without a tremendous loss of lives. Because of what was witnessed by so many, the United States government decided we needed some sort of a small reconnaissance vehicle and put the idea out there for American auto makers to develop based on specific needs requested. The main objective was to be a light weight, built tuff 4-wheel drive vehicle easy to work on and able to haul 4 or 5 people. When others in the high ranks of the fast

charging cavalry units were asked their thoughts of what was needed the list went on to say, "It had to be as faithful as a dog, strong as a mule, and agile as a goat along with being able to go where horses couldn't." The thoughts and the demands were heard loud and clear, so in 1937 the United States Army began to work on specifications to create this 4-wheel drive reconnaissance vehicle with enlisting the American Bantam auto company in Butler, Pennsylvania. Ford Motor Company, Willys, and later Kaiser also jumped in at the chance to build their versions for the government with the same guidelines. With four different companies creating and developing what they thought was needed, the Army evaluated hundreds from each of the companies and cherry picked the best ideas from each which became the standard issue specification that they would build by. On November 23 of 1940, the first proto type Jeep was delivered for tests. There was still horse cavalries in the Army then , but with the jeeps being rapidly introduced into the picture, their versatility proved to be much more user friendly to work on and with, besides getting more men in and out of places quicker. Horse cavalries quickly became a thing of the past and Jeep production was being pushed to supply what Franklin D. Roosevelt called, "The Arsenal of Democracy." One comment made by an old maintenance Army guy sounded kind of funny but true done quite often thru all the years. If something on the bottom side needed repair, two or three guys could lift the Jeep up on it side where it would sit by itself and do whatever was necessary. A transmission change for instance, then plop it back down, fill all the fluids and it was on its way again. And since everything about the Jeep was built to government specs, every part from any manufacture interchanged without an issue.

On May 1, 1937, with seeing conflicts to gain power over others and claim lands starting in Europe and later Asia, President Roosevelt signed the Neutrality Act not wanting to be involved even though WWII would soon be eminent. Henry Ford agreed with President Roosevelt remaining quite the pacifist even though he was building Jeeps for the government military. Henry's son, Edsel saw more of the possibilities for Ford Motor Company during this time frame and pushed to become a vital supplier of wartime equipment. I have seen it many times over the years and have always said it is really ashamed that this country has to be in wars declared, or not as Viet Nam, for this country to thrive economically. So many lives wasted as the war mongers promote to line their pockets while they sit in the safety of this country. Never the less, Willys built 362,894 wartime jeeps, and Ford built 285,660. American Bantam who started the Jeep concept, got the short end of the stick building only 2676 Jeeps. Willys got special permission from the government to begin building civilian Jeeps months before other auto makers were allowed to switch from wartime production and resume their usual businesses. Because of this transition from the military Jeep to the civilian public sales, Jeeps are thought of or considered the grandfather of all modern day 4-wheel drive SUV's.

From 1972 thru 1976, Milo Gunderson served in the Air Force as a maintenance person for medical and dental equipment repair in the Philippines. During his time there he purchased what he called a flat fender military jeep (an earlier jeep) from a DOD teacher there that he used for daily transportation until he was shipped back to the states. He was telling me he always liked the simplicity of that old jeep and how fun it was to drive. So here we are today 40 years later, with Milo purchasing another Jeep 3 years ago to relive old memories. He purchased it from the VFW Legion in Brandon that was looking for cash to remodel their kitchen. The 1964 Jeep was pretty much restored as it appears today with the exception that Milo added lock out canvas top, and a rear mounted spare tire to complete more user friendly. Milo thoroughly enjoys his an old memory along with knowing that this is a real piece of American enabled America and its allies to win wars. Today the Jeeps have been replaced heavily armored, General Motors built, Humvee with a \$220,000 each price tag noted from 6 years ago, compared to a Willys 1941 Jeep price of \$648.00. With GM approaching building 300,000 Humvees since 1989, who said war wasn't big business??



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