

WE WERE BEATEN BY THE ROOSEVELTS

as told by Ralph Turner ⁸¹
to Bob Lindsey - DECEMBER 19~~8~~

I was born February 26, 1908, in Butler Township, Butler County, Pa. I grew up on my father's farm and attended school in Butler. During the latter part of my high school years I had a job in Mr. Sutton's watch repair shop in Butler. One thing that I received from Mr. Sutton's quality work was patience. I still remember working on the main springs that were ordered directly from the factory with the heat-treat crust still on the springs. I would work the spring back and forth on a pumice stone until I thought it was perfectly smooth. I would hand it to Mr. Sutton, and he would look at it through his glasses and say, "Do it again Ralph. It is not good enough yet! Better give it a little more."

Actually I took to working on watches and clocks as soon as I picked up the first one. They completely fascinated me then and they still do. Watches and clocks have been my vocation as well as my recreation ever since. Not too many people can really say that they enjoy working at their jobs.

Well, after graduating from high school in 1928, I was hired in Butler as a Hudson automobile salesman. They were a great car, but the depression hit hard about 1931 or 32, and I lost my job. My after school work in Mr. Sutton's jewelry shop was responsible for success in my next employment.

My uncle was working for the Elgin Watch Company in Elgin, Ill. I wrote to him to see if there was any work there, and he was responsible for me landing a job at Elgin. My work in Butler, and Mr. Sutton's demand for excellence paid off. The supervisors couldn't believe that a "green horn" like myself could walk into a watch factory, and know so much about watches and clocks. As a result, I very soon was given the most responsible job at Elgin, and that was vibrating the hair springs. The hair springs have to be "just right" or the watch will never work right.

I worked for Elgin for eight years. Mr. Sutton died back in Butler, and his wife asked me to return to Butler and run the shop. This move back to butler almost put me in the position to become a millionaire.

Once in Butler I met a car engineer (designer) by the name of Harold Crist. Crist had just been hired by the stockholders of the former Austin-Bantam Plant which was located in Butler. Bantam had gone bankrupt, and Crist had been hired to make the new "American Bantam" a money making operation. Crist had been an engineer at the Stutz Motor Company of Indianapolis, Indiana, for over eighteen years. The Stutz car was one of the best made cars of that time. It even had overhead cam and valves. Crist had also been involved in making the Stutz racing cars. Boy! I'll tell you, he really knew his stuff! I've seen him do things just using his head that others couldn't do with a pencil and slide rule.

So Crist would have been there when Miller was.

Why am I can't compare at So Marks?

Early on 1937/38?

I met Crist, of course, in the jewelry shop. He wanted me to throw in with him at the American Bantam Plant. He said that he had wind of something that would make us all rich if things worked out. I took him at his word, and went to work at Bantam. Crist made me the man totally in charge of production.

The first job we had was to make the Austin engine "tough enough for use". The engine was originally made with only two main bearings. Crist, Chester J. Hempfling, and I redesigned the engine. I cut the block in two. We then placed a third bearing in the middle, extended the crank, and moved the cam shaft over and then welded the engine back together. We then took this engine out on trials and found it to be a strong engine.

Birth of the 3 main.

We were just getting the American Bantam car engineered to the point that it was presentable for production when Crist came in one day with his "wild idea" that would make us all rich. The Bantam car was scrapped at that time. Hempfling and I got the last two cars. I even finished putting mine together at home. I later sold mine in Erie for \$400.00. Boy, I wish I still had it.

Europe was being overrun by the Germans in 1940, and the U.S. Government wanted a small reconnaissance vehicle. Bantam was a small car manufacturer, so Crist decided that we could build the

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Fenn Hired him ?

that the U.S. Government wanted. As I have just said, Crist scrapped the American Bantam overnight and turned his entire energy to the production of the government vehicle which would later be known as the "Jeep".

At this time, Crist brought in a consultant engineer, Karl K. Probst, who had worked for several car companies in Detroit. As I remember, he came from Studebaker to Bantam. Probst and Crist drew up the original plans for the Jeep in only fourteen hours. In order to co-ordinate the demands of the government in the vehicle, a civilian engineer who worked for the Quarter-master Corps, Robert Brown, came to Butler to make the final drawings. which become the bid specs.

I had the job of cutting the metal, and then putting it together. I can remember Crist sitting by the hour on a nail keg changing the design a little here and there as we finalized the first prototype.

I first went to Armco Steel which was located next door to the Bantam plant to get steel cut in the shape that we wanted to make the frame. I took it back to Bantam, and made a "box frame" A box frame is light and strong because it has the ability to twist and give without breaking. We then cut the sheet metal to shape, and formed the body of the Bantam. Crist wanted a curved and rounded hood. No one knew how to make a rounded hood, so Crist hired a German metal smith to do the job. The man took an acetylene torch and a series of hammers, and pounded a perfectly rounded hood. The engine was provided by the Continental Engine Company of Butler (45HP). The differential came from the Spicer Company of Toledo, Ohio. I had to take each axle and cut it down to size. We had Ross steering, Stromberg carburetors, Harrison radiators, etc.. All companies buy common components from speciality companies.

to fit Bantam's size

The next step was to make a transmission with a transfer case. I went down to a local junk yard and acquired two Chevy transmissions. I then cut the sides out of them and welded them together. I had to totally rework the insides to get the desired result. I had to re-drill some of the holes, line up the shafts, and, re-gear the transfer case, and make it work.

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The government had sent out bids to 135 car companies in the United States, and only Bantam and Willy's submitted bids. Willy's was later disqualified because they did not submit a pilot model in the forty-nine day time limit that the government set. The Bantam Car Company was the only one to submit a bid and provide a pilot model on time. There was a \$100.00 dollar a day penalty for any company who submitted a pilot late. Bantam was so broke that they probably couldn't have paid the penalty.

Crist, Probst, Hempfling, and I worked almost 24 hours a day during these 49 days. Sometimes, the project would be on schedule, and I would go home to get some sleep. No sooner would I get to sleep than Crist would call and say "Come on back Ralph; We have a new problem." I never thought that men could get so tired and still work. But we did. I remember once that Crist and Probst got into an argument about the front engine mount. Probst wanted a straight mount coming up from the frame. Crist knew from practical experience that the mount had to be angled to accomodate the torque of the engine. Crist won the argument and the Bantam was built with a front motor mount that set at an angle.

At noon on the 49th day, the world's first "Jeep" was completed at the American Bantam Car Company in Butler, Pa. This prototype, except for the rounded hood and grill, is the same Jeep that fought in WW II.

I took the prototype to Holabird Proving Grounds. There I met Captain Eugene Mosley who was head of the test section. They took the little $\frac{1}{4}$ ton truck for a test drive. The word "Jeep" had been an Army cuss word up until that time. As we stood around wondering what to call the little truck, the word "Peep" came up. A Sergeant Littlefield who was standing nearby said, "No! Peep doesn't describe the vehicle, but "Jeep" does." Both Crist and I heard the remark, and the newspapermen got a hold of the remark. After that the word Jeep became the name of the $\frac{1}{4}$ ton truck.

During the workout of this prototype, I noticed a man making sketches of our Jeep. I asked Brown who this man was. Brown told me that he was a chief engineer from Willy's by the name of Ross. I immediately called Crist who was in Butler and told him of the situation. He came to Holabird as soon as his car would get him there. Crist and Robert Brown got into a very hot argument about letting Willy's sketch our truck. Brown said, "Don't worry boys. I'll take care of you." He surly did. Brown even allowed ^{Ross} ~~Ross~~ to sketch the Bantam from under a grease rack and before the day was over, Willy's was given blueprints of our Bantam Jeep.

SPOILED
ROSS

NICKNAMED

"Barney" Ross

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Judson's note



War mania was cranking up in the U.S. and at this point the U.S. Government was claiming all the Bantam engineering work as its own. All we could do during the war was argue with the government. We had no patent or trademark on our product. Who would listen anyway during the greatest war the U.S. was ever engaged. Eventually after the war we did go to the Supreme Court (1948) and to Senate hearings on the subject. But by that time the damage to our Butler operation was beyond repair.



There are some things that most writers don't take into account. One, we produced the Jeep on time. Two, we proved that we could turn out 275-300 Jeeps per day. Yet the government reports declared that we didn't have the capability. Three, we met all the weight allowances. Neither Willy's or Ford ever met these requirements. Four, Our Jeep out performed Willy's and Ford according to the test drivers, yet when the government reports came out Willy's ranked first, Bantam second, and Ford was worthless.



I'll get back to Ford and Willy's later. Let me tell you about the tests on our Bantam. I saw Capt. Mosley put the Bantam in a mud hole which was loaded with large rocks and ruthlessly drive it back and forth over these big rocks all day. The Bantam held up. The Jeep was supposed to carry 600 pounds of sandbags, but they actually loaded in 800 pounds.

The original Bantam had some repairs to be completed after 3,163 miles of horrendous driving. Only 247 miles were on a road. I remember that we had to replace the tires after 2800 miles. But the Jeep kept running. We drove the original back to Butler, and cut it apart to see what had happened. By December 17, 1940, we

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made 70 more pilot models to be placed in different army camps around the U.S. Actually we had completed some of the seventy Bantam Jeeps before either Willy's or Ford had submitted their first pilot model for testing. (November 13, 1940 and November 23, respectively). Willys used a channel frame and it broke three times in the first 1500 miles. Bantam's box frame didn't break at all. Willy's was also 200 pounds overweight. They never did correct this. The government raised the weight allowance to accomodate this problem for Willy's. (Ford)

Close call here.
Last Bantam
Dec 2?

I put over 7000 miles on my 1939 Chevy going from proving ground to proving ground to check on the Bantams. I was never reimbursed for either gasoline or mileage. One time I was called to Ft. Knox, Kentucky to see why the oil had burned out of a differential. I was met by a real gruff officer who was playing his role to the fullest. I finally got him to calm down enough to show me where the Bantam was located. We went into the garage where the Bantam was stored, I knelt down and looked under it. I couldn't believe what I saw. There was about the equivalent of a bale of barbed wire wound around the drive shaft. I asked the officer to bend over and look at why the differential wore out. His face turned bright red. He lined up all his officers in the garage next to the Bantam and chewed them out like a bunch of kids. Well, we sent back to Butler for a new rear end, and the Bantam performed perfectly. Another time I was sent to Georgia to see why one wouldn't start. I got into the car with the driver, and told him to start the car. He began to grind the starter, and the Bantam didn't start. I asked him if he ever choked the car while trying to start it. He replied that you don't need to use a choke. I told him to try it anyway. He pulled out the choke and it started as soon as the engine had turned over twice.

Yes, the Bantam factory in Butler, Pa. invented the very first Jeep. Since, however, the government had given out the original specifications for the vehicle, the government claimed ownership of the drawings. The government had not taken part in any of the engineering, or even donated money in helping develop the vehicle. Who would ever thought that this would happen? The government needed the Jeep quickly. We met every specification

the government wanted; weight limits, time limits, production quotas, etc. Willy's and Ford never met all of the government specifications, but they were the ones who built 650,000 Jeeps for WW II. Bantam did finally get a contract for 2,500 Jeeps and the U.S. Government sent them to Russia on the Lend Lease Program. Someone else had a hold of our "steering wheel" at this point. At this time, however, we had no idea what was happening.

We had a Bantam sales representative by the name of Fenn who tried his darndest to deal with the government, but he could never get anywhere. One thing that really burns me is that the newspapers and the government at that time kept saying that Bantam did not have the production capability. We proved that we did. We could have made 300 Jeeps per day with the factory that we had. There were three miles of land in back of the plant that we could have used for expansion. We had even underbid Willy's in price by \$100.00 but when government statistics were released it showed Willy's \$100.00 cheaper than Bantam. Ford was always more expensive than Willy's or Bantam. Just think 300 Jeeps per day times 365 days. That equals 109,500 units per year or 438,000 units over the war years. (19-20 Million dollars profit). We figured that we wouldn't have the entire contract. But, a third share would have been nice. But, who would have ever thought that we would have been completely cut out? '43 FTC

When we went to court in 1948, the truth came out then, but Bantam had been destroyed by that time. The truth was that the Roosevelt "crowd" had purchased the bankrupt Willy's stock prior to the government bid. We even learned that some of the Roosevelt family were heavy investors. As far as Ford was concerned, we were financially depending on the Jeep contracts to make the first money at Bantam in over eight years. This we did with the 2500 contract. Ford, however, had one of the largest lobby groups in congress. How could we buy off congressmen with no money. Facing facts, I guess I can say that we didn't have politicians in high enough places to capture the government contracts.

President of the company
Does he mean Payne?

Gen McAuliffe

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Elliot?
Substantive

★ We couldn't believe it at the time! Things kept sailing right by us! We would do what was expected. Then we would lose it! We were beaten by our own corrupt political system- particularly the Roosevelts.

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FOIA to
FBI could
not substantiate
found his
picture on the
web as courtesy.

Another strange story that comes from the Bantam quarters is that of Capt. Mosley who was the head of the test at Holabird. The drivers of the Bantam, Willy's and Ford tests continually picked Bantam as the winner. We were able to get 30-50 miles per gallon on the Bantam Jeep, while the Willy's and Ford Jeeps were able to get only 20-24 miles per gallon. But each time the newspapers printed the story Willy's kept coming up as the winner. Well, Capt. Mosley was with the first Americans to land in North Africa when we invaded. Mosley disappeared from the "face of the earth." All the people at Bantam[?] were questioned by the F.B.I. as to his disappearance. None of us knew anything. I tried to get some information from the agent who questioned me. What little he said was that they weren't even sure he got to Africa in the first place. Crist and I always wondered if his involvement with the Jeep wasn't the cause of his disappearance. Someone wanted him GONE! They made sure that he would never testify when the time came. Mosley and I spent a lot of time together. He was a fine man. He had a wonderful wife and children. I even spent time with him and his family. What a shame!

Crist and I quit Bantam as soon as we were certain that our company had been bypassed by the U.S. government. Hempfling stuck around and made trailers and bomb carriers for the war effort.

We went to court in 1948. I attended Senate hearings. I was present at the Supreme ^{FTC} Court decision which stated that "Willy's did not invent the Jeep as all their sales advertisements had stated during and since the war. The only thing we were able to recover a lot of publicity and the fact that "Bantam had indeed invented the Jeep". Willy's was able to keep the "Jeep" name because we had never filed for a trademark and Willy's had.

In the summer of 1952 Crist was hired by the Mid-American Research Corporation of Wheatland, Pa. to make a smaller vehicle than the Jeep for the Marine Corps. That vehicle was called the "Mighty-Mite". Crist talked Hempfling, Frank McMillan and me into working on the Mighty-Mite. It was a tough little devil. It would even run on only three wheels. We put an air-cooled Porsche Engine in it. It would really run. We did have some trouble with the air tube which cooled the engine. Dust would sometimes plug up the tube. The Marines tested it in among and beside tanks, trucks, etc. The amount of dust kicked up was unbelievable. The test drivers again liked our vehicle, but the Marines decided that they didn't need such a vehicle. Again we lost out.

I should have known enough by then to quit worrying about government vehicles, but Crist talked me into one more venture. He said, "Ralph we have this contract nailed down for sure". He truly thought that he did. This time it was a mail delivery truck.

In 1953, the Mid-American Research Corporation had taken on the job of making a postal delivery truck. By January of 1954, it was completed, and I took it to Florida for postal testing. Our delivery truck was ahead of its time in design. It had front wheel drive. Some cars as early as the 1930's had had front wheel drive, (Cord for example). We again used a Porsche air cooled engine. We could also interchange the air-cooled engine with a water-cooled if one was wanted. We could remove four bolts and either engine could be replaced. We also had an automatic window that could be rolled down by a button on the dash. The postal drivers fell in love with this truck. Its name was the MARCO. We lost that government contract. Back in those days mailboxes were nailed to trees or anywhere the person wanted to nail them. Some of the mail in the south was still carried by horses. We put the MARCO into those old mud holes, and she never failed to be driven out. In addition, the whole truck was a mechanic's dream.

After that I went back to the job that always fascinated me.

That was being a jeweler .

As I look back over the last forty-eight years, there probably isn't a day that I haven't thought that there must be thousands of people who have been steam-rolled by the same government that is supposed to protect them. But, putting all things aside, THE JEEP IS STILL THE BEST ALL AROUND VEHICLE EVER MADE! I've said before and I'll say it again, "How can you drive if someone else has a hold of your steering wheel?"

Well, Bob, I'll be eighty in February of '88. Right now I wish that I could get rid of this flu so that I can go deer hunting this week.

CHAPTER TWO

Some Things Needed Worked Out

We had a few things on the Bantam that needed to be worked out. For example the engine ran too hot. The QMC wanted a certain heat rise in relation to the load the engine was carrying. Crist and I talked it over. I asked Crist if a thicker radiator would solve the problem. He said, "Probably". So I asked him to order a radiator $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches thicker. He called Harrison Radiator Company in ^{LOCK PORT} Rochester, New York, and our radiator was on its way. While we were waiting, I had the machine shop make up a special hub that would make the fan turn faster. Then, I replaced the four blade fan with a six blade fan. These changes made the Bantam fall well within the limits the Army wanted. We had a machine that the engine was hooked up to. Everything about the engine, oil pressure, RPMs, temperature, torque, etc. was read off an instrument panel. Hempfling and I took 12 hour turns and we ran the engine 64 hours straight. The Continental Engines were terrific. About the only thing we needed to do was change spark plugs about every 48 hours.

The next and most time consuming correction was the carburetor. I worked with a man from Stromberg by the name of Sutton for over six months before we got it to work to Army specifications. The Army wanted a certain gas mileage plus the Bantam had to run up hills at a prescribed angle without the float shutting down the engine. The problem with conventional carburetors was that the float would shut off on a step hill. When the gasoline could no longer flow into the carburetor the engine would stall. Sutton finally made a modified airplane carburetor that was able to allow gasoline to flow at any angle either sideways or up or down hills. On the final test Sutton drove and I was in back with a protractor and a level. I read the degrees as he drove up the hill. I hollered up to

to him that she wouldn't take much more. I no sooner got the words out of my mouth, and over she went. Sutton bailed out. He was a real big man. I don't know how he ever cleared the car but he did. Sutton and I rolled the Jeep over, and the steering wheel was crunched into the seat. Sutton got up on the hood, reached down, and pulled the steering column up enough that we drove it back to the plant.

At Holabird there were all kinds of rocks sticking out of the ground. The test drivers, I swear, tried to hit every one they could. Well, the oil pans couldn't take that kind of punishment so I had the mechanics make a skid plate over the oil pan. It solved the problem. Willy's copied this idea and it was on their Jeep when they showed up with their first model. Willy's also put their spring shackles on the front at exactly the same angle as our placement.

We had another first at Bantam. We floated the first Jeep. Crist had Firestone make up some pontoons which we placed along side the Jeep. I made up fins that fit on the wheels. The fins extended almost to the bottom of the tires. This idea worked but not very well. Crist, Hempfling and I took our Jeep up to the Butler reservoir, and jumped her in off a bank higher than the Jeep. She floated all right but she needed better propulsion. I looked over at Crist, and he had an unusual color. I asked him what was the matter. He said, "I hope she floats Ralph because I can't swim."

We took the Jeep back to the plant. I went home and got the propeller off my 22 horse Johnson boat engine, brought it back to Bantam, and adapted it to the power take off. I then went to the local junk yard and got a Willy's break lever. It had a ratchet along the side that would catch when it was pulled up, and could be let down by twisting it to release the ratchet. We hooked this lever to the shaft which was hooked to the PTO on the back of the transfer case, and the propeller could be

lowered when in the water or raised when on land. Boy, now I'll tell you that idea really worked.

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 → Here's one for Jim Gilmore to sort out
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When the 2500 Jeeps went to Russia, I was sent along with them. I'll tell you right now that's one place you DON'T want to go. They kept me in a hotel that you wouldn't keep pigs in. They fed me food that the devil couldn't eat. The hotel was cold, dirty, only one bathroom for the whole place, and that was even terrible. They kept watch of me. I couldn't go anywhere. I may as well have been in jail. I didn't know anyone, and I didn't know the language. Boy, it didn't take me long before I knew that I wasn't going to stay there very long. They WEREN'T going to let me go! I'll tell you my head began to swim. One day I saw an American freighter tied up at the dock. I ran as fast as I could and luckly made it on board. I rode that old tub back to the United States. As I look back on it, I think I could have come up missing in Russia. I doubt if Roosevelt would have helped me out!

I'll tell another thing. The Russians that came to Butler couldn't believe what they saw. They were let off their ship in New York, and was given a map, and told where to go. No one asked questions. No one cared. They couldn't believe that anyone could live like that. They traveled all over the Butler area. always in amazement that they could do that. They shopped in area shops. They couldn't believe what they could buy. They DIDN'T want to go home. But, of course, they had to. I don't think Americans even come close to knowing how lucky they are.