

# They saved the world, and got the old Jeep going

By Sal Emma

George Fulton had a mission that day. Not as memorable or hair-raising as some of his previous missions, but a mission just the same.

The generator on the old Jeep had gone south. The last time she ran, the Jeep went only four blocks before sputtering to a stop. She was using the battery for ignition, her motor spinning a dead generator.

Fulton had to replace it with a new alternator, to keep her motor going and battery charged. He did not plan to have a passerby watching him that day. He probably would have rather been left alone.

He was cordial, just the same. "You know, those old generators weren't worth a damn, anyway. It will be better this way," he said.

A 1944 Willys CJ-2A. She stands sentinel before Ocean City's Veterans of Foreign Wars post 6650 on Bay Avenue. Olive drab, white stars, a Jerry can for spare gas, the real deal. A World War II veteran, like the man who is working on her. She's had her share of dings and bruises, too. Rust is creeping up her skirt and the windshield is cracked. But for a car her age, she's not doing too badly.

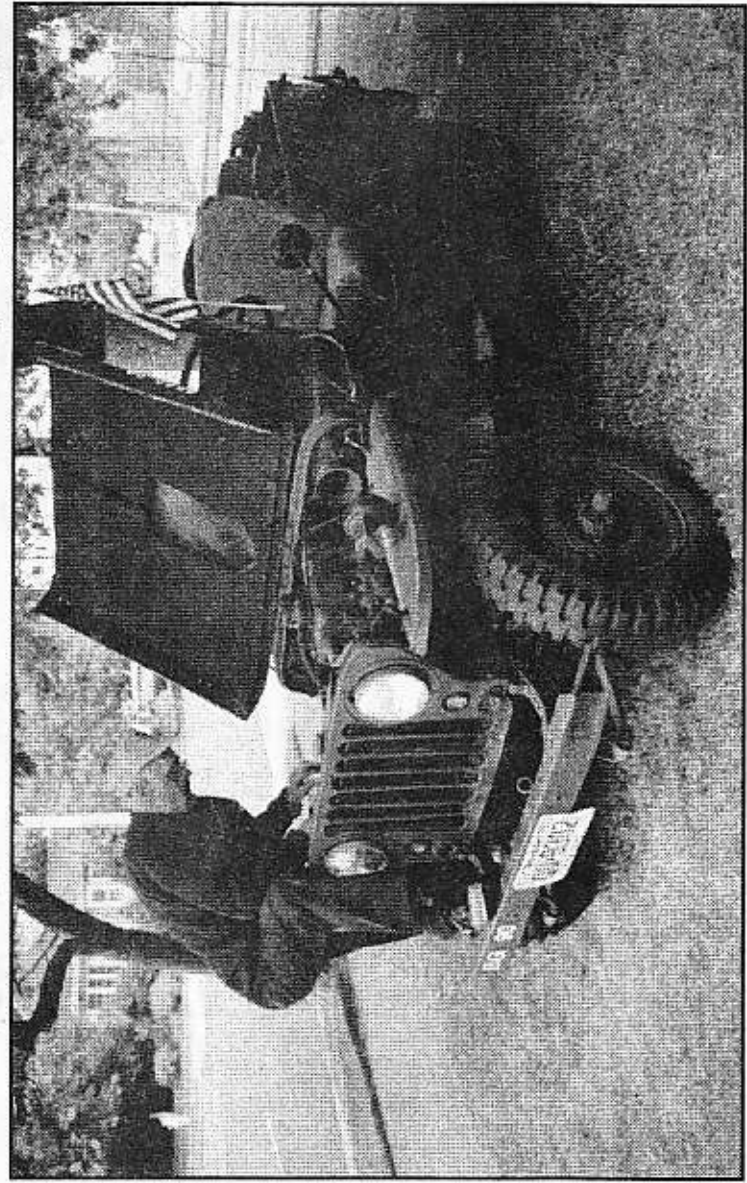
Her record is unknown. The 6650 bought her off somebody's front lawn in North Jersey. These days her workload is pretty light. Just the occasional parade between days of silent guard duty on the lawn of the VFW.

Fulton knows she'll purr before too long. She hasn't let him down yet. His tools spread on the front fender, Fulton does his mechanical work, securing the alternator and adjusting the belt.

As Fulton works, his observer prods him about his military service. He surrenders tidbits of history, one at a time. "I was in the 888th Central Postal Directory," he says. "I was in the 888th Central Postal Directory."

whole answer. He's not going to say what he really ought to:

"My office was a B-24 Liberator. It was made of tin and floated 20,000 feet above Nazi-occupied Europe. It was 30 below zero up there. The plane had no heat. An ice-cold air-plant, so freezing cold that I didn't dare touch my gun with my bare hands 'cause I knew I'd stick to the metal and have to rip off my skin off to get loose. I was cold. I couldn't feel my feet and I couldn't feel my fingers. Until the flak started. Then things heated up. Orange bursts, followed by little, innocent looking puffs of black smoke, then shards of razor-sharp steel, each with your name on it. They punched holes in the airplane and whizzed by our ears, sometimes landing right where we were working, sometimes zipping through the opposite wall, making another patch of daylight as they left. And sometimes they whizzed into your buddy standing next to you. If he was lucky, he'd take it in the leg, in the shoulder, in the arm — maybe make it back to base and get taken care of. If he wasn't, he'd lay down and never get up again. Or worse. They might have to scrape what was left of him from the walls, so much frozen meat. When the flak started it was still 30 below, but all of a sudden it felt like 100. We'd sweat through every layer of our flight suits, from our long johns, through the electric heat suit — the one that didn't work, half the time — right through to our parachutes. And when the flak didn't get you, the fighters took their toll. ME-109s, FW-190s. Sometimes they passed so close we could look the pilot right in the eye as his cannon hurled 20 millimeter shells in our direction, his guns spraying 30-caliber bullets. We had



George Fulton, commander of the Ocean City VFW post 6650, spends some quality time under the hood of the post's 1944 Willys Jeep. The Jeep's old generator recently went bad and Fulton installed a new alternator in its place.

Sal Emma

it was ball bearings or railroad cars dashboard and blows the horn. If the horn blows, the battery's working. It gives a weak honk. He turns on the key to juice the plugs, then repositions himself so he can reach both the starter button and the carburetor. "Here's where we love it or curse it," he said.

He covers the carburetor with one hand — choking it to richen the mixture — and thumbs the starter button with the other. The engine cranks half-heartedly, two or three times. Then just clicks. The battery is not quite strong enough to get it started. "Damn. That battery's deader than anything. Wasn't worth the walk to the truck," he said. The battery comes

The jumper cables are connected. Thurlow gets back in his car to step on the gas and rev the engine. Fulton's behind the wheel of the Jeep, pumping the pedal, pulling the choke and pushing the starter.

Honk. Click. Click. Click. Taylor checks the jumper cables. They are dead, in spite of being connected to Thurlow's running car. Maybe a loose connection. Maybe a bad alligator lead. After a few minutes of fiddling, Taylor gets sparks to fly from the business end. He re-connects them to the Jeep as Fulton extricates his long frame from the driver's seat.

HONK! This time, the horn is

on Jeeps during the war. That question makes him laugh out loud.

"I flew heavy bombers," he said. "17s or 24s?" his interrogator replied.

Fulton stops working to look his observer dead in the eye, apparently surprised by the response.

"B-24," he said.

"On the flight deck, or in the back?"

Fulton's attention returns to his alternator. He secures the last bolt and makes a temporary electrical connection. "In the back. I was a gunner. Fifty missions."

His reply was matter-of-fact. Just like that. Without looking up from his wrench. That's the odd thing about World War II veterans. They rarely let on about how important their work was. How amazing, how mind-boggling, how unimaginable it was. Ask a World War II vet what he did during the war. You'll never get the

We fired back. So much lead in the air, tracer bullets flying in every direction. The intercom jammed with nervous kids, hollering the positions of fighters zipping by. The officers on the flight deck scolding us when we yelled. It's hard to believe any of us got out of it alive. We prayed a lot. What else could you do? I've never been more scared, before it since. Then we dropped our load to rearrange the scenery at one of Hitler's factories, railroad yards, oil refineries. We'd say another prayer that the bombs would hit the target without destroying women and children on the ground. Then if the plane wasn't leaking too much fuel and we weren't leaking too much blood from the flak holes, we'd make it back to base. Say another prayer. Give our report. And do it all again a day or two later, if the weather was good. Whatever they told us to blow up, we blew it up, if all went well. Whether

The new alternator looks out of place under the hood of the old Jeep. Its silver spray-painted finish is anything but military. And it's not yet dusted with oil and road grime.

It's not too alien, though, considering the engine it's attached to. A Willys — and certainly appropriate for the vehicle — it's nonetheless not the original flathead that powered her when she was new. "It had that motor when we got it. It's post-war, maybe '46 or '48, made after the flatheads were discontinued," Fulton explained.

For this Jeep, the engine stands too tall by an inch or two. That's why the hood has been modified with a modest scoop, to give the carburetor a place to breathe.

Fulton twists together a pair of copper wires and ambles slowly to his pickup truck for the battery. He hefts the battery into its tray and slips on the terminals, then moves to the

Fulton tries again the next day. One day becomes two as Fulton charges a handful of batteries. None will hold a charge, so he's ordered a new one. That will get the Jeep going, for sure.

Before the new battery arrives, another VFW member shows up. Stuart Thurlow, also a heavy bomber veteran. He flew the B-17 Flying Fortress, the Liberator's wartime counterpart. Thurlow has another battery, one he took out of his old Cadillac. Fulton joins him at the Jeep and they repeat the dance. Honk. Choke. Crank, crank, click. This battery is nearly as dead as the first bunch.

Thurlow pulls his car next to the Jeep and retrieves a set of jumper cables from the trunk. Steve Taylor comes along to lend a hand. A friend of the 6650, he's younger than the WW II vets, a generation behind. Other members have emerged from the front door to witness the progress.

starter button as Fulton chokes the carburetor. Crank. Crank. Crank. Rumble. Pop. Rumble.

Finally, the old girl rattles to life, belching fuel-rich blue smoke. Fulton deftly chokes and throttles, alternating to keep her going. The smoke clears as the idle smooths. The jumpers are removed and she's still running, on her own. The hood is latched down and Fulton gets behind the wheel again.

Taylor climbs into the shotgun seat and Fulton puts her in gear. They roll down the curb and speed away towards the sea down 15th Street, stars and stripes flying in the breeze. She continues to sing that one-of-a-kind Jeep melody: deep, throaty, four-lung exhaught accompanied by the high-pitched mechanical whine of cogs in her drive train.

Mission accomplished. They saved the world from tyranny.

And they got the old Jeep going.

**Bill Zeltman's**  
**bodyWORKS**

**Ocean City's Health Club**  
**FITNESS & TANNING**  
612 Asbury Ave. • Ocean City • 399-1670  
<http://members.aol.com/BodyWorkOC/prof>

- State Of The Art Cardiovascular Center
- NEW! Elliptical Trainers
- South Jersey's BEST Aerobics
- Free Weights • Nautilus
- Body Sculpting Area
- Area's Most Knowledgeable Staff
- FREE Certified Personal Trainers
- NEW! Weight Loss Program
- NEW! Taeboerobics Program
- NEW! Road Runners Club
- Cardio Kickboxing • Yoga • Power Yoga
- Massage Therapy • Senior Citizen Programs • Tanning
- Student, Casino, Senior, Couple & Family Discounts

**Daily Weekly**

**Monthly Members**

**Welcomed!**

**Taebo and**

**Elliptical Trainers**

**are here!**



"Home of South Jersey's Best Aerobics!!"

Now Serving Veggie Subs, Chicken Wings & Tenders

SACK O' SUBS

HOT & COLD SUBS • SANDWICHES • KIDS MEALS • SALADS • SUB STYLE PARTY TRAYS  
VEGETARIAN SPECIALS • On Original A.C. Style Bread

525-0460

FREE DELIVERY  
926 Asbury Ave. • Ocean City

Order

Night in Venice

Party Trays Early!

Daily Lunch Specials

1/4 Sub & Cup of Pasta Salad

\$4.25 & \$4.50

HOURS: Sun. - Thurs., 10am-10:30pm  
Fri. & Sat. 10am-11:30pm

Buy 1 Whole Sub,  
Get Second 1/2 price

(Equal or Lesser Value)  
Not to be combined with any other offer.  
O.C. Sack O' Sub location only (SP)