

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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President & CEO

## The Jeep - An American Original

In 1940, on the eve of our nation's participation in World War II, the U.S. Army was in search of a motorized vehicle that could replace the horse but retain the animal's maneuverability. The U.S. Quartermaster General issued a request for proposals to 135 car manufacturers for a prototype vehicle that could climb a 30-degree grade, pull a cannon, go anywhere a horse could go, and yet weigh less than one ton — in 49 days!

All the major carmakers laughed off the incredibly tight deadline. Only one company met the Army's deadline and requirements.

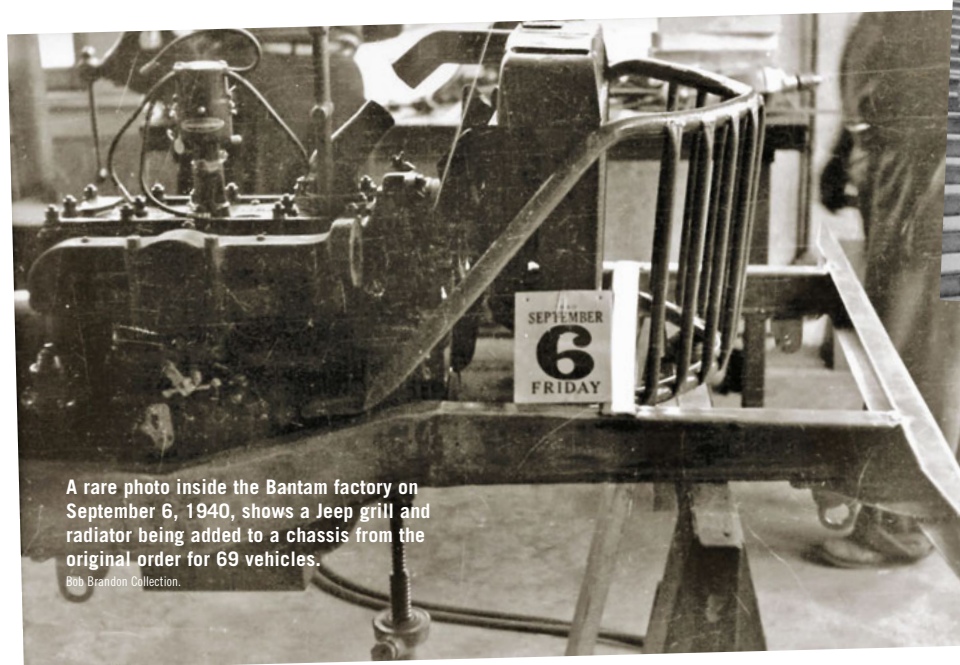
The tiny American Bantam Car Company in Butler, Pa., had been building lightweight roadster cars at that time. After deciding to come up with a proposal and working day and night to meet the Army's 49-day deadline, the Jeep was born—cobbled

together with equal measures of spare parts, ingenuity, and “can do” spirit. As the only company with blueprints, Bantam was officially awarded a contract for 70 vehicles on July 25, 1940.

The Bantam Reconnaissance Vehicles were deployed to military installations across the U.S. for further testing and became known as “Jeeps,” though no one knows with certainty where this name comes from. Over the next year, Bantam produced a total of 2,675 Jeeps, far exceeding their typical yearly output of automobiles, but by 1941, the government feared that little Bantam could not meet wartime production demands and turned to Willys Overland and the Ford Motor Company, which turned out nearly 700,000 Jeeps. As a consolation prize, Bantam was given a contract for Jeep trailers but by the early 1950s, the little company with a “can do” spirit passed into history.

To mark the 75th anniversary of the start of World War II, the History Center is recognizing the Jeep's key role in the Allies' victory, along with dozens of local individuals and innovations, as part of the *We Can Do*

*It!* WWII exhibition. Visitors can explore the stories of local heroes from George Marshall and Tuskegee Airman Carl Woods to Iwo Jima hero Michael Strank and Rosie the Riveter. Three Jeeps are prominently displayed inside the exhibit along with nearly 300 artifacts that help to showcase Western Pennsylvania's contributions to the war effort. We invite you to visit the History Center to learn about these local contributions as well as the incredible story of the vehicle that both George Marshall and Dwight Eisenhower singled out as the vehicle that helped to win WWII. ☼



A rare photo inside the Bantam factory on September 6, 1940, shows a Jeep grill and radiator being added to a chassis from the original order for 69 vehicles.

Bob Brandon Collection.



A Willys Quad prototype Jeep climbs the steps of the U.S. Capitol Building in February 1941.

Washington Daily News.