

# The Pete Miller Story



**PETE MILLER** and his authentic World War II jeep.

**S**ome people can't bear to throw anything away. A cursory look at Advertising sales rep **PETE MILLER**'s work space immediately reveals that he belongs to that group of collectors (or pack-rats) who value old stuff. Typeface books from 1950, old rate cards, memos from 1971, the year he was hired, even a *TIME* Magazine with former publisher Philip Graham on the cover are all part of his eclectic desk collection.

Like most collectors, however, he does have an area of special interest and he stores those items in a safe place—his garage. Miller's main collection is authentic World War II era memorabilia and, specifically, anything having to do with the military. His prize, the jewel of his collection, is a vintage 1945 Ford WWII Jeep. Since he purchased the Jeep in 1979, Miller has searched antique shops and traded back and forth ("I'll trade you these sparkplugs for a distributor cap.") with a network of other passionate collectors of these military vehicles to restore his Jeep to its authentic, olive drab appearance.

Although Miller was only seven years old when WWII ended, he has drawn on his historical knowledge of the era (and memories of older friends who are veterans of WWII) to refurbish his Jeep as authentically as possible. Miller decided to restore the Jeep to circa 1945, as it might have looked after a year in combat in France and Germany.

Miller spent nearly ten years collecting the mechanical parts needed to get the Jeep drivable. He also collected anything that might conceivably be used as a "prop" for this museum on wheels. His collection is eclectic and expansive, having displaced most of the space in what was formerly a three-car garage (to his wife's consternation) and ranges from an authentic M-1 carbine to a wooden cage for carrier pigeons. Books on WWII, vintage magazines, and tapes of radio broadcasts and popular music from the era are all part of his impressive collection.

He reserves the best stuff to display on or in the Jeep. The M-1 carbine, Garand rifle and Thompson submachine gun carried in the Jeep are authentic but have been rendered inoperative. He can usually count on at least one unscheduled stop during drives around his Annapolis neighborhood so police officers can make sure these aren't dangerous weapons. One officer turned the examination into a half-hour tour, marveling over the original, unopened K-rations, the field telephone, walkie-talkies, and fully-stocked first aid kit. He even has a vintage wine jug (filled with water). Says Miller, "After the GI's 'liberated' a wine cellar, they drank the wine and used the bottles for water. The bottles were preferred over the government-issue canvas or metal water containers which made the water taste terrible." Miller's only

concession to post-WWII technology is a tape player concealed inside a 1944 radio receiver.

Miller is a member of the Military Vehicle Preservation Association, an international organization. It's a diverse group. One wealthy member residing in Virginia owns over 30 completely restored vintage military vehicles—including six or seven tanks. Most of the group's members, though, have only one or two vehicles.

Miller has taken his Jeep to the annual auto and military vehicle show at the Airmen's & Soldier's Home in Northeast DC and took part in a parade at Ft. Meade commemorating the 50th anniversary of the activation of the National Guard 29th Division (part of the first wave of troops to hit the beach at Normandy on D-Day).



From a bird's-eye view, World War II paraphernalia can be seen hanging from the sides of the jeep, stuffed into nooks and crannies and gently placed on any available spot, as in the case of the pigeon. Even a jeep can be a true pack rat's dream.

So if the strains of Moonlight Serenade catch your attention and the music seems to be coming from a wartime Jeep, you're not in a time warp. It's just Miller (Pete, not Glen) and his Jeep, out for a spin.

*This article was written by **CHRISTINE SWERDA**, a member of the Public Relations staff.*