

**Toyota Runaway Accelerator**  
*by Harry Zirkelbach 02-20-2010*

**At Washington's Navy Mine Warfare School, Spring 1945, it was required  
that all know how to drive the Bomb Truck they would be assigned.  
Was large, multiple forward gears.**

**To accomplish that, we were given a brief lesson. I learn nothing.  
Had never driven any motor vehicle.  
Was licensed without learning to drive.**

**Graduation, the long train ride with three others from the east states. From  
school, to home, to San Francisco. Processing there, carrier ride across a  
calm Pacific to Honolulu. Here every day a scene unimagined in sunshine,  
beauty, variety, novelty, excitement, for each of these young Ensigns.**

**At Oahu's Pearl Harbor, more training, story swaps,  
preparation for a Japan Invasion.**

**Also recreation time, the Pacific ocean, Honolulu, pineapple and sugar cane,  
that small Island where even frequent rains were warm,  
and freedom to learn to drive an automobile.**

**Pali Pass, Honolulu north, had a paved road which wandered, a gentle rise  
to the crest through jungle like growth. Here the island presented a wall, a  
vertical descent, hundreds of feet, then a gentle path to the north shore. In  
this descent a road had been built, hugging dangerously to the cliff, through  
a series of tight hairpin turns. There were no guard rails. In short, an ideal  
road to learn to drive, down shifting being a must.  
I was taught and learned, driving a Jeep.**

**The War ends. Assignments that followed, never involved driving.  
Then January 1946 I was sent to Japan. Again plenty of Jeeps.**

**Jeeps were identical. Had a cushion seat/back, just a little softer than sheet  
steel. Forty miles per hour on paved roads was dangerous.  
There were no doors. Holding the steering wheel helped keep the driver  
inside. Over rutted Japanese countryside dirt roads,  
hold tight, be careful.**

**Eighth Army command to which Naval personnel were attached,  
prohibited Officers from driving automobiles.  
All were provided an trained driver.**

**The Navy was exempted, for we went everywhere, alone, often for weeks.  
Besides, these were Navy Jeeps, brought ashore in September 1945.**

**In bull sessions, I often heard certified drivers claim incredible speeds. While the speedometer range was 0-60. some mentioned 100 MPH.  
I was curious**

**Japanese roads were seldom straight for any length. Always narrow, unpaved meandered to the next town, whose buildings hugged the road.**

**Sometime during the war, the Japanese had begun a cement pavement from Kyoto to Osaka, absolutely straight, through no village.  
Only 10 miles had been completed. On duty, I drove this often.**

**This memorable day, I chose to test the Jeep's top speed.  
There was no traffic.**

**I finally got the Jeep to over 40 MPH. It seemed at full speed.  
I press the accelerator harder, finally the speedometer vibrates above 45.  
Deciding no more speed was available, remove my foot from the accelerator. Whoops! Speed continued, farmland passing rapidly,  
a town in the distance.**

**I reached down thinking the accelerator stuck, pull. Nothing.  
Then yank the pedal, and there it is, in my hand, pulled off the floor,  
the engine screeching, taking my buddy and me toward the end of the cement. Putting the drive in another gear and noises  
unacceptable to the Jeep.**

**In Neutral the motor sounded ready to explode.**

**Hah, turn off the key. That too did nothing to slow me and my Jeep. While pondering where to crash, for I didn't dare enter that village, the engine ceased accelerating, then sputtered to a long halt. I learned,  
the engine had become so hot, combustion continued  
without the spark igniting gas vapors.**

**Unable to drive full throttle,  
I open the hood and examine for trouble.**

**Jeep's engineers, foreseeing idiots behind the wheel doing what I did, placed a solid metal stop inside the fire wall, limiting accelerator movement.  
Something like 45 MPH my guess. I had forced the accelerator rod beyond that peg. When thus exceeded, the accelerator control could not return. I had to get a metal bar to force that piece to where it belonged.  
Then reattach it to the gas pedal, inside the Jeep.**

**Now, here I was with all this experience on a Jeep's top speed, too embarrassed to mention how stupidity  
had brought me to this reasonable conclusion.**

**I own a Toyota to,day. Their problem now, have no ideas.**

**But today I am blessed to share that day with you,  
and steal Bob Taylor's line,  
Life is Good.**



Harry and the Jeep in Japan, Spring 1946.

The Jeep was easy to drive. My first training on level terrain in Paradise, then the hairpin curves to the right, too sharp for the Jeep to complete without crossing the center of the roadway. Practice, traffic light, and by the fourth trip, both teacher and student became relatively comfortable. However, I was never able to enjoy this spectacular view until after the war, for that summer I crossed the Pali as driver, and never took the eyes off the roadway and the pending curves of doom.

Most Officers were then assigned an Army Jeep. Drove often. Even I became completely comfortable in that wonderful vehicle.