



# Sabretache

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF  
THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## Forget the Jeep “Let’s take the Seep”



Seep" was the contraction of "Sea+jeep". It was never official. US Army Ordnance specified this vehicle was the "Government ('G') Amphibious, 80-inch wheelbase ('P') or "GPA" in production and it was known internally as the "QMC-4 1/4 Ton Truck Light Amphibian". It was basically Ford's response to the Motor Transport Board to develop an amphibious Jeep, the equivalent to the German **Schwimmwagen**, the amphibious car derived from the ubiquitous Volkswagen Type 82 Kübelwagen,

In collaboration with the US military Ford approached Roderick Stephens Jr. of Sparkman & Stephens Incorporated, who were yacht builders, with a view to using the standard Ford (Willys) parts to create an amphibious version of the Jeep: a “Sea Jeep” which would be called the “Seep”. The amphibious Jeep was created, perhaps in too much of a hurry given the pressure of wartime needs, and put into production.

Several distinct hulls were built and tested, first in scale model form and then at full size. Somehow, while this was going on there was no jeep available for use in the experiments. All the engineers had to work from was a table of specifications, and those specs understated the jeep's weight by about 30 percent. This factor had a serious negative effect upon the performance of the end product.

When the pilot vehicle was ready, tests were run in the Huron River, at Dearborn. Ranking officers from the various branches of the service made comments, although adequate endurance and performance tests had never been made. There were those who expressed concern over this seemingly premature standardization of the design.



Schwimmwagen

**Attention All Members: A second request from our friends at the Calgary Military Museums Page 4 & 5**

**Colorized Phoyo’s from WW! Page 6**

However, it was February 1942 by this time, two months after the Japanese attack upon Pearl Harbor. The need for water-going jeeps was declared by field generals -- General George Marshall in particular -- to be urgent. Besides, Ford was pressuring the government for a contract, even suggesting that production facilities might not be available unless the project got under way immediately.

The potential seemed enormous. *Popular Science*, describing the Seep as "essentially a specially equipped jeep with a steel hull built around it," noted, "This seagoing jeep operates on either land or water, and can pass from one medium to the other with a single minor adjustment by the driver, during which the car doesn't have to stop. Its possibilities as a reconnaissance vehicle are startling. With it an advance patrol can creep up back roads to a river, scout along the shore, cross at any point to investigate the enemy's territory. It can race back with its information about as fast as any other jeep -- upwards of 60 miles an hour on good roads. Twenty of them can ferry 100 fully armed men across water to strike the enemy from the rear." Unfortunately this was all "HYPE"

- Controls were identical to those of the land-based jeeps, with the addition of two more handles, located just behind the transmission lever. One of these engaged the propeller, while the other operated the bilge pump.

A letter of intent was issued on April 11, 1942, calling for an initial production run of 5,000 of the little amphibians, and the project got under way. Eventually, after only 12,778 had been built, then, production was halted.

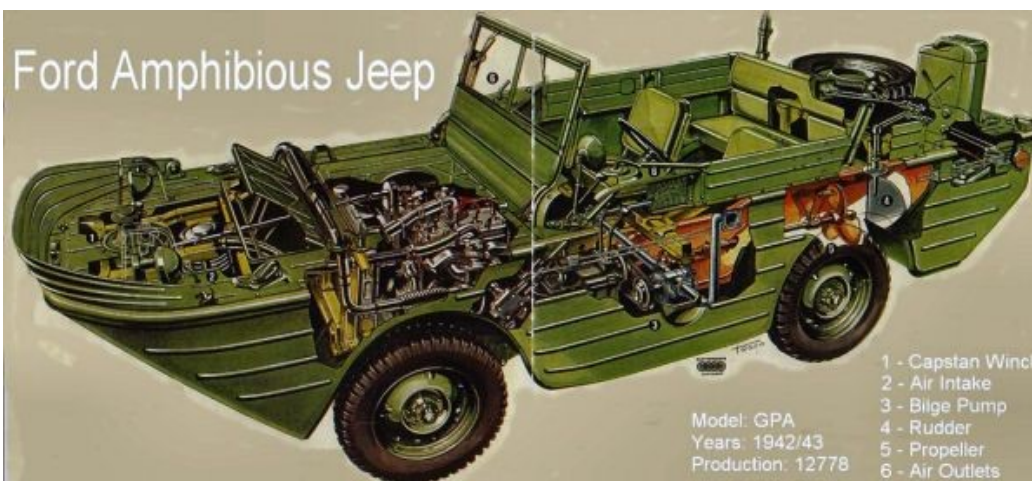
What had gone wrong? Design features of the much larger and successful **DUKW** amphibious 2½-ton truck were used on the GPA, but unlike these and the jeep, the 'seep' was not a successful design. It was considered too slow and heavy on land, and lacked sufficient seagoing abilities in open water, due mainly to its low freeboard. In the water meant that the GPA could not handle more than a light chop or carry much cargo. The GPA's intended use of ferrying troops and cargo from ships off-shore, over a beach and continuing inland, was therefore very limited. On land, the vehicle was too heavy and its body too unwieldy to be popular with the soldiers. GPAs would frequently get stuck in shallow waters, where the regular Willys MB's water fording abilities allowed it to drive straight through. Production was already halted in March 1943 due to financial quibbles between Ford and the US government, as well as bad reception of the vehicle in the field. The "Seep" did participate in the Sicily landings during September of 1943 and a small number were used in the Pacific.



Testing the Ford GPA on the Huron River



DUKW Amphibious



- 3-Speed transmission (same as jeep)
- 2WD / 4WD engaged in or out (same as jeep)
- Hi-Range / Low-Range transfer case (same as jeep)
- Dash mounted Parking Brake lever (same as jeep)
- Rear Rudder
- Rear Propeller PTO engaged in or out
- Front deck Capstan Winch engaged in or out

## The Ford GPA “SEEP” goes to Russia

During the Second World War Canada, Britain and the US forwarded large quantities of military materials to Russia. Among those were jeeps, trucks, and amphibious vehicles like the 6x6 DUKW and the 4x4 Ford GPA. The latter were used to help men and equipment get across the many rivers of Eastern Europe and combat the Germans. After the war, Russia decided to develop two similar vehicles, the BAV-485, an equivalent of the DUKW, and the GAZ-46 MAV, an equivalent of the Ford GPA

Due to bad reception of the Ford GPA 'Seep' by Allied soldiers, most of them were routed to Russia under the US Lend-Lease program, before production was halted prematurely in 1943. The Russians however badly needed jeeps with the GPA's ability to cross rivers and inland waters, so they acquired a license from Ford to start manufacturing the GPA themselves even before the war ended. After Ford had transferred all documents, tools and dies, Russian Seeps were built under license as the GAZ 011 from 1944 to 1945

In Soviet hands, the vehicle was extremely popular. It was issued to reconnaissance units who used them to traverse the many swamps and marshes of Eastern Europe.

The experience of the end of World War II demonstrated the strengths and weaknesses of various Soviet military equipment, as well as gaps in its creation. So in the army there was no domestic floating cars. At the same time, the four-wheel-drive amphibious Ford GPA and DUKW six-wheeled trucks received under the Lend-Lease program made it easier for Soviet troops to force the rivers of Eastern Europe at the final stage of the war. It is quite natural that this military equipment was taken note of by the military and after the end of the conflict it was included in the long-term rearmament plan along with other samples. In the USSR, the design of both passenger cars and cargo floating cars began.

Although the GAZ-46 MAV used the mechanics of existing Russian GAZ 4x4 "jeeps" as well as being created somewhat bigger for better buoyancy, its design is heavily inspired by that of the wartime Ford GPA. Just like the 'Seep', its hull is entirely out of steel, welded to a steel chassis. The layout is the same: engine compartment in the front, crew compartment in the center, and the spare wheel horizontally mounted on the rear deck. The driver and the commander of the vehicle have individual seats in the front with a three seat bench behind them. The windshield can be folded down, and if necessary, a cover can be installed to close the cockpit. The engine is coupled to a manual three-speed gearbox and a two-speed transfer-case. Also there is a screw-propellor for in the water propulsion, driven by a power take-off, and a proper rudder provides good maneuverability. Front and rear suspension is in the form of leaf-sprung rigid live axles. Thanks to its steeply raked front and rear and four-wheel drive, the GAZ can manage reasonably steep river banks before swimming across.



GAZ-46





Help with locating artifacts to loan to The Military Museums.

The Calgary Military Museums is looking for artifacts for the Military Immigration Exhibit commencing June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

Currently sourcing artifacts such as; Medals and badges, uniform components, equipment, bayonets, and other similar material.

Some of the countries we're looking for are:

Czechoslovakian army 1961-63

South Vietnamese air force, Vietnam War (helicopter pilot related)

South Vietnamese rangers, Vietnam War

South Vietnamese navy, Vietnam War

United Kingdom, Women's Army Corps (WAC) WW1

South Africa, WWII

British Women's Auxiliary Air Force, WW2

Greek navy 1970s and WW2

Lithuanian Cavalry WW1 or pre-WW2

Danish Army/Militia c.a. 1910

South Africa/2<sup>nd</sup> Boer War/ Canadian 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion)

Any help in **loaning** artifacts to the above would be greatly appreciated.

For any inquiries, contact Rory Cory, Senior Curator of The Military Museums at:

**The Military Museums**

4520 Crowchild Trail SW

Calgary AB T2T 5J4

Email to Rory Cory at: [mor-curator@telusplanet.net](mailto:mor-curator@telusplanet.net)

Phone to Rory Cory at: 403-410-2340, ext. 2602





## Are you an Immigrant to Alberta with Military Service in Your Country of Origin?

EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST  
OPEN CALL: DEADLINE APRIL 30



Are you or one of your family members a migrant to Alberta, with military service in your native country or elsewhere? Or do you have any ancestors or friends who settled in Alberta, and served in a military capacity with non-Canadian armed forces?

We are seeking individuals to share stories relating to non-Canadian military experience. Our interest is global in scope, including experiences spanning national armed forces or conscripts, informal militia service, volunteers, guerrilla forces, freedom fighters, child soldiers and medics. The material we compile will be considered for inclusion in an exhibition at the University of Calgary's Founders' Gallery at The Military Museums in Calgary, fall 2021. We are especially interested in learning about artworks, photographs or artefacts relating to individuals' stories, or the places in which they served, and if you are an immigrant artist who knows a military immigrant in and if you are an immigrant artist who knows a military immigrant in Alberta, please get in touch.

The aim of this project is to highlight and better understand the wide range of nationalities that have settled in this province, both historically and more recently. We will provide learning opportunities about conflicts worldwide, many of which may not have involved Canada.

Planning for this exhibition involves extensive outreach to community associations and ex-pat groups in Calgary and beyond. We recognize that some individuals may be sensitive about sharing their stories: if individuals wish for privacy we can offer the use a pseudonym (false name), or anonymity.

If you have a story you would like to share or would like more information on the project, we'd like to hear from you. And If you are a museum or heritage-institute with relevant stories, artwork, or artefacts in your collection and are interested in participating in this project, your support is also welcomed.

To find out more or become involved please contact: Rory Cory, Snr Curator/Director of Collections, [mor-curator@telusplanet.net](mailto:mor-curator@telusplanet.net) (403) 410-2340 x 2602. Dick Aaverns, Curatorial Coordinator, [dick.averns@ucalgary.ca](mailto:dick.averns@ucalgary.ca)

For more information on For more information on The Military Museums, including our mandate, visitor information, education programs, and events and exhibitions, please visit <https://themilitarymuseums.ca/>

We look forward to hearing your stories! Are you an Immigrant to Alberta with Military Service in Your Country of Origin?

Photos: (L) Hieu Tran, South Vietnamese Navy. (R) Sharon Wildwind, American Army Nurse



**UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY**  
Founders' Gallery



Canadian cyclists pose for a photograph at some point during the conflict. Quiet and stealthy, the bicycle covered just as much ground as a horse, but required far less care and attention, making the cyclists effective messengers in the theatre of war



A Canadian soldier and his horse wear gas masks at the Canadian Army Veterinary Corps Headquarters. Horses were primarily to be used as a form of transport during the war. Historians suggest that some 8 million horses and mules were killed during the Great War

## **Sabretache**

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE CALGARY MILITARY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
The SOCIETY

is a non-profit registered society which fosters the study of the military and the police, and the heritage of Canada, the British Empire, and the world as well as the preservation of military artifacts and records.

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