

The Attackers: Hole in the Head: Uncle Harold, Mr. Willys, & Mr. Pine; the Valley of Elah: Israel's HQ at Beit-Nettif, Philistia's at Socoh; David's Artillery, 1 Sam 17:40; Goliath Taunts David, vv. 43–44; David Counters with Divine Viewpoint: “The battle is the Lord's,” vv. 45–47

Memory Traces: “Mr. Willys, meet Mr. Pine”

“Uncle Harold, why did you take the doors off your Jeep?”

“I didn't. I bought it that way.”

“So why doesn't it have any doors?”

“It was salvaged from World War II and I got it cheap. I just need it for riding around the farm and for going up to school in September. Get in and I'll teach you how to drive it.”

This is how I was introduced at age 10 to a 1951 version of Drivers Ed.

My grandparents ran a farm outside of Opp, Alabama, where my mother's brother, Uncle Harold Martin, lived when he was not attending Alabama Polytechnic Institute in a little cow town over in East Alabama. But in the summers he conducted a boot camp for me and my cousin, Tommy Martin. We were given a two-week refresher course each year in the strict discipline required of farm hands and were abject failures. Tommy was from Pensacola and thus knew more about beaches than fields. I was a city boy from Troy and knew more about paved streets than dirt roads.

But the summer session of '51 had this exciting distraction from our labors. I can attest that an open cow pasture is an excellent place to learn how to drive. No traffic, no laws, no lanes. Just get her started, let out on the clutch, suffer minor whiplash, and then steer. The trick was learning how to manipulate the manual transmission whose stick shift was in the floor. I had just turned ten and didn't have much of a reach but I was eager to learn. Within a day I'd mastered the clutch and the shifting. By the end of our two-week tour of duty Tommy and I were driving up and down the dirt road that passed in front of the farm house. We were excited about leaning to drive and therefore we had mixed emotions about leaving for home. The upside was getting away from Uncle Harold's farm chores so we were more than ready to get back to “city” life.

About a month later, September 10, 1951, Uncle Harold dropped by our house at 600 North Three-Notch Street on his way to enroll in API's fall session. It was a Sunday afternoon and my close friend Andy Harrell and his parents were over visiting. When Uncle Harold came in I was excited to see that old Army-green Willys.

The Willys Jeep came into popularity among the general public following World War II. Willys-Overland Motors reports on its Web site that it was “awarded a contract to build Jeeps for the US Army in late 1940. Ford was also awarded a contract a week later. Of the roughly half million jeeps produced for World War II, Willys-Overland made about 360,000 between 1941 and 1945. The jeeps proved to be rugged and dependable in the war, and by the time the soldiers came home, Jeeps were well known and loved for their durability and *unstoppability*.”

O really! This may have been true for our men-at-arms in the Great World War II but this Army vet had not yet met the driving expertise of a ten-year old.

Andy heard I'd learned to drive the thing and pestered Uncle Harold and me to take him for a ride. My parents, distracted with all the company in the house, buckled under the pressure and said that I could do it if we only went down to the pool and back.

Our house was on the corner of North Three-Notch and Pierson Streets (which Jo Henra insists is misspelled), directly across from Mary Chevrolet. Pierson was a dirt road at the time—a perfect arrangement based on my training. It ran two blocks west down to Murphree Park and dead-ended at China Street. I hopped in the driver's seat, Andy sat in the middle, and Uncle Harold rode shotgun. I fired her up and we headed out.

If you put the wheels in the ruts of a dirt road any car is easy to steer. In those days the street that circled down by the city pool and pavilion was asphalt. It was also a one-way road so that when you arrived at the entrance to the park there were two sets of ruts, one set kept going straight to China but the other set veered off to the right and merged with the asphalt. The Jeep hugged these ruts and put us up on the hardtop very nicely, but I had gotten lazy and did not pull the Jeep out of its rut-directed turn and as a result it continued to veer to the right and head directly toward a pine tree a hundred feet tall with a diameter at its base approaching three feet. It was a rude introduction: "Mr. Willys, meet Mr. Pine." Mr. Pine was not impressed with Willys-Overland's claim that its product was "unstoppable." I can boldly assure you that it was. Instantly.

Several of these tall pines lined the drive around the park and this first one was growing on a slight incline a few feet off the road. The "unstoppable" object lost to the "immovable" tree and the Jeep tipped over. With no door to keep us inside I fell backwards out of the driver's seat onto the asphalt followed quickly by Mr. Jeep. My head got it from both sides. First my scalp was ripped away from my head by the rough asphalt and the roof of the Jeep hit my forehead fracturing my skull. Had it not been for the fact that Willys-Overland designed their Jeeps with the spare-tire mount on the driver's side the edge of the Jeep's roof would have crushed my skull instead. The spare mount kept it off the ground just enough for me to survive.

I don't know the lady's name who was the supervisor of Murphree Park at the time but she heard the crash and called the police and an ambulance. Their arrivals were tardy. Uncle Harold leaned over into the Jeep from the passenger side, now pointed to the heavens, to pull me through the cab but my arm was trapped between the Jeep's side and the asphalt. I maintained enough consciousness to tell him the problem. He ran a one-eighty around to the other side, put his farm-work strengthened hands underneath the edge of the roof and lifted the Jeep off me so I could free my arm. I then remember holding my arms up and him clutching them tightly and pulling me out.

My grandfather, Alex Griffin, had a new 1950 Ford and an intuition that he should follow us on our venture both of which placed him at the scene when the accident happened. As my uncle got to the car I remember my grandfather asking, "Do you want to take him back home?" to which Harold replied, "No, we need to get him to the hospital."

Pierson to China: one block; China to Murphree: one block; Murphree to Pine: one block; Pine to Beard's Hospital: two blocks. We made the trip in less than three minutes. I remember as we entered the hospital nurses were awaiting our arrival in response to a third phone call made by the lady at the park. They in turn had contacted Dr. James O. Colley, Jr., who was "on call" that weekend and he arrived from his home in Hillcrest at about the same time we did.

During all this I remained conscious. By this time I entered the operating room the pain was beginning to set in and I remember writhing on the gurney until a nurse put a mask over my face and told me to breathe in while counting to one hundred. Ether was inhaled and I didn't make it to three.

I have no recall of how long I was under sedation—I never thought to ask—but here’s what went on in that OR: Dr. Colley ordered X-rays of my head which I was shown later. If you’ve ever seen a pane of glass shot through with a bullet then you’ve seen the X-ray: a central hole with fractures reaching outward from its circumference in jagged lines. My scalp was peeled back exposing an inverted U-shaped portion of my skull. I had stuck my head under a Jeep and the result was not pretty.

I must now resort to second-hand descriptions of post ether-administered events. Dr. Colley, or “Tip” as he was affectionately known by all, had never dealt with such a mess. Usually cases involving this kind of trauma were soon handed off to local undertaker, Robert A. McGehee. Not this time. God’s plan still included me and so events transpired to keep my soul installed in my body long enough for Tip to figure out what to do and what he did was call the head of neurology at the University Medical Center in Birmingham.

Principle: When in doubt, call the University of Alabama! Rammer Jammer!

Tip, with a telephone by the operating table, was talked through the intricate process of piecing my head back together. The shattered nature of my skull led the neurologist to advise against inserting a steel plate in my forehead, just stop the bleeding, suture it up, and hope for the best. All told I had 99 stitches installed in forehead and scalp. Tip announced to my parents that he’d done all he could but that the chances of my survival were slim. He advised them to consider making funeral arrangements.

Such action was not required. Through the grace of God I survived but not without pestering nurses for six weeks in the hospital and my parents for much of the rest of the year at home. While residing at Beard’s I received three shots a day, one each of Terramycin, streptomycin, and penicillin. A ten-year old’s South side isn’t big enough to accommodate that much incoming artillery so they ultimately opted for my lower back. I soon got so used to the attacks that on a nurse’s arrival I could turn on my side, pull down my pajamas, and get the injection without missing a word or panel in the comic book I’d be reading.

For several days in mid-September 1951 things did not look good for my survival and the wonderful experience of growing up in Bedford Falls. By the grace of God I made it and returned to duty in Mrs. Zubie Smart’s fifth-grade class the following January. Needless to say, I didn’t do well in school that year. Rather than have me repeat the grade, Mrs. Smart, who lived just two doors down the street from our house, agreed to tutor me during the summer.

24. The Philistine headquarters were situated between Azekah \ah-zē'-kā\ and Socoh \sō'-kō\ at a site identified as Ephes-Dammim \ē'-fes-dam'-im\ while the Jews were situated northeast of Socoh at Beit-Nettif in the Valley of Elah. The brook *Wadi es-Sunt*,¹ separated the two camps. Its bed provided David with a broad selection of “smooth stones” from which he selected five (1 Samuel 17:40).
25. David put the stones in his shepherd’s bag. His sling was in his hand as he advanced on the Philistine. Goliath was not impressed:

1 Samuel 17:43 - The Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods [**Dagon**²].

¹ “Wadi: a valley or ravine, bounded by relatively steep banks, which in the rainy season becomes a watercourse” ([http://www.getamap.net/maps/sudan/\(su34\)/_essunt/](http://www.getamap.net/maps/sudan/(su34)/_essunt/)).

² Dagon: Name of the god of the Philistines. See 1 Samuel 5:1–5.

v. 44 - The Philistine also said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field."

26. David was in no way cowed by Goliath's bloviation. He fired right back at the big oaf with what amounted to a prophecy:

1 Samuel 17:45 - Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted.

v. 46 - "This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel,

v. 47 - and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hands."