

Unfinished Business

A fallen U.S. soldier left behind projects, so groups of enthusiasts picked up the pieces



BY MIKE McNESSOR

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The late Major Jeffrey R. Calero's 1970 Pontiac GTO convertible (above) arrived at Paul's Rods & Restos in Deer Park, New York, as a "50-footer" in need of considerable metalwork.



The crew at Paul's replaced the floor, the trunk floor, quarter panels and hood, and performed repair work on the front fenders. The 400-cu.in. engine was rebuilt and the chassis will receive some additional modifications before the finished car is presented to Calero's family in June.



When an improvised explosive device claimed the life of 34-year-old Major Jeffrey R. Calero of Queens while he was on a reconnaissance patrol in southern Afghanistan, a lifetime's worth of great accomplishments were left forever undone.

Marriage, maybe a family of his own, a couple of highly successful careers—first in the military then in the private sector as a mechanical engineer—and who knows what other dreams and aspirations, would all go unrealized.

His old cars, however, would be a different story.

Calero, a muscle-car enthusiast, owned a 1988 Mustang GT that was restored by a group of volunteers and presented to his family last year.

Between deployments, Calero would also stay busy fixing up his 1970 Pontiac GTO convertible, and he was a member of the Long Island GTO Club of New York.

After Calero's death in late 2007, the GTO club decided to honor him with a Best of Show Award at its May 2008 Car-B-Que Car Show and by beginning an effort to get his GTO restored. Among those in attendance at the Car-B-Que was Paul

DiMauro, owner of Paul's Rods & Restos in Deer Park, Long Island, who offered to perform all of the labor on the car free of charge. Work has progressed steadily since, and DiMauro told us recently that the GTO is ready to be painted and he hopes to present the car to Calero's family on June 9. It will sport a custom paint job and a host of custom suspension touches that DiMauro hopes to keep under wraps until the official unveiling.

The GTO required extensive sheet-metal repair to get it to this point, DiMauro said, including a complete floor pan, trunk floor, quarter panels, left-side door, hood, radiator support and lower fender repair panels. After the metal and body work was complete, the car was shot with sprayable polyester filler and block sanded, followed by PPG K36 urethane primer and more block sanding. The car will be finished with PPG Deltron basecoat and clear.

"We called the car a 50 footer at the start," DiMauro said. "We had to replace nearly everything, and we had to do a lot of fabrication. It has been a really rewarding project. The Calero family has been appreciative, and we want the finished car to not only show the quality

of our work, but what Major Calero's service meant to our country."

Calero was killed on October 29, 2007, while on patrol in Kajaki, Afghanistan, serving with ODA 2132 of Company C, 1st Battalion, 20th Special Forces Group. He was born in Puerto Rico, raised in Queens, New York, and graduated from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, in 1995 with a degree in mechanical engineering.

He served six years of active duty in the Army, reaching the rank of lieutenant, and was promoted to captain after training as an Army Ranger. In 2001, he became a Green Beret after completing Special Forces training. In 2003 and again in 2007, he was deployed to Afghanistan while serving in the National Guard. The Army promoted him posthumously to the rank of major. His numerous awards include the Bronze Star Medal for Valor and the Purple Heart.

Calero is survived by his father, Raymond; siblings Dennis Calero of Queens Village, Irene Nauke of Manhattan, and Joyce Crespo of Westbury; and three nieces, Amelia, Lauren and Claire.

For additional photos of the project go to www.paulsrestos.com/jeff.php. ☼

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