

DEER, DEER WHAT CAN THE MATTER BE

Ever since I was a youngster during the war, I never let the opportunity pass of 'Making a Few Quid' whenever the occasion presented itself. Particularly when I was drafted to the RNAS Stretton, HMS Blackcap, near Warrington, Lancashire (Now Cheshire) during the mid 1950's. The once front line Fleet Air Arm operational base was slowly and systematically being 'run down' prior to 'de-commissioning'. Following my preference draft following a spell on HMS Albion together with a few shipmates with homes nearby in Liverpool, Manchester or the Lancashire Mill Towns. After a brief spell at the Fire Station I was re-assigned to the 'Barrack Master's Party based on the Main Camp Site. This allowed me to combine my daily duties with that of helping to manage the 'Slipstream Club' on the old airfield. The Buffer's Party were all 'Blue Card Special Dutymen' which allowed them to come and go virtually as they pleased.

Everyone on the Party had their own little 'Fiddles' which earned them a few quid from time to time including the 'Buffer' with his nearby 'Smallholding' a few pigs and chickens and a fairly large allotment for fresh vegetables. His pigs were fed on the 'gash food' from the base which we used to deliver and then 'boil up' in a copper. I had a wonderful relationship and regular liaison with the nearby USAF Base from which everyone on our Base profited.

About 11.30 pm. one evening, having missed the last 'Pusser's Bus' from Warrington I was compelled to take a Taxi following a 'Business Night Out'. It was a clear moonlight night with a little frost on the ground. About a mile from the base the Taxi Driver pointed out that there was something lying in the road ahead. We stopped and in the headlights I saw a Deer lying a few feet from the grass verge. We could see that the animal had not been dead long as it was still quite warm to the touch. I asked the Taxi Driver if he would give me a hand to get it back to the Base at Blackcap. He was reluctant at first but when I offered him a fiver he changed his mind. Pulling out a tarpaulin cover from the boot we covered the animal and placed it on the luggage step on the passenger side strapping it in. Fortunately the animal was not too large so we were able to secure it fairly easily. Reaching the Base and turning down a side road adjacent to the Main Camp the Driver helped me to push the animal over the high fence and onto a grass verge behind some unoccupied Mess Huts near to the Galley.

Making my way through the Main Gates I retrieved my Station Card from the Reg Office after bidding a pleasant "Goodnight" to the Duty RPO and Bosun's Mate, I quickly ran around behind the Paint Store intending to retrieve the animal and leave it overnight in the Buffer's Equipment Store. As I passed I noticed that the lights were still on in the Main Galley Kitchen. Peering through the window I saw my old mate 'Scouse' the kellick Chef was still working. tapping gently on the window 'Scouse' looked up, saw it was me and quickly opened the door "What the bloody hell" "Shhhhhhhh" I hissed motioning him to be quiet. "Wait here a minute"? I whispered, disappearing momentarily to retrieve the deer carcass. I explained that I needed a big, big favour in helping me to cut up the animal. I explained what had happened and pointed out that if we 'screwed our nuts' there was a nice little earner in it for us. "Fair enough, just let me take this tray of 'Kiy' and 'sarnies' over to the Reg Office and I will be with you"? Whispered Scouse, now sensing the need for silence.

Returning a few minutes later "That should keep those Buggers quiet now let's get busy" He said rubbing his hands. "I will cut you can clean and scrub out" Scouse ordered. Now I know why Royal Navy Chefs are among the very best as I watched Scouse expertly and systematically butcher, dismember and trim before stringing the joints into manageable sizes. He also prepared a selection of steaks which would have been the envy of any Chef in the land. While he worked I scrubbed, cleaned and polished. "What shall we do with the meat"? I enquired. I'm Duty Breakfast Chef this morning so put all the meat into this cardboard box and mark it 'Wardroom Do Not Touch" then put it in the cold room but make sure you collect it before dinner time as I am away on Week-End at 1pm."? Scouse replied. "What about the gash"? I asked him "You will have to get rid of that yourself, why don't you take it down to the Buffer's pigs, those buggers will eat anything"? He replied. "What a damn good idea, I hadn't thought of that, I must be slipping". I found myself thinking. Carefully putting all the carcass remains into a Hessian sack and newspaper I carried them outside and placed them onto the PO Chef's trade bike nearby. Whispering to Scouse that I would see him later I carefully wheeled the bike through the Main Gate which again was fortunately unmanned. Climbing onto the bike and quietly cursing that there were no lights and grateful that there was a bright moon shining, I sped off down the road turning right by the pub and down the lane towards the Buffer's Piggery, which minutes later greeted my arrival noisily. Intending to empty the contents of the sack over the wall I heaved it onto the top when it was suddenly wrenched from my grasp "Oh! Shit" I thought then all hell broke loose as the inmates of the Piggery began to scrap noisily for the sack and it's contents. Realising I had better make myself scarce I pedalled away as quickly as I could returning the PO Chefs bike to the Galley past the unlocked and unmanned gate. I finally got to my 'Pit' around 2.45 am.

After breakfast at 8.am 'Both Watches of the Hands' fell in as usual outside the Regulating Office. As members of the illustrious 'Buffer's Party and 'Blue Card' holders we were excused mustering. Today being Friday was an extremely busy day for us. We had to make the weekly 'Firewood and Fuel trip and delivery. The a few 'private calls' comprising the usual week-end deliveries to the Senior Rates Mess and collect the 'Bets' It was customary on Fridays for me to visit a local Farmer to collect our 'Meat' for distribution to the RA men and the married quarters, at a greatly reduced charge and much cheaper than going into town for it. This was a very popular little earner and very much appreciated. On this particular day I decided to treat my customers to 'Prime Fresh Venison' My regular customers included Officers. Senior Rates and even the Regulating Staff looked forward to this excellent service.

Having duly collected 'The Venison' in the cold room I borrowed the 'Buffer's Landrover to make my deliveries and collect my dues. Visiting the Reg Office first the gasps of surprise and admiration confirmed that Scouse had done a superb job with the Butchery. Subsequent visits to the Wardroom and Senior Rates Mess also confirmed his expertise. All chores, collections and deliveries made and many satisfied customers together with a nice little earner, I handed Scouse a well deserved £20 for him to enjoy his week-end as I ambled over to the Dining Hall for my 'Tot' and early lunch before meeting our 'Bookie' with the regular daily bets from Blackcap.

At 2.45pm 'Long Week- End Libertymen' was piped over the tannoy, they, began to muster outside the Regulating Office. Leave Passes issued, Station Cards collected, Ratings inspected, 'Pusser's Buses' awaiting outside the Main Gate. Finally the 'Jossman' bellows. "Libertymen, Shun". Turning to face the OOD he salutes smartly. "Permission for

Libertymen to Carry on Sir"? He enquires politely. "Carry on please Master at Arms"? The OOD replies. The 'Jossman' turns to face the assembly. "Libertymen, turning right, dismiss". A huge cheer as the chaotic exodus of 'Mad Matelots' charges towards the Main Gate much to everyone's amusement. "Now for a bit of peace and quiet" the 'Jossman' mutters to no one in particular. Spotting me watching the proceedings he beckoned me over to the Reg Office steps. Taking me gently by the arm he steered me out of everyone else's earshot. "By the way JR, I have just had a couple of very strange telephone calls"? "Oh! Yes Master" I smiled. "One was from your local Farmer friend who usually supplies the week-end meat asking if we had forgotten to order this week. The other was from the local Police"? Really, Master" I replied, desperately trying to feign disinterest"? The Joss fixed me with a beady, piercing stare. "It seems like someone reported running over a Deer near the Base and when they searched for it couldn't find it anywhere"? "Perhaps it just crawled away"? I suggested pleasantly. "How the f.....g hell could it when it was stone dead"? The Joss whispered placing his face perilously close to mine. "I asked you JR because you were late back last night and may have seen something and by a sheer bloody coincidence we had venision this week instead of the usual beef, pork or lamb"? I looked him straight in the eyes "Master", I said emphatically, realising he was just fishing. "How on earth would I be able to pick up a Deer on my own, in the middle of the night and cut it up without anyone seeing me, besides I get our meat from reliable sources". The Jossman glared at me for a few seconds before turning on his heel to disappear back into the Reg Office muttering "Why am I not entirely convinced that you know nothing about it at all"?

I STILL WONDER IF THE 'JOSSMAN' EVER BELIEVED ME