

## **SURPLUS TO REQUIREMENTS OR FOR JUST A FEW DOLLARS MORE**

The 'Shock Waves' and general aftermath of the departure of the two Senior Supply Sergeants Finkel and Caitano from the USAF Base at Burtonwood on charges of misappropriation of Government Stores from the Base together with their misconduct over a period of time brought sighs of relief from everyone. During the 1950's whilst stationed at the RNAS Stretton or HMS Blackcap. I have to admit that I knew 'Hymie' and 'Angie' and had a few minor dealings with them but as a small fry in their 'large pond' I preferred to keep my business with them very much by the book and on a 'Buddy Basis' only. It subsequently turned out that their misdeeds involved thousands of dollars. We were all delighted when the American authorities decided to finally 'Draw a Line' under their activities. Fortunately for me I had several good and trusted friends on the base who kept my involvements with the two to a minimum and who I am positive had a hand in their eventual removal.

One day about two weeks after Hymie and Angie's departure to the States I received a telephone call from my old chum at the USAF Base, Sgt Steve Marcowicz asking if we could meet up for a beer and introduce me to his buddy who had just been posted from a USAF Base in Germany. Steve was a really great guy and we had shared some good times together. I told Steve to come around to the mess at 'Tot Time' the next day. As a member of the 'Elite Buffer's Party' at Blackcap with a 'Blue Card' we could very much come and go as we pleased. We carried out everything on the base from furniture removal, dismantling, painting and decorating, fuel supplies, gardening and even road mending. Naturally enough we knew everyone who needed to be known. In our exalted position and with our many contacts we could supply just about anything. No one got hurt, no one minded and no one gave a damn anyway as the Base was in the throes of De-Commissioning so everyone was inclined to 'turn a blind eye'. Our 'Band of Brothers' or as one newly drafted CPO once rashly remarked 'Den of Thieves' and was quickly reprimanded by his more magnanimous and understanding colleagues not to 'Bite the Hand', 'Rock the Boat' or upset the 'Status Quo'.

Popular requests were always real American coffee, tins of foodstuffs and fruit which were flown in daily from the USA or Europe on their transport aircraft. We could even get children's toys from the States which were like gold dust over here. We had a Friday Meat Market especially for the men living ashore or going on week end leave or those in Married Quarters. Everyone received our services from time to time from Officers, Senior Rates and even the Regulating Staff were glad of our services from time to time. We provided 'Messmen', 'General Mess Party', Working & De-Commissioning Parties. Everyone in the Buffer's Party had their own particular 'perks' including 'the Buffer' who was rather partial to American Bourbon. Our General Mess Party was extremely useful at 'Tot Time' which was always issued in the Main Dining Hall. The 'Witnessing Officer' was always the same, namely a Senior Commissioned Supply Officer who enjoyed a tot or several and always allowed us to surreptitiously to dispose of the gash rum by allegedly pouring it down the galley scuppers, which of course we never did. The spare rum was always used to repay favours particularly to galley staff, Fire Station lads and anyone on our payroll. Anything left would be taken back to the mess for the RA men to have a tot before going home. The Senior Rates were also a decent bunch and many of them did not drink their tot of neaters which we unofficially bottled and stowed away to be used for trading. The 'Yanks'

absolutely loved our 'Navy Neaters' which came in very handy for trading purposes. You could say that we on the Buffer's party had things pretty well sewn up and everyone was happy with the set up. I had a little 'gold mine' with the 'Yanks' which provided the basis for many of our deals together. The 'Yanks' are avid collectors of anything remotely British and I had a flourishing trade in 'Antiques', 'British Army Badges' and other Militaria. Police Helmets were in great demand and I could get 4 bottles of spirits for one. I had built up quite a collection thanks to a few good pals in 'The Old Bill' and in those days they were allowed to keep their old uniforms as souvenirs. Through my contacts I was fortunate enough to be able to purchase a few complete sets from entire uniforms including truncheons and handcuffs or wrist restraints which were in great demand at the USAF Base and competition was fierce to obtain them.

A couple of days later a jeep bearing the 'Stars and Stripes' drew up outside my mess on 'Glorious Site' on the North Camp. Our site was practically deserted since the departure of the Squadron personnel and this suited us down to the ground as we could carry on with our activities without arousing curiosity. Steve and another 'Top Sergeant' climbed out and he introduced his companion as Master Sergeant (Supply) Sherman S. Brewster newly arrived from Heidelberg, Germany. 'Sherm' had been specially selected to carry out a thorough audit investigation into the activities of his predecessors 'Finkel' and 'Caitano' who were presently awaiting Court Martial and Trial in the United States. We shook hands warmly as 'Sherm' introduced himself. His full name believe it or not was Sherman Sheridan Brewster the Third and he was named after the famous Union Army Generals in the American Civil War, as if I'd never have guessed. He came over as an extremely nice fellow from the start and completely opposite to the two previous incumbents of his office. We went into the mess and Sherm tossed down a canvas bag containing cigarettes 'just to break the ice'. Peering into the bag I noticed that they were the popular brands 'Lucky Strike', 'Chesterfield' and 'Camel'.

Placing the much in demand items into my spare locker I produced my trusty bottle which had once contained 'Daddie's sauce' but which now contained a much more precious liquid, namely 'Pussers Neaters' and reserved for special guests by courtesy of the Senior Rates Mess for services rendered. This trusty bottle had proved invaluable in the past among members of the American Forces. Producing 3 glass tumblers, slowly and with great reverence I poured out three large measures of 'Nelson's Blood'. Steve winked at me anticipating what was to come. We raised and clinked our glasses. "Cheers, and down the hatch, as they say in your Country". Sherm said, taking a large gulp. The subsequent look on his face was somewhat reminiscent of someone being struck on the head by a heavy object. His mouth opened but no sound came out. Grasping his throat and managing a hoarse whisper, he managed to say. "Jesus H Christ, what in Hell was that"? Steve and I simply burst out laughing. "Sorry Sherm old son, I forgot to warn you about 'Navy Neaters'? As I grabbed what I thought was a fanny of water realising that it was the left over's from the Dinner Time Grog Ration which I used to bring back to the mess for the RA men before they went home. Dipping in the glass I handed it to Sherm who drained it gratefully only to contort his face once again. Steve and I both winced and it took poor old Sherm a few minutes to regain his breath. I then apologised and explained the potency of Navy rum and that I had not intended to set him up. We all had a bit of a laugh and refilled our glasses, this time with Sherm taking very respectful sips. "I guess I could get used to it in time"? He muttered. "It takes years buddy, it takes years"? Steve smiled.

Looking at his watch Sherm explained the real reason for his visit. "My buddy Steve here says that you are a pretty regular guy who you can trust and that's good enough for me". Sherm went on to explain that apart from his 'Special Assignment' in preparing a 'Case File' against his predecessors he had taken over as 'Base Supply Officer' until his enlistment was up and he returned to the United States. In the meantime if I could act as his unofficial 'Liaison Officer' and any contacts which might help him would be very much appreciated. I fixed Sherm with a stare. Sensing that he wasn't quite being up front "Why don't you just tell me what you really want Sherm"? I asked quietly. Both he and Steve exchanged looks before laughing. "Steve said you weren't just a dumb ass Limey and knew just about everyone worth knowing". He chuckled. Pouring them both another glass of rum I said. "I also know everyone not worth knowing too"? They both roared with laughter. Pulling up their chairs closer and looking around the empty mess hut Sherm explained. "This is the deal, when I came over from Germany in the transport aircraft; I brought a load of WW2 GI Army surplus with me for disposal over here". "What do you mean disposal"? I asked suspiciously. "Well, Command Orders say quite clearly 'Destruction By Burning'". Sherm added. "What kind of Government surplus are we talking about here"? I asked. "You know the kind of stuff, uniforms, coats, shirts, webbing gear, helmets, canteen packs, all of which is obsolete and not for re-issue. Some of the guys are allowed a few souvenirs for their buddies or folks back home or the kids but that's it period"?

"It sure is one helluva shame"? Steve remarked shaking his head sadly and I was forced to agree. A moment or two passed as we quietly sipped our drinks before I suggested that I might just be in a position to get rid of some of the stuff and get them both a little bonus to take back home with them. Sherm and Steve looked at each other again and gave a kind of relieved smile which convinced me that this was the real reason for their visit in the first place. Another refill all round. "Why do you bloody Yanks always have to bullshit and go around the houses. Why not just tell it like it is"? I enquired. "We weren't exactly sure how you would take it"? Answered Sherm lamely. I looked at Steve. "You ought to know me better than that, how many deals have we had"? Steve looked down at the floor sheepishly. Perhaps the rum was beginning to take effect but I could not resist asking "Just how dumb do you have to be to be a Top Sergeant"? Both men laughed "Right, you guys, now let us get down to business"? I suggested.

I had already formulated a plan whilst they were talking but first I had to know just how much 'Surplus' they had and how much they expected to get for it and I was not really prepared for their answer. Sherm and Steve looked at each other again. "I guess around 3 tons maybe a little more"? Said Sherm, almost deadpan as Steve nodded in agreement. Trying very hard not to show my incredulity or fall off my chair, I asked, "Are you quite sure"? "You've seen the crates Steve, what do you think"? Enquired Sherm. "Well, Sherm, like you say the crates have all come from all our bases in Germany and it's all US Army and Air Force WW2 stuff, I've seen the cargo manifests and I guess about 3 tons"? "OK then you guys where is the stuff now"? I simply had to ask. "Well. I guess, right now it's in a locked cargo container in a locked and secure unit in an airfield hangar. There is only one key and I have it right here and no one except Steve and I have authorised access". Replied Sherm emphatically as Steve nodded his agreement. I could not help but smile the kind of smile which says "Buddy we have got it made". It seemed to show as both Sherm and Steve chorused together. "You've got a plan haven't you"? I grinned. "I think I have now just listen whilst I run this by you. By the way what is the date today"? Both looked a little hesitant so I fished out my diary. "Today is the 12th June so it's too late to celebrate D Day as that was on the 6<sup>th</sup> so what are we left with"?

Both Sherm and Steve shrugged their shoulders. "Are we missing something, celebrate what"? They both enquired. I stared hard at them. "Come on you dumb asses what do the Yanks celebrate apart from Thanksgiving"? They both exchanged embarrassed glances before echoing together "The Fourth of July, Independence Day, of course" they said gleefully. I outlined my plan and the expression on their faces turned from smiles to sheer delight. "That is absolutely Goddam brilliant" Said Sherm. "Incredulous". Enthused Steve "It simply cannot fail" They both agreed. "It's a swell plan" Said Sherm "But what about disposal"? This is where I came into my own. "Let me worry about that as I have all the right contacts to guarantee success, now I want you two to sort out all the equipment. Put all the good gear into a separate container and keep all the rubbish items together but in the same hangar, have you got that"? I explained in detail what I intended to do. "That should present no problem at all and I believe I get your drift. All the rubbish will be incinerated as ordered am I right"? Enquired Sherm smiling. "And that gets us off the hook too"? Enthused Steve feeling somewhat relieved.

"Now listen carefully you guys before you both go off half cocked, let me explain the plan in greater detail. In order for this to succeed we have to guarantee that the 'Fourth of July' will be celebrated by you 'Yanks' as a 'Special Day' and should be regarded maybe as an 'Open Day' If your CO approves we could have a 'Bonfire' and all the kind of shit you 'Yanks' love to do. The 'Fife and Drum Band' bloodied bandages, Paul Revere's Ride and all that Jazz and how about 'Glenn Miller' style music and a good old fashioned 'Hooley' to go along with it. Everyone can dress up and we could all have a 'blast'. At the same time we could dispose of all the rubbish gear on the bonfire. Now do you think you buggers could do something and arrange that kind of thing and maybe run the idea past the Colonel for permission to hold a real 'American Wing Ding for the 'Fourth of July' and invite just about every bugger like we all did in the old days"?

There was a dreadful pause for several painful seconds before both Sherm and Steve whooped with delight. "It's brilliant and simple and I know the Colonel will go for it, I can't think why we didn't think of it in the first place"? They enthused. The scornful look on my face was enough to change the conversation. "Right, now you guys listen, this is what I need you to do ASAP. I need you to trust me on this one and allow me to get hold of my contacts in the Military Surplus Game who will be happy to take the gear off your hands if s thats OK with you"? They both nodded vigorously. "Now this is what you have to do as soon as you get back to Base. Let me know how much good gear there is and keep it completely separate from the rubbish gear which is what we shall be burning. When this is done just let me know and I will do the rest. In the meantime give some serious thought to 'Real American Hot Dogs & Hamburgers' relish, cold beer, you've got the idea haven't you"? Sherm & Steve smiled and nodded again. "We don't know what to say JR, Steve and the guys on Base seem to think you are a regular guy so let's just go for it"? Said Sherm eagerly. "Before you both go there is just one more thing. Can you lay on transportation for the girls and anyone locally who can't get there"? "No problem there". Steve said. "I will see the Motor Pool Sergeant when I get back". "Right you buggers now off you go I've got lots to do, now you are sure what you have to and any problems ring me straight away. Don't forget to keep 'Schtum' OK"? Steve and Sherm climbed aboard their Jeep which weaved unsteadily along the country lanes back to their Base.

As there was only a couple of weeks to go I lost no time at all in contacting my outlets in Liverpool, Manchester, Stoke-on-Trent, Nottingham and Derby. In fact everywhere except Warrington and the Lancashire mill towns. This soon brought howls of protest from the

latter as news leaked out of an apparent load of 'surplus gear' on the market that I had a fear of demand outstripping supply. I need not have worried for the following day Sherm telephoned to say that the 'Good Gear' was at least 3 tons worth and some ancillary gear which included 'steel helmets' and all the 'Duff Gear' had been kept separate. "By the way JR Steve and I want you to have the 'helmets' if they are any good to you"? "How are the arrangements coming along"? I asked tentatively. "Really swell, everything is going well and Steve is organising that side of things, The Colonel had agreed to an 'Open Day' and everyone is pitching in and looking forward to things"? "That is good news indeed Sherm" I said. "Everything is OK this end now what I want you to do"? I explained that the gear should be sorted into quantities of at least 150lb each and to let me know when it had been done. At that moment in time I had absolutely no idea just how I was going to get the gear off the Base.

Meanwhile all my twenty five Dealers had expressed great interest and were prepared to take all the gear. In fact two or three wanted to take the lot themselves. I refused this offer which would have been easier, and so as not to lose contact with the other Dealers who had been good to me in the past. Later that afternoon Sherm telephoned to report that all the good gear had been sorted into bags. There were 200 wait for it 'Canvas Body Bags' each containing exactly 150 lbs and that they were now in a secure unit. Feeling rather pleased I telephoned some equally pleased Dealers who all agreed to take 8 bags each at £50 per bag. Which should give us a 'nice little earner' between us. I rang Sherm with the good news that the deal had been done and would he and Steve be willing to accept 3 Grand English each. There was one of those awful silences before Sherm replied "You are kidding me aren't you"? "No, I'm not kidding you, are you happy with that or not"? I snapped irritably. "You must be joking"? Bawled Steve as he grabbed the phone from Sherm. As the news eventually sank in "How in Hell did you manage it"? They both chorused. "No questions asked, you know the drill"? I insisted. Now listen up the pair of you, the next bit has to go like clockwork.

"It goes like this from now on and correct me if I go wrong. The Fourth of July has been declared an Open Day correct"? "That's correct"? They both agreed. "I suppose every bugger in the County has been invited including VIP's"? "I guess so why do you ask"? "I want you to get me about 30 'Official Guest Car Park Stickers' Can you manage that"? "No problem at all there old pal I've got to give the Colonel an Official Guest List later"? "I hope I'm on the bloody thing"? I countered. Sherm and Steve both laughed "Yours was the first name on the list"? "Right, now don't forget to include The Lady Mayoress, Chief Constable, our CO and Officers and enlisted men and I'll sort out the ladies, just make sure the transport is there for them". I said. "Don't worry JR everything is on schedule"? Replied Sherm. "Right then just one more thing we have to meet up once more before the big day"? "That's great how about tomorrow night it's 10 cent drink night in the NCO's Club come on over about 6oclock it's 'Happy Hour' first we'll meet you then OK"?

Feeling greatly relieved I mulled over the details in my mind and thinking that Sherm and Steve although thoroughly decent guys, did not have the sheer cunning of 'Angie' and 'Hymie' who were brilliant at 'scams' such as this. Still, perhaps it was just as well look where they are now in some Military 'Rat Hole'. On the whole I think thanks should be given for small mercies or as the saying goes 'Where Ignorance is Bliss tis folly to be Wise' The following day a pal dropped me off at the USAF Main Gate where I met Sherm and Steve again. A white helmeted sentry on duty with a .45 sidearm gave me a salute. "He salutes everyone". Sherm observed casually. I had visited the American Base on a number of

occasions and never seemed to wonder at the sheer size of it. There were Fire Stations at strategic points and a huge Control Tower. Numerous light Bombers and transport aircraft lay between the massive hangars. As we drove around the Base in Sherm and Steve's faithful old Jeep I was again impressed at the vastness of it compared to 'Blackcap'.

"Show me where you've stowed the gear then"? I asked politely. "How about a drink first"? They both suggested. "Business first and then pleasure". I reminded them. The Fourth of July main festivities area was plain to see and the huge hangar decorated with the Stars and Stripes and banners intermingled with the Union Flags was nice to see. "That was my idea". Said Steve proudly "I thought you'd like that"? He grinned. "Show me the stuff that we are going to burn"? I requested. Sherm pointed to a huge mound about 20 feet high covered with a large tarpaulin. "How about the clothing"? I enquired. Steve indicated two huge wooden crates stamped 'US Government Obsolete Equipment, For Destruction'. "That is absolutely great boys, there is no doubt at all about that is there"? "We made sure that the Colonel saw it first". They enthused. "By the way, you wanted these"? Said Steve handing me a wad of 'Official Guest Car Stickers'. "Great job lads, now where is the 'good stuff'? I enquired. Sherm and Steve led me to one of the smaller hangars. Looking around furtively Sherm unlocked the large padlock on the heavy steel door. We went in and I saw all the canvas 'body bags' arranged neatly in rows. "Bloody Hell lads couldn't you have arranged them a bit better than that, they look like bodies back from a bloody 'Combat Zone' I could see Steve and Sherm were puzzled. Grabbing the bags and stacking them one on top of the other and covering them with a nearby tarpaulin hoping to make them a little less conspicuous. "Haven't you buggers got any imagination"? I said grinning. "See what I mean. Now what about that drink you promised"? As Sherm and Steve nodded their approval.

"Now all we've got to do is figure out how we are going to get the 'body bags' into the Dealers cars and off the Base"? "Oh Shit". Said an exasperated Sherm "I hadn't figured on that"? "I guess I forgot too". Said Steve looking sheepish. I looked skywards as if for Divine inspiration. "It's a bloody good job I remembered then isn't it"? I said grinning. "I couldn't help noticing that there were a number of smaller tents scattered around"? "That's right they are all catering, stores and supply tents for the big day why do you ask"? Enquired Steve looking puzzled again. "Can you get hold of one and put a sign or something on it like 'Base Supply Officer Private No Entry'? Sherm and Steve glanced at each other and as if by telepathy replied. "We sure have, we've got our own small marquee which we always use on manoeuvres."? "Great, now pitch it next to the Official Car Park and secure it so no one can enter and both of you are to be in attendance have you got that"? "That's a Roger"? Sherm replied finally getting the picture. "Well, I'll be goddamned, I get the idea now" Steve replied grinning. "Well, we are all f.....g relieved about that then"? I replied acidly. "By the way Sherm how many of those steel helmets did you say you had"? I enquired to change the subject. "I think there's around 50 or so Steve and I were going to give them to you anyway"? Sherm replied. Steve nodded in agreement. "I think I know just the place for them, it will be in a good cause I can assure you"? I replied.

As the Fourth of July celebrations neared I finalised the arrangement with 'My Dealer Friends' so arming myself with lots of small change and little red book which folk thought were 'The Thoughts of Chairman Mao' I sought the tranquillity of a nearby telephone kiosk away from prying eyes and ears. Firstly, Edna's girls on the Warrington Telephone Exchange who had always supported our 'Pusser's Hops' at Blackcap. Next came the Dealers some 25 in all who received strict instructions to bring their cash in £20 notes in

brown envelopes to meet me at 'The Thorn' public house car park at 9am. sharp on 4<sup>th</sup> July to collect their official car park passes for the USAF Open Day celebrations. Finally one remaining 'specialist dealers'. "How much for 50 brand new US Army steel helmets"? I enquired politely. "To you JR the going rate to buy is four quid" Came the answer. "Make it a fiver and your'e on"? I replied. A slight pause at the other end followed by a chuckle. "OK you robbing bugger it's a deal". My last call was to a Dealer in retail Sports equipment. "I need some blue and white striped Rugby shirts about 50 how much"? I enquired. "I can let you have them at two quid apiece" He replied. "Shame I wanted green"? I lied "I tell you what, I'll give you thirty bob each for them". I answered. The voice at the other end answered. "OK done you old bugger I'll leave them with John at 'The Thorn' later tonight OK"? He laughed. Checking my little red book I muttered to myself " That's me just about done apart from arranging my day off and my transport".

A shower and change into civvies and something to eat then off to 'The Thorn' where John the Landlord handed me a brown paper parcel and in turn I handed him an envelope containing £75. "I suppose you know what's in the parcel"? He enquired sarcastically. "Of course I do unless you've nicked any"? I grinned. Grabbing the parcel and my trusty 'Pusser's Red' I rode back to the Dining Hall where I managed to sell them to the eager lads for two quid each. It seemed as if everyone at Blackcap was really entering into the spirit of this for the 4<sup>th</sup> July tomorrow and almost all the lads were going to dress as 18<sup>th</sup> century 'Seafarers' wearing white ducks and straw hats of every description painted black with a Blackcap cap tally or bandanas knotted on their heads.

The 'Great Day' had arrived, sunny and warm. There was no turning back now. I may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb I remember thinking. Well here we go. A quick shower and shave then breakfast followed by a glance at my little red book before grabbing my 'Pusser's Red' and duffle bag on the handlebars. No one gave me a second glance, then again, fortunately for me no one ever did. Flying quickly down to the 'Thorn Car Park' A quick look and aroma of cigar smoke told me that 'My Dealers' had all arrived. One brown envelope each with the Dealers name written on it was dropped into the duffle bag and an Official Car Park Sticker handed to the recipient. A final word to everyone that I would see them at the Base and I was off again back to my mess on Glorious Site on the North Camp. Already Blackcap was buzzing with guys dressed in all kinds of 'Comic Rig'. There were Matelots with false beards and sideburns. English gentlemen in tweeds and carrying walking canes or umbrellas. As my mess was deserted it allowed me the privacy to count out exactly 300 £20 notes which I carefully placed in two large envelopes one marked Sherm and the other Steve which I then placed into my Service Respirator case together with a bottle of 'Pussers Neaters' courtesy of the Senior Rates Mess bless em. The rest of the money I hid in my locker for the time being.

My transport for the day was the Landlord of the Thorn's car driven by his wife Joyce accompanied by his small daughter. He would be joining us later when his 'Relief Landlord' arrived. At the Main Gate of the USAF Base we were met by Sherm in his Jeep as usual and he indicated for us to follow him to his Supply Tent which I was delighted to see was conveniently positioned near a roped off area of the car park reserved for 'My Dealers'. Steve was guarding the tent and had arranged for my guests to be positioned so that the boot or 'trunk' of their cars almost touched the Supply Tent. Telling John's wife and daughter to go on ahead I lost no time. Luck was with us as the now quite large crowd was gathered around the back of a USAF truck where the Base Commanding Officer was talking into a microphone. Without any prompting Sherm and Steve had already zipped

open the rear of the tent and were handing out 150 lb 'body bags' like men possessed into the eager hands of 'My Dealers' who grabbed them with equal alacrity quickly stowing them into the boots of their cars which were immediately slammed shut and locked. Whispering "Now bugger off, all of you and don't leave the Base for at least a couple of hours. Everything is free so go and enjoy yourselves"? As if by magic all the Dealers seemed to vanish like a morning mist to merge with the crowd. Quickly zipping up the back of the tent I noticed that there was one remaining body bag. Thinking that one of 'My Dealers' had forgotten his bag I unzipped it to find it crammed with steel helmets, a bottle of Jack Daniels and a bottle of Jim Beam. The tent flap suddenly opened and I nearly had a fit which changed to immense relief as a rather dishevelled Sherm and Steve stepped inside. "I see you've found your present"? They both grinned. "That's just to say a big thanks and we couldn't have done it without you"? "I bloody well know you couldn't have" I grinned. Grabbing my respirator case I handed them both an envelope. "Check them both quickly and put them into your pockets"? I suggested. Both Sherm and Steve began to say "But there's no need to"? I cut them both short. "Check em you bugger's right now to see I have not done you"? I ordered sharply. Both tore at the envelopes eagerly and their eyes almost popped out of their heads when they saw the contents. They sat down at a nearby table and for the next few minutes all was quiet. Both Sherm and Steve beamed and held out their hands which I shook warmly. Placing the money into their jackets I pulled out the bottle of 'Neaters' which I had brought with me. "I think we all need this" I said as Sherm produced three glasses from a nearby filing cabinet.

Just then the tent flap was flung open and an irate Joyce peered inside. "Come on you load of skiving buggers everything is about to start."? Sensing something she glared at us "You buggers are up to something wouldn't you know"? She said. "Actually Joyce we were just having a sort of celebratory drink will you join us"? She smiled. "Well perhaps just a small one then"? Sherm produced another glass and bottle of Bourbon from the filing cabinet and liberally filled up her glass. "What shall we drink to"? She enquired. We all looked at each other before Steve answered "How about today"? He suggested. We all raised our glasses "Here's to today". Borrowing Joyce's car keys I quickly grabbed the remaining 'body bag' which I hastily slung into the boot of her car. Explaining that it was a present for one of her husband's friends. We all drained our glasses. "Come on you lot we will miss all the fun. As we went outside where the Colonel was still speaking. "Oi, wait for me you lot" Came the familiar voice of Joyce's husband John as he hurried to catch up. "You go on we will see you later"? I suggested as they walked off. The three of us strolled towards the crowd just in time to hear the Colonel publicly thanking Sherm and Steve for all they had done to organise the day which was followed by huge applause and I found myself saying under my breath "Amen to that Colonel old son".

I could not help but marvel at the efforts the 'Yanks' had made to ensure the event was a day to be remembered. They had absolutely pulled out all the stops. There was even a mock up of one of the 'War of Independence Battles' although I must confess it was difficult to say for certain which one. I am prepared to grant the organiser poetic licence as it looked suspiciously like the 'First Battle of Bull Run' during the 'American Civil War' featuring 'Confederate' soldiers. Who cared anyway it was simply a wonderful day and everyone seemed to be dressed up in something. My lads from Blackcap were very much in evidence in their striped Rugby shirts, white ducks and bandanas with a little 'Buffer's Party' black enamel paint liberally applied to straw hats for authenticity. There were 'Yanks' dressed in 18<sup>th</sup> century mock uniforms with ketchup stained bandages and a 'Fife and Drum Band'. "We borrowed them from Fort Bragg in the States where they have a whole passel of them

for occasions like this”? Explained Sherm. The Beer Tent was understandably packed as it was free beer, so were the Hot Dog and Hamburger tents. Ice Cream and Candy Floss for the kids who were having a great time. There was even a ‘Fire Eater’ who mercifully did not come too near us. Meanwhile Steve had rejoined us following a short absence with several bottles of Pepsi Cola. “Holy Shit Steve” Exploded Sherm can’t you do better than Pepsi. Steve merely winked at us. “Just wait till you taste em”? As it was a warm day I took a large swig only to discover they were filled with Bourbon.

As we wandered around there were displays of all kinds, fire engines and aircraft lined up for folk to explore. Jeep rides were popular as were those on the ‘Bomb Trolleys’. Then suddenly the unmistakable sound of Glen Miller music filled the air to rapturous applause followed by a general stampede towards one of the open hangars where the band had set up. Turning to Sherm and Steve I said “Do you know boys the best thing we ever did was to bring civilisation to you buggers over in the States”? We all burst out laughing as I managed to evade both their uniform caps. Another cheer resounded as I realised that Edna and her girls from the GPO Exchange had just arrived. A quick kiss of thanks and they were all quickly whisked away by a group of uniformed GI’s. We wandered on being introduced to various people before being confronted by a huge bonfire over 25 feet high which had been erected at one of the dispersal areas. Right at the very top were the two packing crates containing the surplus GI uniforms. Sherm nudged me and whispered “The Colonel is going to light it with a ‘very pistol’ at 2000” We all grinned. “Should be a really good burn” I muttered to no one in particular “Now maybe we can all relax a little”?

Time somehow had crept up on us as a tap on my shoulder from one of the Dealers reminded me that it was 7pm and the day had flown by. “We are going to be off now JR thanks for everything and if you need me anytime you know where I am”? “Thanks Alf, I think I’ve just had enough for one day”? Seeking out John and Joyce who were also leaving as he had to take over from his ‘Relief Landlord’ for the evening I scrounged a lift. “I think I fancy a nice quiet pint in the ‘Thorn’ I grinned. Carrying his small daughter who was fast asleep we made our way through the Main Gate, past the uniformed Sentry with the .45 on his hip who saluted smartly and I breathed a sigh of relief. Reaching the ‘Thorn’ and retrieving my ‘body bag’ from the boot of John’s car I carried it into the bar. He had already pulled a couple of pints which we gratefully gulped. Reaching into the bag I handed him a bottle of ‘Jim Beam’ his favourite tippie. Winking at him and tapping my nose I reminded him “If anyone asks, you know nothing”? John grinned innocently.” Who me, I know nothing about nothing”? As we both laughed. I looked out of the window to see a huge glow in the sky “It looks like they’ve lit the bonfire”? John observed. “I’m bloody glad about that” I muttered under my breath. It would be fair to say that we all made a pretty good profit on the day which was without doubt the best pay day I ever had. There was my share from the deal and the additional £250 for the helmets which were collected the very next day. I often wonder what became of Sherm and Steve, Hymie and Angie and a few of the other ‘Yanks’ who I was friendly with. I know that Edna became a ‘Singing Star’ in her own right and later married a ‘Pop Star’ of the day. I managed to buy my Uncle a car and send my folks on holiday from my share of the profits. Years later after leaving the Navy and joining the Police Service I was indeed fortunate enough to have other friendships with American Servicemen on their bases in East Anglia. I really miss ‘ Dear Old Blackcap’ she had been an absolute Godsend and life without her would never be quite the same again. Then again there was always HMS Victorious to come where I could perhaps find another small niche. You bet your dammed life I would.

