

STORY NUMBER 4 - LUCK WAS WITH ME - FORT SILL, OKLAHOMA
As told by William J. (Bill) Kuhrt, 1990

This is the fourth of a series of episodes that occurred to me during my life. This particular one happened in the battery commander's school at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. I was taking the course to improve my service as an artillery officer. We were about half way through the course, and if I do say so it was about the toughest course that I ever took in my life. They had tried to jam what they taught at West Point in two years into a ten-week course to help out in getting more artillery officers who could handle the guns properly.

So it was on a Saturday afternoon and I was just sitting there. I'd had a pretty bad week. My record was in very good shape until on a Wednesday morning I woke up sick with a sort of a dysentery. And I was sick on Wednesday and on Thursday during the class work so I couldn't take any of it.

That particular week the class was studying what was known as lateral observation, which was one of the most difficult things that you get into in field artillery. And it was tough enough as it was, but to miss out on two days was even worse.

I got back to classes on Friday and after the class I talked to the instructor, told him that I'd been sick for two days, and he said, "Well, were you in the infirmary?" "No," I replied. "Well, we can't do anything for you then as far as your record is concerned. You'll just have to do the best that you can."

So on Saturday morning when we always had the examinations on all of the subjects that we'd been studying, I came up on lateral observation and I could only answer two questions and a part of a third out of ten questions. The rest of it was all out of my line, I didn't know what they were talking about. So I knew I wouldn't get anywhere near a passing grade on that one. But I did reasonably well with the other subjects that we had.

Anyway, it was Saturday afternoon and I was just sitting there wondering what in the world I could do to avoid the effect of my having such a low mark on that particular course. We were supposed to maintain an average of 75 or it would reflect on our general record.

I was just sitting there and somebody came to the door of the barracks and said, "I need one more for Oklahoma City." By golly, I thought, I have nothing to lose, I can't do anything here so maybe I'd better go. I said, "How much you want?" He told me a hundred dollars and said we could start right now. "All right, I'll throw something into a bag and be right with you."

So I got into the car. It was an old Hudson, I don't know how many years old it was, but it was still running, and I found that in the back seat were three cavalry officers who were pretty well liquored up before they even got to Oklahoma City. So we started out and made about 30 miles an hour, something like that.

We got into Oklahoma City about five o'clock. I registered at the hotel there and had a good bath, which you couldn't get at the fort. A good bath and a good evening dinner, and a good sleep.

And in the morning I took a walk around Oklahoma City and just sort of waited around until it was time to go back. I was still very, very much concerned as to what would happen with regard to my marks for the previous week.

Anyway, at five o'clock the car came around and the three cavalry officers were still in the back seat and they were really, really liquored up. So they weren't able to help us or do anything, and we started out rather promptly at about five o'clock to go back to Fort Sill. The driver said he'd get us in there well before midnight so we'd get some sleep and be ready for reveille the next morning.

Well, we headed down the pike towards Fort Sill, and got about 30 or 40 miles below Oklahoma City when suddenly the right front wheel rolled off the car and went on down in front of us. Of course we skidded and stopped. I went down and picked up the wheel and brought it back. Fortunately the lug nuts were still available. I forgot where they were but at least we didn't lose any of them. We put the wheel back onto the spindle and tightened it up best we could, but I could see right then that the threads on the bolts were pretty well worn.

So anyway, we started out and drove another few miles and the wheel came off again. This time I knew we'd have to do something, so I cleaned off the bolts as best I could and then I got some mud out of a ditch. There was some red mud in the ditch there, and I smeared that mud all around on the spindle, where the wheel went over, and then I took a handkerchief and tore it into strips and mixed a little bit of grease with that red mud, and then I wrapped that piece of handkerchief around it.

My theory was that if I could get something that would slow down the slipping on that wheel we might be able to get back to camp. So I got them all done and we slipped the wheel back on over the bolts and then I took the lug nuts and finally, finally got all of them started. And believe it or not they went on pretty good. And as they trued up a little tighter they kept getting more and more solid, and finally we had to use the lug wrench to tighten them up, which was a good sign.

So we got them all tight and then put the cover on and we started up again. And by golly, the wheel stayed on. I don't know exactly why, but anyway it gave us some security as we went on.

One thing we had overlooked was that about half way down, about 50 miles down toward camp we had to cross what was known as the Canadian River, or the Red River of the south. And it really was red. Fortunately the ferry was on our side, so we were able to run the car onto the ferry, and then we had to figure some way to get it across the other way. I never had steered a ferry boat before, but anyway, the driver took the loops off the four posts that held the ferry from moving, and then I took the boom, that big long wooden boom on the back end, and we started off. I learned very quickly that in order not to go downstream I had to steer the ferry somewhat upstream. And finally we made it across within possibly a foot of the right landing. So we got over there and threw the loops over the posts, drove the car off, and went on.

When we got into Fort Sill it was about four o'clock in the morning. And my hands were dirty as all get out. In fact my clothes were dirty but I couldn't do much about that.

Anyway, I was in time for reveille and had a good shower, but no sleep of course. I stood reveille and then had breakfast before we went back to classes again.

When we came to the class on gunnery and lateral observation, the instructor stood there with a bunch of papers in his hands. "Well, we didn't do very well on lateral observation last week. The highest mark in the class was 54 and the average was only 24." And by golly, I looked at my paper and it was 27. So I thought I had come out pretty good. He said, "Well, we're going to have to do better, so beginning tonight at seven o'clock we're going to have a rerun on lateral observation for all this next week, and you'd better have a good mark so that we can substitute your new mark for the old one."

And that's what we did. By golly, the next Saturday when we had the examination on gunnery and on lateral observation I got a 93 on my paper, so I didn't get marked off and I didn't have any trouble.

So that's the end of that story. Quid erat zu erzhalen. That which was to be told. Thank you.