

STORY NUMBER 3 - MOCKINGBIRD VALLEY, THE WEINER ROAST
- LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY
As told by William J. (Bill) Kuhrt, 1990

This is the third of a series of episodes that occurred to me during my lifetime that various people have asked me to record. This particular episode took place at Camp Zachary Taylor just outside of Louisville, Kentucky during World War I. It was about the middle of July and I was taking this course in preparation to be commissioned as an officer in field artillery. It was a very, very hot, humid climate and I was just sitting on my bunk and wondering what I could do to keep cool. Most of the gang had gone into Louisville and other places to the hotels where things were much cooler.

While I was sitting there another candidate officer came up to me and he said, "It's hot, isn't it," and I said, "It sure is," and he said, "How would you like to go on a wiener roast tonight with a church group out of Louisville?" I said, "Where?" And he said, "Well they have a place called Mockingbird Glen or Mockingbird Valley. It's just about a half hour by street car out into the country and they tell me it's lots cooler out there." I said, "Well I'm sorry but I can't go because I don't have a pass." He said, "Oh, don't worry about that, we'll take the street car out there at eight o'clock and then we'll come back at eleven o'clock so we'll have plenty of time to take the twelve o'clock red car back to the camp." Well, it sounded all right but I said, "Are you sure about the timing?" He said, "Oh, yes, I talked with the minister about it right after church this morning and he said he had it all set so there'd be no problem." And it sounded all right, but of course we were very concerned about being A.W.O.L. because in the early part of our enlistment there they had stressed the fact that being A.W.O.L. was a very serious thing and they were going to take off at least ten points on our service record if we were late getting in. So I naturally was a little nervous about taking any chances.

Anyway, it sounded all right so he and I went in about seven o'clock, and we met this young group of about twenty or twenty-five boys and girls, very nice, and we got ready to take the street car at eight o'clock.

Well, just a little while before eight o'clock the minister came out and said, "There's no hurry, I can't go for another half hour so you might as well just continue your visiting until I can get loose." Well, there went a half hour of our time, but anyway, the street car came at eight thirty and we got out there about nine o'clock.

Then the minister insisted on a little devotional service before we started anything. That took another half hour. And after that was over nobody seemed to make any moves, neither the boys or the girls made any move, so my friend and I got busy and we built a fire in the fireplace.

I should have told you a little about the glen. It was just a pavilion with an overhead that was kept up by the city of Louisville, and then it had tables and chairs, and a fireplace to build a fire, and of course the two d.j.'s that they had to have. There also was a water faucet there so we could get plenty of cold water.

Anyway, he and I built a fire in the fireplace and got some nice coals going, and then some of the girls got busy and took the wieners out and the buns and some cold drinks, I don't know what they were anymore, but in due course we had the wiener roast and we were sitting around the tables just talking.

After we finished the wiener roast my friend and I got busy and cleaned up everything and got it up on the platform where it could be loaded onto the street car when it got there. We expected the street car at eleven o'clock. That would get us back into Louisville in plenty of time to catch the red car to the camp.

While we were doing that the minister came over and said, "There's no hurry boys, I ordered the street car to come out at eleven thirty instead of eleven o'clock." Well, that just really knocked the whole thing because we would have only about five minutes to transfer from the street car station to the red car station which was about two blocks. And so if we were the least bit late we'd never make it.

I said to the minister, "You know what you just done? You just made two of us A.W.O.L. out of the camp." And he kind of chuckled and said, "Tell the general that you went on a wiener roast." And I said, "Oh, my friend, you don't know Army regulations very well or you wouldn't say that because it's a serious offense to be late."

Anyway, the street car came at eleven thirty and we got back into Louisville just about twelve o'clock, maybe five minutes before, and my friend and I made a dash for the other depot where the red cars would start from.

And we got there just in time to see the last red car pull out for the camp. So there we were, bound to be late and bound to be A.W.O.L. at the camp. And we went back in. There was nothing we could do. We went back into the station and got our tickets for the one o'clock. That was the next red car that would be going out to the camp.

While we were sitting there talking some cooks came in, men who were doing the cooking, and it turned out to be the cooks in our own barracks. They had their sleeping quarters on the first floor of these barracks, and of course we (that is the candidate officers) had our bunks on the second floor.

And as we were talking one of the cooks came over and said, "Do I understand that one of you doesn't have a pass?" I said, "Yes, that's me, I don't have a pass the way things worked out." And he said, "Well, maybe we can help a little bit." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a pad of slips that he could fill out and he filled out the pass for me and handed it to me. He said, "Well, that will probably get you by the guard anyway. And then after that you're on your own."

Well, that helped a little bit so we didn't worry quite so much on the way out to the camp after we had taken the one o'clock. We got out to the camp about 1:35 a.m. or 1:40 a.m., something like that, and we made our way to our own barracks.

Well, we watched the guard, and when he left our side of the walkway, when he got pretty well toward the other side of the building we stepped in and my friend and I were going to go up the stairs. But we didn't make it. The guard must have felt the vibration and he turned around quick and said, "Halt! Show your passes." So we had to turn around and line up and show the passes.

Well, the cooks with their white passes went ahead and they passed all right. And then my friend it turned out had a pass all the time but his pass was pink as it should be for candidate officers, and he passed all right. And then I came along with a cook's pass which again was white, but the guard passed me no question about it and he went on about his business moving to the other side of the building. So we very gingerly went up the stairs and I had gotten up to the top and just was entering the dormitory when I heard the guard yell upstairs, "Hold on there fellow, you gave me a white pass, yet you're one of the candidate officers and you have to have a pink pass. Come back down here, you don't have the right pass."

Well, I knew there was no answer to that so I just made a quick dive for my bunk which was number seven on the right hand side. There were about 50 bunks there in that dormitory. And I jumped into bed, covered up everything I could, and just feigned sleep. I knew he would be following as quick as he could get a big flashlight.

So that's what he did, and he came in with a flashlight and was going to shine it in the faces of every one of us that were sleeping in this dormitory. Well, he got right up to me and he shone the light a little longer on me but he went on and he didn't say anything, and when he got to number eight or nine some of the boys started to wake up. They said, "What the hell are you doing with that flashlight up here? This is a dormitory, we're supposed to be sleeping here." And somebody else said, "Take that darn thing out of here and go on down about your business. "

Well, the guard kind of spluttered and he finally gave it up. He finally went down stairs. But it was a pretty close call for me, and I can tell you I didn't want to hear anymore about Mockingbird Valley or Mockingbird Glen or wiener roasts or any of that sort of thing for a long time because it was too close a call, really.