

Only in the Backwoods of Ontario

The following story was told to me by one of my old School Days chum from Timmins, by the name of Bruce Stock. I think he was a year ahead of me in school; was quite an intellect; did well at the Timmins High School (I went to South Porcupine High School); and then eventually graduated from University with a Bachelor of Arts degree. He went into the Military with a Commission and joined the PPCLI. He had some interesting postings, some of which paralleled my own career, in some respects.

He was in Germany in the early to mid 1960's at the same time that I was stationed overseas in London, England; Metz, France, and Sardinia, Italy. My overseas adventure spanned a five-year period, while Bruce's tour of duty was shorter. In later years Bruce served in Bosnia, while my Career Manager had me checking out cities in Egypt, Israel and Syria in the late 70's with UNEF II.

Bruce tells stories of his visit into the grounds of Buckingham Palace, and I tell of the invitation that my wife and I received to attend the Trooping of the Colours, and later, to the Changing of the Guard at the same location, so it's been rather fun to compare notes and bragging rights over the years. But I must say, Bruce has definitely topped me, with a two year assignment he received to be one of the Aides de Camp for Governor General Georges Vanier, Canada's Commander-in-Chief at the end of October, 1964. He described the intangible rewards and memories of that posting in one word.... PRICELESS!

As you may be aware, stories coming out of the hallowed halls of Rideau Hall, have, over the years, remained confidential (for the most part); however sooner or later, some of those same stories seem to take roost somewhere and are passed along 'incognito' or without anyone's signature attached at all.

This story took place back almost three-quarters of a century ago, at midnight in the Town of Chapleau, Ontario, managed by a Town Hall staff that may never have been blessed with the sharpest of minds, but they were friendly back then, and apparently still are!

In 1939, Canada hosted a remarkable Royal Tour planned at Rideau Hall months in advance for King George VI and Queen Elizabeth who travelled across Canada by train. By all accounts, it

was a smashing success, with the Royal Train stopping in dozens of communities en route enabling hundreds of thousands of Canadians to provide a roaring, flag-waving, cheerful greeting, as they welcomed their King and Queen to their respective home towns. The schedule included a stop at the small, Northern Ontario town of Chapleau, albeit at midnight, to allow the steam locomotive to take on water and coal for the onward trip.

During the pre-tour planning, stopping at Chapleau at that late hour seemed a routine procedure, but it didn't take long before the royal tour planners found themselves embroiled in a debate. The big question? When the train stops, do we, or do we not invite the Mayor of Chapleau and his wife aboard the Pullman car to meet Their Majesties at the ungodly hour of midnight? Or, do we just carry on and sneak through town, because Their Majesties need their sleep and, for goodness sake, it is just too uncivilized an hour to be sociable!

The two camps quickly dug in, neither side willing to budge an inch in favour of the other's viewpoint. In fact, it seemed likely they were heading toward some sort of 'battle royale' in order to render a decision, when it was suddenly remembered that yes, this was a Royal Tour – perhaps the King would have an opinion, as after all, he may be asking the Queen to stay up late too!

Well, wouldn't you know it, His Majesty responded to Rideau Hall suggesting that if he were the Mayor of a small town, and woke up one morning to find that his Monarch had stopped, however briefly, in his town the night before, and had not had the courtesy to say hello, he would have every right to be mightily offended. As a consequence, a beautiful, ornate, scrolled invitation, with gold lettering and the Royal Coat of Arms, was soon dispatched to the Mayor of Chapleau, and his wife.

On the appointed date, and precisely on time, the mighty steam-engine locomotive, thundering in all its puffing magnificence, arrived at midnight in Chapleau, where His Worship and his wife waited dutifully on the platform. They were quickly invited aboard the Pullman, with its magnificent Art Deco interior, where they were presented to Their Majesties. Refreshments were offered and a most cordial and happy evening was under way. Understandably so, for how often does one get to meet a King and Queen at midnight, in your own back yard, so to speak?

During the conversation, His Majesty made an observation. "Your Worship", he began, "I see you are not wearing your chain of office this evening?" Completely taken aback, and looking down at his empty front, the Mayor tried desperately to explain the oversight, in what he hoped

would be a suitable manner. “Oh yes, Your Majesty That’s right It’s back in the Office.” Then, gaining confidence that he was on the right track he continued, “You see, Sir, I only wear it on important occasions!”

..... only in the back woods of Canada, could these words be ever repeated!