



Joseph Capossela Story

Part Eight of Ten

Another Side of War

by Joseph T. Capossela

From the World War II years some vignettes of life have stayed in my mind. Here are a few accounts of what was etched in a young man's memory.

On the way overseas, our 4-engine Liberator stopped in Marrakech, Morocco, for maintenance. On a trip into town I met a Free French refugee. He said he had left France due to the German invasion. He had lost everything.

I offered him a cigarette. He held it in his hand. When I offered to light it he said he was saving it to take home to his wife. It had been so very long since she had an American cigarette. I gave him the rest of the pack and said, "Take this home to your wife." Tears welled in his eyes. He fondled the cigarettes, then said, "Merci, Merci."

Usually GIs would bring candy, chewing gum or other goodies along with them wherever they went during the war. They were hard to get in England, however the Yanks had them.

In London on a three-day pass we struck up a conversation with some young ladies in a restaurant. I had brought along an orange. When I mentioned that to the group they wanted to see it.

When I displayed it they oohed and aahed. I then offered it to one of the young ladies. She clutched it and said she would bring it home. Why? I asked. She said she was going to give it to her niece who was ten years old. It seems the youngster had heard of an orange - but had never seen one.

On another occasion on holiday to Edinburgh, I and two buddies befriended a Scottish family. They invited us to their apartment. En route I purchased a pint of Scotch. I presented it to the head of the household who placed it on the center of the table. He, his wife and several female members of the family just stared at it.

Drink it, everyone, I said.

But they hesitated. The Scotch are a hard and proud people. They would never accept a gift without offering something in return. It was then that I saw the mother of the family come back to the kitchen with her most prized possession. It was a White Owl cigar in a cellophane wrapper.

Now a White Owl cigar in those years was worth about five cents, or three pence English. About at the bottom of the scale in tobacco worth. The cigar was hard, brittle, and very old. The cellophane was crisp and crackled. But it was a treasure in the eyes of this soul. She insisted I smoke it and then they would have a drink.

Realizing the protocol of the situation, I care-fully removed the wrapper, bit the end off the stogie and lighted it. The smoke nearly gagged me into unconsciousness. But I persevered. As the family drank the Scotch and smiled, I smiled back and puffed on the cigar.

If there ever was an Academy Award for showing how to enjoy smoking, I won it that night in Edinburgh, Scotland.

In London on another pass I had lunch in a Piccadilly restaurant. My eyes popped when I saw steak on the menu. Meals were sparse in England during the war and such a delicacy as steak was unusual.

After the meal I complimented the owner on the fine steak dinner. His reply pulled me up short. "It should be," he said, "it's the finest horse meat available in London, just got it fresh this morning."

That bit of repartee reminded me of the story I heard once about General Stillwell, Allied Commander in China during World War II. The general was asked if the mules weren't a great weapon on the road to victory. "They sure were," the general said. And added: "They tasted good too."



T/Sgt Joseph Capossela (left) and T/Sgt Duane C Heath at North Pickenham, England, August 1944.

Story Continues in Part Nine: [Wisconsin State Journal](#)

Source:

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