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EDD TIDWELL AND MUTT TIDWELL:
DECEMBER 20, 1927 – DECEMBER 14, 1925:
CHAPTER 21

“I’ve been caught makin’ moonshine 57 times,” Elbert (Ebb) Tidwell said during an interview which included his brother Gerstel (Mutt) Tidwell and Luke Denny. The interview took place in the rough terrain of Turkeytown Ridge in Clay County, also located near Jackson and Overton Counties in Tennessee, January 14, 1988.

“And, I’ve spent nearly 14 years behind federal bars; all for makin’ moonshine,” Ebb Tidwell said from the front room of his Turkeytown trailer. Ebb, who has a hearing problem, said “I’ve been sent to the federal pens at Lexington (KY), Indiana two times; Marion, Illinois; Florida; and Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama. I really don’t count the times I’ve spent in the local lockups. The last time the law caught me was last November (1987) and the television people from Nashville came up here and put me on the evenin’ news. Folks around here laughed when they saw me puttin’ the ax to my own still.

“Me and my brother Mutt, have been brewin’ moon’ for a big bunch of years. I guess you could say it’s in our blood and we don’t want to get it out, plus we like to drink that home brew, too,” the unshaven Ebb said, while laughing.

His brother Mutt added, “Oh, we’ve been humpin’ sugar around these old hollers for a long time. We’ve had moonshine stills just about every place we could find water and hid. When the law came up here in November we had the new still just about ready to cook some off.”

Luke Denny questioned, “I remember way back yonder you got caught a time or two, didn’t you Mutt?”

“Yep Luke, the sheriff and old Silas (Anderson, the revenue agent from Cookeville, TN) brought me down from these here hills five times. Luke, do you ‘member what I use’ta tell you ever time you come to get a load?.” Without waiting for

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the moonshine runner to answer the slender 63-year-old woodsman revealed. “You’re goin’ to ruin your suit Luke, let me load your whiskey for ya.”

Ebb added, “We always loaded the whiskey for our customers and we treated them right, too. One time I sold 600 gallons on credit and got paid ever cent of it. I remember comin’ to Luke’s place different times and told him when we would have the moonshine ready for him to haul.

“We fed the mash to our hogs and the hogs like it. One time Luke come to pick up a load and he was walking in the mash. I yelled, ‘Luke, you’re goin’ to ruin your shoes if ya don’t get out of the hogs mash.’ Luke looked down and saw what he was standin’ in. Boy, he jumped up and cleaned them off in a hurry while me and Mutt stacked the whiskey in his blue car.”

Luke said, “I recall yelling back at you, ‘What the hell are you doing pouring out all this mash, here?’”

Ebb answered, “It wasn’t exactly right, so I threw it out. Me and Mutt always make good liquor and I don’t want to sell it. Do you want to go down and look at the last still the sheriff caught us with?”

Luke and this writer nodded yeas and within ten minutes the foursome were standing on the side of a hill, just off a path behind the Tidwell’s trailer looking at the remnants of a still.

“We had just about finished this still and, in fact, hadn’t run one single batch through her when John Law came snoopin’ his nose ‘round and nabbed us,” Ebb Tidwell, 61, the shorter of the bachelor brothers, said.

“When I saw you on TV,” Denny returned to the interview, “I thought you might have been caught down at your old barn.”

“Oh Lord, do you remember the days down at our ‘Gasahol’ barn, Luke?” Mutt asked, as he pointed his walking stick toward the southeast and lifted his green baseball Co-op Feeds cap with his right hand.

“Sure,” Denny said as he too pointed his cane in the same direction. “Before we leave let’s go down and take a look at it.”

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Without hesitation the two brothers headed for the Tidwell’s four door, worn out Chevy and beckoned our presence. On the way to the barn Ebb turned into a block building and said, “Hold on for a second I’ll be right back.” In a couple of minutes he returned with a pint of liquor. “boys, I’m sorry but this cheap government, rot gut whiskey is all I can offer ya.”

The three old friends turned up the pint and downed large gulps on the way to the gasohol barn. Mutt said, “This shore don’t taste like that good old moonshine we used to make, but shucks, we don’t have any of the good stuff...since the law busted us in November.”

Ebb’s old car came to a sliding halt in front of another trailer with old junk cars and large outdated home appliances surrounding the area. On the side of the trailer, about 40 feet,

a dozen pit bulls began barking, loudly. “Don’t go near them dogs. My son raises them,” Ebb announced, then advised. “They’ll tear ya arm off, if they get a hold of ya.”

However, he and Mutt led the way as if the dogs were not on the earth...totally without fear. Ebb pulled the door open and sure enough, there was a sign painted in red on the backside of the door. It read, “**Gasahol Private Keep Out**”. The first stall to the left contained a large and muscled, brown pit bull carrying a cement brick in his jaws like a feather. Ebb said, “See that big building block next to the dog? That dog will be ready when it can carry the block around in his jaws.”

Slowly Luke and this writer followed the brothers to the back of the wooden barn. Mutt added, “Don’t mess around with that dog, she just had pups and if she thinks you are hurtin’ one we might not be able to get her off you...and us, too. Mutt, and Ebb pointed out where the old still was located. Then showed us tow large wooden barrels.

“You might not believe this, but some years back I had a license to make gasohol,” explained the younger brother. “Then the law caught me making moonshine in the early 80s and shut me down. I knew it was just a matter of time before they caught me, because this barn was too close to the main gravel road.”

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On the way back to the brother’s trailer Mutt and Ebb said, back and forth, “We get along with all the people around these ridges and hollers. Some people don’t like it that we’ve made liquor all our lives, but we don’t cheat anybody. There is no place like these hills, no place.”

As we departed Ebb Tidwell shut the door on my Chevrolet Blazer and, while waving said, “Watch for my trial. It should be comin’ up soon, from down at the Celina Courthouse. I’ll save ya a seat if you’ll come and see if the judge sends me back to the pen. And, don’t forget to bring me and Mutt a few of them pictures.”