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GLENOUS ("B") BALLARD: MARCH 17, 1924:
CHAPTER 25

"Two days before the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor I started makin' moonshine whiskey," Glenous ('B') Ballard, 65, said while looking at a spider web covered seven gallon whiskey still at his home in Seven Knobs Community, south of Gainesboro, Jackson County, Tennessee, March 19, 1988.

"Thirty years later I stopped drinkin' the 'Devils White Juice', but I didn't stop makin' it until 1972," "B" Ballard said to his long time friend Luke Denny and this author, from his side porch. "This feller right here (Luke) was one of my big haulers, too. I really couldn't guess and say how many thousands of gallons of whiskey Luke bought from me."

Denny said, "Off the top of my head I'd say at least 10,000 gallons. At least that amount."

"That's a low guess, Luke. Think of all the moonshine you bought from Hoot (Huston Mansell), my father-in-Law? Back in '39, when I was sixteen I hauled whiskey, but for some unknown reason makin' moonshine was what I liked most. Probably because I knew that aspect of the business more than haulin'," Ballard added.

"In the early war years, about 1942, we brewed moonshine in the Engine Gentry Hollar and Blackburns Fork, here in Jackson County. Some around here call in Blackman's Fork. Back then we had both steam rigs (stills) going at the same time. One boiled 50 gallons while the other pumped out 30 gallons. Silas Anderson and Paul Knowles were the two federal agents who stayed after us all the time. Both were good lawmen and I'm sure you will hear that statement from the old Jackson County moonshiners as you interview them. Sure they were after us and we tried our level best to hide from them and not get caught, but when they nabbed us they treated us like human beings.

"They never actually caught me at one of the stills. I mean, actually said, 'Hands up - - you are caught, put the cuffs on me and took me to jail," the moonshiner made it clear before

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continuing "Silas and Paul 'swore' at me twice and Charles Carter (Tennessee revenue officer, Cookeville office) once, but they were never able to run me down and get me at the still. Don't get me wrong, it didn't matter if Sicy reached out and put his hand on your shoulder or 'swore' (yelled) as you ran away from the still. That was what both the lawmen and the moonshiners called 'swearin' at you or 'being swore at.' It stood up in court.

“The first time the Feds (Paul and Silas) raided Hoot and me is kinda funny. It was about two in the afternoon and we were workin’ hard at the still. One of my partner’s had fallen and sprang his ankle. So, he started fishin’ down by the creek while the ankle healed. Sicy parked his car and came down the hillside by the ridge. Our hurt friend saw him and three other agents and came a runnin’ up the other hill toward us. I can see the scared expression on his face as he hurriedly spouted, ‘Get out of the hollar, the law is comin.’

“I took off toward my father-in-law’s still to warn him. When I thought the law would get to him before I did I stopped for a moment and gave out a keen, loud whistle. Just as the sound of my whistle echoed off the rocks and through the trees I spotted an agent comin’ right at me. At that time I took off to try and get away and you will never believe what happened a few hundred yards away.”

“Don’t stop now,” Luke said from the edge of his chair in the Ballard’s dining room, “what happened?”

“My feet couldn’t carry me any faster. I mean I was flyin’ through those hill paths and ran smack into Sicy, sitting on a stump, with his old hat on. Before I could come to a complete stop his barrel was starin’ me right in the face. Have you ever looked straight down the barrel of a lawman’s pistol, Luke? That thing looked long as a shotgun. I turned and ran, and ran and ran. Sicy ‘swore’ loudly at me and said, ‘Come on down to jail ‘B’. I was scared to death. Then I lost my balance and fell down a steep grade and into a little pond. I started back up, but I was give out. The leaves told me they were closing in on me, but I couldn’t see them. I saw this large hollow Chestnut log filled with leaves so I crawled in and began boring a hole through them. Then, I packed the leaves in behind me as fast

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as I could to block the entrance so the law couldn’t see me. They came around the log. I could hear them talking so clearly. One kicked the Chestnut and another pulled some of the leaves away from the end, but thank goodness he didn’t continue. About 5 p.m., three hours later, I slowly dug my way out from the hollow log and made it to the house.

“My wife was at my mother’s home and the first thing she said was, ‘Silas said he never wants you to ever go near that whiskey again and for you to come down to the jail and make bond.’ The raid was broken. Hoot got 18 days and I pulled 30 days in the Putnam County Jail and Judge Gore, I believe it was Judge Gore, gave me 30 days for lying and four years probation (probation), I really and truly didn’t lie. But, in all fairness I should have spent many more than 30 days in the klink.”

“When was the second time you got caught?” Denny questioned his friend.

The red haired, slender former moonshiner answered, “It was probably around 1953, when I was about 19-years-old. We had been using Jim, our ol’ mule to tote the sugar

bags down the hollar to the still at Henry Spring, here in Jackson County. Jim carried some moonshine out at times, too. He also drug wood to the still. In the winter we used a sled to bring in the sugar and wood. Anyway, I had just finished unloadin' the 100 pound bags of sugar from the back of our mule and sat down on a log. As I wiped the sweat from my forehead, I looked up to the top of the rim and saw something stickin' out from the tree. It had to be the brim of Silas Anderson's hat. I remember, like it just happened, what I said to the others 'Mushrooms don't move like that. It's Sicy.' That broke the raid.

"The three of us ran in different directions and Silas yelled, 'Stop 'B'! Stop 'B'! I'm going ta shoot ya! I'm not for sure if he fired or not, since so much commotion was goin' on. Plus," the strong-handed former moonshiner smiled and continued, "we all knew Sicy wouldn't shoot us. He would scare us and then send us to prison, but he would never try to kill us for moonshinin.' Some of the lawmen were runnin' around the hills, too. I knew they had me, but I kept runnin.' I finally saw

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my two buddies getting' away, but Paul Knowles was the closest to me. I simply stopped and surrendered to him on the top of the ridge. A long way from the still, down in the hollar.

"Silas went all the way to the still and got on our ol' mule and started toward the creek when it threw him off. It's a wonder Sicy didn't get hurt, but it sure made him mad. Silas got up and continued after the other two toward the creek. One thing about Sicy, he never liked to come up empty handed. About an hour later the revenuer came ridin' back to the still in a log truck. Paul told me to 'Go on home and come in tomorrow and make bond.' As I was walkin' away Silas pushed the still over the top of a falls, near a steep bluff and said to me, 'By God I'll never try to ride that darn mule, again.' We had a good laugh about it. I know Sicy was sore after that fall."

"How much time did you pull, the second time you got caught?" Denny muttered.

"I spent a few days in the Putnam County Jail in Cookeville and then built 60 days in the federal penitentiary in Montgomery, Alabama. The judge also gave me two years probation (probation)," 'B' Ballard returned.

Denny grinned, removed his brown hat and said, "I came rollin' around the road to pick up a load that very same evenin', 'bout half looped, too. I was always talkin' loud. 'B' was tryin' to get me to shut up. I didn't know what he was tryin' to tell me. He finally held his index finger up crossed his lips and said, 'Shhh. We just got raided a few minutes ago and the Feds might still be around the barn. They cut up our still and pushed it over a bluff. We don't have any liquor, now.' 'B' was mad, too, about this time.

"In a few days, maybe a week or so, I returned to his daddy-in-law's. I had contracted for 150 gallons, but I couldn't haul that much whiskey in one trip. So I took 75 gallons

the first trip and came back for the remainder of the load. I took both loads below (west) Lebanon in my black '53 Ford pickup, with hay bales on top of the white lightning. At that time I didn't have my crate rigged up.

"When was the third time the Feds got you?" Denny asked.

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"Well, my family moved to Cookeville, from Jackson County. I believe we moved on New Year's day 1960," Ballard said while looking toward his wife who was sitting on the couch in the living room. "Isn't that right, hon?"

"Yes, I think it was January the first 1960," she answered.

'B' Ballard quipped, "We had five kids and it was hard enough to make ends meet selling insurance, so about 1962, a feller asked if I could come up with some whiskey. He said he would pay \$36 a case and I knew the goin' price for a case in Seven Knobs was only \$18. So I drove down to Jackson County, there on Freewill Ridge, and told my daddy-in-law, 'I need two cases of whiskey.' Hoot said somethin' like, 'The boys are makin' on top of the hill. Go on and get a couple of cases.' It was about 2:30 by then. I walked out to the point and got another relative to help me load it from the barn. On the way back I heard a voice say, 'Put the whiskey down!' It was Charles Carter.

"We walked to my black '51 Chevy coupe and Carter said, 'Who's that kid?' I had forgotten all about my daughter Debbie waitin' in the car. She was about ten at the time.

"The revenuer told me he was takin' me down the hollar, to round up the others. Mr. Carter said, 'Paul you go around and 'B' and I will go down the path.'

"We 'til Paul got out of sight. Carter looked at me and said, 'Get behind me.' We got real close to the boys at the still. I was wavin' my hands - - behind Carter's back - - 'til one of the lads finally saw me montionin' and broke for the wind. Mr. Carter got mad at Paul because he hadn't reached the other side and they all got away. The revenue officer never knew it was my wavin' that helped them get away, not Paul's slowness.'

"The Feds took my car and stored it in the Ford garage in Cookeville,' Ballard said. "They had to have at least one bidder and the Ford man, Mr. Earl McCauley I believe was his name, said 89 dollars. I bid ninety dollars and got it back from the sale. The judge gave me four years probation (probation) and my probation officer was Charlie Norman. He was the best man I've ever seen. He was a good feller and nice to ya. Now for the puzzlin' part. In 1966 I had finished with my four years

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probition - - my tenth year of probation - - when this letter came sayin' I had four more years of probation to pull. I have never understood why the court did that. I don't think

it was legal, but they done it anyway. In 1970 I had finished 14 years on probation for foolin' with moonshine. Then, a couple of years later I totally quit messin' around with it."

Denny chimed in with, "What do you remember most about me?"

"Probably your eating habits. Every time you had a spare second you wanted somethin' to eat. Your quick special was a helpin' of corn bread, beans and onions," Ballard laughed and so did his wife and Luke.

"Do you remember that colored bootleggin' lady I used to unload to in Carthage? She paid in coins and I had to count every darn cent - - from pennies to nickels," Denny noted with a frown.

"Lord yes," his friend returned, "Let me tell you about that same lady. I moved in on your territory a few times when I was a little short on cash, Luke. I had my '50 Ford and had a sleeve-like container tied on the side. It was a 12-foot roll of linoleum, with 12 fruit jars of moonshine neatly stored inside. The bootlegger's son came out with a scared look on his face saying, 'We don't want none of your blankets.' See I always had blankets with me and other novelties. I laid a blanket on the ground. The lad gave me a death-type stare and very slowly said, 'Mom's getting' raided, at this very minute.' I picked up that blanket and said somethin' like, 'Let me know if you need any blankets.' I didn't look back, but got the heck out of Dodge."

Both men shook their heads. Luke mumbled something like, "You nearly made it a fourth time with the law, 'B'. Do you remember what was the biggest still you ever cooked on and how much moonshine it would brew?"

"In the early '70s, when I was just about finished with makin' whiskey, we had a 500 gallon pot" Ballard revealed. "It would make 100 gallons in just five hours if we had enough hands at the mill (still). We were sellin' it for ten dollars a gallon back then. To fool the Feds we rigged up a 1,000 gallon water tank in the barn loft. There was false bottom under the mule's stable in the barn for storage, too. The mash was

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pumped through into a sink hole. The revenuers knew we were makin' it and loadin' it from the barn, but they couldn't find it. Finally, one of the agents, walked around the barn and waded in mash. That's how they found the whiskey. I don't believe they discovered the hidden storage room under the mule's stall, but they locked up a relative. I quit. But, I don't regret for - - a minute - - makin' whiskey. One thing about makin' liquor that I didn't like, was when people got drunk and beat their kids. That upset me.

"Boy I can see old Luke here rollin' around - - always in a hurry - - in that furniture pickup truck. Not only did we have to load 96 gallons, but most of the time he wanted us

to tie his rope at least twice around the Frigidaire refrigerator crate,” Ballard said with excitement in his voice.

“Now wait a minute,” Luke added, “I helped tie the rope every once in awhile. Both laughed. See, I couldn’t make no time if the crate was loose. It was more than six-feet tall and would get top heavy. If John Law got after me and I turned to sharp on a curve the load would shift and over I’d go.”

As the interview came to a close the two old friends shook hands on the Ballard’s porch. Before pulling away “B” Ballard waved for us to stop and said, while laughing, “I remember one more funny story. It was in the fifties, down at the still. I would go over to a 50 gallon wooden barrel and get a drink from the trough running cold water INTO the barrel. After a few times a close relative saw me getting’ a drink and took a sip of the red hot, boiling water from INSIDE the 50 gallon wooden barrel He didn’t say anything, just jumped back and shook his head. I saw what happened, but waited for a hour or so, then when back to the very spot he had stood and took another long drink from the cold water trough while watching him out of the corner of my eye.

“A few minutes later he went back and tried it again, from the inside barrel with the boiling water. He quickly turned to me and stuttered, ‘By Go, Go, God, I, I, I want to know, know, know, how in the he, he, he, hell you are drinkin that ho, ho hot water?’ The whole crew enjoyed a good laugh out of his hot water drinkin’, stuttering.”