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CHARLES (SCOOTER) BILL BURTON: NOVEMBER 25, 1946:
CHAPTER 30

When law officials really “out the heat” on Luke Denny’s moonshine hauling operation he used different methods to insure the mountain dew arrived at his bootleggers, throughout middle Tennessee. By the late 1960s Denny’s hauling days were numbered. In fact, he rarely delivered illegal whiskey in his truck or car as most lawmen knew of his exploits and continued trying to nab the whiskey running legend.

Charles (Scooter Bill) Burton, 42, grew up watching Luke Denny make moonshine deliveries around Smith County, Tennessee. “Most of the boys my age had heard tales about Luke - - the ‘Fancy Dresser’ - - and saw him cruising around Carthage,” remembered the blue eyed Burton. “Some of us kids helped bootleggers by keeping watch for the law. We knew Luke was one of the big time haulers. I never loaded, not unloaded him, however.

“But I recall one time Luke took a fast ride with ME,” Burton said from the kitchen of his Dixon Springs home, on Highway 25, November 5, 1988.

“Wait, wait,” the 73-year-old whiskey runner chimed into the interview, “let me tell what was going on before our ride. See, I was working two jobs and not hauling much moonshine at all. Maybe a little dab every once in a while. It was right before Christmas. My big bootlegger in Alexandria, that’s in the western part of DeKalb County, near the Smith County line, had only a gallon or two on hand. He offered me an extra 50 bucks if I would get him 100 gallons by midnight. My whiskey buddy from Chestnut Mound (Smith County), told me he had the moonshine on his farm and would go havers with me on the profit. I could keep the extra \$50 for my trouble. All day the cops rolled in front of the Hollywood Café in South Carthage, where my truck was. Finally the time had come to get the moonshine rolling on to Alexandria.”

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Burton, who was 21 years-old at the time, revealed, “I was shootin’ pool in the back of the room of Hollywood’s when Luke came runnin’ around the table, nearly out of breath, saying, ‘Scooter I need a quick ride over the Caney Fork Bridge’. “I told him no, at first. Really, I didn’t want to mess with him since I was playin’ for five bucks a game and winning. Luke was persistent, you could tell it by the look on his face. He had been acting as if he was drunker than a clown, but all of a sudden he was sober as a judge behind the bench. Then I knew he was in trouble and was not acting a fool.”

Denny added, “Young Scooter Bill didn’t know that I was already late for my rendezvous with my whiskey man. I also told him I was in a hurry. Looking back on it, that was a mistake. See, if I didn’t get to the Caney Fork Court my whiskey man might leave.

Seems to me Red Petty owned the Court place at the time. I was counting on the moonshine profit to buy Christmas presents for the kids,” the moonshine hauler laughed.

“Luke didn’t realize that I was driving a high performance racing car,” Burton smiled while pointing at his lifelong friend. “Under the hood was a 396 cubic inch V-8 with more than 375 horsepower. It was also beefed up with two four barrel carburetors. That 1966 two-door hardtop silver Chevy Chevelle had other goodies under the hood, too. There may have been a car on the street that could have beaten it, but I didn’t know of one. It was fast. You must remember I had just turned 21 a month before and had a very heavy foot - - on and off the track.”

“By George that’s the truth if he ever told it,” Denny continued the story.

“When he crawled into the passenger’s seat I told him to buckle the seat belt he was in for a ride,” Burton said. “I put the gas pedal to the floor while painting two strips of black rubber and sending gravels flying all over Highway 70 in South Carthage. By the time we reached the Benton McMilan Bridge (over the Caney Fork River) - - about three miles - - we were going 142 miles per hour. On the eastern side of the bridge I started pumping the brakes...in front of what is now Senator Albert Gore Jr’s farm. Near his farm was the Court. I flipped the steering wheel and slid backwards between the gas pump and

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the door. This next statement I’ll never forget. I asked Luke, ‘Do you want me to take you back?’ His face was white as a sheet. Do you remember what you said, Luke?”

“As I jumped out of the car I said, ‘HELL NO’. You drive too damn fast for me,” Denny explained, “Before I took a step Scooter sent gravels and dust all over the front of the building and me, too. How long would you say it took you to run the three or four miles, both ways, Scooter?”

“Probably 10 to 12 minutes from starting the engine at the Hollywood to turning the switch off back at Hollywood’s,” the younger brownish haired man responded.

“My Chestnut Mound man was waiting with the moonshine in his old rusty, beat up Chevrolet farm truck, with a load of corn stacked over the liquor. We can’t use his name because he wouldn’t give us permission. Anyway, the two of us drove the back roads to Alexandria. There, the 100 gallons of whiskey in fruit jars, was off loaded. The bootlegger then surprised both of us by saying, Is the corn for sale, too?’ After the corn was shoveled into the shed my Chestnut Mound friend spotted two big pigs. You guessed it. On the way back to the Court two sows rode in the back of the flat bed. We had to rig a makeshift tailgate to keep those smelly hogs in. You know darn well I didn’t help load them stinky porkers,” Denny grinned.

“That was a good money making ride. I didn’t carry it in my truck, didn’t load it, didn’t unload it and put about \$350 in my wallet. But, in a couple of days the money was all gone. (This author did not question Luke about the Christmas gifts he bought from this moonshining project.) Easy whiskey money seemed to go just as fast as I made it,” Denny said to Scooter Bill Burton, who is a construction foreman.

“Old Luke was always a sharp dresser. It’s no wonder he never got caught hauling whiskey...he looked like Dapper Dan Denny the preacher on his way to a Sunday morning revival,” Scooter Bill noted.

Following a few photographs of the two companions in the living room, Luke spotted some pears on the back porch of the Burton’s Civil War era home. Yes, you guessed it; two brown paper sacks of pears rode home with Luke and this

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author...in a hail storm. As we crossed the same Benton McMillan Bridge, Luke looked over at the speedometer and concluded, “Picture us traveling nearly 100 miles-an-hour faster than we are taking this two-laned bridge. Shucks, I get the screamin’ eagles just thinkin’ about it. Now you know why I’m a nervous wreck.