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JAME (DICKIE) CLINTON: AUGUST 13, 1938:
CHAPTER 35

Fifty-one year-old Luke Denny and his fifty year-old friend Dewey Watson met on a Smith County farm in 1969 to discuss how they would make one last big moonshine run, "For old time sake," Denny said January 20, 1990 in Jackson County, Tennessee.

Watson added, "The day before, Dickie Clinton, an old friend from the hills of Jackson County, who dabbled in whiskey makin', came down to my house to trade mules. We sealed the deal with a hand shake and a drink of his moonshine. Dickie then told me he had 100 gallons of shine he wanted to sell; all at one whack. He didn't want to sale it a little dab at a time because he was getting out of the business. He wanted to know if I knew anyone who would take the entire batch off his hands - - in a hurry - - as he was one his way to serve some Federal time at Eglin Air Force Base correctional facility near Fort Walton Beach, Florida.

"I told Dickie my good friend Luke Denny had run whiskey for about 30 years around these parts, but for the last few years he had only contracted a few loads here and there, but he hadn't hauled a load in a month of Sundays. I told Dickie to hold the 100 gallons for a couple of days. That way it would give me time to run over and visit my old buddy Luke and take a jug of this here white mule with me. Maybe, after a belt or two he might say yes."

As Dickie Clinton drove east toward his Pine Hill home in Jackson County, Dewey Watson headed west to meet Luke in Carthage.

Luke said, "It was one of those lonely, overcast, gray, drizzly afternoons. Dewey's arrival sure lifted my spirits. See, I was between girl friends and was down in the 'girl dumps' you might say. Plus, I had been out of the whiskey hauling business for nearly ten years. Oh, every once and a while I would contract a load and someone else picked up the whiskey and dropped it off. I was missing the action and the excitement more and

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more. Dewey came just at the right time. I hadn't had a drink of moonshine in a good while, but I did have a few hundred bucks we could use to buy Dickie's load and I knew a colored bootlegger from Gordonsville would buy it. After we put away probably a pint of that white mule both of us were ready to roll.

"We had to come up with a plan. First, to double check with the colored feller to make damn sure he wanted the booze. Second, get the word back to Dickie we wanted it. Third, how would we haul 100 gallons since both Dewey and I couldn't drive worth a lick at night, so it would have to be a dangerous daylight run. Next, when would we

make the run and where would we store more than half the whiskey since the bootlegger didn't have much storage space.

"Dewey and I were havin' one more time. It was like going back in time with the planning. Many times the planning phase was more exciting than making the actual run. Well, Dewey headed on home while I drove to Gordonsville. The colored man wanted about 75 gallons, but he could only take about 25 gallons at a time; that's all he had room to hide. So, we definitely had to come up with a storage place for the remainder. I remember driving back to Dewey's house that very same night. My radio in my old pickup was set on WSM (Nashville's county-western station) and I was singing along with Roy Acuff's 'Wabash Cannon Ball'. It was a happy time.

"Dewey came out on the porch. When I told him the good news he told me how he had come up with a good hiding place in his barn. We walked down and he turned on a flashlight and laid out his plan," Denny added.

Watson continued, "See I had a lot of hay so all we had to do was move some around and make a hollow section for the moonshine. I also told Luke we could use some of my hay to camouflage the load. This suited Luke just fine. And, I remember we had a drink while setting on a couple of bales of hay."

The next day Luke and Dewey drove to Jackson County to make the final arrangement with Dickie. Luke had never met Dickie Clinton and, "I had a long standing policy to check out my moonshiners and bootlegger personally, before ever buying or selling any whiskey. I had to feel right. My gut feeling was so important to me. It just had to feel right. This is one

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reason I hauled so long and didn't get caught. When the three of us got together we talked for probably 15 minutes about moonshine people. I was checking and rechecking Dickie out. I did this every time I didn't know people. Usually, the law will send in an undercover man from way off and he will not know the local whiskey people. Also, the law normally wants to make a quick case, to save money.

"Quickly I found out Dickie knew more Jackson County whiskey people than I did and had been caught three times for making whiskey by Federal and State revenue agents. When I heard Dickie say he was on his way to prison and was quitting the business, I felt he was okay because I could check this out very quickly with the law and the newspapers. We walked down and saw the shine. After samplin' it the deal struck for \$5 a gallon (\$30 a case). He would have the whiskey in three different containers; six gallon cases, a couple of five gallon plastic jugs and some glass Coca-Cola syrup jugs.

"That night I tossed and tumbled all night long. I even woke up in a cold sweat. This wasn't like me," Denny recalled. "Finally I got up and went to a restaurant for an early morning breakfast. Along about mid-day I backed up my truck up to Dewey's barn."

“Hey, I didn’t get much shuteye the night before,” Watson added, then said, “By the time Luke arrived I had 16 bales of hay by the stall door ready and waitin’. We packed it all on the bottom of the bed so no one could see the hay as we went into Jackson County. We wanted the local folks to think we went over to buy hay. On the way out, you see, they could see the hay stacked up in Luke’s bed. We planned to place the moonshine in the middle of the bed and stack the 16 bales of completely around it so the law wouldn’t be able to see it. They would have to take it apart to find it and who would think two men in their 50s would have a load of moonshine in the back of an old pickup truck in the late 60s.

Dickie Clinton, a soft spoken six-footer, weighing 200 pounds (plus) with a mid-section pooch and sporting a small brown Fu Manchu mustache revealed, “The three of us worked quickly getting’ the whiskey stacked just right so it wouldn’t rattle. We restacked the hay around and on top of the whiskey.

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You should have seen us. Lord, lord, what a motley crew. Once the whiskey was loaded it was time for them to roll on and time for me to pack a few duds and get ready to go to the pen in Florida.”

“Then the funniest thin’ happened,” Denny reentered the conversation from inside the Clinton’s trailer. “As Dickie and I shook hands, Dewey kinda tomahawked the goodbye handshake with a slow karate-type chop, but he didn’t break our handshake, he just touched the tope of our hands.

“I said, ‘Fellows, this is a historic day for the three of us. Dickie, this is your still’s last whiskey run and we are making our last big whiskey run. I guess you could say, this is it, it’s all over.’”

“It was a sad occasion. I drove to Dewey’s barn, with him ridin’ shotgun. We unloaded 75 gallons in his hollow hidden place in the hay and took 25 gallons to the colored Gordonsville bootlegger. A few days later, close to a week, we took the second 25 gallon load and then the last load to him the next week. We sold off the remaining gallons a jug at a time to the many friends around the county.”

Dewey asked Dickie how long he stayed in the Florida prison and what did he do there.

“As I explained earlier,” Clinton said, “Charles Carter, the state revenuer, caught me with my 50 gallon still behind this trailer. I lived about 100 to 150 yards up in the field. I hid the still near a tree thicket so the law wouldn’t suspect I was brewin’ moonshine down here. See, in order to make whiskey you must have water and there wasn’t any here. I had a big water tank by my house and ran a underground water line down to the still. Well, the judge gave me six months in Federal prison, after Charles talked up for me. Mr. Carter had a long talk about me making whiskey and I promised him I would quit.

The judge took what Mr. Carter said and gave me only six months, but told me if he ever saw me back in front of him to stand by for the book. I kept my word to both the judge and Mr. Carter, too.

“Anyway, I spent four months and 18 days at Eglin, Air Force Base. They let me off nearly two months early for good behavior. The Eglin prison wasn’t for hardened criminals. I

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worked in the base commissary six-days-a-week. Oh, ‘bout seven in the mornin’ a bus would pickup the prisoners and take us to our jobs. My job was to stock the butter and eggs. The guards were real good to me and I did what they said. My wife Verdie came to see me a couple of times down there. And, I promised her I would stop makin’ whiskey and I’ve also kept my word. I’ve been logging timber around these Jackson County hills and hollers ever since and doin’ a little farmin’ on the side.”

Denny’s inquisitive nature got the best of him. He asked, “That was the third and last time you got nabbed. Who got you the first two times?”

In a low tone, without smiling, Clinton said, “Before Sicy (Silas Anderson) retired in the mid-60s he got me down in Robinson’s Branch. And, there was a real big State man with him, too. I think he was an ABC agent. We had a 150 gallon still cookin’ away and I ran off. He didn’t actually catch me, but he swore at me. He yelled for me to come in to Cookeville or he would come back and take me to jail in ‘cuffs and it would go harder on me. The next day I met him at his office and made bond.

“Three months later I was cookin’ on a 50 gallon pot on Pine Hill when Mr. Carter and two other agents caught me. They got me at home this time. I remember one lawman was dark complexioned. They took me to Cookeville and I made bond. Since my other case was pendin’ the judge gave me three years probation.

“There’s an interestin’ tidbit about the second time I got caught. When Mr. Carter and the agents came up to the house, one said, ‘Dickie are you still makin’ whiskey?’ I naturally said, ‘Nah, not me.’ One of the officers, and I’m not real sure if it was Mr. Carter or the dark complexioned feller, said, ‘Dickie let’s not waste your time and ours. We know you’ve been makin’ it down at the Pine Hill still. If you don’t believe us take out your driver’s license and look at the corner.

“Now, that shocked me. I had no idea what the officer was referrin’ too. I took out my wallet, found my license and low and behold one corner was cut off. I couldn’t believe my eyes. My curiosity got the best of me. I had to know how this

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happened. So, on the way to Pine Hill to cut up the still, I asked one of the agent's when did they snip the corner of my driver's license? He said, I left my coveralls hangin' near the still with my wallet in the breast pocket. They cut off the corner to prove it was me. Boy, that was a slick way to get me. It also stuck in court."

This revelation brought back smiles. Dickie quickly continued ."The third and last time was just over into Putnam County, near the Gentry Community. I was makin' it that day on a 50 gallon pot when Mr. Carter got me, again."

Dewey Watson, who was setting in a living room chair, all at once started laughing while slapping his right leg with his right hand as he pulled his green cap off with his left hand. "Dickie you've got to tell us about the time you acted like a revenuer with the flashlight. It's been so long I nearly forgot half the story."

Everyone started laughing, but this author, as I did not have a clue what Dewey Watson was talking about. Dickie, while smiling, explained, "I had been makin' moonshine in this pine thicket in the 60s. It was a dark late fall or early winter evening. On the way down to the still I grabbed a flashlight from my truck so I wouldn't bust my fanny on the crooked paths leading to the deep, slanted hollar. The still was in a real good hidin' place. It was hard to locate even if you knew exactly where it was, in the daytime. A large friend of ours - no really he was and still is a fat feller - - had come down to the still for the first time. I do know he wasn't in the whiskey business, but heard us talk about the stills and the adventure. Finally one of my relative's told him he could come down and see it in operation. As I got near the still I came up with an idea. I wouldn't turn on the flashlight until I got right on the still. Then all of a sudden I clicked it on and quickly shined the flashlight back and forth like the revenuers did and screamed, 'DON'T MOVE, THIS IS A RAID!'

"Since the workers at the still knew I was due, they didn't think much about what I was doing, but this green horn got scared. Well, the second I hit the flashlight and yelled at the top of my lungs, this fat feller took off like a bat out of hell, with two gallon jugs of whiskey...one hooked in each index finger.

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First, he ran thru the bushes, then down a little bluff. He had no idea where he was since this was strange territory for him. But, he knew the law would think he was a regular whiskey makin' man if he got caught and he would probably go to jail. I hit him with the light every once in a while as he continued runnin' like a preacher with the devil after him. Then, bam, he ran clear off a bank and hid in the friars. I yelled, while flashing the light on him, 'COME OUT! THIS IS THE LAW! I'VE GOT YOU!'

"He dropped the two whiskey jugs, jumped up and started runnin' like he was shot out of a cannon. This time he ran smack dab into the creek, waded across and finally found this cabin. I hid the flashlight and walked up to the window about five to ten minutes later. There he sat, still breathing hard, with his head in his hands, scratches all over, clother

torn and totally drenched. My, my, what a sight for sore eyes. I told myself this was not the time and place to tell him I was the phony revenuer and there wasn't a raid at all.

"I grabbed a fishin' reel by the door and was going to tell him I had been fishing. When he opened the door I started to ask what happened to him, but before I could get the first word out of my mouth he yanked me inside the cabin shut the door quickly, but softly, and whispered, "They r-r-a-a-I-I-d-d-e-e-d-d the still. As you see I was darn lucky to get away, just by the hair of my teeth. Boy, the law nearly got me."

"I told him to get out of those wet clothes that he would catch a death of cold. Then I fixed him some canned food. I was kinda feelin' low. Here this feller nearly killed himself because of my silly prank, but I didn't have the nerve to tell him I was the culprit behind the practical joke. I've never told him, either. And to this day this man doesn't know the raid wasn't real. By the way, the man wouldn't go near a still again. He was truly afraid. I've got a feelin' he will pay me a visit when he reads this in the book."

That statement brought laughter from the foursome and from Dickie's wife in the adjoining room.

Before we stopped laughing Dickie added another whiskey story. "You boys know 'B' Balland (Chapter 25) and I made liquor a goodly number of time. Well, it started to get cold

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during a mid-60s winter. We wanted to finish up the batch before the snow fell. I had an old lazy red bone coon dog named Jinks. Now that dog would lay around and do absolutely nothing, until he heard a strange noise then he would sound the alarm by barking. 'B' started walkin' up the path toward the road to gather some empty gallon jugs, and Jinks got up and ran in front of him. I nearly forgot Jinks did this. He was like the point man on a combat patrol. If anything; wasn't the way it should be - - like the law hidin' in the bushes - - he would bark and retreat.

"Well ;bout a day or so before I had stored a big bunch of empty whiskey jugs off to the side of the path where the weeds were a little taller than my normal hidin' place, without takin' Jinks with me. Anyway, the second he spotted those jugs he went to yelpin' like a skunk sprayin' its 'perfume' on him and within a second he was gallopin' back by 'B'. When he raced by the still where I was stirrin' the mash he was literally flyin'. Jinks ran all the way home and hid. 'B' thought Jinks spotted the law so he jumped into some bushes and so did I. After layin' there for four or five minutes and nothin' happened I remember those jugs and hollered down the trail toward 'B's hidin' place. Later 'B' and I had a good laugh...this joke was on us."

Dickie revealed he started working in moonshine when he was about eight years old. For the next 20 to 25 years he continued working at stills in or near Jackson County. "The smallest still I've ever worked was 50 gallons and the biggest was 1,000 gallons. My

cousin and I fixed up the 1,000 gallon still, with a nine coil worm. Durin' the first batch she blew. We had so much pressure (steam) we had to put a sack of dirt on the end of a boom pole on a long white oak limb to hold the cap on. When it blew it sent up the biggest blue blaze I've ever seen. I'll make a wild guess and say the whiskey was probably 200 proof. Normally, good Tennessee or Kentucky wildcat moonshine whiskey is 100 to 110 proof. Some cut it down with water to 80 proof.

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“Some folks don't realize you must test or gauge moonshine when it's cool, not hot, to get its correct proof. My 150 gallon stills would make about 1 gallon every three minutes when it was runnin' good and I had the men to help me work it. The lit' 50 gallon ones were much slower. They could only put out about six gallons an hour, at full throttle. One must remember it takes many, many hours to get the still built, the supplies to the still and the men to help work it to get those fast gallons. Makin' moonshine is NOT EASY,” he stressed, “and sure isn't worth the effort. Then, if a moonshiner wanted an extra special batch he ran it through twice. Some called this 'double whiskey', some call it 'double sugar'. That's double work, too. This moonshine usually has double the amount of beads.”

Dickie stood up, looked at his two friends dressed in overalls and continued, “My great uncle, for example, stood six-foot-six and weighed at least 250 pounds. He was strong, I mean real strong. I remember he once carried a 50 gallon still 25 miles - - all the way from Jackson County here, east to Monterey - - through the mountains, by himself, in the mid-50s so he wouldn't get caught.

“One of the hardest chores I can remember havin' was around '61 or '62. Federal agent Bob Willey, from Bowling Green, Kentucky, came around lookin' for some Old Crow which had been stolen from the Louisville Distillery. After Bob left a bootlegger said, 'Virgil has it on his farm. I just bought four barrels of that Old Crow. Dickie, since it's getting' dark and Willey is headin' back for Kentucky, how about helpin' me load them on the truck. I'll pay you 20 bucks and be the lookout from behind this tree while you load.'

“I didn't like the idea, but the quick money sounded good. I took two two-by-fours and laid them from the back of the truck bed to the ground and rolled four of those 50 gallon barrels of Old Crow up and into the bed. We drove out of that field and he dropped me off down the road apiece. I heard later the bootlegger ran into a ditch a few miles away, but didn't get caught. I didn't hear what happened to the rest of the Old Crow. Boy, there was a big bunch of barrels out there. I'm lucky I didn't get caught that day, I guess.”

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Dickie walked to the door and said, “How would you boys like to see where Mr. Charles (Carter) caught me the last time? It's just out back.”

Before he got the last word out, Luke and Dewey was out the door in a flash. Dickie explained how the still was built and showed us the grass covered remains of the moonshine still's red brick foundation. Down about 10 yards sat a large drum like container with a knife looking slit in the side. Dickie explained this piece of equipment contained the oil he used to fuel the still. The lawmen use a double-bladed ax on the side and it has not been moved from the spot where they rolled it too, until this day. After a few photographs were taken of the trio, with a gallon glass Coca-Cola syrup jar it was time to say so long.

Before departing Dickie said, "Wait, wait, I've got one more story you might find interestin'. About '68 or '69 my brother and I had a 150 gallon still cookin'. One the way down the main road in the early mornin' a farmer friend of ours came runnin' out and flagged my truck down. He said he saw revenuers getting out of their cars and headin' down in the woods where we had been workin'. We pulled off and eased around so we could see the officers lookin' down on the still. We were watchin' them from up in trees, lookin' for us, from about 20 feet away. It was kinda funny, now that you look back on it. We stayed there all day and the officers didn't leave till about 10:30. I had a good feelin' they wouldn't stay all night. That wasn't like the revenuers. They didn't like to spend all night in the woods. I sure can't blame them.

"When they pulled out, shortly we did too. Instead of headin' home we drove down to Highway 70. My brother stopped the truck and let me out. He drove on by Charles Carter's home and waited for me. I walked slowly by and looked in his window. Mr. Carter was tired. Shucks, he had been in the woods all day. He was sitting in his chair with his feet up toward the fireplace. When I saw him, I headed to the truck.

"Then we drove to Sicy Anderson's Cookeville home. I walked down the street and stood on my tiptoes. When I saw Sicy's bald head I knew we were in the clear. We cranked up the truck and drove like Richard Petty's ol' number 43 back to the

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still, We started haulin' out the 25 to 30 gallons of moonshine already made, about midnight. It was about a mile hump from the still site to the truck. Just as daylight began peepin' between the trees we laid the last section of the 150 gallon still in the back of the truck. We unloaded the truck later on and didn't wait around for the lawmen to return. At that time I was tired, real tired. I slept all that day and the next night.

"We didn't stay around to see the look on Charles and Sicy's face when they came back the next morning to discover the moonshine and the still had disappeared in about eight hours. We got away that time, but in the end they always caught me. The third time charmed and I got out of the whiskey makin' business. I'm happy I did."