

Midnight Moonshine Rendezvous

By Sr. Stony Merriman

Walter Ray Denny – Chapter 12 – pgs. 164-167.

b. 24 January 1932, Rock Springs, Putnam Co., TN

s/o William “Willie” Timothy Denny & Effie D. Rippetoe

William “Willie” Denny was the s/o John Smith Denny & Nancy Henrietta Carlen

*See Chapter 5 of ajlambert.com website for family listings.

Luke Denny’s first cousin, Walter Ray Denny, 57, was born and raised a few miles from Luke’s birthplace in the Rock Springs Community of Buffalo Valley, in the southwestern corner of Putnam County, Tennessee. Today, Walter Denny resides on the old home place. He vividly remembers what happened when Cousin Luke would not let him go for a moonshine ride in 1940, during our interview on a chilly December 28, 1987, day.

“I was eight-years-old,” Walter Denny said with a smile, “and I wanted to go on a whiskey run with my cousin, so bad. He told me they were going to the store and I couldn’t go with them. I knew better. I can remember it like it was yesterday. I told Luke, ‘You are going to Jackson County to get a load of whiskey and if you don’t let me go I’m going to tell on you.’”

“They laughed, got in the car and took off,” Walter explained with a scowling loon on his face. “I was really mad. I yelled and screamed, ‘You’ll be sorry!’, as they drove between the fence opening by the barn.”

Luke, who was 23 years old at the time, chimed in, “I had Eugene (Gene) Peak (a tenant farmer) and another cousin with me at the time. We loaded about 75 gallons from Willie Lane’s still in Jackson County. Shortly, we returned to my Uncle Will Denny’s farm and quickly found out the little stinker Walter Ray had booby trapped the only road between the wooden barns, up to Uncle Will’s home.”

Walter Denny added, “I knew they would have to come back here to drop Gene off because he lived on our farm, just down the road. Now, I was hoppin’ mad when they left and didn’t take me with them. Ya gotta remember, riding with Luke was a big thing for a kid my age, back then. If you hadn’t taken a moonshine ride you didn’t have any real adventure tales to tell. I wanted to go badly.

“Anyway, when the three of them got out of sight I rounded up about 100 nails and some old scrap lumber. Then I drove those nails through the wood and placed them across the road leading up the small hill by the barn. Yep, I placed the nails UP to give Cousin Luke a flat tire. The boards were between six and 12 inches long. After looking at my trap I remember hearing Luke brag about his puncture proof tires, so I went back to the barn and found three wooden tobacco sticks and drove them into the ground beyond the nails. Next I fixed steel tobacco spokes on top of them. Then I ran to the garage to hide and wait for their return,” Walter said with a grin as he adjusted his glasses.

“You can imagine,” Luke recalled, “driving up the dirt path and all of a sudden a real loud noise comes from all around the car. It sounded like a team of mules kickin’ the car’s fenders from all directions.”

Eugen Peak, two days later, commented on the episode, “I thought the sheriff was shootin’ out the tires. Brother, it scared me to death.”

When Luke drove across the nails, the boards stuck into the tires and each time the tire turned they hit the fender causing loud bangs. When his tire hit the tobacco spikes one tire went flat.

“Now I was really pissed. I was ravin’ mad,” Luke said as he got out of his 1940 Ford.

“At this same time I was laughin’, but not very loud, from my hiding place in the nearby garage,” Walter continued.

The trio pulled the scrap lumber, with nails, from the tires and replaced the one tire with the tobacco spike in it. After dropping off Gene, at his home, deliveries were made to the bootleggers.

Walter ran to his dad’s home. “I didn’t say anything about what I had done for many days. They kept trying to get me. I knew I was safe by dad’s side, and I did stay very close for the next few weeks,” the younger Denny said while petting his blackish dog. Both laughed.

After a few photographs were taken of the two at the spot where Walter’s booby trap was sprung, the cousins thought about Walter Denny’s last moonshining venture.

“Let me see,” Walter said in a slow, soft tone, “it was between 1948 and ’49. Cous’ here came to dad’s house to get me. I was about 16 or 17. He had been drinking and was stuck in the middle of the old dirt, gravel road about three miles from the farm. It had been raining for a few days. A recent flash flood had left the old road very muddy. It had even washed out in several places.

“Luke wanted me to pull him out,” his cousin revealed. “So, I drove dad’s tractor, with Luke holding on, to his car. I soon found out that while he couldn’t go forward, all I had to do was put it in reverse and spin the wheels a little and it came out.”

Luke added, while taking off a yellowish sports jacket, “I wanted Walter Ray to pull me out, and help me drive across the old rickety, one land Laycock Bridge. In my condition I didn’t think I could make it. Little Walter Ray drove to Lancaster, near DeKalb and Smith County line. I wanted him to help me unload the whiskey at the bootlegger’s hiding place.”

“When we finished unloading about half the ‘shine,” Walter said, “Luke motioned we were finished and away we went. At another spot, in Smith County, we unloaded the rest of the booze.”

Once the car was emptied the two Dennys slogged back to the spot where Luke’s car became stuck in the mud. Walter climbed aboard the tractor and drove home. “Luke didn’t give me a dime for helping him,” the younger cousin concluded with a smile, but he did give me a handshake and said, “Thanks Cous. The nail prank debt is paid.’ I knew, a that moment, my cousin had forgiven me for booby trapping his tires back some eight or nine years before.”

Luke Alexander Denny – b. 21 November 1917, Rock Springs, TN
 d. 6 August 2000, TN, Alvin C. York Medical Center in Murfreesboro, TN
 s/o Hugh Toi Denny & Martha Anne Huddleston
 Hugh Toi Denny was the s/o John Smith Denny & Nancy Henrietta Carlen
Died on a Sunday of congestive heart failure.
*Made his own funeral arrangements, including the inscription on his tombstone. * See Luke Alexander Denny’s Obituary.*
Farmer & Appliance Salesman – Veteran of World War II.
Luke Denny tells his story: “I sailed to England in the early part of 1943 on the USS Marine Raven. It took 14 days and I got seasick. I was a member of the, Battery ‘A’, 696th Armored Field Artillery Battalion in England. We trained for three months there, then landed in Le Havre, France. During World War II I fought in five major campaigns; France, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg and finally in Germany. In October 1946 this old lad of 29 left the war zone for home.
There is a book called ‘Midnight Moonshine Rendezvous’ by Dr. Stony Merriman that is all about the life & moonshine times of Luke A. Denny.
 Buried: +Cookeville City Cemetery, Cookeville, TN
 md 1st July 1948, Rossville, GA, Jewell Ray Koonce
 md 2nd 13 February 1950, Nellie Ora Keathly
 b. 9 November 1926, Carthage, TN – d. 1 September 1982 –
Cerebral Hemorrhage. Step-father was: William Franklin Sanders.
 md 3rd Alice Jewell Whitehead



Family of Luke Alexander Denny 1953
 Luke with his wife Nellie Ora (Keathly) Denny & their children: Charles Lyn & Marilyn Elizabeth Denny.
 All family pictures courtesy of Marilyn (Denny) Smith



L to R; Luke Alexander Denny & Walter Ray Denny
 Picture from pg. 86 of the book, Midnight Moonshine Rendezvous by Dr. Stony Merriman