

THE CAPTAIN'S REPLACEMENT

By John F. Hall

There was something amiss when they asked me, a Lieutenant at that time, to go into a newly formed unit and relieve its Commander, a Captain. It wasn't a clean replacement. I would have to go in and serve as the Captain's Executive Officer. They would allow the Captain to serve his remaining two-year command time (about six months), and not allow him an extension of command time or offer him another position. There is drama in nearly every organization. Usually, in the Kentucky National Guard, politics does not come into play until a person is promoted to the rank of Major. I was not told what the Captain did. What ever it was, it may have been connected to the Captain's full time occupation as an associate professor at Murray State University.



He was just denied tenure.

Denial of tenure may end a professor's career, since it usually means the professor is no longer employable at the particular college with which he was tenure track. One obvious reason why a person may be denied tenure is the failure to publish a certain amount of material, the "publish or perish" requirement. Other reasons may be more nebulous or even nefarious. Failing to show skill in teaching is a perfectly legitimate reason for a professor to be denied tenure. Another reason for which a professor might be denied tenure is if enemies are made with senior faculty. The famous Kentucky writer, Jesse Stuart created over 4,000 fictitious characters. I don't write fiction stories. All of my stories are about real people, in real places. For this true story, I changed the name of the Captain/professor who was denied tenure. I did this for the same reason that the old Dragnet and Adam-12 TV series used the disclaimer: "The names were changed to protect the innocent."

Many years ago, I was invited to speak to the students at Heritage Christian Academy in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. My topic was "How —Words Can Hurt a Person." I played the role of a very old, decrepit professor. I had a white wig, a fake white beard, and my old black college graduation gown. I called myself "Professor A'Wiggins." I was an adjunct (part time) professor at the Hopkinsville Community College around that time. I talked softly and I walked with a limp. William Shakespeare once wrote: "All the world's a stage,/And all the men and women merely players." So I decided to call the professor in this story, Professor A'Wiggins. Since the professor was in the Kentucky National Guard, I referred to him as Captain A'Wiggins.

Like Jesse Stuart, writing has become my life. Everyday, I am not content if I am not working on a story. Christ has given me so much grace upon grace upon grace, that I feel that I better use the talent that He loaned me, before He takes it away and calls me home. There was something that I could not explain about Captain/professor A'Wiggins. To me, he was arrogant and conceited. In the end, his motives proved to be nefarious. Confucius said, "Before you embark on a journey of revenge. Dig two graves." One will be for you.

In 1979, I was given a Direct Commission in the Kentucky National Guard as a First Lieutenant and I was assigned to the 198th Military Police Battalion in Louisville. My day job was being a Kentucky State Trooper in Trigg County. The District Judge was a Colonel in the Army Reserve in Paducah. He talked to me after Court one day and asked if I would be an Executive Officer in his D Company in Murray. He knew that I was having to drive up to Louisville for drill and Murray was just 25 miles away. I agreed and I transferred from the National Guard to the Army Reserve in 1980.

In 1981, I received a call from the full time National Guard Officer at the 198th. They had a critical mission and they wanted me. I agreed to meet with this Officer and his assistant at the Cadiz restaurant. I asked: "What is the mission?" The Officer replied: "We want you to relieve the Commander of the 614th Military Police Company in Murray. It will be risky mission for you because you first have to go in as his Executive Officer." I told the Officer that I would have to get approval from the District Judge who is also my Brigade Commander and my senior rater.

I reported to the 614th in Murray with written Orders to be the Executive Officer. The Commander's day job was being a professor at Murray State University. I do not believe that he knew the real purpose why I was sent there. I felt there was resentment from the four Second Lieutenants in the unit because they were not selected to be promoted to the Executive Officer position. I had Captain A'Wiggins and four other Officers that I could not trust or confide in. As time went on, Captain A'Wiggins began to talk about his dislike of Dr. Curriss. He was obsessed with his hatred of Dr. Curriss. He confided in me about how he was going to get back at Dr. Curriss for not granting him tenure. I became concerned and I contacted Dr. Curriss. We first met off campus. I called Dr. Curriss "Deno." I said: "Deno, the Commander is a nut and he is furious that you denied him tenure. He brags that he has several Board of Regent members in his pocket and that will vote not to renew your contract. But my concern is that, as crazy as he is, that he will do something to harm you and the University."

Dr. Curriss and I continued to meet. One time he invited me to Oakhurst. He gave me a tour of the entire house. We went up stairs and looked into the bedrooms. The rooms were all neat and the beds all made. I remembered 13 years earlier when I went Oakhurst and borrowed a bow tie from Dr. Harry Sparks. I told Dr. Curriss that I had nothing to report, but I felt that Captain A'Wiggins was up to no good.

It was coming time for the Murray State University Homecoming parade. Our unit provided assistance with traffic and crowd control. My suspicions were confirmed when the Captain A'Wiggins called me into his office and said that he wanted me to give the soldiers loaded side arms. I told him that was not a lawful Order. He said: "I am giving you a Direct Order to give the soldiers loaded side arms." I said: "I respectfully refuse to obey your unlawful order." I walked out of his office.

I suspected that Captain A'Wiggins thought, that because I had only three years experience as an officer, that I would obey an unlawful order. What he did not know is that I was never afraid of my job. I was a Maverick and not afraid of people that I thought

were crazy. I suspected that what he wanted to do was to have one of his aggrieved Second lieutenants fire off a round, in the air, during the middle of the parade. Then have the Second lieutenant leak a false report to the newspaper. The report would claim that Dr. Curris asked me to arm the soldiers with live ammunition and that I disobeyed a lawful order from the Captain A'Wiggins, not to arm the soldiers. If I had obeyed Captain A'Wiggins's order, Dr. Curris' reputation would have been trashed and the Board of Regents would unanimously vote not to extend his contract. Captain A'Wiggins wrote on my Officer Efficiency Rating (OER) that I was insubordinate. That kind of statement would normally end the career of an Officer. My Senior Rater, the 198th Battalion Commander, wrote that I was sent to the 614th to relieve Captain A'Wiggins. When Captain A'Wiggins's two-year command time was up, he was not offered another position and his career in the Kentucky National Guard was finished.

I hold no malice against Captain A'Wiggins. In seeking revenge against me and Dr. Curris, he doomed himself and his future prospects. The Apostle Paul says in Romans, Chapter 12, Verses 17-19: "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord."

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*Read other stories by John F. Hall and others at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>