

LUKE DENNY

By Jerry Tammer "Gus" Denny

Hey Michael and Audrey. Thanks for your kind words re my e-mail. In Alabama where we live is not the end of the world, but you can see it from here. I once read about the demise of Buffalo Valley, don't believe it. Woodland, Alabama is a reincarnation of Buffalo Valley in the 30's. It is still too big for me, so we live out in the country. (I am sending you by your employer a letter I sent out to my friends a couple of years ago when we retired here.) I thought it was clever but did come under some comments (especially my brother) about getting a letter from a damn dog. As I told him the dog only barked once but he had been doing it all his life. Truthful we do love each other as you will see later in the Gus nickname version. I am well versed about the Enola Gay and Col. Tibbets who flew it (for info Enola Gay was Tibbets' mother's name.) You might recall all the fuss about the gay going into the Smithsonian. One word on war (really two) (1) war is hell. The politicians who cause them can go to hell. (2) war is declared by older men to enrich their wealth and power. War is fought by younger men so that they might die.

Now the Luke story. You asked in one of your e mails if I was the boy who went on the trip. I am tempted to lie and say yes, because I wish I was. But no I was not. First I had the pleasure of knowing Luke for a long time. Luke Denny was a legion in his time, he was admired, talked about, a ladies man, a classic dresser, a dare devil, respected by his "bitter foe" the law men. I personally believe they didn't want to catch Luke, because their jobs would not have been as secure as they were. It is for sure they would not have been as glamorous with out him, the build up to the whipping. On Sunday afternoon the Baxter base ball team (they were pretty good): Bill Lee, Moon Lee, Carl Swallows, Ernest Austin, s.n. Barr etc. (these were all adult people) would gather to take on mighty foes from Smithville, Gainesboro, Silver Point, Gordonsville, Alexandria, etc. I was about 10 years old and right up close to cheer my heroes on. Pea Thompson had just slapped a double and the home run hitter, Bill Lee, was up next. Excitement had reached its peak. And then the shiniest new 40 ford coupe pulled up right beside the spectators (there were no seats at the field) and out stepped a man in a suit, shoes shined to a glow, hair cut neat, a clean shave, his skin scrubbed and the sweet smell of bay rum from the barber shop filled the air. (I think even Bill Lee turned around to see him).

When he came to stand by me, my chest nearly burst with pride. This was my kin, and he was with me. I was among the elite. I don't remember if Lee struck out or if he hit a home run. It just wasn't important anymore. Can you believe this? He asked me if I would like to ride in his new car. The car was customized to haul 119 gallons of shine and would exceed the gallons in speed and had the best driver in the country. What a thrill as I climbed into the car. Making sure as many people as possible saw me in this historic moment. The street in Baxter is about 150 yards long and that day I didn't want him to speed because I wanted to be visible to anyone on the side line. If only my whole school could be lining the street. But alas on Sunday afternoon the street in Baxter is a ghost town. That didn't matter as I created a crowd in my own mind. That afternoon, after my retreat home my emotions were jumping so I could not hold them in. I had to

tell everyone, including my mother. I have never seen such a cloud come up so darn and fast on a person who was usually by protector and my friend. What my mother said were not words that I had heard at the Methodist church that morning. The words boiled down to: no kid of hers was going to be seen with a whisky runner, drunk, law breaker, and the threat to the virtue of all young girls. The lashing didn't last as long as the stinging words about my hero. The whelps had been long a long time before I realized the "older women" just didn't understand how important it is in life to have these thrills...thanks Luke.

About the Luke book: years ago I was in Tennessee. And stopped by a local motel and Luke and Dr. Merriman the author were selling and signing copies. I purchased one and brought it back to ala with me. Several of my friends borrowed it and loved it, one so much he failed to return it. The dirty dog. I have looked for the book for years but to no avail. I think it was put out by a "vanity press" where the author buys the book and then sells them. Please look in your book and see if you can find the publisher or any other info, where I might be able to find one. I am sure by now it is out of print but you might have some contact with the daughter. That is true about his tombstone as I have seen it several times.

This is all for now--let's see what this brings up. Best "Gus".

Source: (Back cover of the book: Midnight Moonshine Rendezvous by Stony Merriman): Author Dr. Stony Merriman, was born January 1, 1943 near Pikeville, Tennessee. He moved to Detroit with his family at age 10 and enlisted into the Marine Corps after receiving his high school diploma. Nearly twenty-three years later on March 31, 1983, Master Gunnery Sergeant (E-9) Stony Merriman retired from his position as Public Affairs Chief, headquarters Marine Corps, Washington D.C.

The Top Sergeant saw action during two tours in Vietnam and was wounded twice while serving as a military combat correspondent. Among his decorations are the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star with Combat "V", two Purple Hearts and the Meritorious Service Medals.

He has degrees from Nassau College, Garden City, New York; University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee; Chapman College, Orange, California; Tennessee Tech University, Cookeville, Tennessee; and California Coast University, Santa Ana, California. Stony was the Sports and Wildlife Editor for the Smithville Review (1983-1985) and Publisher and Editor of the Carthage Courier (1986).

He has served as Chief, Public Affairs Officer, with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Nashville District, since January 11, 1987. Dr. Merriman celebrated 28 years of marriage to Judy Love Merriman on August 2, 1991, and they have one son Don, a senior at Tennessee Tech University, majoring in criminal justice.

I did a search for the telephone number of Stony Merriman wife, Judy L. Merriman still lives in Smithville, TN.

Subject: RE BOOK

Hey AJ & Mike. Thank you so very much for the info on the book. I called Tennessee Valley press, they no had and thought it was out of print. They gave me a number, the same one you had sent. I called and got Mrs. Merriman, nice lady. She had some extra copies and would send me one. The price you quoted was correct. So as soon as she gets the 20 , I get the book and we will be back in business. Thanks again. I have some more stories but I wanted to ask you first if they are help, entertaining, humorous, or down right boring. Let me know if they do not fit in your scheme of things. I don't know much about the computer, but I do know how to turn it off. See you later. Gus.

Let me tell you a little story about John Henry Denny, Hugh Wayne"s dad and a brother to the famous Luke Denny. John Henry was a "slicker" and a guy that was well liked and respected by the entire area. He was sharp as a tack and had the sense to make up for his fooliness. He was a top notch joker and fun poker at anything or anybody. My brother nick name was slick and often referred to as little John Henry. Brother Luke had an elustrial life but John Henry did not take a back seat to no one. Later in life I often called him "Luke's brother, and his reply was Luke was the courser side of the Denny's but he was the refined side and there was more ways to make money than hauling whiskey

John H. true to the Denny line had a love for the spirits and they were to be consumed not hauled. For years and years when I attended the reunion at Baxter Seminary John H always was the first to meet me at the door for he knew I had an ample supply of store bought booze. It was off to the car and as many toasts as we could get by with. At one time Alabama had the miniature law which they used 1.6 ounce bottle to serve in bars (the same as you see on air lines) and John H fell in love with the small bottle but it is tough drinking out of such a small container. He was always well dressed but on those nights his suit pockets nearly pulled him off balance with the load of miniature that I had bestowed on him. John H served many years as county clerk and other political offices and the way politician B.S. today he could have been a senator.

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