

High Jinks at the White Hart Inn

By John W. Howland

In the evening, Bill Doherty (CP) and I rode our bikes to the WHITE HART in Great Yeldham and had a few drinks and dinner. This is a very old Inn. It was built around 1500 on the stage road between Colchester and Cambridge. The huge oaken doorsill is deeply worn by the many thousands of feet that have crossed it. A half-moon shaped board has been fitted to the bottom of the heavy door to fill a gap approximately two inches deep. The atmosphere is typically English. Windsor backed chairs in the dining room seem almost too delicate for the commercial service they are subjected to. The huge open hearth and lounge chair comfort of the adjoining pub room provides a warm, pleasant, homelike atmosphere.



Shortly after our arrival at Ridgewell in late December 1943 I was having a pint of mild in the pub room. I had an opportunity to watch a sergeant gunner from the base perform his classic act. The young American from the New York City area could speak with an absolutely perfect cockney accent. The middle-aged owner of the Inn seemed to love him like her son. Occasionally, a British salesman or traveler would stay overnight at The White Hart. The sergeant would strike up a conversation using his realistic cockney accent. Invariably his pigeon would ask, "What are you doing wearing an American uniform and flying with the Yanks? Why aren't you in the RAF?"



"Oh I was in the RAF", replied the sergeant. "But the bloody conditions were impossible. The food was bad, the uniforms were scratchy and the pay awful. So I joined up with the Yanks." Then, without explaining how he had accomplished such a miracle, he would rejoin his comrades, who also played the game. Everyone kept a straight face and didn't break into peals of laughter until the pigeon left the room.

The atmosphere had changed the evening Bill and I went to dinner. We were not unwelcome. But the sergeant gunner was missing in action. The proprietress tearfully informed us that she was terribly tired of war and it would be best for all concerned if we Yanks stayed on the base.

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