

## Dropping A Clanger

To "Drop a Clanger " in British Army slang is to make the sort of mistake that gives you nightmares. My mates name was Clanger Booth. He earned the nickname clanger because whatever he did, and wherever he went something would go wrong. Just keep that in mind. In 1948 I was serving with the 11th Hussars in Osnabruck Germany. As the regiment was considered a senior cavalry regiment, we used to get, from time to time, special assignments. Such as guarding Sir Brian Robertson. Commander in Chief. British Army of the Rhine. When he travelled to West Berlin through the Russian Sector. At the time there were no Checkpoints such as Checkpoint Charlie and no Berlin wall but it was understood that no one should stray into the Russian Sector. East Berlin, ringed West Berlin and nothing was allowed through except the C in Cs train ( which had been Hitlers Private Train). The 11th Hussars provided 10 men as train guard to the C in C. We boarded the train at Bad Oeinhausen after picking up the Old Man and travelled to the Russian/ British border. Here the Russian Zone Guard checked the documents of travel. ( Why, I do not know. The only thing that was allowed through was the C in Cs Train and they had 3 days notice of when it was going to arrive) After about 30 minutes we were allowed to continue to West Berlin. On arrival, the Train Sergeant asked us if we would like to visit our mates in C Squadron. ( The 11th had 3 Armored Squadrons. A and B squadrons were in Osnabruck and C squadron was in West Berlin. they had been there for some time. Only 2 of us wanted to go. Clanger and me. We wanted to see what the city looked like. What was left of it. We went to C squadron to see the lads and then left for a look around the city. When it was time to go back to the train, though I was convinced that we should take the main road, Clanger convinced me I was wrong and we should hop a lift on what was really a B class road. We flagged down a truck, hopped in the back and away we went. After about 5 miles we went past a sign which said "You are now leaving the BRITISH SECTOR" I started to cast doubts on the validity of Clangers Mum and Dads Marriage lines and started shouting for the driver to stop. The truck was covered and separated from the cab by a bulkheads so the driver could not hear us shouting. It was about 3 miles before he did. By this time we were well inside the Russian Zone. To help matters it was also 5.30PM. The train had left at 5pm. Trying to look on the good side, we analysed our situation. If we got caught in the Russian Sector there was a fair chance they would put us away and throw away the key. With luck we might get out in 10 years and face a Court Marshall for desertion while guarding the C in C BAOR, that with remission might be 20 years. Yes, we would be old men by the time it was all over. About half a mile before we stopped I had spotted a Railway station, so we headed for that. On arrival we saw a train in the station heading we thought toward West Berlin, so we hopped aboard, standing just inside the doors. As we pulled out of the station we noticed 2 Russian Soldiers standing further down the car. I said to Clanger. Whatever you do don't look at them. With hindsight. I have no doubt the Russians were saying the same. There is an unwritten law in Armies throughout the world. " Keep your head down and don't get involved". When the train stopped at Westcreitz, (I think that's how you spell it) The Russians got out. At the next station we got out and there in the sidings was "our train". It had been moved because of a security scare to its present position. It was just luck that we had ended up at the same place. Someone "Up there" was looking out for us. The Train Sergeant went ballistic but eventually quitened down. He had not reported us missing as he should not have allowed us to visit C squadron. He was just hoping that we might arrive before the train left and save him having to report our desertion. It certainly saved our bacon. There is a sad sequel to this story. On another Train guard some time later, when the train stopped at the Russian Zone border for a document check, the orders were, that should anyone attempt to board the train, they were to be shot without challenge. This used to scare the life out of me and as luck would have it nobody ever did, but you can imagine how tense everyone was. On this particular Train guard, while standing in the station. One of our own guard accidentally shot Clanger in the throat. The Russians quickly took him to hospital where he was stabilized. He was transferred two days later to the Military Hospital in Hanover, where he relapsed and sadly died. That was 53 years ago and it is still very vivid in my memory. On a lighter note, when Clanger and I were on leave, we went rowing near the Mohne Dam. I lit a cigarette and dropped the match inside my shirt, Clanger laughed at my contortions and his false teeth fell in the lake. He never did get them back.

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