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BRIEF TALES

written over a period of time in early April 2006
submitted to numerous publications
(includes my side of an on going written narrative between acquaintences)

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When The Guns Of Iraq Are Outlawed

written by Ray A. Monigold II
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He was standing on a dusty street corner, in front of a building whose facade was pock marked with funnel shaped holes - about as big as a silver dollar, tapering down to that of a dime. He was young but cast the shadow of an older, wiser man. The sleeves of his olive drab shirt had been intentionally torn off at the shoulders, leaving frayed edges, probably to showcase his dark, well defined, powerfully biceped arms. He wore a rifle on his back at an angle that had the barrel's end showing above his shoulder while the butt peeked out just below his waste. Across the street from his post was a make shift police station, officers standing in front, staring into the heat. The young man seemed to care less who was over there, as long as they were not in his sphere of influence.

I had to learn this story.

As an American reporter, I walked purposefully over to him, sorting out my question list.

"Been on duty here all day?"

"Why you ask?"

"Oh, you look like you could use a drink of water, that's all." and I reached into my *photographer's vest of many pockets* to fish out a bottle of water.

"YOU! STOP!" the young man said unslinging his rifle and pulling the bolt handle to make a round ready to fire, in one easy all too natural move.

"OK. I'm just getting a bottle of water. See?" and held the clear plastic container out in front of me - gesturing a bit, by wiggling the bottle.

"Water? For me?"

"Yea. Go ahead. You deserve it. This is a quiet corner and I imagine you are responsible for that."

"Tanks you. I am goods for here."

"How old are you?"

"Sev teen. What bout you?"

"Much older. Much. Who do you work for?"

"I dones work for. I pretecet family. I keep safe from bad guy."

"What if someone comes here to hurt you or your family?"

"One shooze and help be here. I think I not helped need."

"You out of school?"

"No school of me. I am to protect family. This my school."

"Do you have a permit for your rifle?"

"I dones needs premits"

"Where did you get the gun?"

"My fathers was get by merican G.I. when they give to him."

"Your father was given the gun by American soldiers?"

"Yes. And bullets. Merican G.I."

"You know that only people 25 and older, who get a permit, can have a gun?"

"Takes from me. You. Takes. I show how to keep. I pretecet family. I keep safe from bad guy."

When The Guns Of Iraq Are Outlawed

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At last report, more than a year ago, the United States military had received and distributed "... over a hundred thousand hand guns and as many rifles to Iraqi civilians and police recruits". AK-47 rifles and Glock pistols. Millions of rounds of ammunition came with the guns for the same purpose. Some of those weapons found their way to Baghdad - for another, unintended purpose. In a quote from Major General Rick Lynch, an American military spokesman, "Baghdad is a battlefield." A place where guns are available to anyone who wants one. For sale, as bribes and trade items. Small arms weapons have become the currency of Iraq - the coin of the realm. And many of those guns are now being used to fuel the hatred of centuries old rivalries that have morphed into arguments of death. Generations of differences were suppressed long enough to fester instead of allowing the natural relief that comes from seemingly rhythmic small bursts through minor acts of fisticuffs or shouts. A divide that only religion can construct has degenerated into the excuse of genocide. Our occupation and idealistic insistence has only widened the gap that has always been in the region.

We, America and the suckling babes of long owed favors, came to Iraq to find and destroy the weapons of mass destruction that peppered the land and threatened our very existence as a people and a nation. We vowed, as citizens swearing allegiance to our government, to disarm the Iraqis and bring them peace, civility, political freedom and justice.

But something went wrong. Somehow we instead sent guns, bullets and the divisions of historical hatred.

Neither fact or fiction, this story was compiled and retold from the filings of reporters stationed in Iraq. Published in The New York Times, Christian Science Monitor, BBC World News and culled from the contemporary archives of the United States Government's public records.

RADAR AND LICENSE PLATES

by Ray Arthur Monigold II

Radar is pretty basic stuff. Send out a narrow beam radio wave then detect it as it bounces off of something.

Usually, when we think of Radar, we imagine a darkened room filled with air traffic controllers. Each looking intently into a round greenish screen with one of those pie shaped wedges circling around making little dots pop onto the screen, that immediately begin to fade as the green wedge continues it's never ending sweep. Every dot or "blip" is an airplane.

A while back some cool technology came to Radar - the TRANSPONDER.

A transponder attached to a vehicle, ship, tank or airplane changes the radar wave that hits it and returns a modified signal. This can be either active or passive. Active transponders, like on airplanes, when struck by Radar, capture the signal and return their own unique amplified radio wave. Air traffic controllers watching Radar screens with transponder receivers will see the airplane's number printed next to the blip. COOL!

Developed towards the end of WWII, it is a technology the military uses for identifying it's own during times of conflict. The civilian usage has also been around for a long time.

So here is where license plates kick in. The other type of device we think of when talking about Radar is the police Radar Gun. This time the radio beam goes out, hits the car and the return signal is measured in milliseconds, then translated to Miles Per Hour, usually confirming a the need to issue SPEEDING TICKET. But, if a special paint is applied to license plates, that modifies the radio signal of a radar gun, then the returning information can be interpreted as that car's license plate number! Dark nights? Car just out of clear sight? Poor visual conditions? Hit the plate with the I.D. Radar Gun and BINGO - the correct number! Passive Transponders!

The company that invented this licence plate paint technology offered the radar guns to Washington State and certain municipalities to test the system. All the government had to do was buy the special license plate paint and application machinery. Well, according to the local newspaper(s), our fair state agreed to this arrangement a few years back and THAT is why we Washingtonians all need new plates every few years. Oh, and why WE have to pay EXTRA for them!

I KNOW that this may sound a bit far fetched. So PLEASE, surf the WEB, make a few calls and prove me wrong. But if the story pans out it's all yours! Also, please notice that I waited until AFTER April Fools Day to pass this along. When I heard you all talking about mandatory license plate replacements, I knew you would want to know the REAL STORY!

AUTOMATIC versus STICK SHIFT

by Ray Arthur Monigold II

Of all the issues plaguing the world today, perhaps the most pervasive argument among American drivers is that of the two transmission types - Automatic versus Stick Shift.

The good news (or bad, depending on your bent) is the Federal Government's intervention into the fight. Well, settling the age old dispute is not exactly why they have come down with an edict. Rather it's that pesky air pollution issue that got Uncle Sam's bureaucrats involved.

Oldsmobile, today's non existent badge of automobile innovation, bringers of such novelty items as the dashboard and, yes the automatic transmission in 1949, was the company who decided to start the "tranny" fight. Others may argue that the Chrysler Corporation got there first with their clutch optional transmission, but really the credit must go to Olds with their truly clutch pedal gone missing Hydromatic.

Over the years a number of variations on the theme were presented to Yankee drivers, but each invention was really only a stick shift transmission with some kind of automated clutch. There was Hudson with the Electric Shift. Dodge and Chrysler with their Fluid Coupling Clutch. And let's not forget the Volkswagen Automatic Stick Shift. This ill conceived device had the clutch operated by an electric mini switch attached at the base of the floor mounted gear shift lever. Each time the shifter was pulled or pushed an electric signal operated an engine vacuum, hydraulically amplified clutch actuator. As if the complexity of the gadget weren't enough to ruin a mechanic's day, the long lag between starting the shift cycle and actually having the whole thing begin - happened at a snail's pace. Added to this is the American driver's penchant for resting their right hand on the shift lever of any vehicle so equipped - from big rig truck to tiny Bug. Yup, the whole Automatic Stick Shift fleet broke down more than it operated. (not to mention that the huge chrome script badge, bragging of the system, covered a goodly portion of the Beetle's already small rear deck lid! (*Automatic Stick-Shift*).

Later, even Detroit Iron got involved in the hybridization of shifting (to remove the smell of a burnt clutch). Implementing the idea that a manually controlled automatic would pacify the public into thinking ANYONE could operate as stick with aplomb. Again, if they build it a different way, drivers will break it! So it was back to the drawing board.

AUTOMATIC versus STICK SHIFT

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Ironically, it was the VW Bug's near cousin, Porsche, that finally figured it all out and brought not just acceptance, but desire to a fully automatic transmission that could, under strict computer supervision, allow the driver to pretend a manual transmission was installed. The Tiptronic was a hit! Now people who are left leg challenged along with those who are inattentive to engine RPM and optimal shift points because cell calls take priority, can at last own and drive a sports car.

Yet the Federal government wants a piece of the action. As I said earlier, it's about clean air.

It seems that with all the anti smog devices and purposefully engineered power plants of today, everything goes out the window as soon as the driver pushes in on the clutch and revs the engine between shifts, as we were taught. At that moment, the anti pollution controls are nullified and smog is generated. So, it's automatic transmissions for the lot of us. Computers will be controlling every aspect of spark, intake air and gasoline, not just while we are cruising, but during acceleration, shifting, coasting, idling and even when the car is shut off! Yes, the gas stored in the tank, on all newer cars is kept safe from leaks and fume escapement even while parked at the mall. A sophisticated series of tubes, hoses, valves, expansion tanks and even a charcoal canister are mandated by the EPA and DOT to keep the gas from escaping (except out the tail pipe after it is used). Hey, one of the more common causes for that pesky check engine light going on is a loose gas cap. Yup, no matter what anyone may say, according to the Government's Regulations, the **ONLY** reason a check engine light is automatically turned on - the car is polluting! That's it. Look it up! And if it **FLASHES**, the car is damaging it's own pollution control systems!

This is the acceptance portion of our little discussion. Automatic transmissions and computer controlled shifting gear boxes are on the way - as a no option implementation within the next few years. So if you really enjoy sitting in traffic with your left leg quivering a bit because you want the jump on the next car, or you know that a pricey clutch job is a badge of complete control, then hang on to the car ya got, 'cause the end is near!

Ray A. Monigold is a Certified ASE Repair Technician and member of the Society of Automotive Engineers.

He not only holds an automotive related patent, in use today, but is a trained, experienced former Porsche tech and current VW Service Manager. As an author, lecturer and video training instructor Ray has many published works.

MORE JOBS THAN WORKERS
by Ray Arthur Monigold
[see end piece for source material]

JOBS for anyone willing to work
WE WILL TRAIN YOU
Pays best salary in industry
ALL BENEFITS included – Call

MOVE HERE TO WORK
We will pay for your move
No contract to sign
BEST STARTING PAY
Includes ALL MEALS FREE

SIGNING BONUS
For all qualified workers
NEED Supervisors
May include NEW CAR and Gas

Fantasy classified ads? No, they are real - plucked from the newspapers and copied off the handbills plastered on every blank wall in towns and cities throughout China.

THERE IS A LABOR SHORTAGE IN CHINA!

This is significant. First noted and reported in 2004, the Chinese officials who once discounted the phenomena as an anomaly are now indicating that a shift in production is taking place. Not a country who welcomes foreigners for anything but tourism, China has a strict anti immigration policy. Compounding this is the need to increase the speed of agricultural automation. Farmers are leaving home in hopes of becoming a part of the fastest growing group of people in the world today - China's Middle Class.

The labor in industry problems are so complex and pervasive that China is officially rethinking it's national strategies. Having decoupled from the weary dollar as a method of monetary measurement and refusing to revalue it's own currency, too much money - in country - is becoming a problem. Unable to simply ship dollars back to America for fear of fouling the Yankee money nest with inflation, thus hobbling the spending power of 200 million crazed shoppers, China is redistributing green backs in an effort to get the bucks returned to their home court through the back door. A large South American country has just paid it's defaulted World Bank loans, in full, with dollars from China. In exchange, they are aerating millions of acres to plant soy beans for China. This same thing is happening throughout South America and soy oil products could soon displace petro oil products as the top cash producer for the region. Likewise, a few former Soviet States are now partnering with China to develop their vast oil reserves using - you guessed it - American Dollars.

MORE JOBS THAN WORKERS

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Meanwhile, due to the human resource shortage, some of China's factories are having to pay more for labor than non subsidized, genuine capitalistic precepts might otherwise permit. These same facilities are rapidly upscaling to higher priced, more sophisticated manufacturing, thus leveling out the economic balance sheets. Asian computer chip makers, once thought to have a lock on high tech production, are now looking over their shoulders as China's dragon of expansion and innovation moves closer to their factory doors.

And on the low end production news, China is borrowing a page from our play book - outsourcing. Some of China's basic goods, like textiles are being off loaded to Vietnam and Bangladesh where labor is still cheap, but quality remains high. These two countries are still reeling from the shut down of U.S. importing after our government raised tariffs on their products to protect the now missing American textile giants. Glad to see a resurgence of interest from anyone, Vietnamese and Bangladesh business owners are welcoming China with open arms.

To wrap up this tale of money, people, factories and shopping malls, lets take a look at just two more classified ads (of the near future) - this time they are in The States:

DISHWASHER WANTED

Minimum – Masters of Science

Long Hours – Low Pay

Only Registered U.S. Citizens need apply

Dry-cleaning steam press operator

Must be experienced with recommendations

Will be laid off or fired

When better applicant is found

Good Luck and Good Night to us all, fellow Americans, we are going to need it!

This story was compiled from the filings of reporters stationed in China. Published in The New York Times, Christian Science Monitor, BBC World News and culled from the contemporary archives of public records.

PATRIOTS ALL

04/06/06

My ire has been elevated because of comments on today's show (4/6/06). Nearly at the end, the discussion turned to that of American Patriots in the Revolutionary War. One comentator said that they were harmless and civil. NEVER acting as terrorists. "Why, the Boston Tea Party hurt no one!"

As a Vietnam veteran I've become a bit of a history buff and having just read the book "1776" by David McCullough, I must disagree with the coments made on the show!! We, the rebellious subjects of England were anything but civilized. Even further, the Boston Tea Party "held" the evening of December 16, 1773 took place nearly two years BEFORE the official beginning of the "WAR".

Without great detail here, I offer that the fledgling Americans did not just brake the long standing rules of engagement under which Europe had conducted wars, WE SHATTERED THEM! We killed officers in the field, a BIG NO NO in the 1700's. We attacked on the flanks, we hid like cowards and ambushed like animals (their words NOT mine). After the British occupied New York City, we "PATRIOTS" snuck into town at night and set the city on fire. It coincided with a cold dry wind that blew fiercely from the points of ignition up into the heart of the city. A city, by the way, full of civilian women and children - all asleep to boot. The fiery shingles flew through the air igniting buildings as they landed. With a lack of fire fighters, the flames were finally halted by tearing down a several block strip of houses and business near the center of town. The smoke rose for days after. There is a reason we were called gorillas. The Hessians, a specialized group of German mercenaries employed by the British, with the rumored reputation of eating their enemy dead, were appalled by our actions as soldiers.

So all things are relevant. But we must remember that what was once considered horrible acts of random violence are now the norm. Yet acts of violence against others should never be condoned. Terrorism is unacceptable, no matter the period of history. But let's not justify the actions of others today with claims of our historical innocence.

Perhaps it would do us all some good to look at history, to see if there are lessons we might still learn, particularly concerning violence and the indiscretion humans perpetrate upon each other.

iPod VOLUME TOO HIGH?

by Ray Arthur Monigold

I bought a new car recently. Part of my decision was based upon a feature that caught my eye in the brochure. I also heard about it from the sales people, and saw it when I visited the dealerships to view the car. The car will go 120 miles per hour! On my several test drives the freeway was always full of traffic. But now that I own the car I have no less than FIVE speeding tickets. As a matter of fact, my attorney informs me that I could lose my drivers license. This is ridiculous! I am outraged and incensed!

The reason I'm contacting you is to see if any of your listeners have experienced the same problem and might want to join me in a class action law suit against the car manufacturer. Let's face it, they made a car that will do 120 MPH and I drove close to 120 MPH, but it ends up - news to me - that this endangered not only me, but those around me. The car company has offered to affix a device that will limit the car's speed to seventy, but that is not acceptable as it is a 120 MPH car. I want MONEY! And having the car company hobbled or put out of business is becoming more appealing to me the more I contemplate my fate.

Well, I must be off for now to see if I can join the class action suit against Apple because they never told me, except in the little manual that came with the thing, that turning the volume way up on my iPod could have (and has) caused damage to my ears.

Remember, as consumers we have the right to use something we buy any way we want! So let's get out there and SUE!