
Quid Pro Quo

By S/Sgt. J.R. (Jack) Kenny (retired)

In the early 1960s, Jasper, Alberta, was a busy tourist destination in the summer but during the winter it was reclaimed by the local residents. Skiing facilities had not been developed to attract the thousands of skiers who now flock to the ski resorts each winter. Back in the 1960s, the local winter population at Jasper was made up of National Park employees, business people, pipeline and railway employees.

Ben, a local resident, was a retired railroader who operated a bed and breakfast during the summer months. He and his wife lived in a house behind the hotel on Main Street. One cold winter day, Ben phoned the Detachment office to report someone had backed a vehicle into his fence.

We weren't very busy during the slow winter months so as the NCO i/c, I decided to investigate Ben's complaint. You could see by the tracks in the snow where a car, parked behind the hotel, had backed up into the fence and then took off down the alley behind the hotel.

I checked with the bartender in the hotel to see who was in the bar last night and it turned out there were four young railroaders drinking until the bar closed. The bartender knew them all and passed the names onto me. I interviewed the group. Yes, they had parked behind the hotel but they didn't back into Ben's fence.

"Ok, fellows," I said, "so you didn't damage Ben's fence but Ben was a railroader just like you fellows and I think it would be a nice gesture if you people went down to the lumber yard, got some lumber and repaired Ben's fence for him."

"Good idea, Corporal," they said. The fence was repaired.

As time went on, I would meet Ben on the street in Jasper and we would stop and talk. He appreciated the fence job. One Sunday in summer, when Jasper was crawling with tourists, I saw Ben walking past my residence. I was outside mowing the lawn. Ben waved at me and walked on, then he stopped, turned around and came over to where I was working.

"Hi, Corporal," he said. "Thought I should tell you

about a young fellow who came to the house last night looking for a bed and breakfast. He had no luggage, said it was coming later. He is wearing new clothes and has very little money. There is something different about him. Don't know what it is — just thought I'd pass it on."

"Thanks, Ben," I said. "I'll drop down and check him out."

I finished mowing the lawn, picked up one of the constables and we went down to Ben's place in an unmarked car wearing blue jeans and T-shirts. Ben met us at the door and invited us in. We met the stranger in the downstairs hall. After identifying ourselves we asked to see him upstairs in his room.

The room was bare, no luggage, not much of anything in the room. His answers to our questions were very vague. The constable stood in the doorway while I checked some of the dresser drawers. When I opened the night table drawer I found a writing pad with a letter half-written to the stranger's father.

It read: "Sorry dad, for all the trouble I have caused you but things are about to change. By now you have heard on the radio that I escaped from Spy Hill Jail and the police are looking for me...."

We took the prisoner back to the Detachment cells and I phoned the Sub Division NCO to advise him the escaped prisoner had been apprehended in Jasper. The Sub Division NCO had been stationed at Jasper and knew how busy and crowded the town became during the height of the tourist season and his first remark was, "How in the h— did you ever find an escaped prisoner in Jasper at this time of the year?"

"Just a little fence-mending, Staff," I said.

"What's that?" he replied.

"Nothing, Staff. The prisoner and escort will arrive in Edmonton on the noon train tomorrow."

For my statistics report, I showed "Damaged Fence" as unsolved and "Escaped Prisoner" as solved. ❖