

Glimpses of Brillion

Submitted by CAPT R. Claude "Frenchy" Corbeille, USN (Ret)

When I turned off the dark road and entered the even darker forest, I noticed splotches of moonlight randomly scattered over the forest floor. Beams from the waning gibbous moon, high overhead, were finding their way through the forest canopy and created a crazy quilt pattern. Subconsciously, I avoided stepping into a splotch of light, causing me to wonder why I did so. I wondered how much of the one-mile loop through the forest I would travel before there was sufficient light to discern hazards to navigation, like projecting rocks and roots. When I tripped on a rock, but did not fall, words of a psalm came to mind: "The valiant one whose steps are guided by the Lord, whose way God approves, may stumble, but he will never fall, for the Lord holds his hand." I do not feel the Lord holding my hand, nor do I worry about falling from the numerous trips over roots and rocks. I may not be jumping over candle sticks, but I am nimble enough to keep erect when a foot catches on an unseen obstacle, perhaps because, though imperceptible, the Lord really is holding my hand. In any event, I do not pitch forward onto my face, nor do I expect to do so.

Back on the road, under a lighter sky, with the eastern horizon showing where to expect the sun to appear, I noticed a layer of stratiform cirrus clouds covering most of the sky, and my thoughts turned to how much more character a Midwest sky has compared to the sky over Southern California, where a monochromatic gray layer of clouds hides the sky most of a day. Some of us have wondered from time to time just how high up are those cirrus clouds, formed of ice crystals rather than water droplets, estimated often, but rarely measured. As if on cue, an airliner coursed overhead leaving a condensation trail, or contrail, in its wake. The condensation trail was beneath the cirrus clouds, telling me that, since an airliner is usually flying at an altitude of more than 30,000 feet, the cirrus clouds were much higher than 30,000 feet. At some six miles vertical distance away, the passing jetliner was inaudible and the plane itself was a tiny speck; absent the condensation trail, it would have passed unnoticed, and I would still be wondering just how high up those cirrus clouds are.

A recent social event that involved outdoor grilling of one's supper, a thick tenderloin steak, brought on a train of thought that I will share. The steaks were of a specific weight, and being of small diameter, were about one and half inches in thickness. I popped my steak on the grill and quickly realized that getting it done to medium rare was going to take a long time. I removed it from the grill, broke out my jackknife, laid it open, into a three-quarter in thick butterfly. The lady standing near me thought that to be a good idea and asked if I could do that to hers. I did. My actions did not go unnoticed, and soon everyone either asked me to cut open their steak or borrowed my jackknife to cut it themselves. I processed the thought that, of all the male folks present, I was the only one who had a jackknife. For me, it is like the proverbial American Express card – I never leave home without it. Never.

When I was a youngster, pre-school age, my winter footwear consisted of a pair of "high-tops," shoes that were laced by means of hooks rather than poking a string through holes, about twice the height of regular field shoes. The best part was a leather pocket with a snap closure on the left boot that held a small jackknife. Upon attaining school age, I wore similar footwear to school, with the knife in its little pocket. No teacher ever, at any time, took exception to my having a knife on my person. I was not alone. More than half of the boys in school carried a jackknife. In fact, during recess, we often drew a circle in the dirt and played "knife," an improvised game that involved throwing one's knife into the circle. All the details of the game escape me, but I do recall that many jackknives had blades with broken tips as a result of hitting a stone in the dirt. Teachers witnessed these games but never interfered; having a knife on one's person was an acceptable practice; one I have never outgrown.

To this day, people who know me and find themselves in need of a knife, never ask if I have a knife; they simply ask if they might use my knife, because they know I always have one with me. It is kept in my left front pocket, and I have jeans that show premature wear at the point where the knife rests. I like the world I grew up in, and I expect a teacher today would react differently from the nuns who tolerated me, and a jackknife in the hands of a youth would be cause for alarm, if not ejection.

**Freedom Is Not Free
Frenchy Sends with Warm Regards**

