

**"Like wot I rote"**

(With apologies to 'Ern')

**D**URING WW2 I was on board a ship zig-zagging across the Atlantic, a manoeuvre to minimise the chance of U-boat attack. In those days world-wide travel and television had not warned us what to expect when travelling abroad and 'British' was synonymous with 'best', although we knew from films that everything across the pond was big. Fortunately I became familiar with currency "bits" and "dimes" etc., as the passengers on the ship were mainly injured American troops returning home.

We were met on arrival in Canada by lady volunteers offering us coffee and doughnuts. When given mine, I was asked whether I would like a "Hershey bar" to which I felt obliged to say "no", not knowing what it was. I later changed my mind when I discovered that "Hershey" was synonymous with "Cadbury" in the UK – my education had begun.

Having thought that such companies as "Kellogg's" and "Nestlé," were British, I was surprised to discover that a large number of what I had always thought to be British companies were in fact either American or Canadian, and ours were merely a small off-shoot of these giant corporations.

Our small group of RAF personnel were sent to an army camp fairly near to New York where we were issued with three sets of "drabs" the American equivalent of our "khaki drill", this was to save the hard pressed supplies in the UK. I then learned what was meant by "bum freezers", although I was delighted

with two pairs of shiny brown shoes of superb quality.

A further problem presented itself when I first went to the toilet in the barrack block or "enlisted men's quarters". I was faced with two rows of six w.c.s facing each other in a large open area – it might have been 'bigger', but was it was 'better'? (This layout was subsequently abandoned). And what was a "faucet"?

You know you have 'made it' in The States when you can order something to eat in a fast food establishment. The first time I tried was early after my arrival when travelling on a Greyhound bus from New York to Miami, taking about three days. On the first refreshment stop I followed others into such an establishment, but couldn't understand a word of our 'common language' with rapid fire instructions from the counter to the rear kitchen and back. With about ten ways to cook eggs using a foreign jargon, what chance had I without an interpreter? I had to buy a bunch of bananas from a nearby shop to keep me going until I could learn the language.

Through a volunteer organisation I was invited to spend any off-duty time with a 'well heeled' family in Connecticut, and for my first visit I was given instructions to take a train from Grand Central Station and I would be met by car at my destination. When I reached Grand Central I thought I must be at the wrong place, as it was a massive marble hall approached by enormous flights of steps with shining hand-

rails and not a train in sight – nothing like Kings Cross or Paddington with all the smoke, dirt and noise.

While awaiting departure time I decided that a wash and brush-up might be a good idea, but was rather surprised to have first my shoes and then my clothes progressively taken from me and replaced by a towel as I made my way towards the lavish interior. Following a leisurely soak I retraced my steps to be given my newly cleaned and pressed clothes and highly polished shoes. This *was* a highly civilised country! Then off past a sign "To the trains" which were to be found somewhere in the bowels of this gigantic palace.

I was met as promised by a 'station wagon' (or was it 'shooting brake?') by my hostess, (hubby was away making millions), and taken to a lovely house standing in its own extensive ground. Near neighbours, I was told, was the Sperry family of aircraft instrument fame. We played tennis and swam in various private gardens and I was given free use of one of their cars. No-one imagined that I might not drive, after all, even kids drove to school. Driving licence? "Just don't park near a fire hydrant, obey the road signs and you'll be OK".

That was all very well but when on the road what was a "Turnpike" or this prohibited "U-turn" thing etc., and with the lights suspended overhead I worried about missing them. I had learned in New York that at a road junction pedestrians don't move until a signal says "walk", unless wishing to be arrested by an armed policeman.

Over a period of time I learned to survive, particularly when travelling about in 'my' car. The main problem was having no money, but being a "Limey" I didn't need much anyway. Everyone seemed to know that we were only paid peanuts and weren't expected to pay for anything as there 'was a war on'.

During my period of re-education I became accustomed to the New World developments of the English language – phonetic spelling, such as "sox", "program" "color" "gray" "meter"(metre), and pronunciation such as "clerk" as in 'perk' and not 'park' etc. At first I thought that this was taking unwarranted liberties with our language, particularly after years at school trying to master the idiosyncrasies.

After a while I realised that it was possibly a very useful development, particularly as 'English' was to be the universal language of aviation and much more – it made a lot of sense as the rest of the world would not have to cope with 'standard' English peculiarities. I then realised that the New World must be at the cutting edge of language development!

Which brings me to the purpose of this short and enlightening article, kindly permitted by the Editor.

You may have congratulated yourself on detecting a real 'schoolboy (sorry, schoolroom) howler' in the editorial of the last issue, but did you ever think that it may be that this magazine is closer to that cutting edge of language development, possibly a little ahead of its time?

The Ancient Traveller