

Girl Scout Cookies *

Here is a true story that took place 50 years ago. I am reminded of it every year, but now that it has reached the half-century mark, now seems an appropriate time to share this heart-warming story.

So many times stories about our service men and women end in tragedy, especially the ones that survive down through the years, an example being Lt. Edward Carrington, killed one month prior to the end of hostilities during the Civil War. This tale has no heroism, but does relate to one of the every day, run-of-the-mill events that involves many, possibly the majority of our service personnel who serve their country in all corners of the world. It is unfortunate that so many stories revolve around something that went wrong, or involves violence or tragedy. Here is one of the other kind:

Recently I, along with a large number of other residents in this great nation of ours, received the boxes of Girl Scout cookies that had been selected last winter. It seems that each year there are fewer cookies in the box, although the price keeps rising. I'm not complaining, this is a major fund-raising effort for the Girl Scouts, and the price is incidental.

In 1956, a destroyer escort, the USS Hanna, (DE-449), belonging to the seventh fleet of the U. S. Navy, made a visit to Apra Harbor, Guam, Mariana Islands. This was before our involvement in Viet Nam, and this naval facility, along with the U. S. Air Force's base at the other end of the twenty-six mile long island, were very small, and not at all the scale reached a decade later. As a consequence, there were relatively few military personnel, and fewer civilians on the island.

The small vessel, with her crew of 140 some-odd officers and man, found herself the only naval ship in the entire harbor when she tied up at the dock. A short time after this, but before any of the crew had left the ship, a Chevrolet station wagon with a blond lady at the wheel, and five young girls pulled up near the gangplank of the ship. The driver got out and approached one of our officers on the quarterdeck. A few words were exchanged, and a call was made to the captain, who promptly picked up a phone and made an announcement over the public address system, which went something like this: "This is the captain speaking. As you all know, we are now tied up at Guam, a territory of the United States. We have a group of young ladies on the pier who are members of the one and only Girl Scout troop on Guam. They are the daughters of our military personnel stationed on this island outpost. Their leader informs me that they have just received their allotment of Girl Scout Cookies. I am also informed that the asking price is .50¢ per box. Because we have been deployed in the Western Pacific for nearly a half-year, we have not had too many opportunities to spend our money. I would like to suggest that we give these Girl Scouts \$5.00 per box."

There wasn't a man in the crew who disagreed with our captain. No one had eaten an American cookie, nor seen the smiling face of an American child for six long months, and they both looked pretty darned good!

Initially, they had two or three cartons of cookies, which sold out faster than they could remove them from the boxes. Everyone piled into the station wagon and was whisked away, only to reappear in a short time with six or seven more cartons, which represented every single cookie in that year's shipment to Guam. Some members of the crew purchased two, three and four boxes each, resulting with all cookies sold before

everyone had an opportunity to get any. Those with multiple boxes then sold some of their surplus so that everyone did end up with at least one box. But the scene on the dock very well might have been unique in the annals of the Girl Scouts. The entire troop was gathered around their leader, and while we couldn't necessarily hear what they were saying, the body language was loud and clear: "We have to get more cookies!" "There are no more cookies to be had, we are several thousand miles from the States, and getting more is impossible." "But we could sell many times more cookies than we already have – and at \$5.00 per box!" "Girls. What more can I say? If it was possible, we would get more, but it just isn't. Be thankful for what has happened today."

And so there stood the girls of Guam, tears streaming down their cheeks, their faces showing both shock and elation, staring at the gray warship in front of them. It is a scene that is indelibly fixed in the memories of the men who were there that day a half-century ago.

To my dying day, Girl Scout cookies will always have a special meaning for me, and I wouldn't be surprised if there aren't six ladies out there somewhere, now grandmothers or perhaps great grandmothers, who feel the same way.

Historic Bytes

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