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I will tell you a story...It happened in Italy, a long ago now. Christmas 1944. It was a day or two prior to that Christmas. Me and my mates had just moved up a few more weary miles from Forli to somewhere around Ravenna, a town that had just been liberated by the famous 8th Army and me. Well, I did help. Mind you, we hadn't completed the job properly, some of the northern territory as still a bit hostile.

Then, there was this wonderful billet, a real beauty, it actually had a roof, and yes, it still had some panes of glass in the windows. That is it did have until some nasty minded Hun let off a Christmas cracker outside and blew most of what was left out. Anyway, we still had a roof.

Settled in, kit and blanket spread upon the marble floor—how those Italians lived it up before coming under the bad influence of Adolf Schicklgruber—the shattered glass swept aside and glinting in the solitary candlelight in all life looked bearable especially as a bottle of Johnny Walker Black Label whiskey had somehow come close to hand. A couple of generations apparently were missing from its family tree, a black sheep of its family, perhaps because whatever the cause it had been diverted by the contingencies of war and where it was intended to go it never arrived.

In this haven, that Christmas, were we. There was Bert, the water tank driver. Great guy, but a little slow. Oh yes, he could drive alright and would do so for ever and a day until instructed to stop. Once we sent him to get some anti-freeze for the Don Rs motor bike. He went. Upon return he gave me a message purporting to come from the working MSM. I'm sure the MSM never used such impeccable phrases.

Eric, a fitter extraordinaire who could smell a fault a mile off. Only person I ever saw who switched off six cylinder lorry engines by leaning bare armed on the line of plugs. Also had a disconcerting habit of holding an electric wire with one hand whilst flicking passers by with the other.

Jock, the cook, was real Glasgie. Specialty making corned beef fritters, in fact it was his only specialty and yet from some source produced a Christmas pudding like no other. It was sumptuous even if it had a denture in as a lucky prize.

Picture the setting. Four weary us on the marble floor, a Christmas pudding and a bottle of Johnny Walker Black Label to boot. A happy circle and all was peace, or was until that Jerry sent another cracker outside and the remaining bits of window glass fell out, and worst still in the stunned silence that followed that precious bottle fell over and broke. Oh! What tragedy!

Now a bottle of Johnny Walker simply cannot be wasted. Four spoons as if by magic appeared and salvaging scooping operations commenced and then, when no more could be scooped in the true spirit of waste not want not, it was seen to that the remainder got lapped up by tongue.

My Mum always told me that you eat a peck of dirt before you die, so a little dust well sterilized by alcohol could do no harm.

It could not have done because I am still here.

One of the happier moments.