

CODE NAME SIXPENCE

By Chuck Tatum

Lt. Colonel Waldo Clancy Drum was vaguely aware that someone was attempting to wake him from a deep alcohol-induced sleep. He swept backwards with his hand attempting to strike the person trying to awaken him. To voice said, “Come on now, W.C., you know you will have to get up sooner or later, so why not just get your no good semi-Mexican ass out of the sack before I dump this glass of water on you!”

Drum throws first a pillow and then grabs a shoe and slings it at the location of the offending voice. Drum rolls over and wraps the sheet tightly around his upper body and head, leaving his body exposed from the waist down. His tee shirt is bunched up in the blanket. His boxer shorts had gathered up between his crouch, leaving his testicles slightly exposed.

The Marine Colonel with the offending voice made good his threat and slowly poured the contents of the glass he held on W.C. exposed testicles! It only takes a second for the liquid to saturate his shorts and run down the cheeks of his gluteus maximus.

Drum explodes out of the bed, grabbing his private parts with both hands and rushing headlong into the bathroom where he attempts to strike the offender as he rushes by. Colonel Rusty Wallace, U.S.M.D. neatly side steps Drum’s headlong rush. The sound of running water can be heard above the stream of Spanish and English expletives emitting from the shower.

“Wall-ass! You damned dumb bastard! That wasn’t water in the glass you dumb son-of-a-bitch! You just wasted a full glass of Sol A Misha vodka just to wake me up! Goddamn you! Don’t you know it’s Sunday morning and it’s my first day off in weeks?!”

Colonel Wallace responded, “Day off, you’ve got to be kidding! No one needs a day off from keeping Marine Corps Reserve records!”

W. C. came out of the shower, drying his hair with a big, oversized towel. Colonel Wallace is sitting on the side of the recently vacated bed, holding a big official-looking envelope with stamps all over it saying “Top Secret” in his hand. He waves it in front of W.C.’s nose.

W.C. says, “Okay, Wall-ass,” using the nickname he had used since the days there were both plebes at the academy, “why in the fucking world are you waking me up so early on a Sunday morning? Can’t this official bullshit wait until Monday morning?”

“Guess not, W.C. I was told to deliver it at once by General Briggs.”

W.C. finishes drying his hair and wraps the towel around his naked body. “Okay, okay, Wall-ass, what’s the bad news? I never got any good news from an official dispatch from anyone in the Marine Corps, much less from Brigadier General Briggs. I know that bastard had had it in for my ass ever since Nam!”

“W.C., wait just a minute, this official dispatch says you are to report to Marine Corps headquarters in D.C. by 1800 hours tonight! So get your gear and I will take you to El Toro. They have a jet waiting.”

W.C. looks straight at Colonel Wallace and says, “Goddamnit Wallace, you opened my dispatch. Don’t you see that’s marked secret?!”

“Well I did it because it has my name on it and furthermore it says that I’m personally responsible for getting your butt on that plane, so get that ugly mug of yours shaved and let’s go! You wouldn’t want me to keep your old buddy Briggs waiting, now would you?”

“Wallace, I want to tell you something. Personally, I could care less!”

“You know, W.C., that’s been the main part of your troubles for a long time. Your “could care less attitude” that’s what got you here in this God-forsaken section in the first place! Keeping records on Marine Reserves units is the end of the line in the Marine Corps and you and I both know it. W. C. you presently hold the record of being the oldest Lt. Colonel in the entire Marine Corps. That “fuck-it” attitude is what has kept you in grade for so damned long. You should have made full colonel three years ago when I did. But no, you can’t leave the vodka alone long enough to tell which end is up! That’ why Jill left you! She

was the best and only real chance you had and you screwed that up just like everything else!”

“Wallace what do you think they want me for in D.C.? To kick me out of the corps or do they have some other shit assignment for me?”

“W.C., the only thing I can tell you is that it’s not going to be a promotion.”

W.C. is quiet on the way to El Toro, hardly a word is said between two old friends. The friendship went back to their first day at the Naval Academy. The dark complexioned kid from El Paso, Texas and the kid from upstate New York were assigned to the same squad room. Some people are *simpatico*; it’s a natural thing that defies explaining.

W. C. Drum’s dark complexion was from his mother, she was Mexican or Spanish. His father claimed that she was Spanish but the truth was that she was a full-blooded Mexican and proud of it. Although she had the fair complexion that the Conquistadores had. More Castilian than anything else he had inherited his mother’s cold black hair. It was now more gray than black. He had only a little gray when he went to Nam, but a lot of gray when he left.

Rusty Wallace’s real name was Russell g. Wallace. The Rusty was from the color of his hair – red! Wallace’s hair was the same color or red that rust is. It grew in curls that created

a mar celled look. It was easy to take care of and he still wore it in a close-cropped, cut like it was at the Academy. He also had large freckles all over his face and was not comfortable in the sun.

The sun never affected W. C.'s skin, just a difference in pigmentation, I guess. W. C. were the initials that Waldo Clancy used instead of his name. You took your life in your hands if you called him Waldo or Clancy. He hated Roll Call at the Academy because the instructors used to lean heavy on the "Waldo", but they were upper classmen and could get by with it.

He truly hated his name. Waldo was his mother's choice and his father wanted to use an Irish name so the second choice was Clancy. His mother thought that Waldo sounded romantic, she had recently read Emerson shortly before W. C.'s birth. People that didn't like using initials called him "Drum"; he liked that.

As W. C. boarded the plane that was to whisk him off to Washington, D.C. the old friends shook hands. Wallace said to

Drum, “Don’t screw this assignment up! We both know this is your last chance.”

“I won’t,” replied Drum as he walked up the boarding ladder. He turned at the last minute and said, “Adios, Mother, see you around!”

The jet taxied down the runway, waited a few minutes, received clearance and took off for Washington, D.C.

At a naval prison Platoon Sergeant Alonzo sat on his lower bunk staring down at the floor of his cell. He wondered how in hell he had ended up in a naval prison. He really knew the how; he had fucked up by the numbers when he left Lance Corporal Dancy on an outpost, guarding a desert road while on a desert training maneuver. He just plain forgot to pick him up, and then forgot to take Roll Call when the men in his platoon assembled to be picked up.

No one noticed that Dancy wasn’t on the truck that was taking them back to the main camp. The Marines in the two trucks thought he was in the other truck. He knew that he had fucked up the next morning when he realized that one of his

men was missing! He prayed that some other outfit had seen him and had picked him up. He would show up soon, surely.

Private Simpson came up and said that Dancy had not slept in the tent last night and asked, “Sarge, was he assigned to a new outfit?”

Platoon Sergeant Alonzo knew he was in big time trouble then and went to Lieutenant Robert, in charge of the platoon and told him, “Sir, I think I have screwed up. Lance Corporal Dancy is missing. I think I left him in the desert.”

A full-scale search party found Lance Corporal Dancy the second day, canteen empty, about five miles from the post where he had been left. He wandered in ever-increasing circles until the sun had baked his brains in the 120 degree heat. Platoon Sergeant Alonzo knew he was facing 5 to 10 years in the brig and a dishonorable discharge.

Next morning the court martial rendered a finding of guilty on all charges and sentenced Platoon Sergeant Alonzo to five years at hard labor, demotion to the rank of private and a dishonorable discharge at the end of his sentence. Platoon

Sergeant Alonzo loved the Marine Corps; it was his life, his home. He had escaped drug use and the gangs of Los Angeles when he got wise and joined the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps had given his life a new meaning and it made him feel like a man.

Alonzo had responded well to the discipline of military life and it was to become his way of life. He volunteered for demolition school. He did so well that he was made an instructor at the school. This type of duty was a piece of cake to Marine Alonzo. He relished the power of explosives. He loved explosives. He read every book he could read on the subject. He wished that there was a war going on so he could practice his trade. He had missed Viet Nam by a month or so. He did the next best thing, he taught other Marines his trade. He respected the power of destruction his playthings carried. He was never disrespectful of the dangers that they possessed. He knew that familiarity breed contempt.

Leaving Lance Corporal Dancy in the desert was his first and only mistake in the Marine Corps. He would have given anything to make up for this mistake.

First Lieutenant Daniel Roberts career in the Marine Corps was in ruins. Platoon Sergeant Alonzo took all of the blame on himself, but that's not the way the Marine Corps works. Lt. Roberts was to receive a severe reprimand for his dereliction of duty. This letter in his file meant that he was through in the Corps. He was forever branded by this letter because he was the platoon leader that had lost a Marine while on a training mission.

Mountain climbing was Lieutenant Roberts' passion; that is besides girls; he loved them both. But he liked the mountains the best. He was given a new assignment at the Pentagon, shuffling papers; an 8 to 5 job where if he screwed up and he would not get someone killed.