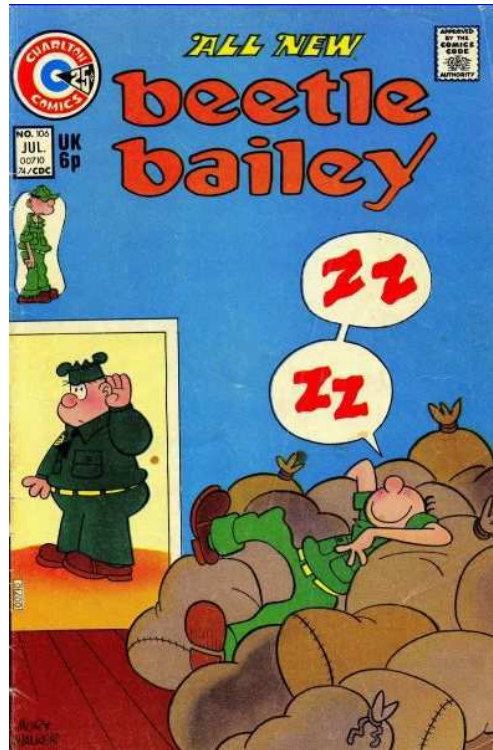


The Saga of the Milk Machine

Lackland Air Force Base, Texas

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I suppose we must have had base detail several times over the course of my basic training at Lackland. I think that the duty rotated between barracks because we had it every couple of weeks and mostly on the weekends, of course. I remember sweeping floors, emptying the trash and dusting the base headquarters building on Christmas Eve. I even learned how to run a floor buffer there. In basic training quarters, there is no buffer, just old GI blankets and recruits to polish with. Now, I wasn't too happy about all that at the time, after all, it was Christmas Eve! If I remember right, the base commander was Brigadier General Stillman (not the Vinegar Joe Stillwell that comes to mind) and I was duly impressed with the thick carpet, walnut desk and all the finery in there. I thought about taping his drawers shut, maybe gluing the phone handset down or something like that, but I didn't. Other times, we had to be pilots. You know. "When I was in the Air Force, I was a pilot!" When I was told, I would "pile it" here or "pile it there."

Once the whole flight marched over to one of chow halls and policed up, mopped the floor and placed all the chairs back in position, and that was all we had to do. It was KP duty, Kitchen Patrol.

I envisioned that KP would be something like it was for Beetle Bailey in the funny papers. He was always getting in trouble with the Sarge and he'd be sitting out back with a pile of potatoes and a peeler. Turns out that Air Force KP wasn't quite like that.

During one detail day, a group of us were assigned KP duty at the WAF (Women's Air Force) chow hall. We had to march about a mile before we got there and then we were turned over to the Mess Sergeant. By this time, most of us were pretty familiar with a chow hall, but none of us had been back in the kitchen area. I was told by the big boys at the pool room back in Casey, "Never volunteer for anything!" They had also said, "You don't want Pots and Pans!", and I had remembered that. Up to this point I hadn't volunteered. This time I broke the rule.



The Mess Sergeant had lined us up, clipboard in hand, in the kitchen area and started assigning details, such as the serving line, working the kitchen area, mopping, bussing tables, clipper duty and "shudder" pots and pans.

The "Clipper" was a giant steam powered dish washer. Clipper must have been the brand name, I suppose. I couldn't see where it would clip anything. You loaded the dishes and silverware in these big trays and they went through the whole cycle in just a minute or two and came out the other side hot and sterilized, ready to be stacked. I thought that might not be too bad. However, before he had gotten to the clipper, he says "Does anybody here know how to run a milk machine?"

Hey, I can do that! Just load the milk cans in there when they're empty and go get some more. That ought to be easy. I'm thinking "Anything to get out of pots & pans, right?" So, what did I do? I raised my hand and got the job.

One of the permanent cooks, a two striper (Airman Second Class) told me to come with him and he showed me what to do. He showed me where to find a cart then took me to the big walk-in refrigerator where these approximately 5 gallon stainless steel milk cans were stored. He said to load one on the cart and we went up front where the two milk machines were. There were two cans in each stainless refrigerated box that opened from the front. The cans had an opening near the bottom where a rubber hose came out. He pointed out that the hose simply snaked down through the dispenser handle which would pinch off the hose until you lifted it. "Yeah, I know how to do that." I thought as he showed me the routine. He says, "Take that can back to the refrigerator and put it back. Come back here and keep

an eye on these machines and when one runs out, go get a can and replace it! Take the empties out to the dock where I showed you!" OK, I'm in business, this is gonna' be easy!

Now, this can't be all bad. I'm watching the girls come in and go through the chow line and they all stopped by the milk machine and got them a couple glasses. This afforded me an opportunity to get a good look and every once in a while there'd be a cute one come by. Sometimes I could get them to talk a bit, but mostly they kept their mouth shut like they were told as they side stepped through the chow line. I was happily chatting one up, you know, "Where you from? Do you like it here?" and similar, when a voice behind me says "WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING WITH MY GIRLS, AIRMAN?" I probably jumped a foot and turned around to face the voice. It was about the ugliest, nastiest, biggest, female TSgt I have ever seen. She told me, in no uncertain terms, that I would not be talking to anybody in that chow line and to mind my business or she'd take me outside and kick my ass. And I believed her! That spoiled some of the fun, that's for sure.

In no time, one of the milk cans was empty, so I took the cart and retrieved a can of milk from the cooler and began the task of replacing the empty. I opened the door, removed the empty, unthreaded the hose from the handle and placed the empty on the cart. I removed the sticky paper covering the opening to release the hose on the full can and set it upside down in the machine. What did I do next? Like an idiot, I used the provided box cutter to cut the milk hose BEFORE I threaded it through the handle mechanism. "Oh shit!", I said. There I was, standing there pinching the end of the cut hose and wondering how I'm going to thread the hose through there without losing a gallon of milk? Do I want to turn the can up-right and take it back to the refrigerator? No, they would find it and I WOULD be in deep shit! I figured I'd just have to get it threaded in there and clean up my mess. Then it hit me again! "Oh god, did I cut the hose long enough to get through there? Damn!"

Well, I managed to get it through there without losing more than a pint or so, however, the hose just barely came out of the handle. I cleaned up the mess and gave a big sigh of relief after looking around and seeing if anybody had seen me. Handily, I had a couple stacks of paper towels and a big GI sponge on my cart.

I was entertained a bit by watching some of the girls looking under the mechanism to see if there was a hose for the milk to come out of. Normally, there was about an inch or so that you could see easily. Before I'd tell the ladies it was OK to use, I'd look around to make sure one of those nasty WAF T.I.s weren't looking! Finally, that damned can was empty. The next dozen or so cans were installed by without a hitch. I had learned my lesson the hard way and now, I was a veteran KP'er.