

## **“I Need Some Bullets, Hurry Up!”**

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Mr. Ouchley recounts a story when he as assistant manager at Lacassine National Wildlife Refuge in 1981. He woke up to the manager of the refuge, Bobby Brown, saying he needed some bullets. Mr. Ouchley got out of bed and ran over to get the second assistant manager, Charlie Herbert, and got in a boat and raced to find Bobby, who was at a tug boat interrogating the crew about some poacher plaguing the area. The tug boat crew plead their innocence, but said there was a john boat in the area and suggested that might be who they were looking for.

The three men set off to find the john boat, in which they did and the houseboat that was home base for the poachers. They managed to boat the houseboat where they found four poachers, five deer, and over thirty rabbits. When Mr. Ouchley asked the manger about the message he had received about the bullets, Mr. Brown stated he forgot to take some with him.

Keywords: poaching, refuge, boat, Lacassine National Wildlife Refuge, Bobby Brown, Charlie Herbert.

“I need some bullets, hurry up!” That was the garbled radio message I heard late one night while lying in bed on Lacassine National Wildlife Refuge in 1981. Be assured that my feet hit the floor of the assistant manager’s refuge house when those words soaked into my sleep fogged mind. The call from refuge manager Bobby Brown was short, urgent, and indicated his location to be somewhere in the marsh near the intersection of Bayou Misere and the Intracoastal Waterway. We had been working shifts trying to catch poachers who shot deer from passing tug boats as they traveled through the refuge. This didn’t sound good.

I ran across the headquarters compound, law enforcement gear in tow (including plenty of bullets), and banged on the door of second assistant manager Charlie Hebert. In no time we had lowered the Whaler from its cradle in the boat house and were racing down the Mermentau River. Six miles later we came upon the scene of action. You couldn’t miss it. Bobby had “pulled over” a large tug boat which was lit up like a small city, search lights pointing in every direction. We managed to climb on board and found the crew spread-eagled and Bobby in the process of interrogation. He had heard shots just before the tug came down the bayou and assumed they were the culprits. The indignant crew insisted they were innocent and told of passing a small john boat just before being stopped. We searched every nook and cranny of the tug and came up empty handed. There was nothing to do but turn them loose.

The investigation then turned toward the alleged john boat. If it existed the boat had to be in the small, narrow bayou between us and its outlet in Lake Misere. A plan was made. Bobby would make a twelve mile run down the Intracoastal and enter the lake at the opposite end. Charlie and I would ease up the bayou and effectively bottle up our prey. We knew of a rickety houseboat anchored in a small cove off the bayou and thought that might be the base of operations for the john boat. As it turned out, it was. We gave Bobby a head start since he had more water to plow. He left before it occurred to us to ask about the “out of bullets” message.

As we idled down the bayou one of south Louisiana’s renowned pea soup fogs rolled in and cut visibility to a boat length. After about thirty minutes we neared the houseboat cove and could see the faint glow of lights and hear a generator. Someone was home. Not long afterwards Bobby’s running lights appeared in the fog directly in front of us. We radioed him but got no answer. Suddenly, he raced forward straight toward the houseboat. Not having a clue what was going on, we followed him. Bobby’s boat struck the houseboat, propelling him between the split windshields and up on the back covered porch of the houseboat. A man caught him just as he was about to continue on into the water beyond. We later learned that Bobby had seen two men skinning a deer on the back deck. His idea was to race forward, cut the engine, and jump aboard before they could throw the deer in. He waited a bit late to cut the engine and had it not been for the outlaw catching him, he would have been ejected over the far railing.

In the meantime Charlie and I made a somewhat more controlled docking at the other end of the houseboat and stormed aboard. The front door was locked and when I gave it a kick it was just like in the movies. The whole door fell inward on the floor. We stepped inside to a scene that would be expected at a chainsaw massacre. When the bad guys saw us coming they began slinging freshly dressed deer on the back porch into the houseboat. Blood was everywhere. Large smears on the floor led to carcasses under bunks and in corners. Some were covered with sheets, towels, table cloths, and underwear. After the initial shock, our first reaction was to secure

the scene, i.e. separate these knuckleheads from the numerous weapons lying about. The three poachers were soon tended, and almost as an afterthought I decided to take another look outside. A homemade “port-a-john” was perched on one corner of the front deck. As I walked by I noticed a man standing stiff in the shadows against the toilet. I instructed him (probably in less than a professional manner at this point) to come out with his hands up. He did not move. I wondered if he thought that I did not see him. I stepped closer and gave the order again. Same results. Finally, a prod with a cold metallic object brought him forward. He seemed to be in some type of trance and remained in this condition until we left.

The final tally was four poachers, five deer, thirty-something rabbits packed in ice chests, and several guns, one with a recently filed serial number. The bad guys lost that time. The next morning as we were sorting out the contraband I remembered to ask Bobby about the bullets. “Oh, I just forgot to bring any last night,” he said.

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