

Buxton's War
By Rob Bresnen

It was a frightfully cold and damp evening when I set out from my family home in Thornton le Moors, our rural idle at the boot end of the Wirral. There was a southward breeze blowing in off the Water, carrying with it a hint of the Mersey, the silt mashes and the factories. Had I have been as wise as I am nowadays, I would have stayed at home, but it was 1938; I was young, foolish and keen to get caught up in the mess that was the 'British Civil War'.

The roadblock was about a mile south of our village, near Widow Greene's cottage. It was a rather humble affair, consisted of a barricade made up of tea chests filled with rocks, and a gate just wide enough to allow a truck through. In the siding was a small, tired looking road menders wagon that had been pressed into service for the duration of the war. I leaned my bicycle against a red sandstone wall, alongside two other bikes.

I paused a moment to remove my bicycle clip and straiten out my suit. I checked my new armband was on correctly. I was inordinately proud of my armband- the only 'uniform' of the Cheshire Local Defence Force. It was black, and my mother had spent all day embroidering it with the letters L.D.F; it had been my birthday present. I slung my newly issued Lee Enfield rifle over my shoulder, in what I took to be a suitably military fashion, and knocked on the door.

After a moment of shuffling and grunting from within the wagon a face appeared at the door- an old man, about my father's age, peered out at me suspiciously.

"What do you want lad?" He asked in a gruff voice.

"I'm Ernest Buxton. I mean, Private Buxton. I am supposed to be here Sir," I replied hesitantly, showing my armband. "Captain Williams sent me. He said I should come here to 'learn the ropes'."

"Did he now." The old man said, tweaking a neat, no-nonsense moustache "Well you had better come in then. And don't call me 'sir'; I'm no officer. You can call me Sergeant, if you must."

It was, of course, Mr Goodson- I knew him from the village, where he worked as a tenant farmer for the former Mr Williams, now Captain Williams of the C.L.D.F. The story was that Goodson had served in Flanders in the last war. He had once caught me, when I was a lad, scrumping for apples on his farm, and had taken a leather strap to my backside. I prayed he would not recognise me.

He was a tough looking man, even at his age. He was dressed in a weatherworn tweed suit with gaiters with his sergeant stripes were sown directly onto the sleeve of his jacket. At his hip he wore a pistol in a

brown leather holster. At the time I thought there was something rather strange about the pistol, and later I found out that it was a German officer's automatic pistol that Goodson had brought back from France in 1918.

Inside the wagon was warm and dry. A small stove provided plenty of heat for the tiny space. It was sparsely finished, with a plank bench down both sides, and a folding card table in the middle. A set of dominoes was set up on the table, ready for a game. The wagon had a peculiar, but reassuring, earthy aroma that reminded me of my father's potting shed. A small kerosene lamp hanging from a nail driven into a rafter illuminated the wagon.

Apart from myself, and Goodson, the only other inhabitant of the wagon was a man who looked even older than Goodson. His face was as wrinkled and battered as a badly wrapped parcel and framed with ludicrously bushy mutton-chops. He was dressed in a suit that was as crumpled as his face. He eyed me suspiciously while stroking the stock of a shotgun that looked every day as ancient as he was.

"This is Corporal Tipham. He fought the Boers in Africa." Goodson said, by way of an introduction. I made an attempt at a salute, but the corporal never reacted.

"By goodness, how old are you lad?" Goodson asked as I stepped into the light.

"A day past my eighteenth birthday Sir. I mean Sergeant." I replied.

"You're the baker's lad aren't you?"

I answered that I was and we exchanged pleasantries. Goodson asked after my family, and I replied that they were all well. To my relief he made no reference to the incident with the apples. Then I remembered something in my pocket and fished out a small brown paper bag. The bag had got damp in the rain. I handed it to Goodson.

"My father sent you that." I explained. Goodson opened it up and peered inside.

"Is that what I think it is?" He asked, hard eyes now sparking. I nodded.

"Sugar. The Royal Navy managed to bring a Russian cargo ship through the royalist blockade last week. My father knows a grocer in Liverpool who got him a sackful."

"Well this is a princely gift isn't it Corporal?" Goodson grinned.

The older man nodded slowly, still eyeing me up, but still he did not speak.

"Do you play dominos?" Goodson asked. When I replied that I was familiar with the game, he grunted. "Good. We play for a halfpenny a game."

I decided it best not to mention that my father had forbade me to gamble, and took a seat on the bench next to Goodson, having first

carefully propped my new rifle against the doorframe. Tipham, who still hadn't spoken to me, set the game up for three to play, while I fished a halfpenny out of my jacket pocket and plonked it on the table besides theirs. While we played Goodson chatted amiably, but Tipham did not join in the conversation, only speaking at all when the game play demanded it, and then only with great reluctance.

"So you want to fight in the war hey?" Goodson asked.

"I want to do my duty and fight for my country." I replied enthusiastically

Goodson laughed, rather unkindly, then turned his attraction back to the dominos spread out on the table. "The question is: whose side are you on? What are you, Royalist? Fascist?" Goodson cocked an eyebrow "Communist?"

I had to confess, I hadn't given the idea too much thought. Looking back, I should be shocked by my ignorance, but I was just a Cheshire lad from a small village at the bottom end of the Wirral. I wasn't yet politicised in any way. I wasn't stupid, of course: I knew about the war, and about the causes. I knew how King Edward's refusal to abdicate, and his insistence on making Wallis his queen had led to the collapse of the government, and had allowed Mister Mosley, the leader of the British Union of Fascists, to become Prime Minister. I knew that the socialist dockers in Liverpool had refused to unload goods destined to help the BUF, and when army and navy had mutinied rather than break the strike, it had led to the formation of the Liverpool Free State, and what we now call 'The Siege of Liverpool'. I knew about all those things, but it never occurred to me that I had to choose a side.

"I am not sure." I stammered nervously. Goodson chuckled.

"That's best lad. Sit on the fence for as long as you can lad. That's my advice." Goodson said.

"What about you?" I asked. "Whose side are you on?"

"Well I'm not sure that Corporal Tipham and I are altogether on anyone's side, if you catch me drift. We take orders from Captain Williams. Who he takes orders off, I couldn't rightly say, if it's anyone at all. That's the captain's business, not mine."

Then he let out a deep sigh as he looked back at the dominos. "Looks like Corporal Tipham has won again."

Tipton wrinkled face split into a toothless grin as the three halfpennies disappeared into his pocket.

Five games of dominos later, I was already down two pence halfpenny and beginning to wonder when Sergeant Goodson was going to 'show me the ropes'. Then I heard the distant rumble of a truck engine coming up

the lane.

“You’ve got good ears lad.” Goodson said when I told him. “See corporal, the young are good for something after all. Grab you rifle and follow me. The Corporal can cover us from the window. And for God’s sake don’t say nothing, just watch and learn.”

Outside the damp had turned into a heavy drizzle, but I didn’t feel the cold it all that adrenalin pouring through my body. My hands were shaking a little as I fumbled to get my rifle strap over my shoulder. I heard the shutters of the wagon open and saw the hard lines of Tipham’s shotgun barrel protruded from the darkness within. Goodson seemed nonchalant, but I noticed that he had unbuttoned the flap on his leather holster.

There were two trucks coming up the lane; Army issue Fords with canvas hoods over their beds. I guessed they were troop transports. In front of them, with a whole bank of headlights and sidelights blazing away, was a limousine- a jet black Rolls Royce that gleamed in the headlights of truck. A small flag fluttered on the bonnet of the car. It was a flag I was, by now, very familiar with: A black lighting bolt across a white circle, on a red field.

It was the badge of the British Union of Fascists.

The car and the trucks came to a halt ten yards short of our roadblock. For a moment nothing happened, then half a dozen BUF black shirts jumped out of the nearest truck. They were armed, as I was, with Lee Enfield’s. They took up position in the shadows of the hedgerows on either side of the road. Although I could not see them, somehow I knew their rifles were pointing as Goodson and me.

The door of the Rolls Royce opened, and a NCO climbed out. He had something in his hands that, in the gloom, looked like a short spear. I gripped my rifle tightly in expectation, my breath well and truly baited, as he began to fiddle with this spear. Moments later it sprang open and I realised it was a large black umbrella, the likes of which were favoured by undertakers and golfers.

“Stand easy lad. They are from the Manchester Legion of the BUF.” Goodson pursed his lips as he spoke, and I got the distinct impression that the sergeant didn’t approve of Mancunians interfering in Cheshire’s affairs. He certainly wasn’t the only one to hold this point of view.

“What are they doing here?” I asked in a stage whisper.

“There is a battalion of them garrisoned at Hoole Hall to bolster the defences of Chester. They often come this way on patrol, looking for Reds. Think they own the blasted place.”

The NCO strolled down the lane towards us, skipping over a large puddle with a surprising degree of daintiness for a man of his bulk. He

stopped before Goodson, and executed a snappy fascist salute. Goodson did not return it.

“Evening Sergeant.” The fascist was dressed in a striking black uniform with bright red piping. His knee-length riding boots were polished to perfection, and partially gleamed in the car headlights. His hair was slicked back with Brylcreem, and he had modelled his ‘spivy’ moustache on his glorious leader, Oswald Mosley. I bet he thought it made him look dashing. “Captain Webster would like a word with you.” He said, nodding towards the car.

“Best not keep him waiting then. Come on lad.” Goodson set off towards the car, but the fascist NCO stopped me, pushing me in the chest with some force.

“Wait up. Who is this?” He said, addressing Goodson, not me.

“That is Private Buxton. A new recruit.”

“Not a Red is he?” He eyed me suspiciously. I did my best to not look like a communist.

“No. Here to do his duty and ready fight for the country. In’t that right lad” Goodson gave me a conspiratorial wink.

“That’s right sergeant.” I agreed hastily.

The fascist seemed satisfied with this answer. He walked back with us to the car, but never offered to share with us the shelter of his large umbrella. He ducked back into the front passenger seat of the Rolls Royce, leaving us standing outside, getting wet.

It was then that I noticed the BUF captain’s driver for the first time. She was a striking woman- not at all attractive, but striking. She was heavysset, with a solid frame; she looked like she would have made a good scrumhalf. Her hair, part blond and part something else, was scraped back into a tightly coiled bun on either side of her head in a very Germanic style. She looked, to my mind at least, like the fat lady who sings at the end of an opera.

“That’s Edith,” Goodson whispered, with a quiet chuckle. “Captain Webster’s...bodyguard.”

She certainly looked capable of being a bodyguard. I, for one, wouldn’t lay a finger on Captain Webster if she was around, but I got the impression that Goodson thought this Teutonic woman’s duties included something more than protection. Each to his own, I suppose, what with beauty being in the eye of the beholder and so on.

The window to the limousine slowly wound down, and the BUF Captain’s face appeared. He had a square-ish face, with fleshy jowls and a double chin. A magnificently bushy and old-fashioned moustache sat directly beneath a bulbous nose that was so red that it practically glowed with its own light.

“Evening Sergeant. Dreadful weather is it not?” Captain Webster asked.

Goodson looked up at the sky, as if the thought had not occurred to him until the captain had mentioned it.

“It’s not that bad Captain” He shrugged, “Us Cheshire lads are made of sterner stuff than you Mancunians; you might be as well to remember that. Sir.”

“Quite.” Captain Webster said with a mirthless grin. “Now listen Sergeant. I’m taking this patrol north, and we will be just passing through your village, so you needn’t worry yourself about it, you hear?”

“Well my orders were to stop any traffic coming through Thornton Le Moors and find out their business. I suppose I could send Buxton here to go and wake Captain Williams, but...” Goodson’s voice trailed off.

“I am on party business Sergeant.” Captain Webster snapped, as if that answer should satisfied Goodson. It didn’t.

“With a platoon of rifles, sir?” Goodson nodded towards the trucks, the sergeant was still grinning amiably, but it was clear from the glint in his eye that he would not be dissuaded. He was a tenacious terrier after a rat.

“Very well, if you must know we are trying to find a couple of Red spies spotted reconnoitring the area. Have you seen two men on motorcycles?”

“Can’t rightly say I have Captain. What about you Buxton? Have you seen any of those Scousers snooping about?” I shuck my head, mindful that the sergeant had told me to keep my mouth shut.

“Well if you do see them, be sure to report it to your local constabulary.”

“Of course Sir. Wouldn’t want those Red’s tearing up around here now would we Sir?” Goodson grinned.

“Now will you move your blasted road block?”

“Now Sir, I am not that sure. Perhaps I would be best sending Buxton for Captain Williams after all. His orders were a little vague...”

Webster’s lip twitched in anger. He produced a large brown paper bag from within the car and thrust it out of the window towards Goodson, who took the package and held it behind his back without passing comment.

“Now that I think about it, Captain Williams did say that I was to detain any traffic until I could establish their business.” Goodson said, as if nothing had happened. “And now we have established that, then I guess you could be on you way then. Snap too Buxton, open the gate and let the gentleman and his boys through.”

I jumped to it, swinging open the gate to allow the Fascist patrol to head through. I was a mighty bit surprised by Goodson’s flagrant disregard for his orders, but I wasn’t about to make a fuss.

As the BUF clambered back into their trucks, Goodson came to stand besides me. Perhaps he guessed my mood, because he muttered under his breath: “Steady boy. Your doing fine.”

As we watched the Fascist drive off up the lane towards Thornton Le Moors Goodson shuck his head.

“He might be an officer, but Captain Webster is no Gentleman. I can assure you of that.” He said, “Do you know what they call him?”

“The Butcher of Beswick.” I answered. I had heard the nickname bandied about the village hall at the last meeting of the Cheshire Local Defence Force.

“And do you know what they call him that?” He asked. I answered that I thought that the captain’s nickname referred to some previous brutal and unpleasant act. Goodson laughed.

“They call him the Butcher of Beswick because that’s what he was, before the war. He owned a butcher’s shop in Beswick, just outside Manchester. Webster is no more a gentleman than your old dad. No offence. War has a strange habit of elevating some men above their status, and humbling others.”

“Why are we letting them through?” I asked. Goodson snorted, as if I had made a wonderful joke.

“They’re just passing through. And besides, we’re hardly going to stop them are we? The corporal’s shotgun and your rifle and against a platoon of fascist. We’re hardly going to make a dent.”

“And your pistol.” I reminded him.

“This old thing? I haven’t had bullets for this nigh on for twenty years.” Goodson said with a grin. “I suppose I could have always thrown it at one of them if they came close enough. No lad, we’ve done our duty tonight. They’ll be through the village like a dose of salts, and then they’ll be someone else’s problem. And besides,” He held up the paper bag Captain Webster had given him. “We’ve got a pressie. Smell.”

Goodson held the paper bag up to me to sniff. I was instantly transported back to the dry warmth of my father’s bakery by the scent of cinnamon and raisins.

“Teacakes?” I was incredulous.

“Certainly. Captain Webster and I have an understanding. There’s a little tearoom by the station in Hoole where they make the best teacakes in Chester.” He turned to head towards the wagon. He called up to Tipham: “Put the kettle on Corporal. It’s nearly time for tea.”

Back in the cosy warmth of the wagon Tipham had started to lay the dominos out for yet another game. I was down to my last halfpenny, and was secretly rather relieved I wouldn’t have to loose any more money. So far my time serving with the Cheshire Local Defence Force had cost me three pence!

As Tipham prepared the tiles, I found myself reflecting thoughtfully on my first encounter with Captain Webster and his British Union of Fascist. I was, in particular, reflecting on quite how dash smart the BUF chaps looked in their black tunics and gleaming jackboots. I recalled how proud I had been of my C.L.D.F armband, and then I thought about how much more proud I would be dressed in an elegantly tailored black shirt, with brilliant scarlet piping. I could easily imagine myself strolling down the high street of Chester, dressed in an immaculate uniform, my hair slicked back with Brylcreem. In my mind's eye I could see myself leaning nonchalantly against the stone cross, smoking a cigarette with all the style of Humphrey Bogart. I was certain I would turn every girl's head. I might even try to grow one of those rakish Errol Flynn moustaches like the Prime Minister.

I grinned at the thought of myself as a dandy soldier, handsome as any Hollywood star, and naturally my thoughts turned to Betty Williams, Captain Williams' daughter. Betty was, without question, the fairest rose in Thornton-Le-Moors, and by a good stretch too. It was that flax-haired beauty that had been instrumental to me signing up to the CLDF in the first place, though I doubt she would know it. I felt a sudden compulsion to enlist right after I heard that Betty always accompanied her father to the parade meetings.

Betty was my age, and was as soft skinned and as fair as any maid, with flowing hair and a tinkling laughter that filled my heart young with butterflies. She had been in the same Sunday school class as me since we were seven, though I had never managed to speak to her. In truth, I wasn't entirely sure she even knew I existed. My inability to talk to fair Betty was as a result of a deadly combination of my own crippling ineptitude when it came to all dealings with the fairer sex, coupled with her evident superiority, both in terms of looks and socially. She lived in the big house while I was the son of the village baker. She was, as the Americans tend to say, quite out of my league.

I had, up until now, always reasoned that it was better to maintain a certain aloft distance between Betty Williams and myself, and to simply admire her from afar. It had been my fervent hope that this cool demeanour might intrigue Betty, and some how endear her to me, but it had, to date, failed utterly, and so I maintained that distance, mealy to avoid the embarrassment of rejection before the entire village.

But now I had a new hope- Perhaps Betty would swoon at the sight of me, handsome as a pin, dressed top to toe in an immaculate black uniform. How could she resist? There was nothing else for it: I would enlist in the British Union of Fascist first thing in the morning.

"What are you grinning at Lad?" Sergeant Goodson said, disturbing my train of thoughts. I was glad that the kerosene lamp did not cast enough

light to show my blushes.

“Nothing.” I stammered.

“Well in that case, it’s your go.” He said, indicating the dominos set out on the table.

I was spared further embarrassment and the loss of my last halfpenny, because at that precise moment I heard the sound of another motor heading up the lane towards us, from the south. It defiantly wasn’t trucks this time, for the motor had a higher pitched whine.

“I can hard something coming this way.”

“Like as not you can lad.” Goodson said, clearly not surprised by the sound. “Same drill: Buxton you’re with me; Corporal, cover us from the window.”

I grabbed my rifle and headed out into the night. I was a little surprised when I looked back for the sergeant, and saw him in the doorway, straitening his tie and trying in vain to brush the crumples out of his trousers. Only when he was satisfied his appearance was as good as it was going to get, did Goodson descend the wagons steps to join me.

The drizzle had turned into a damp fog, which swirled about us, obscuring views beyond ten or fifteen yards. I could make out two headlamps in the distance, cutting through the mist. They jiggled and shuck unevenly as the came up the potholed lane, and it was clear that they were not connected but rather belonged to two independent vehicles.

The two motorbikes came to a halt just in front of our barricade, and the engines fell silent, but the rides remained astride their mounts. They were dressed in the usual fashion of motorcyclist, with bulky leather coats, padded leather helmets, goggles and scarves drawn up across their faces as protection from the chill. Even in the gloom, at this distance I could see that they were bother armed, carrying revolvers in their hip holsters.

One of them pulled his scarf from his face and smiled. It was an amiable enough smile, but somehow I felt that I couldn’t trust his.

“A’right Sarge.” He called out, holding up both hands so that we could clearly see they were empty. His accent betrayed his as a Liverpudlian, and I guessed that these men must be the Scouse spies Captain Webster and his fascist were looking for. “’ows it goin’. Shockin’ weather we’re ‘avin’ isn’t it?”

Goodson shrugged. “I don’t know. I hazard it might suit some folks who have a habit of skulking about in the shadows and who might have a wish to avoid being seen.”

“Yer might be right dere Sarge.” The Liverpudlian laughed, but Goodson remained stoney-face. The amiable Scouser sensed that he was getting nowhere with this approach and changed tact. “Look Sarge, we’re just tryin’ to get home. We’re not goin’ to cause any trouble.”

“There’s trouble enough for you on the road ahead.” Goodson said.

The other rider, who up until now said and done nothing, reached up and pulled the helmet and scarf off, and shuck out a mane of fierily copper ringlets. I gasped, despite myself, when I realised that the second rider was a woman, and not just any woman, but the finest looking girl I had even set eyes on. There she was, dressed in a bulky leather jacket, her hair messed up from her helmet, and yet she still looked like a movie star: perfect radiant skin; high, distinguished cheek bones; a well formed rosebud lips, and brilliant blue eyes that glittered like stars.

“What do you mean by that Sergeant?” She spoke with beautiful diction that was clearly the product of an expensive education.

I noticed that Goodson was not at all taken aback by the girl’s appearance, and I wondered at the extra effort he had made to straiten his suit earlier- Was Goodson expecting her?

“Well Lady Emily, it’s like this. Captain Webster took a platoon of black shirts north to the Helsby road about half an hour ago. I hazard they were looking for you and you friend here.”

“Really?” A look of concern and surprise flashed across her face. “Webster is this far north already. He must have set off as soon as we triggered the alarms. Damn it, that Mancunian is getting canny. What did he say?”

“He said he was looking for a couple of spies, Milady. He gave us a bag of buns to keep an eye out for them, and let him know if we saw them.”

“And what will you tell him?” she asked cagily

“I recon we might say that we saw them, heading off in one direction or the other. Trouble is, it’s easy to get disorientated in this fog, Milady. It would be a shame if we sent Captain Webster off in the wrong direction now, wouldn’t it? What do you say Buxton?”

“Yes. A shame.” I stammered. I was so distracted by Lady Emily that I was barely managing to keep up with the conversation. Lady Emily appeared to notice me for the first time. She eyed me up and down, and a smile crept across those sweet, rose lips.

“I say, and who is this handsome young fellow.” She purred.

“Oh that.” Goodson sounded annoyed. “That’s Private Buxton: A new recruit. I am just showing him the ropes, so to speak.”

“Doing your bit for duty and the country? So tell me, Private Buxton,” She let my name roll of her tongue slowly, as if savouring the taste of it.

“Are all the young men in Thornton-Le-Moors as good looking as you? Because if so, I shall have to make a point of visiting it more often.”

I managed to stammer a few nonsensical syllables, and blush uncontrollably.

“You’re cute.” Lady Emily laughed lightly. She fished a small packet out of the pinion on her motorbike, and turned her attention back to the sergeant, who was glairing at me. “Sergeant Goodson, please accept this

small gift to express the thanks of the free people of Liverpool, and from me, for the help you have been given. I am sorry it is not much, but it is a mere token of our appreciation.”

Goodson took the packet and slipped it into his jacket pocket.

“That is very kind of you Milady.” Goodson said, rather formally. “If I was you I would go home by a different route.”

“That is good advice Sergeant. Thank You.” She pulled the helmet back on, making sure she tucked all her summering copper curls back under. “It was very nice meeting you Private Buxton. And if you ever want to fight for a just cause, come to the Liverpool Free State; we need good men.”

And with that the two riders kicked their motorbikes back into life, turned them around and roared off back up the lane. I could hear the noise of their engines long after they disappeared from sight into the fog.

“She’s some kind of woman that.” Goodson muttered wistfully. I wasn’t sure he was talking to me.

He was right, of course. She was ‘some kind of woman’. A kind that I had never encountered before: brave; beautiful; charming; seductive and, I had no doubt, dangerous. In that instant, the destiny of my life sifted utterly. Any thoughts of joining the BUF, and of impressing Betty Williams in my smart black uniform, had completely slipped my mind. In that instant I had resolved to go to Liverpool and join the armies of the Free State.

“Who is she?” I asked

“That, lad, was Lady Emily Rathborne. Her family are one of the old Liverpool industrialist families. Great philanthropists, so I heard. Lady Emily must have inherited their principles and conscience: she joined the Socialist Party, and now she works for the Liverpool Free State.”

“She’s a spy?”

“Well that’s what Captain Webster would call her. Come on lad; let’s get in out of this damp fog. You’ll be no good to any man if you catch a cold.”

Inside the wagon the kettle began to whistle on the stove. Tipham had produced a small, battered teapot, the packet of sugar my father had given Goodson and three enamelled mugs. They were neatly laid out on the card table. Presently Goodson spread out a cotton napkin and sat three of Webster’s teacakes out on it. He took the packet Lady Emily had given him out of his jacket pocket, pulled it open, sniffed it, and grinned.

“Ah, Indian tea. It’s been a long time and no mistake. Mrs Goodson’s nettle tea just doesn’t really compare.”

“Is that what we do?” I asked incredulously.

“What’s ‘what we do’?” Goodson spooned four teaspoons of the dried black leaves into the waiting teapot.

“We play both side off against each other. Taking bribes and passing on information.” I knew I sounded like a petulant youth, but I couldn’t help myself.

“Now lad, we play both sides all right, because we are in the middle. We look after our own, and hope that the war doesn’t pay too much attention to what we doing.”

“What about duty, and country?” I demanded

“Duty and country? I tell you what lad. I hazard that both Lady Emily and Captain Webster would recon that they were fighting for duty and country. And they would both recon they were fighting on the right side too, if you asked them.”

“But...” My protest trailed off, because deep down I knew Goodson was right.

“This is a very British civil war, lad. If you know what’s good for you, you’ll have as little to do with it as possible.” Goodson poured the hot water into the kettle. The steam carried to aroma of tea with it. It filled the tiny wagon. Goodson grinned at me. “An besides, what could be more civil, and more British, than tea and cakes.”