

I Have a Short Snorter



I have discovered, among my father's possessions, that I have inherited his short snorter. A short snorter is a single bill, or multiple bills that have been taped together and that, upon examination, are found to be covered with signatures. It is a custom that apparently originated from or was popularized by Alaskan bush pilots and was eventually adopted by WWII aviators.

As the custom goes, an airman passes around a banknote and asks those he is with to sign it. Then, if they should ever meet again and he is asked to produce the short snorter with the requestor's signature and fails to do so, he must buy that person a drink (or snort).

There are many of these around, some of them containing famous names. Marlene Dietrich collected one that contained 83 bills and over 1,000 high profile names including Ernest Hemingway, Irving Berlin and George S. Patton. My father, serving in the 8th Army Air Corps (448th BG), seemed most interested in collecting foreign currency as his short snorter consists of 14 bills taped together from a number of different countries: Portugese escudos, English shillings, French francs, German marks, Canadian dollars, Cuban pesos, and of course the US

dollar bill. Each of them containing signatures of people unfamiliar to me but who, at one time, apparently played an important part of my father's WWII history.

I can't help but thinking that each one of these bills told a story to my father. I imagine he could not only remember each person whose signatures he obtained but the circumstances in which he collected them. (And I'm definitely sure he'd remember whether he ever had to pay out for leaving his short snorter behind in the barracks.)

But his short snorter is mine now. And if Lenny Burns, Arthur Bach, Eddie "Mulla Bone" Redlan, or any of the other dozen names from 1945 displayed on it should ever ask me to produce it, I'll be ready.

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