



The Rabbiters and the Bull

A true story from Australia's Great Depression
seen through the eyes of a ten year old boy.

The Rabbiters and the Bull.

It was a very hot summer that year in the Great Depression, and we five school kids were out in the paddocks rabbiting, miles from anywhere.

We were loaded down with gear, rabbits slung from our belts, a ferret carrying box with two pink eyed ferrets inside, rabbit nets, sticks and more importantly, one Harrington and Richards shot gun. For the un-initiated, the Harrington and Richards is a most lethal weapon, twelve gauge, open bore, single barrelled. When I was a child almost every self-respecting farmhouse had one ready at the kitchen door or at the milking shed. No crow stealing eggs from the fowl house, nor a fox near the chickens or the turkeys, was safe. Unfriendly snakes were especially vulnerable. A gentle squeeze on the trigger and you were literally "blown away". It cost about three pounds at the town store or about three guineas delivered to the nearest railway station 'cash on delivery'.

My twin brother Bevan, a slightly built 10 year-old, was elected to be in sole charge of this 'cannon of cannons'.

We slipped through the back fence and commenced walking across a tussock strewn paddock until we arrived at a small group of gum trees which were giving much shade to grateful cattle. There was no grass underneath, just small depressions, sticks and cowpats.

In the middle of this small playing field there was a large and seemingly docile brown and black coloured bull. The bull was really of no consequence to us as we were intent on catching hundreds of rabbits: It was fast asleep in the afternoon sun, with its testicles hanging out the back of its legs. These two large vein coloured stones rested comfortably on the warm ground, slowly rising up and down in harmony with the peaceful snores of the bull.

Barry Johns was carrying a 'waddy', a piece of tree branch with a knob on the top and about four feet long, very useful for killing snakes, intimidating everyone around him, a truly lethal weapon with many uses. Before we could think about the consequences, Barry walked up behind the sleeping bull and struck the bulls' testicles a short sharp blow with his waddy.

We rabbiters were somewhat bemused by this, as the bull hardly stirred for a second or two. Then a tremor went over it's skin, followed by a large roar with the animal leaping into the air. An extremely irate bull landed on its feet, shook itself and glared around. It saw no enemy bull, but only five small boys standing somewhat diffidently around.

We soon realised it was Not Amused!

The bull rushed at us.

We decided the fence was our most pressing objective, and fear leant wings to our feet. The tussocks in the paddock made our rapid exit very difficult, given that we were weighed down with rabbit traps, ferrets and other paraphernalia.

Our retreat seemed to be agonisingly slow, the fence was ever distant, the bull was gaining rapidly, only Bevan our brother had the faintest chance of saving us from extinction as he was carrying the Harrington and Richards twelve gauge shot gun.

Bevan called out to the four of us – "Run, run!" We looked back; the bull was boring down on us, but what about Bevan? Would we be cowards and leave him to certain goring and perhaps death? The nearby fence and safety beckoned - and to our ever-lasting shame-

We Went!

I can still see the rushing bull and my twin brother taking the Harrington and Richards off his shoulder, kneeling down in the grass and pointing the gun at the oncoming enemy.

When the enraged bull was about ten paces away, Bevan pulled on the trigger and blew the bulls head off!

We were saved.

Bevan was slapped and cheered.

Another victory, on to the next rabbit warren, then home with the spoils of the day!

It was not until days later, sitting on the kitchen sofa before going to bed that we began to understand the epic proportions of that day.

Jimmy (our dad) was lying down reading the local weekly paper under the soft lamp-light.

"Good Heavens" he exclaimed, "Someone has shot Dave Jenkins' imported English bull!"

"Really," said our mum.

"Yes," replied Jimmy, "Listen to the headlines, 'Bull found dead in paddock. Mr David Jenkins' 'Durham Ox the Fourteenth', recently imported from England at a cost of some five hundred pounds in order to establish a new stud, was found dead in a paddock on his property. The animal's head had been shot clean away!"

He said that the local police were investigating this dreadful act. The paper also reported that Mr Jenkins, the area's largest landowner, was so distraught that he could not be interviewed.

"Who could do such a terrible thing?" said our dad.

We kids were all sitting there in the safety of our home drinking warm cocoa before going to bed. Glances were exchanged and nothing said.

Cowards, all of us.