

THE UNICORN

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It was really chilly that morning. I do remember that. And it was Saturday. And there was a thick gray fog that hung over the post.

I had joined the Army just a few month before, but for the life of me I have no idea what was going on in my head at the time. I was fresh out of high school, red hot and ready to rule the world.

As I recall, the first step was to join the Army, get the uniform, and set about showing the brass how to do things. Of course, they had other ideas, years of experience, and the teeth gritting determination to convince me that their ways were better...

So I accepted the challenge.

But, after basic training, advanced individual training, and a few months in Germany, we were pretty much still at logger heads.

Which is why I was standing in an open field, just outside of Kitzingen working this Saturday morning detail in the chill lost in the middle of the thick gray fog still trying to think of some way out this detail and this man's army.

At first, I was only vaguely aware of the hissing sound somewhere out there in the fog. As the sound became louder, I realized that it was headed in my direction. In addition to the hissing I noticed a low rumble, which also grew louder as it came closer.

I knew what it sounded like, but I couldn't be sure. I could never remember actually hearing one in real life. Then it came out of the fog...

Not more than a few yards from where I was standing it roared slowly from the mist. I was absolutely mesmerized...

But there it was, rolling along majestically, long, black, with bright chrome, pulling along a few old freight cars. And then it happened... with a short blast on the steam whistle it disappeared back into the same thick gray fog it came from.

Now, I was raised on country music. Songs about old trains, hobos, and hobo jungles, steel rails and steam were all a part of the legends that tucked me in bed at night.

But this wasn't a dream. It was something else. It was something magic. It was like coming face to face with a unicorn... A mythical beast of iron that snorted in deep breaths of steam that looked for all the world like the smoke of a dragon coming out of that cold gray fog...

Since that time I discovered that there were still some parts of the world that still use steam trains everyday. I finally got used to them and actually began to take them for granted, as we all do when wonders become an everyday part of our lives...

But I will never forget that first day that I saw the unicorn in all of its splendor and majesty. It is a sight I will always remember and treasure in my deepest memories...