



The View from Right Field

by Rick Ohler

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“The Bomb”

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Perhaps the best reward for holding down the Right Field corner in the *Advertiser*, one that goes way beyond free coffee and pocket calendars, comes when readers—townies and outsiders, some known to me, others complete strangers—trust me with an exclusive tip, a journalistic scoop, as we call them in the trade. Often, they’ll send an unsigned letter to the *Advertiser* headquarters or leave an anonymous message for me at one of my various listening posts around the village: Paint Pot, Vidler’s, the (world’s best hometown) library, Tops, Bulldog Feeds, the new Co-op, the Right Field Satellite Office, southeast corner of Oakwood and Elm. Very occasionally, however, anonymous tipsters choose more a cloak and dagger, surreptitious (RIP, Snake) method.

Such was the case the other day when a gentleman reader sneaked up on me as I was listening to the local gossip at the Satellite Office brass rail.

“Don’t turn around,” a gruff voice said. I knew who it was even though he garbled his voice like Deep Throat of Watergate fame. Naturally, I started to turn around, disobeying his command. “Eyes forward,” he grumbled, repeating the request that sounded even more anomalous in a public tavern filled with holiday celebrants high-fiving and “Merry Christmas-ing” each other. But I played along and kept my eyes toward the bar.

“Is your car locked?” he deadpanned.

“Huh?” I asked, curious now.

“Your car, the black Yukon with the paint smears all over the door handles, is it open?”

“Of course it’s open,” I said. “Keys in the ashtray. Help yourself. Put some gas in it if you go far. And don’t lose my place in my audio book.”

"If anyone asks, you haven't seen me in months, got it?"

"My lips are sealed," I said, pantomiming the buttoning of a shirt pocket, and watched him exit through the front door, plod down the steps and disappear into the night.

I gave him a minute or so then ran out to the Yukon. There, behind the driver's seat, resting amid my drop cloths and stepladders as if it belonged there, lay a four-foot long, rusted, tubular metal object with tailfins on one end and a tapered nose on the other. It looked suspiciously like a torpedo. A blue torpedo. An East Aurora High School-blue torpedo with the word "BOMBERS" painted on it. Could it be, I wondered in amazement, the long-lost East Aurora varsity swim team's iconic mascot, last seen in 1972 and since then the subject of countless dead end rumors and wild speculation concerning its whereabouts?

So engrossed was I in this discovery that I didn't notice the approaching ~~pickup truck~~, er nondescript vehicle, whose driver yelled out, "Sell it, scrap it, ransom it, give it back; I don't care. My hands are clean. And you haven't seen me for months, years even; you don't have a clue how that thing wound up in your car. Understood? Thanks. I owe ya." And away he sped.

This was heady stuff. Had I, of all people, been chosen as the medium through which this revered relic—the mascot held on high in triumph after each win the '60s and early '70s—would come home to roost? Would freestylers, backstrokers, breaststrokers, divers and butterfly racers have me, a simple newspaper columnist, to thank for the return of the bomb? For nearly forty-five years—longer than Jimmy Hoffa's body has been missing, nearly as long as authorities have been searching for bank robber D.B. Cooper's body after his skydive into the Oregon wilderness—the bomb had been in unknown, foreign hands, subject to who knows what manner of mistreatment and disrespect. But on Friday, December 23, I presented the once-purloined, now recovered bomb to coach Chris Musshafen and his 2016-17 varsity swimmers, who received it with reverence, as if it were an elderly relative returning from a long, arduous journey. And I learned that somewhere (I'm not saying where), a couple of dastardly burglars (I'm not saying who), now in their sixties (I'm not saying how far into their sixties), are feeling much lighter (I'm not saying how much lighter) with the weight of their crime lifted from their stooped (I'm not saying how stooped) shoulders.

I could rest on my journalistic laurels at this point and consider my work done: my sources have been protected, I have reported accurately (I'm not saying how accurately) and the bomb has been dropped back into its rightful place. If the plot of this story got any sappier, the ION cable TV channel would come back to East Aurora and make a movie about it.

But that's not the end of the story. And here's where you readers come in.

As this saga has made the rounds in the last few days, I'm learning that my bomb is not the only bomb ever to represent the East Aurora swim team. Apparently, an original bomb, the one Coach Fisher brought with him from his alma mater Ithaca College (whose sports teams used the nickname Bombers) was black. It, too, was stolen once upon a time, whether before or after legendary coach Tom Fahrenholz took over is unclear. My bomb replaced it, or so I'm told. I'd love it if readers with information would contact me, anonymously, of course, so we could tell the whole bomb story. I'd ask my source, but I haven't seen him for months, years even. But he owes me. Stay tuned.