DIPLOMACY

In a Pacific archipelago, two countries inhabit the most significant island on a string of islands born from volcanic activity. To the north is Filterland, settled by the Swedish explorer Leaf Filter, separate from the Norwegian explorer Leaf Gard. LG, rather than LF, could have discovered the islands, but he was in the Indian Ocean, where he found a large island he named Australia for no known reason. After settling on this island, LG gave up his exploring and became the exclusive exporter of kangaroos. But this is another story. To the south of Filterland is Pali, settled by Hawaiians hunting for a place to surf. Filterland is an independent country, but Pali is a protectorate of the United States.

President Gustoff called his cabinet together to discuss Filterland’s annual budget. He informed them that the country did not have the money to meet the budget demands. The reason was that rutabaga exports, their premium product, to the United States had fallen off because of foreign competition. The country was impoverished, and he sought solutions to its budget shortfall. Myer Hoffman said he had the answer to their money problems. He said, “Whenever the US went to war with some country and won, they immediately gave the losing country millions to make up for their losses.” “The solution for Filterland would be to declare war on the United States, and I know how to do that.”

Filterland activated the state militia, all ten clothed in their camouflaged kaki bib overalls, and assembled them at the city hall/ city garage. They were loaded on a hay bale trailer attached to the town’s lawn mower/military vehicle tractor and proceeded at 5 MPH to the border of Pali. Arriving, they found the border guard asleep in a chair. Myer picked up a rock and threw it at the sleeping guard. The guard was immediately awakened and found the stone in his lap. Seeing the militia across the border, he knew where the rock came from, so he threw the rock back, damaging the paint on the tractor. He then stormed across the border to demand an apology.

Arriving across the border, he was accosted by Myer. He told the guard that throwing the rock, which damaged their tractor, and his incursion into Filterland were considered acts of war; thus, Filterland is now declaring war on Pali. The guard immediately rushed back to the capital and told President Schultz, a native Hawaiian, that they were now at war with their neighbor. Knowing what this war would mean to the world, Schultz immediately called the Secretary of State in Washington to inform him that Pali was now at war with Filterland.

Knowing what the world would think about the United States at war with some little country in the Pacific, the Secretary sent for Percival Von Sickler, the Assistant Secretary, and told him, “Go to Filterland immediately and meet with President Gustoff.” It took Percy a while to find an airplane and a pilot who could land on the dirt runway of Filterland’s International Airport. Still, he eventually found a World War II pilot who agreed to fly him to Filterland in his DC-3.

After a twelve-hour flight, they entered Filterland’s airspace and were told to circle until given landing clearance. The hold was necessitated by this being the zenith of Filterland’s tourist season, and the runway was tied up. Finally, getting clearance from traffic control, the plane was cleared to land on runway thirty-three. Since Filterland had only one active runway, why this one was listed as runway thirty-three remains a mystery. Percy was met on the red carpet by an honor guard of Filterland’s militia decked out in new coveralls loaned to them by JCPenney and waving the American flag, which had only forty-eight stars because the budget deficit did not allow for flag purchases. Percy was greeted by Gustoff and driven back to the state’s capital in the state’s freshly waxed 1958 Oldsmobile. Percy was honored with a state dinner featuring five dishes made with rutabagas, followed by wine and fruit. After an evening of entertainment by the Filterland Glee Club, Percy was taken to the executive suite at Motel 6. The problem was that the motel left the light on all night, and Percy couldn’t sleep. It is all right for Motel 6 to advertise, “We left the light on for you,” but they could have turned it off after his arrival.

The next day, negotiations began in the capital’s executive conference room/ cafeteria. Percy told Gustoff that the United States military would crush his militia in days. Gustoff listened and said, “You convinced me. We surrender”. Knowing the United States had just dodged a bullet, Percy told Gustoff that since his country had spent money on a war footing, it was prepared to give them a million dollars to offset their costs. But Gustoff, being a strong negotiator, said he wanted more. Filterland was now the exclusive seller of rutabagas to the United States.

The peace treaty allowed Filterland to meet its budget needs, reclothe the militia with new coveralls, and buy a new John Deere tractor to cut the grass and move the military to other wars faster. But most of all, the treaty allowed Filterland to get rid of the damn warehouses full of rutabagas.

Upon his return, Percy was honored by the United States government for his excellent diplomatic skills in preventing war and ensuring continued world peace. He was awarded the Presidential Peace Medal at a White House ceremony. As the president placed the metal about Percy’s neck, he whispered something. The assembled dignitaries assumed he was thanking Percy for his work, but what he said was, “What the hell are we going to do with all these damn rutabagas?”

The president, recognizing Percy’s diplomatic skills, appointed him the new ambassador to Slobovia in hopes that he could get them to buy some of these damn rutabagas.