

With Thanks to Ladies of Questionable Repute.

A story told by Robert Boyd-Howell

Recorded by
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The winter of 1945/46 was harsh. It was night and there was heavy snowfall when my father, coming up Rayners Hill, encountered some American officers. They were stationed at Headcorn but had visited the Harrow Inn. The Harrow's reputation at that time had spread far and wide as a place where you could meet ladies of a certain type.

I don't know anything more about the ladies but the officers asked my father whether he could give them a lift home. My father hesitated: 'Sorry, Sir, but fuel is hard to get by these days.'

The Americans reassured him that this wouldn't be a problem and they would refuel his truck. Arriving at the base, the guards at the fuel depot stood to attention while my father's car was filled up and several extra canisters of very precious fuel were loaded onto the back. Like agricultural diesel today, it was dyed red to prevent theft and black market trade. On the way home, my father realised that one of the canisters was leaking and had left a red trail on the lanes... an easy give-away for the police. Fortunately, however, not a single policeman ventured out on this wintry night. My father, moreover, had enough fuel to last him through the rest of the war!