Eggs Hussarde

1951 was an interesting time in New Orleans’ history. Harry Truman was President and Chep Morrison was completing his fifth year as Mayor of the Crescent City. Released in September of that year, the film version of Tennessee Williams’ Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, starring Paul Newman and Vivien Leigh, was a huge success. Set in New Orleans, the film set an Oscar record when it became the first film to win in three acting categories plus a fourth for Art Direction.

*The Pontalba Apartments, New Orleans in 1951*

Also in September, at the St. Charles Hotel in New Orleans, the 9th World Science Fiction Convention was held. Also known as Nolacon I, the much-anticipated event took place on the first three days of the
month. The guest of honor was the popular writer of fantasy, horror and science fiction, Fritz Leiber of Chicago, who was also the associate editor of *Science Digest* magazine. Harry B. Moore, President of the New Orleans Science-Fantasy Society, served as convention chairman. Also noteworthy at the convention were the world premiere screenings of two significant movies: *The Day The Earth Stood Still* and *When Worlds Collide*. *The Day The Earth Stood Still*, perhaps the most iconic sci-fi flick of the 50s, starred Michael Rennie and Patricia Neal - and who could forget the film’s eight-foot tall robot named Gort? Or the words, “Klaatu barada nikto,” described by the Robot Hall of Fame (yes, there is one) as “one of the most famous commands in science fiction”? Fans saw and heard it all first in New Orleans, at the St. Charles Hotel, today the site of Place St. Charles.

1951 photograph of the St. Charles Hotel, site of Nolacon I
1951 was also the year Brennan’s chef Paul Blangé created his famous dessert, Bananas Foster, made from bananas, vanilla ice cream and a sauce made from brown sugar, dark rum, butter and banana liqueur. At that time, since New Orleans was a major hub for the import of bananas from South America, a dessert made from bananas seemed like a good idea. Igniting the preparation in a tableside flambé was a brilliant one.
Bananas Foster served tableside at Brennan’s 2015

Also appearing in 1951, at least the earliest newspaper advertisement I could find in which it was mentioned, was another famous New Orleans dish (and one that was also created by Chef Paul Blangé for Brennan’s). This other popular “Breakfast at Brennan’s” specialty was “Eggs Hussarde” and in 1951, when the restaurant was on the corner of Bourbon and Bienville, it could be had (accompanied by strawberries and cream, along with coffee) for only $2.45.
Eggs Hussarde, The New Orleans States, November 24, 1951

Eggs Hussarde in its original incarnation was a dish made with poached eggs placed atop Holland rusks, Canadian bacon and a red wine reduction Marchand de Vin sauce. The whole creation was then topped with Hollandaise sauce.

This world-renowned dish is believed to have been named after 15th-century Hungarian mercenaries called hussars, who wore uniforms of bright tomato red. Le hussard is the French word for such a soldier, and à la hussarde means in the fashion of a hussar. By the time of the Napoleonic Wars, the hussars played a prominent role as cavalry during the years 1796 to 1815. As light cavalrymen mounted on fast horses, they were used to engage in skirmish battles as well as scouting.
Over time, most of the great European powers raised hussar regiments, including the armies of France, Prussia, Russia, Austria and Britain. In the case of Britain, four light dragoon regiments were converted to hussars in the early 19th century.

The hussars of Napoleon perfected the tradition of sabrage, the art of opening a champagne bottle with a sabre. Another macho manifestation was the moustache, a prominent and universally displayed feature sported by Napoleonic-era hussars. British hussars were the only moustachioed troops in the British Army, although they did not all wear moustaches. Winston Churchill is such an example.

Commissioned in 1895 as a Cornet into the 4th Queen’s Own Hussars, Churchill later became the Colonel-in-Chief of the Regiment. His Hussars Regiment was first raised in 1685 and saw service for almost three centuries, before being amalgamated into the Queen’s Royal Irish Hussars in 1958. The 4th Hussars saw action throughout the Duke of Wellington’s Peninsula Campaign and gained distinction in the Afghan War. The 4th participated in one of the most glorious actions of the British Cavalry (remembered in verse by Alfred, Lord Tennyson) when they made their famous charge alongside the 8th Hussars with the Light Brigade at Balaclava: “Theirs not to reason why, Theirs but
to do and die.”

Perhaps because Chef Blangé was a native of the Netherlands, he chose Holland rusks as a major part of his recipe for Eggs Hussarde. In Germany rusks are known as zwieback (meaning twice-baked), in France as biscotte. In Italy, the term is fette biscottate (twice-baked sliced bread) and should not be confused with biscotti (Italian almond cookies). Rusks are slices of yeast bread (thick or thin) that are usually twice-baked until hard, dry, golden brown and crisp. In the United States, rusks are given to babies when they’re teething.
Misspelling New Orleans dishes:
Chef Blangé’s 1971 appearance on Dinah Shore’s “Dinah’s Place”

As mentioned before, Eggs Hussarde is traditionally made with two sauces, Hollandaise and Marchand de Vin. The latter sauce (French for “wine merchant”) is typically based on veal stock and red wine, but some cooks use a red wine reduction called divinity sauce instead. Marchand de Vin is the classic sauce, made by reducing red wine, stock and chopped shallots and then simmering in a basic demi-glace until the liquid is one-fourth its original volume.

Eggs Hussarde is still on the Brennan’s menu today, but “housemade English muffins” have replaced the Holland rusks, and the Canadian bacon is “coffee cured.” Poached eggs, Hollandaise and Marchand de Vin are still important elements of this “Brennan’s Original.”

No longer $2.45, you just might have to say “Charge!”

NED HÉMARD

New Orleans Nostalgia
“Eggs Hussarde”
Ned Hémard
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