Chief Udca Saves the Day!

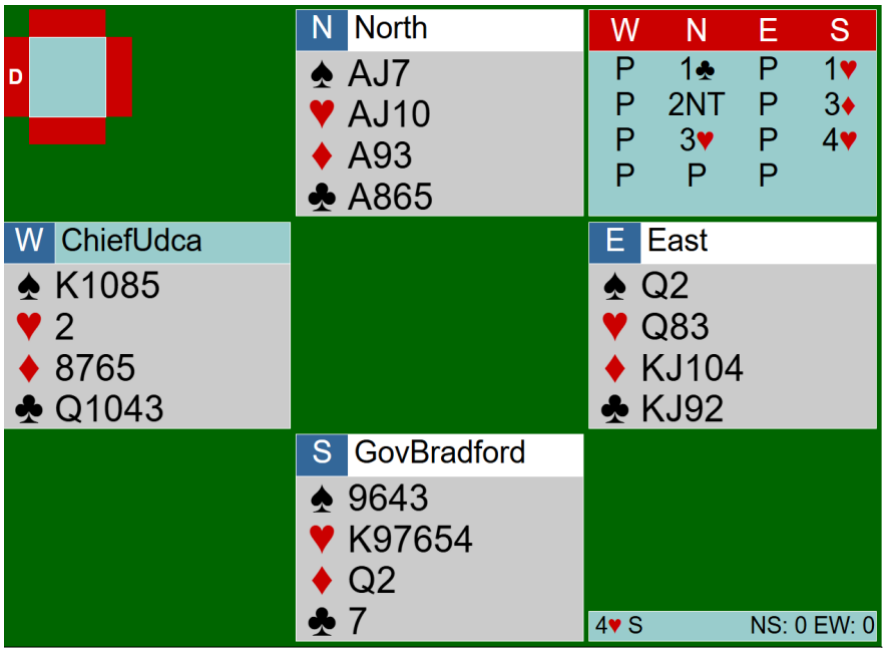
--Bruce Schwaidelson (bruschwade@aol.com)

While stuffing my face with dessert at our Thanksgiving celebration, I started thinking about my acting days in second grade (circa 1956). My class performed a silly, historically inaccurate, poetic playlet called *Pumpkin Pie Saves the Day*, all about the first Thanksgiving. I remember only two things about the show: (1) the leader of the native tribe had a rather unusual name, something like "Chief Udca," and (2) my teacher failed to appreciate my outstanding thespian talents, so my role as Pilgrim Governor William Bradford included just three paltry lines.

Nowadays, whenever I play bridge and my opponents advise that they are playing UDCA (**U**pside **D**own **C**ount & **A**ttitude), I chuckle to myself as I recall my good friend Eugene proudly portraying the Chief.

As you probably know, those using *UDCA* play their lowest and then a higher spot card to convey an even number of cards in the suit (high-low shows "odd"). They use the same method (low-high) to encourage partner when showing attitude (high-low is "discouraging"). This is just the opposite of standard carding - hence the name "upside down."

One of the reasons I like to play *against* defenders using UDCA is that I find they are especially diligent about giving correct count to their partners. Sometimes I think they forget that declarer is watching too. Today's 4♥ contract, played just before Thanksgiving, exhibits how Chief Udca's adherence to his namesake's carding led to his undoing, while affording me the chance to reprise my role as Pilgrim governor.



Governor Bradford responded 1♥ to his partner's 1♣ opener and used New Minor Forcing (3♦) following the 2NT call. If North failed to show a 4-card spade suit or 3-card heart support, the Governor was planning to bid 4♥. North did in fact have three hearts and Gov B's 4♥ call ended the auction. Quite a lot of bidding for his 5 HCP hand.

Chief Udca led his 4th best club taken by dummy's Ace and Bradford then ruffed a club. (You can follow the play by clicking here and continuing to click the *"Next"* button.) He played a trump to dummy's ♥A and then came the ♥J, which did not get covered, so declarer played his King

("9 never") and received the bad news when the Chief showed out, pitching the ♦8 (upside down attitude). The Gov was now in danger of losing two spades plus the ♦K and ♥Q.

Let's zero in on the spade position:

Dummy: ♠ **AJ7**

Udca: ♠ **K1085** East: ♠ **Q2**

Bradford: ♠ **9643**

Defended correctly, declarer should lose two spade tricks as long as West inserts his 8 if South starts with a low spade or the 10 if declarer leads the 9. To no one's surprise, however, Chief Udca had become totally enamored with UDCA. Thus, when Bradford led the ♠3, the Chief carefully played the 5 - his lowest spade – planning to give his partner proper spade count (low-high for an even number). The Gov called for dummy's 7 and East was forced to win with the Queen.

East cashed the trump Queen and led a club, declarer ruffing and playing another low spade. This time the Chief followed with the 8 and Bradford had to decide if he should finesse the Jack or try to drop the offside King with his Ace. Before playing his next card, he stopped and turned to his left and declared: "Chief, I am totally certain you have the King!"

When the Chief asked *"How?"* (sorry, Chief, but you just had to say that), Gov B explained: "When your partner won with the ♠Q, I knew you held the ♠8 & 10 along with your 5. Your play of the 8 just now confirmed that you began with an even number of spades, the 5 as your lowest. Thus, your partner started with ♠Q2 opposite your ♠K1085."

After finessing the ♠J, the Governor knew not to cash his ♠A since the spades were not breaking 3-3. Instead he played a low diamond and, as he already suspected from the Chief's ♦8 pitch, the ♦K appeared to his right. East played another club and declarer ruffed and cashed the ♦Q. A spade to dummy's ♠A and ♦A allowed declarer to get rid of his losing ♠9, making four. Nicely done, Gov!

Postmortem: The irony of this story is that had "Chief Standard Count" been West, he would have undoubtedly played the ♠8 when spades were first led and the contract would have easily been defeated.

And what about my three lines in the poetic playlet, you ask? My cue was: "And spake the Pilgrim Governor" (yes, *spake!*) as Governor Bradford proudly walked downstage center to close the show:

Chorus: And spake the Pilgrim Governor…

Bradford: Our spirit truly remains intact
Our Lord has guided us to safety on new land
And Chief Udca helped me land my 4♥ contract.

We humbly thank them both and wish everyone a belated happy Thanksgiving!

♠ ♥ ♦ ♣

The original version of this article appeared in the *North Penn Bridge Bulletin* during COVID. This deal was played in an online club "Zoom" game where you could see and chat with your partner and opponents.