

A Winning Illusion

By Pete Clark

In early June, 1978 I moved to Powder Wash Oil Camp in northwestern Colorado with Party 25 of Lawson Geophysical. The morning we began work at Powder Wash, we were driving to the first setup when we came to a fence. While the gate was being opened, a pickup sped toward us from the other side of the barrier. The truck stopped and a man got out, pointed a rifle in our direction and told us to stay off of his property. Another crew had crossed his property leaving gates open and cutting fences. We convinced the rancher that we knew and followed the law of the range. *You leave gates as you find them, open or closed and if you must take wire down to make a crossing, you repair the fence, leaving it as it was.*

After a month or so we were sent to Phippsburg, Colorado for a temporary job. We stayed in a railroad hotel in Phippsburg, where we could make no noise any time of the day or night and the food was terrible.

For entertainment in the evenings, we sometimes went to the Vet's Club in Oak Creek to drink beer and shoot pool. The Vet's Club consisted of a dining area with a bar, a back room large enough to hold one pool table and somewhere there had to be a kitchen. One wall of the dining room held a mandatory Bill Mauldin *Willie and Joe* cartoon illustrating the travails of the combat GIs of World War II.

On our last visit to the club one of the men appeared to become very drunk and bragged about his ability to make an impossible looking pool shot. A man who drove one of the trucks in the field said there was no way the man could sink all five of the numbered balls he had placed, seemingly randomly, on the table with one shot. The man, with a cue stick in his hand, said he would bet his paycheck against the other man's paycheck that he could make the shot. The wager was accepted.

Before he attempted the shot, the man laid his cue stick on the table and had a drink. The truck driver looked at the balls sitting in stark relief on the green felt covering the table's slate, under the glaring light emitted by the two green Chinese hat light fixtures hanging from the ceiling, and told the inebriated man he could call off the bet because taking money from a drunken man was wrong. The driver repeated his offer several times and became distraught at the lack of a response. His drink finished the man picked up his cue stick and carefully positioned it. He smoothly slid the cue stick back and forth through his fingers twice and then sank all five balls and did not scratch. Still holding the cue stick, he put his hand out for the paycheck. Perception is everything.