

## Egregious Situations

*By Pete Clark*

In 1967 I was sent out on a steel tower electrical transmission job in northern Colorado. I showed up at a leg assembly yard just off of U.S. 287 on Red Mountain Road. After work the first day I drove into Laramie and stopped at a motel on North Third. I cut a deal with the owner to rent an upper room that had no heat and a window with no curtains that looked out past a flashing neon sign. For twenty dollars per week, I could put my parka on the bed and ignore the flickering light.

The foreman on the job was a Pentecostal Pastor from Texas. We called him the Preacher. The men on the crew decided they didn't like the Preacher and began a work slowdown. I did not see anything wrong with the man so I kept working. A groundman from New York came over and threatened me if I didn't join the slowdown. I ignored him and went back to work. I didn't know if the guy was dangerous or just a bag of hot air and I only bet on the preordained. Before I left work that day, I pulled an automatic pistol from under the seat of my pickup, chambered a round, set the safety and laid the weapon on the seat. Fortunately the man was all mouth.

In the summer of 1959 we were working seismograph near Babb, Montana when an Austrian Geophysicist visited our crew in the field. He had helped develop the seismological method we were using and wanted to see it in action. He was very proud of his home city, Vienna and asked if any of us had been there. The Party Chief said he had seen Vienna, but only from the air. He had been the tail gunner in a B-24. Silence blanketed that little bit of paradise. Finally the geophysicist pointed at the ground and said, "What is it?" I was appointed to identify the insect. I bent down to look, with no threat intended, and told him it was a Sand Baby. The Austrian said, "Let live it!" I complied with his request and things returned to normal.

One weekend I was working extra as a drill helper when a drill truck became mired in mud attempting to ford a wide, shallow stream at the foot of a steep mountain. I had the only truck with a winch, so I was told to go to the top of the mountain, turn around, come down facing the drill truck and winch it across the creek. When I started down the mountain I discovered I no longer had brakes and began picking up speed. I couldn't downshift until I hit a depression and both rear duals bounced off of the ground. During that instant the gears synchronized and I slipped the truck into a lower gear, coming to a stop six feet from the bumper of the drill truck. A stray length of barbwire had wrapped around an axle and ripped off a brake line.