

## A Wrenching Situation

*By Pete Clark*

Back in my days as a grunt in powerline construction I was required to carry a pair of Klein Lineman's pliers, a pair of eleven-inch channel locks and a claw hammer. I never bothered with the hammer because the need for a hammer was extremely rare. The few times I needed the tool, it would be used to pound on metal and for safety, the job required a ballpeen hammer that would not shed splinters of metal. Using the wrong tool in this situation could cost an eye.

In the late Seventies, I was sent out to help build a 230KV steel tower transmission line that ran from Ault in north central Colorado to Hayden in northwestern Colorado. The line curved north through southern Wyoming, passing south of Woods Landing and turned west near Walden, Colorado. The morning I began work, I was issued a toolbelt, a ratchet and a spud wrench. The spud wrench was used to hold the head of a bolt during torqueing, but more importantly, its pointed handle was used to align holes in steel so bolts could be inserted. Using a finger for that process was a very bad idea.

I was assigned to a leg assembly crew. The foreman gave me the job of attaching what we called bananas to the top end of the leg corner angle steels. The bananas were angle steels with a slight bend in their middles. They were used to guide the bodies onto the leg assemblies as the helicopter lowered the tower parts into place. I also installed step-bolts for climbing, if the blueprint called for them. After finishing those tasks, I helped bolt wind-lacing. When we had two leg panels assembled and all nuts torqued to one hundred ten pounds, we used a small crane to set the panels on the concrete footers facing each other. We then filled in the angle steels to create the other two sides. With the first section of the tower completed, we moved to the next set of footers.

I did not care for the idea that I had to use a regular ratchet to torque the steel, because I had to guess whether or not I had the correct number of foot-pounds of torque on the bolts. One day I had gone to check something on a completed tower and found an abandoned torque-wrench lying on one of the tower's footers. I no longer had to worry about power company inspectors checking the torque of bolts I installed.

One morning I was walking to the tool trailer to get my gear when I saw a man take a wrench from a toolbelt on the floor of the trailer and put it on his belt. At the trailer I verified that he had taken the wrench out of my belt. I turned and walked to the van he had entered. When I climbed through the vehicle's door, the man quickly handed me my torque-wrench. I have not always been a dried up old fart.