

STORY NUMBER 6 - STRINGING THE BLOCKS - BRECKENRIDGE, TEXAS  
As told by William J. (Bill) Kuhrt, 1990

This is the sixth in this series of episodes that happened to me. It occurred quite a bit after the war had ended and I had gone down to Texas to the oil fields trying to earn enough money so I could get back and finish college. I started out at Wichita Falls where I worked on a ranch about 25 miles out of the town, and when that had to close up I went down to Breckenridge. I went in there on a fruit truck because there were no roads and no railroad.

Anyway, I was staying at the Y.M.C.A. in Breckenridge and trying to look around for a job of some kind. The manager of a casing crew came up to me and said, "Have you ever worked on a casing crew?" And I said, "Well, yes, somewhat." I really hadn't but I'd watched them on the rig that drilled the well on our own farm and some others. So he said, "Well, we need one more man. We're going out this afternoon to a place outside of town."

So we started out on a truck. It was a flatbed truck and this was a time in December or January when they were having very bad storms. They called them "Northers" in Texas. And sure enough that afternoon and evening it began to rain and turn cold, and there were little ice pellets in the rain, and it was just as miserable as can be. So anyway, I had the job and we went out there to this ranch without getting too wet.

When we got there the driller who was the bossman in the deal said, "Well, we've got a job of pulling pipe instead of running pipe, so we're going to have to have somebody go up and string the blocks." Well, stringing the blocks meant the cables over the small wheels, two on each side of the big bull wheel so that we could have nine lines reaching down, which of course would increase the pulling power of the engine a great deal.

So the bossman of the casing crew looked around and said, "Well, do I have any volunteers?" I was new of course on the crew, so nobody said anything, but I knew what had to be done so finally I said, "Well, I'll do it." And that meant climbing to the top of a 96-foot derrick in that storm, lifting up each individual small wheel and dropping a loop of cable over it, then taking care of it on one side of the bull wheel, and then taking care of the two small wheels on the other side.

So I got up there, but it was pretty awful. It was not only cold and wet but the ice pellets were bad, everything was slippery, and you didn't dare put your hand on anything, especially the bull wheel which might turn every few minutes without warning or it would throw you right off the derrick. So I watched all that. I got up and the bossman on the casing crew had come up on the inside of the derrick with the loops, and he handed me the loop for each one of the wheels and I slipped it into the proper place on each of the four little wheels on both sides of the bull wheel. And then when that was finished, of course, I had to balance myself and stand on these big beams. I was afraid I was going to slip all the time.

Well, anyway, I didn't slip and finally got it done and came on down the ladder. By the time I got down onto the floor of the derrick again, I'll tell you, I was soaking wet and very, very cold. But I didn't say anything and the bossman for the casing crew just said, "Well, thanks, Bill, that was good."

And then the driller who was the top man over us in the derrick, he came over and said, "Well, that sure separated the men from the boys." And that was kind of half-way needed for me because I was quite a bit smaller than most of the men. The other six men on the crew were all from the south and most of them spoke with a southern brogue, Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, what-not.

Of course when they found out earlier I was from New York, why that was a little too much. They still had some feelings about anybody who had been in the Army, especially as an officer, and had now come down to work at that kind of labor in the oil fields.

But that settled the whole thing because thereafter I didn't have any more comments from any of the men on that crew because every one of them knew that that was a really mean assignment and I had come through with it.

So it helped me out in carrying on the work there. Thank you very much. Quid erat zu erzhalen. That which was to be told.