

## A RAINY WEEKEND

The first job to which I was assigned upon returning to State Highway employment, after a lapse of some twelve years, was a small road job in Division Nine. The one structure on the job crossed the creek at the mouth which emptied into the Ohio River. I was the only inspector on the job, and the Project Engineer made only periodic visits to the project.

The contractor had completed grading an approximate one thousand feet of subgrade in preparation for placing the subbase. The existing bridge had been removed, and the proposed bridge was under construction. A temporary road had been constructed which was very satisfactory for use of traffic.

On a Friday afternoon a sudden storm developed. The torrential rain was such that equipment operators could not continue compacting some thousand feet of subbase, which had just been placed.

It rained all day and into the night. The temporary road became a greasy, sticky sea of mud. Over a thousand feet of subbase, over which the traffic had to travel, took on the appearance of a Florida Everglades swamp.

It became necessary to tow the vehicles that were not able to make their way through the quagmire on their own power. There was one dozer, the only available equipment to do the job, and one operator on the job. Darkness came early, which increased not only our problems, but the lowering of our spirits....

Our shelter was a small, crude, shanty, with neither light nor comfort, facilities that served as a State Highway field office. It did have a telephone that could be used when not in use by the other dozen or so party line subscribers. The closest habitation

was a small country store where we could buy cheese and crackers when in need of lunch. Home was some forty miles distant.

I had been unable to get in touch with the Project Engineer; there was no one with whom I could share my troubles.

It continued to rain like, well, hard, on through the night. I flagged traffic to advise them of the condition of the road. The duty of the dozer operator of towing traffic through the mud became more frequent. He threatened to lose his tow chain so he would have an excuse to quit and go home. About three o'clock in the morning, he reported that he had really lost his tow chain. So I, with a smoky coal oil lantern, went scrabbling through the mud looking for it. I do not know why, because I was to the point of not giving a, well, caring too much about anything. I found the chain, half buried in the sticky, slimy, ankle-deep mire.

Saturday morning sneaked in, hardly discernable, with leaden sky perforated by buckets of rain at frequent intervals. We had a left-over breakfast from a yesterday's lunch of a scanty supply of cheese and crackers, and one bottle of pop; no coffee. The traffic had increased.

The Gooding Amusement Company, it is burned into my memory, came through the job, from West to East, with twenty-eight pieces of equipment-loaded vehicles, on their way to a Street-fair engagement. Did we have fun? The man in charge refused to allow the dozer to tow his Cadillac through the mud where it had stalled and slithered to a stop. We had to construct a detour past the traffic lane being used. After so long a time, he came to me and asked that he be towed. I do not think that I had a feeling of anger, pleasure, or anything. It was just another burden for my sodden benumbed brain.

At one time, a large truck, loaded with bottled baby food, skewed crosswise of the road. The road was blocked, and the truck was on the point of toppling over. It was a job for the dozer. The dozer was on the other side of the creek and could not get past the truck at that point of the temporary road. The only possible way for the dozer to get in position to help the truck was to cross the newly constructed bridge and approach slabs, which had not been constructed long enough to support traffic. The problem required that the inspector stick his neck a long way out. He did, the dozer did, the truck went on.

The dozer operator and I dozed through Saturday night, between times of running to inform motorists of road conditions, and to tow the stalled ones on their way. We had abandoned the practice of flagging traffic. Sheer exhaustion had caused us to depend on a lantern-illuminated red flag to induce motorists to stop and inquire of us as to the road conditions when they saw the flag and lantern.

I had been unsuccessful in calling my Project Engineer to inform him of the conditions. At some time in the wee small hours, time had stopped in my rain-soddened mind, the telephone rang. I answered. Amid soft background music, and the sound of heartwarming merriment, a soft, dulcet voice, that reminded me of the purr of a pussy-cat, asked, "How are you getting along?" The drear drab field shack took on a bright, happy glow and the rain drops turned into the cadence of a Spanish orchestra. The inspiring voice of my Project Engineer was coming over the wires. He informed me of all the complications of closing a road and diverting traffic over another existing highway.

But what really built me up and softened the hard pound of the wind-driven rain against the roof and sides of the office shanty and softened the slithering rush of the

torrents of water running off the leaky roof into the squashy mud that was formerly a road, was the seductive purr of his voice saying, “Don’t worry, Clarke, the weather is clearing.” He went on to say, “Here in Portsmouth, the sky is clear, and a bright moon is shining.” I had a somewhat different opinion and several unprintable remarks entered my mind; but mental and physical resistance were to the point of not give a, well, caring, who said what.

Somehow, I can’t recall, the rain and me went on through Saturday night and Sunday morning.

The return of the Gooding Amusement Company caravan through the job on Sunday was the anti-climax.

The rain stopped about noon Sunday. I cannot recall when, where, or how, the end came for me.

There was no hourly limit to an inspector’s work day and over-time had not yet been invented.

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