

# Old Telephone MEN



TELL

OLD

TELEPHONE  
TALES



Telephone

Career

of

George E. Weldon



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In attempting to chronicle my years with South Central Bell, many dates are missing. Listed are what may be considered to be minor office changes, with dates shown. The reason for this, I kept records for the first year of employment until entering service in 1942. After returning from service I kept very few records until a period from 1950 through 1957. Then I discontinued keeping accurate records. Some of the dates have been obtained through a number of papers and letters I have retained.

Through the efforts of Mrs Isla Hilderbrand and Carlisle Wilkins, I was hired by Mr. Candler, who was then Alabama District Plant Manager. I had applied several years prior to actually starting and in the original interview with Mr. Candler he promised me a job at that time. Sometime later he called and said he was putting on some people, but they were outside lineman. He advised against my taking a lineman's job due to my size, but said if I would wait his promise of a job still held.

I waited, and on May 26, 1941 I was hired as a Central Office Frameman in Birmingham, Al. and assigned to the dial office at 6th ave, more specifically "Office 3" under Jack Mitchell who was at that time called a Senior Switchman. The purpose of a "frameman" was in making the connections for telephone service from the cable pair coming from the subscriber, to the proper central office dial equipment. A relative simple job, yet I remember the pre-war moving season when leases expired on houses and apartments. During those moves there were some hectic weeks.

The time I went to work for "Ma Bell" were some fast changing times in the life of our country. For years the country had been mired in a deep recession and jobs were almost non existent. Up to this time my highest salary had been twenty two dollars per week. Accepting a job with the Telephone Company with a starting pay of fourteen dollars per week was a difficult decision, especially due to some developments at that time.

Just prior to taking this job I had received two job offers. The first had not been fully confirmed but was a tentative offer to go to work for Hershey Candy Company as a jobber. However I had accepted a job to begin within the next couple of weeks with a contractor at Childersburg, Alabama, at the new powder plant being constructed there. Both offers paid on the order of forty dollars a week, which was top money at that period.

After much consideration I choose the Telephone Company over the other two for the following reasons. I had once before attempted selling insurance with Liberty National Life and discovered I was not cut out to be a salesman. This worried me about the position with Hershey. With the Childersburg position I was like most of our citizens. What we were doing at the present toward a war effort would scare off the rest of the nations, and we would never become engaged in a war. This would cause the closing down of facilities like Childersburg, and I would be out of a job.

One other quirk about my employment date is the actual time. Although I started on May 26, my service date got changed to June 1 somewhere down the line. Just a few days but at one time I made an attempt to get it straight and ran into the proverbial stone wall. In all probability this came about because at one time the company deducted time from employee's service when they were out on a work stoppage, but later reinstated the time. I have a letter in my possession from one of the state head congratulating me on my 20 years of service during the month of July.

These first days of course on the job as a frameman were fun times and also serious times. At that period in telephone operations the results of an office was based on the number of troubles experienced on your group's equipment, which in our case was the main frame, as it was referred to. These were not busy days normally, except as previously noted, so a trouble was a no-no to us. I suppose this was instilled in us younger employers by our immediate supervisors, who were more or less graded on this particular index.

This motivated us to prevent being charged with any trouble, we could "get out" of. This makes many interesting stories of "conflicts" between, us as frameman and the people of the test desk who were responsible for charging us with the trouble. A good example: When a test deskman saw a short on his test line, he had only a vague idea if the trouble was on the frame or outside on the line. He would have a frameman pull the heat coils and if he lost the trouble it was outside.

When we had a call to pull heat coils all of us would jump in and checked the connections all the way. On one occasion a piece of solder had fallen across the terminal, which was a definite inside trouble. We removed it as we pulled the coils, which indicated to the test deskman the trouble was outside. But as we reinserted the coils we again shorted it out. About five minutes later we removed it without mentioning it to the test deskman, making him assume the trouble came clear. There was quite a discussion between us and the test deskman, but we "got out" of that one.

I suppose this is what was called "Spirit of Service" as was known in those days. As the company grew through the years and as labor unions came on the scene much of this was lost. Not that the company attempted to lower it's standards but work conditions with its dos and don'ts became a reality. At one time the foreman could vary schedules, give you time off, etc, almost at his discretion.

In order to better equip myself about the company, on many occasion I have on my off day ridden with an installer, of course without pay, to learn what went on outside. As the changes came about this became impossible to do because of labor relation rule. Although these rules and regulations became necessary, I remember fondly those days when one had some leeway in finding out what went on in the Company.

The employees of the company many times in those days were called the Telephone Family. Older employees were very helpful

to the younger, although they would then turn around and give them a hard time or play some practical joke on them.

Our job detailed much soldering and I remember on one occasion letting solder flow down on a terminal and causing one of those no-no trouble. Jack Mitchell took me to the back side of the frame where there were some vacant blocks and pulled in forty short wires. He instructed me to solder all forty of them and then call him for inspection.

As I started this job one of the older switchman came by and ask what I was doing. After explaining to him why I was hooking up these dead wires he said, "Let me show you how it should be done." So he hooked a couple of them up for me.

This went on for some time with one of the older employees coming by to "show me how." As a net results of their showing, I must have done less than half of them myself. Completing the job I called Jack and after inspecting them he said, "Now that's good work, do it like that from now on." I never did have the heart to tell him I did less than half of them.

I don't remember all those older switchman who help that day, only a few of them come to mind at this time. George Bell. Roy Roberts. Elmo McCrary, Milton Wright, Tom Gary are a few who do come to mind, many of whom would be very shortly promoted to foreman and I worked for several of them over the years.

The names of some of those working on the frame have slipped my mind, but a few I remember; J.T. Seargent, Hubert Lamberson, Earl Hall, Emmett Blankenship, J. N. Delapp, P. C. Carty, and Jack Rogers.

The company at that time had been hiring a few people along, but sometime in August they hired some new central office people. I believe the number was ten but I can not remember who they were. Any way these people, plus four more of us were put in a five week dial training class on August 20, 1941. J. M. Cornwell was the instructor assisted by J. H. "Pete" Smith.

Those I remember as being hired just prior to the school were: Cecil Jefferson, C. B. Hardy, Paul Franklin, Melvin Otts, Ed Tomlinson and Fred Blackburn. Other in addition to myself were Glenn Blacklidge, O. H. Machen, Frank Hughes, Glenn Parris, Harold Hicks, J. N. Delapp and James Terry.

Two incidents occurred during this class, one involving myself and the other my good friend Frank Hughes. First the instructor Jimmy Cornwell was a very detail person but had a flair for sarcasm. While studying the mechanical adjustment of the old step-by-step switches one operation required blocking the switch shaft in a operated position with a tooth pick, then the adjustment was made with a screwdriver in each hand.

My supply of toothpicks had dwindled to zero, so rather than find one I attempted the adjustment by the use of both hand and holding the screwdriver on the screw with my chin. I suddenly looked across the table and Mr. Cornwell had squatted to my eye level and was looking straight at me. After getting my attention he stood up and addressed the class.

"We are going to find Weldon a job at the Ford Assembly plant where they teach you the first day to use the right hand, the

second day you use the left and the third day they insert a broom up you rear and you sweep the floor while working." It was years before the group let me forget it.

Frank Hughes, well we are still not sure who was the "joker" and who was the "jokee" in his case. As a new employee he claimed to know nothing about electricity. So he became the victim of a joke one day when he was ask to go to the 6th ave. building and bring back a bucket of ohms. To those not knowing the term, an ohm is a measurement for a unit of electrical resistance.

Without question Frank goes to the 6th ave. building and those he contacted were in on the joke. They give him a bucket of water. Returning and handing the bucket to Mr. Cornwell who replied, "Frank this is not ohms, its something else.

Frank, without batting an eye" said to Mr. Cornwell, "They told me that liquid volts was all they had."

As I say today many of us wonder who was pulling what on who. Frank went on to become an excellent toll man and in his spare time opened up a large electronic business in Jasper, Al.

After completion of the dial training class on September 30, 1941 we headed back to the office anxious to put our new skills to work. I was assigned, guess where, right back on my old frame job. But this assignment was short lived and on October 5, 1941, P. B. Edmondson took the whole crew that had finished training and we went on nights doing routine work. This too was a short assignment for me as on October 12, 1941 I was assigned to the Number Three Toll Office.

The job of this group was to maintain the operator switchboard and its associated equipment. The switchboards were located on the 4th floor and the equipment on the third. There were three people in this group, Lee Chambliss, who was Senior Switchman, Bill Caudle and myself. Although as I will relate later, I left this job temporarily many times but I stayed as a Central Office Repairman as we were then called, until sometime in 1953.

Many stories could be told about our work in this group but I remember years later we were in a meeting with Mr. Jim Harris who was State Plapt Manager at that time. Some informal talk was in progress and he ask me something about my going on this job and what I remembered. I told him I remembered one thing very vividly and that was I was three weeks collecting my first pay check.

In answer to his inquiry as to what happened I said, "Mr Harris, as young as I was then and as many good looking operators there were, I didn't realize for three weeks I also was going to get paid on that job."

At that time the toll switchboard had some 90 positions, along with 12 local operator and some 18 information operators, and growing. So we knew it would be only a matter of time before more people would be assigned to our group. And shortly after that Hurbert Lamberson joined the group. I mention him because during the rest of my career I followed Hurbert on several jobs, But this was the only time that Hubert followed me.

But the war was getting closer and of course came Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. It became a daily occurrence to say bon-voyage to someone leaving the company going into the service of our country. From the Birmingham District some 106 people answered this call.

On March 21, 1942 I enlisted in a reserve unit along with many people from all over the Bell system. As we were told, people were needed to man the defense warning systems around the country and we would be called into active service when needed. We finally got that call on May 1, 1942.

#### THE WAR YEARS

Two of us left the company on May 2, 1941 headed for induction center at Fort McPhearson, Georgia. J. H. "Pete" Smith and I would be joined in Atlanta by three other Bell employees from Georgia, who had enlisted under the same circumstances. Those were: Donald L. Tibbett, Atlanta; Richard S. Ihley, Vidalia; William Glass, Savannah. Three days later we were shipped to Fort Lawton in Seattle, Washington where three more from the telephone company came in. Those were: Morris Borges, New Orleans, La.; Dan Mitchell, Alexandria, La.; J. T. Culp, Orlando, Fl.

All eight of us were shipped to Anchorage, Alaska, and from there started to spread out. Richard Ihley and myself stayed together for over two years before we separated. At the present Dan Mitchell, Morris Borges and myself are the only survivors of that group, and we have lost track of Dan. However in July 1991, Morris and I got together and we are making an attempt to locate Dan.

So much for personal data. When we left the company did several things for us. First we had their promise of a job upon returning, and with credit for our army service applied to our company service and wage scale. In addition we were paid the difference between our company pay and our army pay for three months. Remember army starting pay was a whopping \$21.00 per month.

Of course we were not aware of what transpired at the company except what people wrote to us. The company held hiring to a minimum during the war years in order to have jobs for those returning from service.

One incident about my leaving. At that time, a year of service was required before receiving a weeks vacation. My service would be 24 days short of a year, so I was told, "no vacation." At that time there was no union but we had the "Southern Association Of Bell Telephone Employees." I still have in my possession my card signed by M. J. Plott who was secretary.

Milton Smith was either president or representative, but he told me he would talk to Mr. Jule Bowen our supervisor about this. Later he told me I would get a weeks vacation.

I ask Mr. Bowen why the sudden change in policy. His reply, "I had rather give you the vacation than to have to argue with

Milton for an hour." I might say Milton rose to divisions and state jobs.

I stated earlier 106 people from Birmingham went into service. There may have been a few more, but at one time I received a list of 106 who were in service. Of the people I knew and had worked with, all of them returned. There were a couple who lost their lives during the war, but they were ones who I hadn't had the opportunity to meet in my first year with the company.

I was home thirty days on one occasion during the war. At that time D. B. Whitehurst, who was in the Marines had been wounded and was home. Jack Rodgers also was on leave. The assignment and test center held a dinner for Whitehurst, and Jack and myself attended. This was the only company function I attended during the war.

Luckily most of us made it and I returned to Birmingham and my job November 25, 1945.

#### THE POST WAR YEARS

During The post war years, 1946 through 1949, I kept very few records, which accounts for many missing dates. Upon my return to the company, my old job, C. O. Repairman again became routine. By this time the No. three toll group had been assigned a foreman, namely Tom Gary.

One of the first orders of business was attending a dial office course review for one week, conducted by Elmo S. McCary, assisted by J. Milton Wright Sr. A series of schools, I don't remember who was in the one I attended, but the entire group consisted of 27 returning veterans.

Those attending were:

|                   |                 |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| W. O. Monteith    | M. L. Blanton   | J. L. Boyd      |
| P. D. Meadows     | J. N. Delapp    | W. W. McLeod    |
| G. E. Weldon      | J. W. Matthews  | S. F. Tharin    |
| A. P. Franklin    | L. H. Lamberson | A. H. Crawford  |
| J. W. Abercrombie | W. R. Anderson  | O. V. Love      |
| C. B. Hardy       | G. C. Hallmark  | C. W. Jefferson |
| J. R. Shirley     | E. W. Linder    | H. C. Hill      |
| Jimmy Holmes      | J. M. Harding   | J. H. Smith     |
| M. J. Otts        | C. J. Valley    |                 |

Also the hiring process was back in operation. Many new people were placed on the payroll at that time. I cannot begin to name all, but a partial list would include, Gerald Duke, M. D. Davis, Bill Meeks, Sam Elliot, Rosco Hicks, J. Milton Wright Jr., J. D. Moman, J. C. Partain, Mike Crawford, F. G. Tidwell, and Bobby Day. I am sure this is not correct, but most of these were hired after the war.

I was in No. 3 Toll the entire time except for one stretch of several months. After returning from the week of schooling, there was a new foreman in No. three toll, Herman Scherer. At that time there were three of us in toll, which meant I got the night shift. After about a year of nights, I decided to accept something else if offered.

At that period when a job opened up, the foreman or supervisor would begin asking the senior man and proceed down

the seniority list until the job was filled. Mr. Jule Bowen approached me about a 3 to 11 shift open in the Woodlawn Office. I informed him I was his man. The procedure was to advise your foreman you had accepted another job. After informing Tom, the next day I was in Homer Morris office, who was C.O. Supervisor at that time.

He and Tom wanted to know why I was accepting the job. Was something wrong on my present job? I assured them that the 11 PM to 7 AM shift was my only concern. They continued to question me as to why I was wanted to leave toll. I finally got the message across, no more nights. They said if they could get me off nights would I turn down the Woodlawn job. I assured them I would.

I was assigned to evenings in office four on the second floor. About three weeks later Homer called me and said, "We need someone in No. three toll for a week." So back to the old job. This happened every couple of weeks for the next two months. The last time, after three weeks back in number three toll, I quietly moved my locker back on the third floor and stayed in toll for several more years. By that time there had been some foreman changes. Tom Gary was Office four foreman and E. S. McCary was Toll foreman. Other than some tempo assignments and leave I was to stay in Number three toll until 1953.

Many changes were taking place in this period. Improvements and expansions had been nil during war years and were now in full progress. All offices were getting additions, which meant we had Western Electric people in the building all the time. This was another factor added to all that went on. A couple of incidents with Western people I remember well.

Our office was right across a small hall from from one assigned to WECO. J. D. Byrd was the WECO supervisor assigned to nights. With Byrd, we always had something going. Someone started writing a note to Byrd, silly things and at first we would slip them into his lunch box after he finished eating. He started hiding it so we went to his thermos bottle and then to his coat. He finally thought, well I'll fix them, so he would lock the office door every time he left. Someone brought in a ladder and crawled through the transom to again leave a note. After the round with the notes wore out it's welcome, there was always something else to replace it.

Like the time I walked into Byrd's office and told him I was going to set his lunch on fire. He had it in a paper sack on his desk, and told me to go ahead. I struck a match and set the top of the sack on fire and walked out. Down the hall I turned around and looked back and his lunch was burning while he was still looking down at what he was reading. I rushed back as he didn't realize it was on fire.

Many of the outside people often tell wild tale of happenings to them or to others while installing telephones on the customer's premises. We inside people did not experience such happenings, but there was plenty of manufactured incidents to keep things lively.

One amusing incident happened, actually it was some horseplay that went astray. Horseplay was the cause of many amusing incidents. At that time in history the toll switching was all manual, that is all calls completed by the operators, no long distance dialing. On busy holidays the two way lines to distant cities would be split up and some used strictly incoming or others outgoing. A very simple method of doing this was by placing masking tape over the jacks of trucks that the operator was not to use.

After the holiday the first job was to remove all the tape. The normal procedure was to keep wrapping it until you had a ball of masking tape. S. E. Thomas had been assigned to this job and I was working on the frame cutting over some jumpers. After completion of the job, Tommy walked in the frame room and tossed the ball of tape at me and hollered, "Catch."

Since I was holding a soldering iron in one hand and a pair of cutters in the other I had no chance to "catch." So I did the best thing, "dodge." But in doing so I struck my head on the sharp edge of the frame and rip about a two inch gash on the side of my head. Nothing that required medical attention, but did require a bandaging job.

With the cooperation and help of the others on the job, I spent the rest of the day "staying out of sight" as best I could so that we would not have to file an accident report. Our mission was successful.

So much for horseplay, that is unless this next story could be be some more of the same. To set up this tale you will have to first know that an important operation of the switchboard was the recall circuit. This was when a distant operator rang on a circuit that was being used, in caused a lamp on the cord connection to flash at the rate of 120 interruptions per minute, better known as the 120 IPM circuit. The maintenance of this circuit was our responsibility.

One day L. H. Lamberson and myself were working on the third floor when we received a call that there was no 120 on the entire switchboard. Realizing the importance of this function we bounded up the steps and into the operating room. As you enter this room at one door, you were at the back of one line up of switchboard. As we entered it, several back panels were open where WECCO was working and "Shorty" Roberts, then a WECCO employee was standing there.

He tried to stop both of us to show us the cardboard Christmas tree with flashing lights he had constructed. We both hollered we didn't have time, the board was OD, (out of order.) After both of us took about a half dozen more steps, it hit of us like a ton of bricks. Shorty had tied his flashing Christmas tree lights into the 120 IPM circuit, grounding out the system. Goes without saying we didn't have a flashing tree that year.

Our contacts were the supervisors on the switchboard. For the most part there was a good relationship. On occasions something would arise and since we were different departments, these matters were handled up the line. At one time we were not getting enough information on referral trouble tickets from the

operators. We mentioned this to our foreman and he took it up with the traffic managers. They in turn passed it on down the line. I later received a call from Mrs. Myrtle Sharpe, a traffic supervisor. She had a trouble ticket and it was filled out in its entirety. She turned to me and said, "Does this ticket have all the information you need?"

I could tell she must have been somewhat hacked off about our complaint so I stared at the ticket for a few minutes and then turned to her and said, "No mam, it hasn't, I need that good looking operator's name and phone number." For some reason this got to Mrs. Sharpe and she started laughing. It is not necessary to say, Mrs. Sharpe and myself got along wonderfully after that.

Of course it wasn't all games and fun. The night shift had the honor of keeping all the calculagraphs, (Clock for timing toll tickets) clean and fresh ribbons place on them. One messy job. Today computers are used to time and print out all calls.

Another job was the cleaning and repair of switchboard cords. My guess as to the number of cords on the board at that time was around 3300. Worn plugs had to be changed as well as repairing or replacing all frayed cords. The tedious task was the polishing of the plugs. We had a electric polishing machine where we inserted one plug at a time for 10 to 15 seconds to clean them. This machine made a humming sound and in the middle of the night it did not have much effect on keeping one awake. Many the nights I have dozed off while polishing plugs and grind one so badly it would have to be replaced. Do they do that today, no, why? Simple there are very few cord boards in existence today.

I may forget someone, but the people who worked in the number three toll office at the times I did were:

|                 |                 |               |
|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|
| L. H. Lamberson | George Hallmark | Herbert Smith |
| Bobby Day       | C. J. Vallyely  | Marvin Davis  |
| J. C. Partain   | Eugene Grady    | S. E. Thomas  |

We worked hard, we loafed, we had good and bad times, we had fun and we shared our sorrows and feeling with our fellow workers. But when the chips were down, we got the job done.

One story to emphasize this point. The foreman would give us on the night shift a fairly good nights work to do. So when we begun work there was not much time spent in loafing. The only way we could get a few minutes of sitting down time was to work extremely hard and get ahead of ourselves.

This one story is about an assignment we were given one night. I don't remember what the first part of the night was, but we finished that assignment in record time. The second part of the night was to change out some 120 purse holders on the back of operators chairs to a new type. Five hours of good work.

After finishing the first assignment in record time we then sat down to eat a bite. As with all good telephone men, along with their lunches there had to be a domino game. This one got fairly exciting, and when finally glancing at the clock we found it wasn't in the neighborhood of 2:00 AM, rather nearer four. This gave us exactly three hours to do what we had five allotted for.

A quick conference was held and we laid plans quickly. We went to the board and since at that time of night there were only a half dozen operators on duty, we had things pretty much to ourselves. So the first man down the line laid all the chairs on their back. The next followed him, laying out the new purse holders by each chair. Then it was assembly line method all the rest of the way. One of us would take the next operation and go right down the line. We finished at five minutes to seven, but we had worked up a slight sweat.

So with a lot of fun, a lot of hard work, some good and bad times we made it through those post war years.

#### 1950-1955

During this span of time we thought the Telephone industry was producing some dramatic technological changes. This was true, however not a drop in the bucket as to what we see at a later date in our career. In addition these were times of many changes in telephone assignments, and many changes in my personal life as well.

To begin with on January 20, 1950 I married Kathleen Elizabeth Scott, a Birmingham native, then living in Florence, Alabama. Prior to that time I had enlisted in an Air Force Reserve Unit which had been formed at Birmingham Airport, and shortly after we were married I was sent to Elgin Field for two weeks active duty. In between these activities I experienced the only sick benefit leave from the Company during my entire service. (Except military leave) I came down with a flu bug and was sick for some couple of weeks.

In March of 1951, with the Korean conflict escalating, our reserve unit was called into active service. We were sent to Barksdale Army Air Base in Shreveport, La. I can't remember the Telephone people who were members of this reserve outfit, but a few who would up in Barksdale with me were: James Baker, Russell Shirley, Erskine Hawkins, Earl Sisson, and Ed Lollar, along with Bill Menefee and Bill Choron of Western Electric Co.

Our original orders called for our discharge in September of 1952. However orders came through moving our discharge up to July 1, 1952. This suited everyone except me. Kathleen was expecting at any minute and the doctors had advised against us trying to even fly back to Birmingham. With all this hanging over my head, Captain Bell, our signal officer, took care of the situation. He declared me as an essential at that time and my discharge was delayed a month. Our son Scott was born on July 6, 1952 at Barksdale Army Air Force.

On August 4, I was released from active duty and returned to Birmingham and several days later I returned to work. I left for this military leave from number three toll and returned to the same job. By this time P. B. Edmondson was the foreman. I stayed on that job the balance of 1952, however in November of that year I had my first assignment as a relief foreman, at nights in in office three on the first floor.

The Birmingham District of which we were a part had eleven small towns surrounding Birmingham that were maintained out of our district; Those places were, Columbiana, Montevallo, West

Blocton, Centerville, Mount Pinson, Gardendale, Warrior, Silura, Alabasta, Vincent and Calera. These had in the past been assigned to one man, but now the Birmingham District was been decentralized into four sub-districts, East, West, Central and South. The maintenance of these towns were being assigned to different sub-districts. The Central, of which we were a part was given Gardendale and Warrior. They were assigned to Number three toll and I was given those places in addition to number three toll work.

An interesting part of this assignment was the overtime pay I received. Transportation was at a premium in those days, and when I had to go to these places it was difficult to get a vehicle. I was told to leave early with either the trouble man or the installer and come back with him. There were many times the trouble man or installer got tied up and worked overtime, so I had to do the same.

In April of 1953 I again was given a two weeks job as relief foreman, this time in number three toll, where I was working.

On May 3, the above job was again changed so I became a number three toll man only. No more traveling. However on May 25, 1953 an unusual thing occurred. Sam Blackburn who was a switchman on the first floor in dial office three asked me if I would be interested in swapping jobs for a while if we could get permission to do so. He had spent his career in dial and I had been primarily in toll, so he thought we should get additional experience. I agreed and we got approval for this swap.

The odd thing about it was, at that time the union (which I will mention later) was becoming quite strong and almost any move that was not strictly in accordance with the contract was usually questioned by some union member. We never heard anything about this swap. And as time progressed, Sam never returned to the switch room, and I never returned to toll, except on special assignments.

I was now working the first floor as a dial switchman in offices three and seven as they were called then. Later they were referred to as the Alpine Offices. Two weeks after going on the job Ralph Sligh, who had been power man for years bid on another job. Bob Barham the foreman decided not to replace him but to send each switchman to the power room for six weeks training and then every switchman would be qualified as a power man. I was the first to be sent to the power room for training.

This training lasted one week. They were cutting Selma, Al. from manual operation to dial operation and I was told I would be sent there to help. It seems that either Gadsden or Anniston, I don't remember which had just been converted to dial and they experienced quite a bit of trouble during the cutover period. So the company decided to load up Selma, and see what they could do there.

I don't remember everyone who was there from all over the state but from Birmingham, Woody Gill, Russell Shirley, Mike Crawford, Roy Roberts and myself were there. It was one of the best cutovers todate experienced by the company. I don't remember stats on all the cutover, but I was responsible for

number three toll and for one week after the cut we only had one trouble that should have been picked up on our pre cut-over test.

Returning to Birmingham in Sept 1953, R. T. Barham had been moved to the second floor and Al Hamilton had taken his place. On October 25 I again started my power training, but once again it lasted one week. WECO and the Southern Bell Equipment installers, due to all the equipment going in various offices had fallen behind. So I was assigned to work with R. F. Dement and install several bays of misc. equipment in the Gardendale office. This job required about two months and I returned to the old job on Jan. 4, 1954.

Two weeks after my return help was again needed on a PBX job at First National Bank in Birmingham. Herbert Crawford and myself were sent to do this job, which required another two weeks.

Back to the 6th ave. building on Feb. 4. My records indicate that for some reason I worked on the second floor for R. T. Barham for three days before going back to the first floor.

On Feb. 15th it was back to power training, but this time I completed my stay. As a matter of fact I stayed two months on the job, rather than the four weeks I had left. For the balance of 1954 it was a continual swapping of jobs. The following is a complete list of the assignments I had in 1954 including the ones just mentioned:

- Jan 2, Completed Gardendale assignment. Back to Office 4.
- Jan 4 Office 3 & 7 First floor.
- Jan. 16, PBX installation, 1st. Natl National Bank.
- Feb 4, Office 4 R.T Barham Foreman.
- Feb. 7, Office 3 & 7, A. E. Hamilton, foreman.
- Feb. 15 Powerman, Basement 6th ave. bldg.
- April 12, First floor Office 3 & 7.
- Aug. 2, Relief foreman No. 3 Toll 3rd. Floor.
- Aug. 9 Office 3 & 7.
- Aug. 16, N1 Carrier School, Phoenix Bldg.
- August 23, Office 3 and 7.
- Oct. 7, relief Foreman Office 3 & 7.
- Oct. 11, Switchman office 3 & 7.
- Nov 15. Office Four, 2nd floor R.T. Barham, foreman.
- Dec 13 office 3 and 7.

This represents a wide variety of experience, yet there were times I hardly knew where I was suppose to be on a day by day basis. I suppose the next year 1955 was almost as hectic, however I failed to keep any records. What I can give you now will be from a few papers I found and my unreliable memory. The only dates I find is Jan. 16, when I went back to the second floor to work and on Dec. 1, I went to work for J. Milton Wright Sr. on a transition in Office three.

In 1954 I had enrolled in the old University of Alabama Extension Center, (now UAB) in Birmingham, taking electrical engineering. During 1954 and 1955 I completed the equivalent of one years work, but the changing times at the office and pressures with a young child brought that to a halt.

1955 - 1959

References have already been made concerning the many changes in the Telephone Industry in the late 1940's. It is not clear what year would be referred to as the evolution of the telephone business, but 1956 would rank high as far as my personal involvement was concerned. The company still had many old manual exchanges, where an operator at a switchboard physically made the connection between customers. The modern system of dial switching was the step-by-step system. This system meant that each number was dialed and switched through to the next number in sequence for next digit selection. At this time there was also some panel type switching, where each digit is selected individually, however it was done with sets of brushes running up and down brass rods.

The try-out stage of another new system of dialing was in effect, called the crossbar system. This system developed in Sweden where the talking telephone route was selected by master control units and then closed down, customer to customer, releasing the control system for further selections. Local Crossbar offices were being established at a record rate, replacing obsolete, and worn out equipment.

At the same time this new switching system was being applied to long distance, which would enable a customer to call not only the subscribers in his or her home town, but subscribers all over the world. Ten craft people were selected to attend the first long distance crossbar school in Alabama. Those were:

- J. B. Price
- S. E. Thomas
- O. B. Terry Jr.
- W. D. Meeks
- Tim Tyler
- J.A.L. Laird
- F. G. Tidwell
- J. M. Wright Jr.
- E. P. Nichols
- G. E. Weldon

March 5, 1956 the ten of us surrendered our tools and building passes and reported to the Long Distance Dialing Crossbar School. It was held on the second floor of the Liberty National Insurance Company Building on 8th Ave. in Birmingham, Alabama. George White was the instructor, assisted by Herman Scherer. It was to be five days a week, eight to five for eight months. None of us went back to the 6th Avenue building for the entire time.

In November we returned to the 6th Avenue building where Western Electric Company had just completed the new Crossbar dialing office, located on the 7th and 8th floors of the newly constructed building addition. We began to prepare for the cutover which was scheduled for mid 1957.

On February 1, 1957 I was promoted to Central Office foreman and assigned to the same office. There were several supervisors at that time assigned to the new project, however the first of these John "Abe" Abecrombie was reassigned to another office. I

was selected for his vacant spot. Others involved in the cutover were: L. H. Lamberson, H. A. Smith and Herman Scherer.

From then to cutover we were busy with testing all the equipment and familiarizing ourselves with this new equipment. As a matter of fact I had been assigned to write "trunk cards" (a record of all incoming and outgoing connections between cities we connected to.) I spent my first month as a foreman completing these cards. I don't remember how the responsibilities were assigned.

As a sideline to this, the Public Relations people were swamped with visits to clubs etc, explaining this new system to the public. So they ask the plant department to let them assign some of these visits to us. I feel reasonably sure the PR people took the choice assignments and gave us the remainders.

The procedure was to contact the program chairman of the club you were to visit and find out who they would like to talk to. In most cases their number one choice was usually some national club official of that particular club. However on one visit I made it was about the time for a statewide election and there had been talk that "Big Jim" Folson might run for governor again. The club ask if we could talk to him.

I call Governor Folson and by the time I told him who I was he was going on about, "I know old so and so with the company." Finally getting down to telling him why I called, he indicated he would be glad to do so, but give the information to Jamaelle. (his wife.) I did so and on the night of the program someone in the office had gotten us and a club in Mountain Brook on the same line. George White had already begun his call at the Mountain Brook club, so we had to kill time and wait about 30 minutes to make ours at the Roebuck Club where I was.

Finally calling Governor Folson's number we got no answer. We figured he probably sat around waiting for a call while tipping a few drinks, which he had a reputation of doing, and by the time we rang his wife wouldn't let him answer the phone.

We stayed busy during those months and sometimes during 1957 we got the office cut over. It was by most standards a very good cutover, that is we didn't experience a great amount of trouble once it was placed in service. The remainder of 1957 was a busy time as there were many thing we did not know about this equipment and it was interesting to say the least. sometime after cutover H. A. Smith and Herman Scherer left to take other jobs, leaving Hubert Lamberson and myself as the only foreman there. Lamberson was assigned the day foreman and the primary responsibility for the office. I was assigned as four to twelve foreman in the toll crossbar office and was to supervise the evening and night crews, plus the evening and night crews of the number three toll office.

Again not sure of exact dates, I did attend some management classes during 1958. Those I have a record off are;

March 21 One day first aid taught by C.J. Barefield.

April 7- One week management training class

April 18 Better Grievance handling one week

Sept 24 & 25 First aid classes. G. W. Webb instructor. Other

attending were: C. F. Barefield, G. H. Brown, Donald Lee, P. L. Tinsley and myself.

Sept. 27 One week better grievance handling, Bryant Ivey instructor.

Some time during that year I attended another week of management training, but I don't have the date.

At that time when you made a long distance call by dialing, you had to give your number to the operator and she keyed in in the machine. A new system had been devised where this was not going to be necessary. Your number would automatically be identified for billing purpose. Birmingham was soon to get this equipment, which meant another school was needed.

From January 5, through April 17, 1959 it was another school, taught again by G.L. White. However this time it was held in a conference room located on the eighth floor of the 6th Avenue building. Since both L. H. Lamberson and myself were to attend, we still had the responsibility of running the office. We would be called out of class if something came up that needed the attention of one or both of us. The first two weeks of the class was an introduction and we had a number of people for that period only, the rest of us attending the complete course. As my memory serves me the following attended, with the asterisk by the names of those I believe were there for the entire course:

|                  |                          |
|------------------|--------------------------|
| *W.D. McCrary    | Jackson, Mississippi     |
| *W. P. Davis     | Knoxville, Tennessee     |
| *F.T. McCracken  | Charlotte, N.C.          |
| *J. B. Brown     | Atlanta, Georgia         |
| B.S. Bell        | Atlanta, Georgia         |
| J.B. Tyler       | Atlanta, Georgia         |
| H. H. Davis      | Atlanta, Georgia         |
| *I.C. Roberts    | Louisville, Kentucky     |
| J. W. Anderson   | Louisville, Kentucky     |
| *C. H. Siegal    | Louisville, Kentucky     |
| *D. E. McDowell  | Charlotte West Virginia  |
| *John Skorvaga   | Charlotte, West Virginia |
| *L. H. Lamberson | Birmingham, Alabama      |
| *G. E. Weldon    | Birmingham, Alabama      |
| J. W. Coleman    | Birmingham, Alabama      |
| E.P. Nichols     | Birmingham, Alabama      |
| C. J. Vallyely   | Birmingham, Alabama      |
| F. W. Kilgore    | Birmingham, Alabama      |

After this school was completed it was necessary to hold a couple for craft people. Two schools were necessary as part of the people had to keep the office going. George White taught the first, but in the middle of the second class he was given a promotion and L.H. Lamberson and myself had to finish teaching the school. Lamberson would have it one day and I would have the next, with the person not teaching running the office. (And trying to prepare for the following day.)

O.H. Machen a number five crossbar man came in to take over George White's job. We got through this cut again after one harrowing experience. Machen decided that to test out this new method, we would open it up for thirty minutes on a certain day

and time. He then wrote letter to all management people in Birmingham to make at least three calls at that time. Came the day for the cutover and none of it would work. Everyone was running all over the place trying to locate the trouble. I spent much of my time trying to answer the telephone from all the higher ups. After it was all over we found that Western Electric Company had left some test boxes connected and turned on, thus killing all the automatic identification equipment.

After the cutover to automatic identification is was back to a some what routine basis, although the new office provided some real interesting experiences.

#### 1960 - 1969

Early in 1960 our routine was again broken by an announcement that a number 5 crossbar office with some unusual features would be installed on the 9th floor of the 6th Avenue building. I was to have charge of the cutover and the office after it was placed in service.

One of the features of this new office was that we would provide a service to business customers, who now had switching equipment on their premises. With this new Centrex, it would not be necessary to install equipment at the customer premises. We would do the switching in the new 328 office.

Also at a later date we were to supply teletype dial switching through this office. All teletype switching had to be done up to this time by a special TWX (teletype) operator. So we had some interesting experiences to look forward to.

It did mean however another school since this was a different system from Toll. So back to school to a number five crossbar course taught by Ralph Sligh. However at this point the schools had been reduced in time and I think this was scheduled for six weeks with two additional weeks for a CAMA School. It was held on the 9th floor of the 6th Avenue building and I was subject to being called out of school, but since Western Electric Company was in the equipment installation period I did not have to do much as far as the office was concerned.

Ralph Sligh taught the No. 5 Crossbar part of it and I did have to do some studying and teach a week centrex school to the same group including Ralph. After that R. L. Coolbroth from Montgomery taught the two week CAMA school.

After the completion of the school I was assigned two men, Wallace Ray and Kermit Wesley, plus the loan of an experience man Hugh Hamilton from Anniston. These were three top craftsman, but we needed more help preparing for the cutover. I attempted on many different occasions to obtain additional help. My immediate supervisor O. H. Machen also tried with no success. I was beginning to see politics in some of the higher management.

I will not call names, but at a later date another situation arose which proved to me one particular person was not especially fond of me. I will believe to this day he apparently

wanted me to fall flat on my face. But as luck would have it the three outstanding people named above, by all of us working thirteen hours a day, seven days a week we got the job done.

The reason I was suspicious of all this was, about three weeks before cutover they decided to send in a "hotshot No. 5 Foreman" under the pretense that they were worried whether it was ready for cut. I think they planned to flood the place with help if he found out something was wrong and then Machen and myself would share the blame. But they found us actually ahead of schedule and ready for cutover.

We had a good cut over, but my reasoning was still holding water because we did not receive from this person the customary letter after a good cutover expressing thanks to you and your people for the extra effort. But the three people working there soon were to be promoted to foreman. Hugh Hamilton left very shortly after the cutover to go back to Anniston as a foreman, and Wallace left for Huntsville several months after cutover. Kermit made it later but I don't remember when.

We got the office working in good shape and then I was sent to Nashville for a two week school on Teletype switching, as we were preparing to cut over to this new method. This was sometime in 1962. There wasn't a great deal of equipment that had to be added to make this cutover, so there was no great problem.

Not long after we got this cutover they started management reorganization in the 6th Ave. building. Machen our supervisor was to be second level foreman for all equipment in the building, local and toll plus the test and assignment office. Herman Scherer had the local dial but he was being sent to the Pheonix Building. The plan was to have three level and a half supervisors, one over toll, one over local and the other over test and assignment.

H. A. Smith was to have local dial and E. N. Tomlinson the test and assignment. I was to have Toll. But when the first announcement came out Smith and Tommy were named, but they did not announce toll. Billy Joe Leverett was then District Plant Manager had made these proposals, and was the one who ask if I would be interested, told me he didn't know what happened but he would let me know.

This went on for several weeks and I talk to Leverett several times and he said he still wasn't sure why it was being held up. He said he didn't know who but indicated the same person I have talked about.

Several days later he called me into his office and ask if I would be interested in going to Montgomery as a level and a half supervisor. I told him I would surely listen. Mr. V. D. Lockard, District Plant Manager in Montgomery would be in Birmingham within a couple days and he would like to talk to me.

Mr. Lockard offered me a job in the Montgomery District. I was to have charge of all plant operations in what was called the Suburban Group, that is the towns of Prattville, Wetumpka, Clanton, Maplesville, Troy and Fort Deposit. I accepted the job and in talking to Billy Joe Leverett the next day, his first question was, "Did you take the job?" I knew he was up to something else as he already knew of course. He said one thing I have to tell you, if you stay in Birmingham, effective on that date you are due for a raise, which would have been top first

line pay, and almost as much as going to Montgomery meant.

However I told him my decision still stood. Billy Joe said, "Well I think you did right and I would have probably kicked your tail had you not accepted it." He went on to tell me how much better I would be in that situation than by staying in Birmingham, unless certain people left. Looking back on the entire situation, although it meant pulling up stakes in Birmingham, from a career standpoint it was a good decision.

February 2, 1960 I reported to V. D. Lockard in Montgomery. I would be working out of the District office and could see this job would require lots of traveling. I had four foreman, Ervin Joiner at Clanton and Maplesville, B. V. Ray who had Prattville and Wetumpka, George Harvey at Troy and Ray Smith who had the Microwave system. E. Q. Ryals the only person in Fort Deposit was reporting to a supervisor in Montgomery, so I had him reporting directly to me.

I stayed on this job some three and a half years. The group was understaffed and presented quite a few problems. To begin with Prattville and Wetumpka were too much for one man. I finally managed to get another foreman for Wetumpka, Jack Walker. The next largest problem was we had no cable men in the group and had to depend on Montgomery for help, which wasn't always reliable. We were finally allowed to put on men and cable trucks in Prattville, Clanton and Troy.

Most of the people who worked in these places were locals, so in many cases they were the telephone people to much of the public. A prime example of this was Fort Deposit where E. Q. Ryals was stationed. As a matter of fact he recently retired from there. But you might go down early some morning and find several notes taped to the door of the central office telling Ryals of some problem someone was having with his or her phone.

The people would not call in and report trouble as they felt their request would best be met by telling Mr. Ryals. And he had the personality to fall right in with that scheme. We were criticized at times by inspectors from the State Office about this method of operation, but with Mr. Lockard's backing we never stopped it.

The prime reason I was selected for this job was because of the Central Office Problems. Wetumpka had recently been converted from manual operation to step by step dialing. Prattville was an old step by step dial office and through much neglect over the years had fallen into disrepair. Fort Deposit and Maplesvilles were newer step by step offices but had been neglected. Troy and Clanton were still Manual offices, that is still used operators to provide service.

So perhaps the busy time of all was in getting both Clanton and Troy cut over to the new crossbar dialing offices, which was done with a big effort on everyone's part but both were what I consider smooth cutovers, that is no major trouble.

I suppose the most memorial event happened very shortly after I took this job. A heavy snowstorm came through and it hit Montgomery causing heavy icing of trees and wires, which is not the best that can happen to the outside telephone plant.

Everyone possible was called out in Montgomery to work ice damage. That night the ice and cold traveled in such a direction it went into Chilton County and Clanton. Ervin Joiner who was foreman there called me early the next morning and I took off at once for Clanton. We had at that time miles of open wire routes and the trees had iced up and bent down through the wires and tangled them up.

It was impossible to get help out of Montgomery so by using Central Office people outside we finally got back in service. Since I couldn't climb I acted as a "grunt", one on the ground who helps the man on the pole. This was about two days of 24 hour work and by that time the ice was beginning to melt letting the limbs of the trees go back up through the wires again. Another two days of sleepless work.

One important thing did come out of this weeks work. My telephone experience was limited to Central Office work, that is all inside. By hanging in those for days, in that miserable weather, I gained some measure of respect from the outside people. I think they were expecting me to try to run everything from a nice warm inside location. Later one of the craft people make such a remark to me.

We finally talked Mr. Lockard into letting us move our office to Prattville. We found some space in the back of the Commercial office and set up office there. We were able to get our own clerk. Polly Stringfellow who was a clerk in Montgomery bid on the job and got it, and she was one of the top clerks in the District, so that was a great help.

I started to looking around Prattville for a house and one day mentioned it to Mr. Lockard. He begin to tell me I could not live in Prattville, etc. I thought this a bit funny, and several days later he called me in the office and told me why. They had been planning some changes and I was to come into the District office on the staff as a Central Office Supervisor and Paul Chastaing was to take my place. This was in late 1966 or early 1967.

This increased the traveling as the District included the towns I had in the Suburban Group plus Montgomery and the Opelika Group which included Opelika, Auburn, Tuskegee, Hurtsboro, Lafayette and Clayton.

While I was on this job the Illinios Bell had a strike and Supervisors from all over the country were sent there to help out. In Peoria, Illinios they were cutting into service one of the first electronic switching systems and needed help badly. Although I didn't work in this office they put me in a Toll Tandem Office, the first that I had ever work in, although it was similar to the old 4A Crossbar in Birmingham. I worked in Peoria for about seven weeks. Another very interesting experience.

The peculiar thing about the Illinios situation were there were two unions in the Telephone Industry. The Brotherhood Of Electrical Workers represented the Telephone workman and the Communications Workers Of America represented Western Electric and the operators. The BEW was the union on strike and the CWA

members were still working, crossing the picket lines of the BEW, which would be most unusual in the south.

After returning it was pretty much routine work except for a short work stoppage we had and for a couple of weeks I went back to the original job I first had with the Telephone Company, that is working the frame. When Auburn University had their quarter changes I spent about a month there each time helping with the Central Office. The first trip was quite a mess, but we set up some record keeping and a new filing system that was a great help in later changes.

In 1969 we had heard rumors about quite a change that was to be made. The Montgomery District according to the rumors was to be split into two separate districts.

We were working one of the quarter changes when the rumors became a fact. It was announced that the Auburn District would be formed from the Opelika group and the old Suburban group that I had at one time.

Ossie Burns, I.D. Williams and myself, staff people on the Montgomery District were all working in Auburn and one day we got a message to attend a luncheon at one of the local motels. The announcement of the split was made. L. B. Chastain was to be the new District Plant Manager, but that was all the assignments mentioned in the meeting.

Not long after leaving this meeting I got a call from Lockard and ask if I would meet Chastain, Jack Nelson, (Division Plant Manager) and him out near the interstate. I was asked if I would like to come to Auburn on the staff as a Central Office Supervisor. My reply was "not really, but I let them know I knew where my paycheck would be. This somewhat startled them but I went on to explain that my son Scott had just entered his last year in High School and was tied up in many activities. I would accept if I could put off moving until after school was out.

Mr. Nelson and Luke thought this a valid request and said they would present it to Mr Harris, the State Plant Manager. Mr. Harris also agreed to this. About a week later I got a personal call from Mr. Harris and he told me they wouldn't approve this at Company Headquarters, but he had given me his word, and would get back to me.

Later he called and said, "We are not going to transfer you to Auburn ~~at~~ until after school is out. You will still be in the Montgomery District, but Mr. Lockard has agreed to loan you to Auburn until spring." So that is the way I got to Auburn. One thing however it was a good feeling to know we had a State Plant Manager who kept his promises. By the way I never did see an official announcement transferring me to Auburn in 1970.

I. D. Williams was also to go from Montgomery on the Auburn staff and have transmission, and I was to have Central Offices. I commuted the balance of 1969.

THE AUBURN YEARS  
1970 - 1980

An attempt to put my stay in Auburn into chronological order would be akin to an attempt to bail out a sinking battleship. Although my original job was to be Central Office Supervisor, I performed in many other areas. In a meeting where some state people were in attendance some one ask Jack Nelson, (Division Plant Manager) "exactly what does Weldon do." Mr. Nelson said, "He greases the wheel that squeaks the loudest." Which nearly parallels my explanation, "Anything they couldn't get some one else to do."

Each district had a staff supervisor as somewhat of an assistant (with not much clout) to the District Plant Manager. Several people were on that job and finally in the mid 70's I went on it and there is where I remained the balance of my Telephone Career. But from that position I worked on various assignments.

To name some of these assignments, not in any order, were: supervised in several towns when the foreman was on vacation, directed a couple of small cutovers, continued working in Auburn Central Office during quarter changes, took part in riding exercises, made outside inspections and worked in test center on trouble analysis.

While staff supervisor's I was given the job of safety supervisor which meant writing safety programs and results and teaching drivers training. Additional duties of the staff supervisor was in the bid letting for vehicles and other small contracts such as booth cleaning and janitorial services.

I spent six weeks in Mobile at one time when they needed a fill in foreman while a new electronic office was being cut into service. Other than that it was routine, answering and signing correspondence when the DPM was gone and the job of arranging a meeting place and meals for the monthly supervisors meeting.

One of the most interesting to me was the safety program. In the promotion of safety it is necessary you capture the attention of the people to ~~to~~ whom you are trying to convey a safety message. Chastain gave me somewhat of a free hand and we did some things different from most safety programs. In addition to some unusual posters and hand outs we did such things as mount plastic eggs on small cardboard stands, painting a face on the egg with a small band aid across its head. The message on the bottom said, "Only an egghead would work without his hard hat." How effective a programs can be is hard to tell, but the district at one time had one of the longest runs of no accident of any district in the State.

The Auburn District covered the towns of Auburn-Opelika, Lafayette, Phenix City, Fort Mitchell, Clayton, Eufuala, Hurtsboro, Tuskegee, Wetumpka, Slapout, Prattville, Clanton, Maplesville, Fort Deposit and Troy. Later we took in Selma, Demopolis, Linden, Greensboro, Uniontown and Marion. So you see we covered quite a hunk of real estate. Except for Montgomery, is was practically the entire center of the State.

Although there were some rough times, overall it was a very pleasant experience. And with the variety of assignments it was extremely busy times. All in all the people you had to work with were on the whole, congenial people. On occasion we had a few people who could really make want you tell them where to go, which I did at times. That is to be expected in any work place however.

The first couple of years was really trying to put out fires and trying to get organized. Many changes in personal was taking place almost daily. When we first settled in Auburn, the District Office was located in a small room in the rear of the Auburn Commercial Office on Tichnor Street. There were six of us in the office and the standing joke was, before you stood up to move any where you first announced your intentions to the rest of the people so there would not be a mid-aisle collision.

I. D. Williams and myself had desk put together facing each other. At that time both of us were consuming large quantities of Mallox each day, so we kept one bottle on the desk. To paraphrase the old description, "Bread is the staff of life," ours was, "Mallox, the life of the staff."

Somewhere around 1972 a new work center was constructed on Airport Road between Auburn and Opelika. We move into more comfortable offices in the new work center. In 1978 the construction forces were growing so the District Office moved across the street in a rental building. Size wise it was fine, but the one standing joke there was the one and only restroom. We were kidded about having one restroom and should be careful of what transpired. I told all the hecklers, "Don't worry, that restroom is so small that if two people happened to get into it at the same time, there wasn't room to do anything but shake hands."

Although there were some changes along the way, most of the key people stayed in the district the entire time it was located in Auburn. The plant managers were, Harold Stockman at Prattville, Henry Miller, Opelika, B. A. Taylor, Selma, Earl Estes at Phoenix City. Bernice was chief District Clerk the entire time. I. D. Williams served in several capacities and myself.

Others on the above jobs part of the time were Bill Brett at Phoenix city, and Pat McGowen in Auburn - Opelika.

We took part in riding exercises frequently. This was where as many supervisors as could be gotten together would each ride with a different installer-repairman. The idea was to see how service could be improved. I am sure some good came out of these exercises, however I have often wondered if the installer-repairman did the same type work when someone was not riding with him or her.

One very amusing incident happened when we went to Mobile for a three day riding exercise. Each morning the local foreman would introduce us to the man we were to ride with that day. One morning as we were preparing to leave the work center, the installer looked at me and said, "You know I don't like anyone riding with me worth a damm." Quickly I answered him, "I see we

are going to get along fine, as I don't like to ride with anyone worth a damn." A funny thing, he was one of the most pleasant fellows I have ever ridden with.

But the Mobile personal operated somewhat differently from the rest of the state. Perhaps being the furthest from the State office they felt somewhat isolated and it caused a different attitude especially when someone else came in.

Another incident happened one day when we were dispatched some thirty miles to the south end of the district to help an installer place a line across the road. This was a neighborhood road and very little traffic, so he could have done the job himself. The fellow I was riding with told me, "He is always wanting help." Anyway the fellow started to climb the pole and I stopped him asking him if he was going to test it first. (A cardinal rule before climbing) I guess just because I was an outsider he was going to do it his way. He started up and I stopped him and told him to wait just a few minutes and let me call his supervisor to come out and watch him fall. As it turned out the pole was rotten.

We had a funny incident in Auburn with a black female installer, who was one of the first female installers in that area. She was dispatched to a construction site in Auburn to install a telephone for the contractor. In climbing the pole, her climbers cut out and she fell causing only a slight injury. I was dispatched to question the witnesses and to make some pictures. In talking to a construction foreman he told me, "I have never seen a woman climb, so I was standing there watching the first woman I ever saw climb a pole, but someone got my attention and I turned around and didn't get to see the first woman to fall off a pole."

As an end to the tale it was not necessary to climb the pole as someone had already run a line down the pole from the terminal. We believe she just wanted to show those construction workers she could climb.

As previously mentioned one of my jobs was making reservation for a monthly meeting and meal. We usually moved them around so I became familiar with most of the eating places that had meeting rooms.

In my last years in Auburn I was reporting to Luke Chastain, directly above him was Jimmy Dawkins, Division Customer Service Manager, and his boss Ernest Herlong, State Customer Service manager. Straight up and down the line that was as good a line of bosses as one could expect.

It would have been interesting to have kept a day by day log while in the district. So many things happened that it is hard to remember them all.

I suppose one of the biggest ongoing things concerned the Alabama - Auburn football games. Being an Alabama fan and working for Luke Chastain, an Auburn graduate brought up many interesting situations.

I was in charge of cutting over a small office at Hurtsboro and several weeks before cutover Alabama was playing a regular season game in Houston Texas in the Astrodome. I don't remember

who they were playing but I talked to Luke about getting ahead of the cut schedule and taking about three or four days off to go to the game. He begun kidding me about why I wanted to travel that far to see "that game," when Auburn was playing LSU in Auburn.

The next week end I took Kathleen to New Orleans and she flew into Houston. I took off early Friday before the game and got into Houston early Saturday. Alabama won the game there and as we were leaving the comforts of the air conditioned Astrodome, the news came that LSU had upset Auburn in a hard driving rain. I couldn't resist sending Luke a Telegram saying, "Now you know why I came to this game."

It was something like this all the time. But the best of all was what happened after Auburn blocked two punts and scored both times to beat Alabama 17 to 16. At that time I was making a trouble study at the test center in Opelika, reporting to that building instead of Airport Road. Usually I would wait until about ten o'clock on Mondays to contact Luke, but that day I kept putting it off. Finally I got a call from him and from the tone of his voice I knew I was in for some ribbing.

He first question "How was I feeling?" I knew it was to set me up for some badgering. I told him, "Not so good." He snickered thinking I was talking about Alabama losing the game and said "What's the matter?"

I begin to tell him I had developed some problems and the doctor's prognosis wasn't the best news I had heard lately. Thinking<sup>g</sup> I was serious the tone of his voice quickly changed and he said, "George, what in the world is your trouble?" Very seriously I answered him, "The doctor said it is a case of blocked balls." This got away with him so and he got to laughing so hard I think he forgot to give me a ribbing.

One more incident. We were to hold a two day meeting on plans and results, with some state people in attendance. At that time I was having extensive dental work performed, having had all my teeth extracted except seven lower ones. Luke told me one day that I was to present one phase of the job, I don't remember what. I told him I couldn't get up in front of all those people and make a presentation with my mouth like that. He put it to me in a real strong way that I was to make the presentation. I had an idea he was pulling my leg, but I couldn't refuse, since he was my boss.

Anyway I made the presentation after making two remarks. First I told everyone that I had just had some dental work performed, and now I had 40 percent less cavities, but also I had 80 percent less teeth. I then told them for their own protection when I get started, I would advise no one to sit on the front three rows.

But we had this type of relationship, and along with Bernice Griggs we did have many enjoyable times in the Auburn District. But all good things usually come to an end, and we found out that this was true in 1980.

THE LAST YEAR  
1980 - 1981

For some 10 years the courts had been tied up with a suit brought about by the U. S. Justice Department in an effort to break up the so called monopoly of A.T. & T and the Bell Companies. The details of this case are beyond my apprehension, but by 1980 the decision was made, the Bell System was coming to an end and the company would be split up, divestiture the name used to describe this action. It was supposedly designed to bring about more competition and therefore lower rates to the consumer.

As previously stated, I am no authority on economics, but my gut feeling at this time is that this idea was a complete failure. There has been worlds of competition but we are not seeing those utopia rates the courts were projecting. To begin with this case spread over such a long period of time cost the tax payers million upon millions of dollars, and cost the telephone industry perhaps an equal amount. An amount some "smart" government agency said would be picked up by the company. To me this thinking is a lot of hogwash, the cost is to the consumer, just as the governments portion of this comes from the taxpayer.

At first this did open up more competition in the market place. Everyone decide to go into the telephone business but now many small investors have already folded. The bankruptcy of this great number of smaller companies is not good for our economy, plus the loss of capital invested by many share owners in these new operations.

One last word, the settlement of the divestiture was, there were certain operations A.T. & T. and the Bell companies would not permitted to participate in for several years after the breakup, although newer companies were allowed to offer any type services they choose. This doesn't exactly appear to be free competition. To me it points to the fact that the suit by the Justice Department originated from pressure from certain political and money interest.

With the break up facing the company it was necessary to initiate a wide variety of changes in operations. One of the first was the consolidation of many operations and the one that was to affect us was the operations of the Montgomery and Auburn District, which had been split twelve years prior to this time, and would now be combined. The mechanics were, the district operation would be shifted back to Montgomery. L. B. Chastain would be the District Manager for the newly combined district operation.

I agreed to continue, at least tempo in the Montgomery District. I did however announce my intention of not moving again, as I was approaching 40 years of service.

There is no way I can remember all of the details but we were no longer called the Plant Department, rather Customer Services. In this new line up the old plant operation as we knew it, that is Central Office, Cable and Installer repairman was changed.

The Central Offices went into a group called Network Operation, and the Cable Department was called Distribution, taking with them the maintenance of all outside telephone plant, leaving us with nothing but the installation people. However the old Commercial Department, those who took the customers orders for telephones and handled customer billing problems, became a part of our group, Customer Services.

The combining of Plant people and commercial people itself was somewhat of a problem. Each had its own concept of the approach to the job and to say the least it was two different approaches.

One example of the differences arose when I was making plans for our first district supervisors meeting. We sent out notices to all supervisors and the next day I met one of the commercial supervisors who told me I didn't say what time the "Happy hour" would be. I said to him, "Welcome to another world." I went on to explain L.B. Chastain's monthly supervisors meeting were just that, a business meeting and not a social hour.

This is not to say that Luke did not have an occasional meeting for a few minutes and then a social time. Normally he held one a year, where the wives and husbands were invited. His only business that night would be a quick review of the past year. But many of the commercial people had trouble attending a strictly business meeting each month.

Every day was something new in our efforts to get reorganized. Which made for a very busy schedule, and too we had to get acquainted with all the personal in Montgomery. Even with all that I started to thinking about retirement. As a matter of fact Luke questioned me one day concerning what plans I had for retirement. I told him right at that minute I didn't know, but probably some day I would get so mad at something and just walk in and say "I'm retired."

Actually I was thinking in terms of completing 1981 and working one day in 1982 which would give me a couple more months of off days, (holidays, personal days, etc) before retiring. They were offering some district level people bonus of up to two years pay to retire at once. But this offer had not drifted down to second level supervisors.

One day Luke called me in and said the state office had called and in lieu of paying me moving expenses they would pay me the money directly if I would retire. This amounted to around \$10,000. So after giving it some thought I told him yes, I would retire on June 1, which would be forty years service.

Several weeks passed by and I had heard nothing so one day I questioned Luke as to what had happened. He said he would call and find out. Later that day he told me that they wanted me to retire now and not wait for June 1. The day a person works for the last time, he is given all his holidays, vacation, personal days before his actually retirement. I pointed out to Luke if I took these and then retired I would only have four days to work.

No one had realized that, so he called the state office and they said the papers would be there the next day. The day I signed the retirement papers left me with three days to work,

and you can bet I got some question from co-workers as to why this came about so sudden, as nothing had been said to anyone before this time.

I retired on June 1, 1981 with a net credited service of 40 years.

I chose to have a sit down dinner for my retirement. I had worked in three towns and had many friends, so a retirement party would have been rather complicated. Those attending were the people from the office, plus a few others that I had worked closely with over the past few years.

### REFLECTIONS

In the preceding part of this writing I have attempted to stick fairly close to the events of my telephone career. Down the line there have been hundreds of events, stories and incidents, too numerous to mention. I would like to take several more sections and attempt to recall some of these which might be interesting, along with a few humorous stories.

As you begin to reflect on past happenings, the first thing that comes to mind is what did my career mean to me. This is a question not based on those little ups and downs that occur, but on the overall career. I know many people in the work force were better paid than perhaps were telephone workers, but on the average we had very little complaint. And the work, in spite of some monotonous jobs, was something that I enjoyed. So to me I was satisfied with the fact that I choose the Telephone Company for my career.

When I first went to work for the company there was an air of real togetherness among the Bell workers. As the company expanded and grew, some of this dimmed over the years, but much of the same feeling exist today. In our travels all over the country we have encountered people who we recognized as Telephone employees through some insignia or perhaps a T-shirt, and in nothing flat there was usually a friendly conversation in progress.

I am reminded of two such incidents. While traveling through Edmonton, Canada in very heavy traffic, we noticed a young man on the sidewalk trying to attract our attention. I rolled down the window and waved at him. He then went through several gyrations similar to talking on a telephone and then pointing to himself and then our Pioneer tag. The message was he was also a telephone worker and was saying hello to us.

In Mississippi headed west on I-10 pulling the trailer which had a pioneer tag on it, we heard a voice on the CB from another trailer directly behind us. They too were retired telephone people from a northern state. Finally the lady said "The rest stop is about ten miles, if you folks have time stop, we will get acquainted. We did and left with a two new friends.

People are a very important part of the telephone industry. Most are friendly. but as with neighbors and others you begin to

become attached to certain people, and with some they become especially close friends. I could not begin to name all the friends at the Telephone Company, but we became fast friends with three telephone families: Jimmy and Peggy Baker, Birmingham, Ruth and I.D. Williams, Auburn and Hal and Jean Mitcham, Montgomery. These are the kind of friends that if we don't hear from each other with some regularity, then some one is on the phone checking.

After retirement we joined the Telephone Family Campers and out of that group of friends we developed another close family, Stanley and Lou Gable of Gardendale.

Although some of us have not remained in close contact, I can not forget the four families in Birmingham who every couple of weeks we would get together with and make a meal of spaghetti, hot dogs or some other budget meal. Those four were: Herbert and Elizabeth Smith, Jake and Helen Partain, Charles and Dot Vallely, and Gene and Clarice Grady.

There were many others we were somewhat close to, partially because of some common interest we had. Some of those were: J. R. Shirley, through our mutual times of learning to fly, Tommy Hutto who had been a classmate of Kathleen's in high school, J. M. Wright whose sons I coached in Little League, Johnnie Hall whose family Kathleen family had known for years, Hubert Lamberson through a long time association, Bernice Griggs in Auburn for many reasons and another long time family associate, Mrs. Isla Hilderbrand.

And then there were others whom I worked very closely with and became fast friends in addition to co-workers such as; Henry and Dot Miller, Earl and Thera McClain, along with all the life member pioneers in Opelika, plus too many others to even attempt to list.

As a craftman, I reported to somewhere around 15 different first line foreman, and after becoming management I only reported to four people. Not one of these people that I could say I wouldn't want to work for again, in spite of some differences we might have shared. And only a few co-workers that I felt as if I couldn't stand to be around, perhaps two I can recall at the moment. And I can recall a couple of people who were almost impossible to get along with at first but over the years both have become good friends of ours.

As far as some other officials above my supervisor's level there were several I recall that were difficult to get along with. But this is to be expected in any business.

This is not to say there wasn't some wacky going on with people around the company. One of the best examples of this type people, who in reality were very good friends, but their horseplay would not make you think so. Two Test Deskman, both over six feet and 200 pounds, Forest Woods and Marvin Pace. How it started I have no idea, but one would come in the room and sneak up behind the other and hit him so hard, usually in the forearm, that it would knock him out of the chair. The victim would not bat an eye, but get up and go on like nothing had happened. But you could bet your life that some time during the

day the other would suffer the same fate

Everyone was fearful that this would erupt into something rough some day, but it continued for years, and both remained good friends. Now did we have some wacky people?

### TELEPHONE PIONEERS OF AMERICA

Closely associated with Telephone People is an organization called Telephone Pioneers Of America. It is composed of telephone employees with long time service. When I first joined, you needed to be an employee for 21 years, later this requirement was dropped to 18 years. Also in the organization today there is a group called "Future Pioneers." The club in addition to being socially oriented takes on some enormous projects each year, many in the area of hard of hearing, sightless and special handicapped persons.

Projects are approved at State level, but any worth while projects is usually undertaken. A project of many clubs over the state is the making of Teddy Bears to give to law enforcement officers. Seems strange, but law enforcement people have found when having to deal with a small child under any type of trauma, by merely handing them one of these soft cuddly bears, the child calms down in a hurry. Most law enforcement agencies carry some of these in their cruisers. Many of these are made by Telephone Pioneers over the State.

I became a member as soon as I was eligible, but I was not very active for a number of years. I became somewhat involved in Montgomery, but it was not until I moved to Auburn that I became active. The club at Auburn was a real active club when I first started although later it slowly begin to fade. Finally in the Pioneer year 1977-1978 I. D. Williams was elected president of the local club and things begin to pick back up. Regular meeting were again held and several projects were undertaken.

That year for the first time in a number of years a display was taken to the Annual State Assembly which was held in Montgomery, Al. and Inez Clyatt won first prize in creative crafts for her quilt. For the next eight years that I know of, the Opelika -Auburn Club brought home a ribbon each year. I am glad to have had a part in some of those. The awards were as follows.

Huntsville 1979 - Opelika Club won second place in the Community Service display.

Birmingham 1980 - I won a first place ribbon in creative crafts for my hand build cabin and grist mill.

Mobile 1981 - I added a barn to the village and again won a first place in creative crafts.

Montgomery 1982 - I added a covered bridge and sawmill to the village and again won a first place in creative crafts.

Huntsville 1983 - The club won a first place ribbon for its

overall craft display and I won a second place ribbon for my store in creative crafts. I also won a second place ribbon for my collection of miniature telephone.

Birmingham 1984 - A creative craft first place ribbon was won by one of the life member ladies from the Life Member Club in Opelika. It was one of three people, and I can't remember who. I won honorable mention for my Telephone collection.

Mobile 1985 - I won a first place ribbon for my Telephone Collection.

Montgomery 1986 - I won first place ribbons in both creative crafts and collection for my musical instrument collection.

But to get back to the club, a lot of credit needs to be given to I.D. Williams for his work with the Opelika Club and for his fund raising endeavors. He enjoyed selling and I remember one year the club was selling oversize coloring books, some 2 by 3 feet. We had to go to Birmingham for a company meeting and was staying at the old Hilton on top of Red Mountain. I don't remember how many he sold, but it was around a couple dozen, all in the lobby of the Hotel.

I.D. Williams was selected one year in Auburn as "Civitan Citizen" of the year for his efforts in the fund raising of that organization. At the Pioneer General Assembly in Birmingham in 1992 he was awarded a plaque for his community efforts and work in Auburn.

I became president in the Pioneer year 1978-1979 and the club went real good for about three years following that and then begun to slide again. Pat Davis followed me as president and then Luke Chastain was president.

If I could brag of any accomplishment the year I was president I would refer to two things. First the people at Phoenix City did not attend meetings at Opelika and had for some time expressed a desire to form their own club. I became quite involved in this along with Luke Chastain and we were successful it getting a club started. It turned out to be a live wire club as a couple of years after they started they organized a drive to purchase a van for one of the boy's camp and it did not take them long to do it.

The other accomplishment would be in connection with the Life Members. The Montgomery Club was responsible for the Life Members in Opelika but they did very little. The once a year Christmas party was about the only time they let Opelika know what was going on. We started a drive to have the annual Christmas party held in Opelika, as so few life members were able to attend the one in Montgomery. Again we were successful, and even as the club begun to dribble away, I understand the annual Christmas Party is still being held.

In 1981 when I retired from the company there were large numbers of people retiring at this same time. We struck out trying to get a Life Member Club formed in Opelika and again we

as successful. I think Betty Beal was elected the first president and I followed her.

One meeting I invited the commercial manager Todd Strange over to give the members some information about all the new retiree benefits. We were meeting on the second floor of the Opelika Central Office in a small break room. The building had no elevator so it was difficult for some members. Todd ask me why we didn't see about getting a room in the old test center, which was being phased out. He said he would help. I went to see Luke and he got started and the end was they made a real nice Pioneer room with a small kitchen.

The yearly General Assembly of The Telephone Pioneers of Alabama is rotated around to four cities, Birmingham, Huntsville, Montgomery and Mobile. This two day affair gives every one an opportunity to renew old acquaintance and to enjoy some good entertainment, as well as finding out what the other clubs have been doing. I think I have missed only once the past twenty years.

I spoke of projects earlier. I remember some of the ones in Opelika such as, constructing a flagpole for the hospital, holding Bingo Games for nursing homes, selling tickets in the mall for various charities, purchasing helmets for a volunteer fire department, installing life lines for the Pilot Club and various other. But the best in my opinion was the Beeping Horse shoes.

Mac McCloud in Birmingham had developed a horseshoe peg that emitted a continuous beeping. Rubber horseshoes were used and we have seen kids who are sightless play them for hours. The club took the project on, and we would sell them at cost to clubs or people who were going to present them to some blind organization, and many we donated straight to some blind organization or camp. We sent these all over the United States. I think this project was well worth the time and money spent.

At this writing I have moved my membership to the Mobile Life Member Club and have attended several meeting, but admittely I have not gotten real active as yet. The Mobile Life Member Club appears to be a live wire Club.

#### TELEPHONE FAMILY CAMPERS

Another Telephone related organization is the Telephone Family Campers. It carries the insignia and sanction of the Telephone Pioneers of America but are not the same organization. The camping clubs are for the most part socially oriented, although many take part in charitable activities.

Many states do not have camping clubs but there are yearly get togethers in many states. For instance the five states of South Central Bell have a yearly camp out, sponsored by one of the states, and it has been only recently that Tennessee has taken part. Every four years there is a national camp out, where campers come from every state for four or so days. I have attended one of the National affairs held at Beach Bend CG in Bowling Green Ky.

~~Bewling Green Ky.~~

The Alabama club has been in operation for some dozen years. While in Auburn we attended almost monthly. However since moving to Mobile we haven't been as active in the club since most of the locations are in North Alabama. There are very few members from this section of the state.

The Alabama club has gone through various stages of active and inactive times. I will have to say during some of the inactive times they still held monthly meetings, but only a few attended. To really be an active camping club it is necessary to plan ahead the activities for each months camp out, and this has been the failure of the Alabama Club.

I do remember some outstanding campouts. Rather than choosing the same old places to go each month, an occasional different type trip is needed to keep up interest. I remember the trip to Arkansas. We had a monthly camp out at Joe Wheeler State Park in North Alabama and those who were retired and didn't have to work left Monday Morning for the Crater of Diamond State Park in Arkansas and then went on to Mountain View Arkansas for a couple of days. There were about seven rigs making that trip.

Another was a trip to North Central Florida and a tubing trip down the Ichetunkee River, and then over to Waycross Georgia. We didn't get to make the Georgia portion of the trip but the river ride was outstanding. At times part of the club would make a few trips and this is the thing that makes a club active.

There has also been some meetings that were well planned and were well liked by everyone. But unfortunately the Alabama Club at times has not done too much planning. I do enjoy going to these monthly affairs however because of the people we get to see at that time that we would not if camp outs were not held.

I served as Wagon Master (President) of the club for the year 1985-1986, but I missed about four of the meetings because that was the year we made the trip to Alaska.

Another fact concerning the club. They held a planning meeting in January and made plans for the year. But Officers were elected and begin their terms of office in June. Over the objections of a few people we finally changed that so the new officers went into office the first of the year and it was their planning in January for the year.

I spoke earlier of the five states getting together for a five state camp out each year. We have attended some of these and parts of others. This year it was in Mississippi and we were able to get over for one day. Hopefully the Alabama Club will continue and become a thriving club.

#### UNION

A labor union is now part of our country's economy and during my 40 years with the telephone company had its ups and downs. In 1941 when I begun my work with the Telephone Company, workers were represented by "The Southern Association of Telephone

Workers." This was a local organization and was not affiliated with any national labor movement. So it was only natural that many of the larger unions wanted to get their foot in the door with Telephone Workers. Some more powerful unions such as the "longshoreman" were vying for the spot as a representative of the Telephone people.

The vote finally went to the newly formed "Communication Workers of America" in my mind a very wise choice. To the best of my knowledge the CWA was never invaded by the mobster type leadership that some of the unions fell victim to. This is not to say the organization was at all times "Lily White," but the gangster influence was never part of the CWA.

I belonged to the old Association, which many claimed was company dominated, and I suppose it was up to a point. Anyway it was not strong enough to be a part of the bargaining process. Representation on the local level in small matters of dispute was for the most part the work of this association. And the dues were practically nothing, something like five cents a week if I remember correctly.

I joined the CWA and attended meetings regularly. Some long time employees were usually elected officers, but of course after the war was over, the Telephone Company hired many new employees, and the younger ones were more union orientated than were the older employees. This was true in many other industries around the country, and was the beginning of a labor movement of a sort which swept the country in the years following World War II.

The problem with the union on the local level is much the same as with local politics. People vying for office are sometimes chosen from the ones who can talk the loudest, promise the most and appear the most aggressive. It seems that intelligence was not always a qualification, but the "mouth" usually got the job.

I don't remember the year but around 1948 I think it was there was a short work stoppage about national wage bargaining, but it was settled rather quickly. However around 1952 or 1953 we had a strike that lasted much longer. During the first one I was single and I did walk the picket line and attend regular meetings. However by the second one and I gotten married, had a small child and had spent 17 months in the Air Forces, which did not leave me in the best financial position.

So I was out seeking temporary employment. One of the railroads was on strike and Frisco Railroad was hiring some part time employees. So I hired on as a temporary yard boy at Frisco Railroad in East Thomas. A job that I quickly decided I didn't want for a career.

Prior to the strike I had attended meetings but was beginning to lose confidence in the local union. I remember one time three of us were standing in the rear of the meeting hall and a vote was called on some issue. One of the fellows said lets count them, so each of us took a different part of the hall and the vote we counted was not anywhere near what the announced vote was, as a matter of fact it did not carry according to our

count, but the chairman announced it passed. With this and a few other things I had not been attending meetings regularly.

Any way about five weeks or so into the strike I was mowing the lawn one day and got a call from someone as union headquarters. This was the first time anyone had called. I was told I was failing to show up for picket line duty, and was subject to losing any financial help from the union. This got to me real quick and I told them that this was the first time anyone had even called and the only reason they called was because a number of people were talking about going back to work, and they were trying to find out if I was one of them.

To make a long story short I went back to mowing the yard, but was getting madder all the while. In a few minutes I quit and went back to the telephone and called this person again and told him he had just made up my mind for me, I would go back to work the next day. I then called the company and made my intentions clear to them. I was asked if I wanted an escort to cross the picket line and I assured them I walked out under my own power and I would walk in under my own power.

This is not to say there wan't some harrassment after the contract was settled, but it was minimum. One incident several weeks after the strike happened in a small grocery store near the house. The people who ran the store were real good friends of ours and I could afford to be a bit more aggressive there than I could have somewhere else, and this aggressiveness help solve the situation in a hurry.

A strong union member came in and he came over and ask me why I went back to work. I told him exactly why. He then begin telling me of old friends I had lost including him. I then questioned him by saying "Did I visit your home before the strike?" He relid "No." I then ask him if he had visited my home before the strike and again he replied no. I told him "well have I lost a friend?" He got mad and invited me outside to settle the question.

I told him that was fine with me and I turned around and picked up two large glass bottle of soda water. He ask me what I was going to do. I told him "At my age I don't fight fair." He then decided we could settle the thing by talking. From that time on he had been very cordial every time our paths cross.

A second incident came at a later date, after I had made supervisor. They had another short work stoppage and one of the people on my crew worked. Later some WECO employees working on the seventh floor had been riding this particular fellow and when they left for lunch they put insulation from inside cable in soldering iron holders. This causes a very obnoxious order. When they came back from lunch I had locked them out. I went straight to my immediate supervisor after lunch and told him what I had done, he agreed. We had all types of visits from higher ups and the case was carried to State Level. But I was backed up all the way, and they lost that half days pay.

Almost humorous incidents happen sometimes in dealing with the union and in grievance meetings. Many foreman would lose their cool and get in a shouting match. I learned early on the

best way to handle a situation like that was to just sit there and say nothing until they would finally shout, "Aren't you going to answer the question?" My stock answer would be, "Yes as soon as you calm down enough that you can hear what I am saying."

Once during a grievance the union Rep begun to misquote some things I had said at the beginning of the meeting. On his next question I wrote my answer on a sheet of paper and then read it. After several of these the union Rep sarcastically replied, "Are you going to continue doing this and prolong the meeting. I replied, "Yes, just as long as you continue to misquote what I say." It stopped immediately.

But funny things like the grievance I had because I warned an employee about coming to work with "a heavy odor of alcohol on his breath." The grievance went several steps higher and the final settlement, "Change that line to he was warned of coming to work with the odor of whiskey on his breath." The union said they won the grievance.

## THE REST OF THE STORY

### EMBARRISING MOMENTS

As the great spinner of tales and newsman Paul Harvey says, "Now the rest of the story." The rest of the story are those thousand and one tales that people from the Telephone Industry spin anytime there is a gathering. One very old joke which I heard shortly after going to work for the company, illustrates this point very vividly.

The story is told about a party of telephone workers which had begun in a wild manner, that is the presence of booze and women, but it wound up with little groups sitting around, each trying to out do the other in their tales of what transpired on the job. One young lady finally interrupted a group and said, "Please answer one question for me, I have heard that telephone men talk about nothing but booze and women on the job, but now there is no talk of anything but telephone work, why?"

Perhaps the point is stretched a bit, but it is a fact in any gathering of telephone people, the conversation will eventually wander around to tales of their work at the Company.

That is exactly what I intend to do here, to spin a few yarns, mostly truths, although some of these I heard from others. I feel confident that some of the hearsay incidents grew considerably before I heard them. As a matter of fact some of mine have perhaps expanded a bit over the years, but I will honestly try to keep them as near the truth as possible.

Although this is done for my self and will not receive any kind of distribution, I will in some incidents refrain from naming persons because it might cause some embarrassment. However, some names I will mention in incidents and I assure none is intended to embarrass anyone. Several years ago a gentleman from Mississippi attended the Telephone Pioneer Convention in Birmingham collecting tales for a proposed book. I do not know if this project was ever completed.

Speaking of embarrassing moments I will first relate mine. Two such incidents come to mind, the first happening a short time after I begun my Telephone Career in Birmingham, Al.

I had been working about a month and a fellow worker, Forrest Woods, had been an outside plant man about a year and transferred to 6th ave building about the time I started to work. One afternoon, after five o'clock, Forrest and I decided we would tour the building. We located a door in the basement which led to the cable vault. This runs some 100 to 200 feet out under the alley to some manholes. We had gotten to the back when the lights suddenly went out. Groping our way in total darkness we finally located the door but found it locked. After unsuccessfully beating on that steel door for what seemed like hours with no response, we sat down to discuss our options. We discovered we had only one option, sit there until someone came in the vault, which could be the next day.

Thinking we could weather the situation when another thought struck us, "How often do they come in the cable vault?" You can imagine we were not experiencing an emotional high at that point. Finally, the lights came on and the door opened. We stepped out facing our boss Mr. Jule Bowen, 2 city policeman, the telephone guard, and the janitor.

When the smoke cleared, we learned the janitor, a long time employee, saw us enter the cable vault but he did not know either of us. He closed the door, turned out the lights and called Mr. Bowen, who in turn called the police. The results of the whole incident was, the next day Forrest and myself received a detailed tour of every room and closet in the 6th Ave. Building, our tour guide, Mr Bowen.

I guess you would say I learned my lesson well, or did I? A couple of years before I retired, the Auburn-Opelika Telephone Pioneer Club was to hold a fish cookout. We had rented what was known as the "Civic Center," a rustic type building belonging to the Shopping Mall. We had used this building many times before and on this particular afternoon Henry Miller and myself were bringing in some fish cookers, using Henry's pick-up truck.

After arriving we decided rather than carry them up the small but steep bank and around to the rear of the building, that we could best do it if Henry's pick-up could make it up the slope. It did and we were in the process of unloading when all of a sudden we were surrounded by police from both sides of the building.

The turn of events in this incident was, the Mall had hired a new custodian but they forgot to inform him we had rented the building that day. Evidently he thought we were pulling the truck in the rear of the building to ransack the place, which was not a sterling quality building. And smart thinking on his part since it was broad open daylight and cars coming in and out of the mall by the hundreds.

Over my career I have had other experiences with the police, but the shoe was on the other foot in those incidents. Such as the time I was the only foreman working in the 6th Avenue building at night when the police called and informed us they

had picked up a drunk who had one of our test sets and was making a call from a terminal box. When I arrived at the police station I further found, in his drunken condition, he had climbed a pole to get to the terminal.

Of course I picked up the set and followed company practice for those type happenings, that is not to press charges. The police would keep him overnight and release him in the A.M. But in reporting to my boss the next day I told him we should hire that guy, because anyone who could climb a pole and open a terminal at night while drunk was a good prospect.

One other incident with police was not at all funny. At Opelika there had been some lead cable missing at night and a janitorial contractor employee was thought to be the thief. Henry Miller and Luke Chastain had been furnished a police radio and had been on stake out every night for three nights, without anyone's knowledge. On the fourth night Henry had other plans and they brought me in on the incident.

Luke and myself were sitting across the street from the work center when suddenly we saw pieces of cable coming over the fence. Luke alerted the police and a car was dispatched to Shoney's about a half block away to await further developments. The lead was loaded in the car and as soon as the fellow pulled out the police came flying and caught him in a couple of blocks.

We had to go to the police station and finally appear before the grand jury. This was a fairly young fellow and they eventually let him off with a suspended sentence.

One other embarrassing moment, or at least what could have been one happened in Opelika. I was in the restroom when suddenly from two stalls over I heard a recognizable voice very clearly. It was Margie, the chief clerk in the construction forces. My second thought (My first was my gosh I'm in the ladies restroom) was I'm going to hear about this incident for a year. By then I heard another voice which alerted me to what was happening. Opelika had recently installed two way radios and it was Margie's voice, but coming from one of the construction people's two way radio.

Not all embarrassing moments were at the company. While in Auburn and doing some safety work for the district, I was invited to Dean School to present a safety program for small kids. One of my points was an attempt to discourage children from running into the streets by attempting to show them what could happen. I had purchased a cheap rubber beach ball and was going to demonstrate the effect of something smashing the ball, and point out it could happen to them. Unfortunately I did not practice this before hand, for as I rolled the ball out on the floor I took a large ball peen hammer I had brought with me and hit the ball as hard as possible. Unfortunately the ball wasn't as cheap as I had expected because it didn't shatter. Instead the hammer bounced off the ball and if I had not had such a grip on it, the result would probably have been a hammer through the ceiling. I can't recall now what I said after that.

Another incident I recall was more frustrating than embarrassing. I was driving a company car, the small Chevy which

had a rear motor. Passing by the capital building in Montgomery it started making an awful noise, so I quickly pulled over. I didn't see anything wrong until I opened the rear to look at the motor and found it hanging loose on the pavement. All the mounting bolts had broken loose and the only thing holding it was the transmission. I think everybody from the company came by that morning on their way to work, and I heard about "losing my motor" for months.

I'm sure other people had some embarrassing moments, but one really funny one I would like to relate. My good friend Frank Hughes was examining a foam type fire extinguisher which at that time was somewhat new. In doing so he accidentally pulled the pin, and knowing the foam might do damage to the telephone equipment, he hastily picked it up and headed for the rear door to the alley. Upon reaching the door he found out the door was locked and no key was available. The only alternate was to put it in the corner and let it run its course. Its remarkable how much foam one of those things can put out.

#### PRACTICAL JOKES

I guess telephone employees develop a skill for practical jokes as much as they do in any industry. I have seen some good ones so will attempt to list a few of the best practical jokes I can remember.

Perhaps one of the classics would be one pulled by a group of Montgomery employees. An outside foreman Eddie Michalik, himself a fun loving prankster was the victim. Eddie came to Montgomery from up North and we jokingly called him that Yankee. He had developed strong ties with the Auburn University and its football program. How this came about no one knows for sure.

Before the Auburn-Alabama football game one year several employees slipped off to Eddie's house. It was on a slightly elevated lot. The group took fertilizer and on the bank spelled out "Roll Tide." After a few days the sun had burned off some of the grass and "Roll Tide" became quite visible. Eddie saw what had happened and set out to water the spot so the burnt grass would not indicate "Roll Tide." After several days he was successful, there was no burnt grass spelling out "Roll Tide." There was however the darkest, greenest grass which spelled out "Roll Tide."

In my career with the Telephone Company if I had to choose three pranksters they would be, Charles Vallyely, Ralph Sligh and the team of Earl Allen and Paul Dawson.

Charles Vallyely was the sneaky type prankster. For instance on the 11-7 shift there were occasions where someone would slip in a short nap. One night Vallyely wrote a letter and found an envelope that could be seen through. He wrote a letter to their foreman saying that so and so was found asleep when he came in, and signed another foreman's name to it. He left it on the desk, and of course the people working in that office saw it and held it up to the light and read what was said. It was some week or

so before they found out it wasn't true.

The office four 11-7 crew had been victimized by several of Vallely's pranks, so when they went to the lunch room, they decided to keep him out of the office. They obtained a key to the office door and locked it. This was probably the first time in years the door had been locked. When the crew returned after eating they discovered that over the years the brass door handle had been polished so much that the key could not be inserted into the lock. Results, they had to remove the door to get in the office.

Speaking of Vallely he also had a habit of overdoing his actions at times. One cold night we all went outside to drain our cars (no one could afford anti-freeze then.) He was stooped down making sure the water was draining. He then exhibited one of his overt actions and hollered as he ran for the building with his head down. Unfortunately his progress was suddenly stopped by a parking meter as he hit it head on. Luckily a headache was all he received from the incident.

Ralph Sligh added a touch of technically to his practical jokes. Such as attaching a auto bomb to someone's automobile. But his classic was when another switchman purchased a small gas saving car and was bragging about how much mileage he was getting. Every night Ralph would sneak out and put some gas in his car, increasing the amount each day, until this person claimed to have gotten over 60 miles to the gallon. Then suddenly, Ralph changed his tactics and begun siphoning a little gas each night, also increasing the amount nightly. You are talking about one confused car owner.

Now the duo of Earl Allen and Paul Dawson. Most of their practical jokes were against each other, yet they were not above laying one on some unsuspected victim. One thing I remember is both of them going through the line at the lunch room. Paul had put a piece of meat on his plate along with some vegetables. Earl told him that since that was such a little piece of meat put the vegetables on top and no one would know. He even helped Paul cover the meat up, but yes you guessed it, while Paul was paying for his meal Earl told Eva, who ran the lunch room, that Paul had hidden meat under his vegaeable. Eva, being somewhat of a wisecracker herself, just looked and said, "Well if that meat was no bigger than that, he can have it."

A couple of people whose names I won't mention were guilty of looking for greener pastures on occassions. Before going home they would come by the office and shower or do whatever it took to rid themselves of any tell-tale evidence. One night one came knocking on the back door, so Earl and Paul called the police. The police immediately grabbed him, but he told them he worked there, so the police brought him around to the front door.

When Paul and Earl answered the door this person said Paul, Earl tell them who I am. Both of them replied they had never seen the guy and even called each other by different names. The results, they locked him up, but allowed him one call. Mr Bowen had to come down at midnight and get him out of jail. From then on there was no knocking on the back door at night.

But I guess the classic by Paul and Earl happened early one morning. It was a classic because it backfired. At that time most everyone took a shower before getting off. On occasions someone would get a fire bucket full of water from the water cooler and heave it over the top of the shower stall. This particular morning Earl was taking a shower when Paul decided to douse him with a bucket of cold water. When the water hit Earl, he let out a blood curdling scream and yelled, "Paul, wait till I get out of here, I'm gonna kill you."

In a low voice next to the shower stall our supervisor, Mr. J. A. McCormick, who was a natty dresser and was wearing a very light colored suit, said, "He's gonna wish he was dead when I get him." It seems that Mr. McCormick was in the process of using the restroom facilities when Earl screamed. And that kind of scream make you jump, exactly what happened to Mr. McCormick, as he ruined his white pants for that day.

I have been guilty of pulling off a few, but mine were not as ingenious as some of the three mentioned. I do remember one that I don't know how it turned out and I never did ask, because the victim never mentioned it. About a dozen of us was in Atlanta for a school and staying at one of the old downtown hotels. Leaving the Hotel one night for supper I was approached by, as they say in dignified circles, a lady of questionable character. Some quick thinking came to my mind and I told her to wait fifteen minutes and come to my room. The only thing was I gave her the room number of one of the other fellows who shall remain nameless. A good pratical joke that I'll never know what happened.

Another of my favorites. We had one foreman who was prone to report any one for such things as taking too long for breaks. Our phone came in on the second floor in Office four, and if we wanted a break we called them to listen out for us. Normally we hollered over the speaker and told them when we left and did the same upon returning.

One evening this foreman was in the building when I started on break. I called over the speaker to let office four know I was leaving on break. Fifteen minutes later when I returned, instead of calling over the speaker I called the office four switchman over the telephone and told him I was back. I then went to the fourth floor to do some work for the night chief operator and I made sure she knew what time it was and how long I spent there. Fifteen minutes later I hollered over the speaker that I was back, which was exactly thirty minutes after I left.

The next day my boss wanted to have a little talk with me about long breaks. I listened, then broke the news to him that whoever reported me had to have been mistaken. I got my time with the night chief operator to back up my story. This just added some confusion to the next report of too much break.

My other mean trick was to slip in the downstairs office, climb up and hide on the cable rack by the alarm bell. I would then begin to hit the bell with a different stroke from any normal alarm and watch the switchman scurrying all over the room hunting the source.

## MORE STUPID STORIES

Many other stupid stories can be told about telephone people. Some are funny and some, although humorous have a pathetic touch to them. Like the group of construction people whose foreman at times would slip off and have a few too many drinks at lunch. When this occurred he became a real pain, so they would take a break and when he dozed off they would tie him to a tree until 5 o'clock.

My good friend I. D. Williams relates a very funny story. He was raised in Elmore country and admits when he left home he had a lot of worldly knowledge to learn. They sent him to Montgomery for a short time and in those days crews stayed in boarding houses rather than motels. Someone gave I.D. an address and he thought there were some peculiar questions being ask by the landlady. He said it took him two days before he figured it out. His boarding house was a brothel.

People who were in the old construction gangs have more tales that you can imagine, although some of them make me suspicious as they all begin to sound similar. If someone could sort them out, I know there would be some good story material.

Another great source of story material comes from the customer and visits to the customer's premise, especially on trouble cases. At times these visits can be very dramatic such as an installer in my group who was dispatched to repair a telephone in the country. He knocked on the door and no one answered. Knowing this man was very seldom far from home and might be out in his back yard, he walked around the house to found the man, dead. A pecan limb had fallen off a tree and killed him.

So the IRs (Installer-repairman) do have many tales to spin. These first two I heard about but can not swear to them being truth. They are good stories and worth repeating. An IR had just completed an installation job about 30 minutes before the test center received a call from the customer who said, "Your man did a good job on my telephone but I haven't been able to close my closet door since he left." Thinking the IR may have left some material blocking the door, the foreman visited the customer. He found the installer had come through the outside wall into the closet and then bored a hole through the inside wall. What he didn't catch was the closet had a sliding door, and he bored through the wall and sliding door before running the wire through it.

Another "boring" tale was about the IR who measured his distance to come up through the floor next to the wall. He bored awhile and went inside but didn't see his bit. After several attempts he decided something was wrong and again measured once more. He then discovered he had measured wrong and his bit had come through he floor, but also had gone eight inches up a piano leg.

I can not verify those, but the following are similar and each one of these I know about. Perhaps the truth was stretched

some, but they are true.

Boring accidents are a frequent source of trouble to an IR. Today most new house are prewired for telephones, but older ones were not. And in many cases it was impossible to know what was inside the wall. Many have hit electric wiring or plastic water piping while drilling. One boring accident I am familiar with was the IR boring through the ceiling into the attic. After checking several times and not seeing his bit in the attic the IR had an awful thought. He went outside and looked up, and yes he had been too close to the end of the roof and bored right out through the top of the house.

I had to follow upon an incident where an IR had caused a kitchen fire. He was running the telephone wire back of the refrigerator and was going to move it out a bit, not noticing it was a gas refrigerator. When he moved it, the gas line broke and gas spewed out and ignited before the pilot went out. This IR had sense enough to run immediately to the gas meter and turn off the gas or the whole house would probably been destroyed. As it was there was about \$5000.00 damage to the kitchen and appliances.

As you now see the life of an IR wasn't always pleasant. Some of the trouble reports from the customer and their solutions sometimes made an interesting story. One old story told hundreds of times is about customers calling and saying everytime their phone rangs, the dog howls. According to the many stories it always turns out the same way. Normally a telephone is grounded by going to the nearest water line and fastening on to it.

As the story goes they find the water pipe has had some plastic pipe inserted in it before it gets into the actual ground, and the dog was always tied to the ungrounded water pipe, with a chain. Which means when the phone rang the ringing current went to the water pipe, then through the dog to ground, causing him a shock.

Makes a good telephone tale, but as you mull it over it means if the dog wasn't tied to the pipe the telephone wouldn't ring, as there would be no way to get to ground. The next story sounds similar but is true and happened in Clanton, Alabama.

The customers report was, "Everytime she flushed the commode the telephone rang." Investigation revealed that it also rang when she fill up the bathtub or used water in large quantities. The cause was a faulty grounded water pump that causes a surge of current towards the set. When she flushed the commode the water pump started, causing the ringing. Don't ask me to scientifically explained that one.

Sometimes the installers would add a little flavor to the trouble tickets. We had one installer whose trouble tickets each day had a little spice added to them. One day, looking at his tickets, a telephone had been reported out of order and tested as an open line and he had written as the cause of the trouble, "Goats ate the drop wire."

This one I had to see. I drove out to the customers premises and sure enough a pole was leaning and the drops were almost touching the ground. (Within easy reach of a goat) The only thing while there I didn't see any goats grazing in the pasture. I'll have to give him benefit of the doubt however, that could have happened.

One very interesting thing happened in Prattville. At that time all non working telephones left on customers premises carried a penalty in the company bookkeeping system and it was necessary to remove as many as possible. The rule was, we could not enter a customers premise to remove sets unless we had their permission. Many people had the idea they had purchased the sets, especially colored sets as there was an extra tariff on them at that time. This job became difficult at time.

In Prattville one month we were reaching the zero mark, but one customer had four colored sets. We had tried repeatedly to get them with no results. Jim Roy was Montgomery's security man at that time and I called on him. He came to Prattville and before we got to the customers house, Jim stopped the car and got out and opened his trunk. He brought out an old trench coat and a felt hat and put them on. When the customer opened the door, Jim flashed a big badge of some description and identified himself as a telephone security man and had come to get the sets. Of course we were in a telephone vehicle so the lady didn't question him, she let us come in and get the sets. I ran into Jim at a recent Pioneer Assembly and told this tale on him before a group of people.

Telephone men are not the only ones who engaged in a little horseplay, some of the ladies do their share. While working in the district office in Montgomery, three of the clerks applied for maternity leave on the same day. The first one Mr. Lockard believed, but reading the second he was beginning to wonder what happened. Later opening the third letter, he looked at the calendar and realized the date was April 1.

In our district office in Auburn we had a very congenial group although at times there was some horseplay. Much of the bickering going on at times concerned the annual Auburn-Alabama football game. One of our clerks was a die-hard Auburn fan which presented me a good opportunity. Alabama won the annual "Iron Bowl" that year. Sunday night I slipped down to the office with an old toy teddy bear and a stuffed tiger. I tore the tiger to shreds and placed the bear beside in on her desk with a note saying, "The bear tore up that old tiger."

When the new white telephone vehicles came into use we were shown how to put the new striping down the hood. The first new car purchased was one for the boss, Luke Chastain. I.D. Williams was going to do the striping but got his colors reversed making Like's car the only one like it in the district. We told Luke I.D. did it that way so he would recognize him from a distance and would time to slow down.

Much of the banter within our office was always good natured kidding. I worried the ladies more than they did me with some of my smart remarks. Such things as them asking me to pick up the

telephone. I would pick it up and hold it in my hand without answering it. Or asking if they could see my stapler and I would open the drawer, show it to them and put it back in the drawer. In today's work place this would probably be called sexual harassment, but turn about is fair play and I became the victim numerous times. They were a wonderful group to work with and I enjoyed every minute of it.

One big joke was when the district office moved across the street from the work center in Opelika in a rented building. The building only had one restroom which drew many smart remarks. My reply was, "That restroom is so small if two person did get into it together, they would only have room to shake hands, nothing else.

A source of many practical jokes happened while working in Number Three Toll in Birmingham. At that time manual toll switching was used and the switchboard had thousands of jacks. A small plug that fit into vacant jacks came in boxes of a thousand and there was always a large supply of them available. One pastime was to take a container holding several hundred and place a piece of cardboard on the top, turn them upside down and scotch tape them inside of the victim's locker door, then slide the cardboard out.

The victim of this prank would come in, open their locker and plugs would go all over the place. It reached a point where a person would insert a piece of cardboard under the door before opening it in case plugs were there. We fixed S.E. Thomas's locker different. We put a jar of plugs on the door in the normal fashion and in addition we took another jar full and wedged them against the top of the locker with a screwdriver.

We were all waiting when he came to work and he eased the cardboard in and found the jar. In getting them out we started to laughing and Tommy said, "Didn't get me that time." He then reached in the locker, pulled his tool pocket out, the plugs going all over the floor.

I could go on and on with some stories I have heard, but many were repeated time and time again in different ways. To my knowledge there never was the type horseplay that would hurt someone, although as I related earlier I got a cut on the head from horseplay. But for the most part there were no practical jokes designed to do physical harm to anyone, unless you call getting hit by a bucket of cold water while in the shower physical harm.

Some of my experiences with a co-worker in Montgomery were not practical jokes, yet sometimes funny. Ossie Burns, who I had worked with as a switchman in Birmingham was a transmission supervisor in Montgomery. At that time I was a Central Office Supervisor and many times we had to ride together to get to the various central offices. Ossie's absent mindedness caused me to get stranded in Prattville on one occasion. Another time Ossie was working Auburn and I was working in Tuskegee. He called to say he was on the way. About fifteen minutes or so later I went out the door and locked it behind me. No one was working in the office and I didn't have a key. Ossie, instead of leaving, got

busy with something and I stood outside for an hour and a half in the cold.

My time finally came. We were working the Auburn area again and riding together. Since Ossie lived on the way to Auburn I would take the car home and leave for Auburn the next day and go by to pick Ossie up. One afternoon Ossie said he needed to stop somewhere, and he would take me home and come by the next morning to pick me up. That was fine with me but I reminded him the car needed gas.

The next morning Ossie picked me up and we were about three miles from one of the exits on the interstate when the car ran out of gas. He asked, "What are we going to do?" I told him, "I didn't know what he was going to do but I was planning to sit right here." I did and he had to go get gas, bring it back and I didn't even get out of the car to help him put it in.

On one trip to Lafayette, Alabama with Ossie, we stayed at the one small motel there. We decided to wait until seven to eat. At that time I knocked on his room but couldn't raise him, although I could hear him snoring through the door. I finally returned to my room and called him on the telephone.

Many stories are told about sleeping, some true and some made up, I'm sure. I know for a fact I.D. Williams was a sleeper and could also snore. A story is told that when he was working as an installer in Montgomery, he climbed a pole to a terminal, one that had the small platform with a rail around it. He called in for a correction on his order but it took assignment so long to correct it that I.D. dropped off to sleep. They could hear him snoring on the telephone but could not awaken him and had to dispatch someone to go wake him up.

In Birmingham while on the night crew there were times a nap might have been slipped in, and other times where one just fell asleep. Many are the stories about foreman coming in and catching someone asleep. My favorite I know to be true.

At times a switchman would work without ceasing until his assignment was completed, and then catch a short nap. Walter Montieth came to work an hour early one night, laid down and went to sleep. After the rest of the people got their assignment completed they got Montieth awake. He was working like a trojan trying to complete his assignment before seven while the rest of the crew was getting a nap. One of the foreman came in and his report was, "Everyone on the crew was asleep except Walter and he was hard at work."

On another occasion Walter was late getting to work and a supervisor was in the building. One of the crew members laid out Walter's tools as if he had been working. When ask where Walter was, someone said he had gone to get coffee. About that time he walked in and the supervisor ask where had he been. Walter said, "I guess I'm a bit late." Nothing was ever said to Walter about his tardiness, but the switchman who put out his tools caught the devil.

Another group of stories were about people who were mistakenly misidentified. A night Traffic Supervisor once reported me for something, I don't even remember what. Later

when called in the office I begun laughing, because at that time you couldn't get in or out the building without signing a log. I was off that night and hadn't signed in. Those accusations were quietly and quickly dropped. (PS There was a Western Electric Man about my size and build working in the building at that time.)

This person got me in hot water again, before he got himself fired. He cashed the stub of his paycheck in Commercial. At that time they looked exactly like the check, but was marked, "This Is Not A Check." The Commercial Teller didn't realize it for a few minutes. Anyway guess who they came after, right me again. After he was fired I had no more trouble.

There are many other tales to be told, but most of them were not a part of my telephone career. That being the case I will let someone else tell the rest of the story.

### LAISSEZ LES BON TEMPO ROULER (Let The Good Times Roll)

An appropriate ending for a description of one's career could be expressed as is done by the Louisiana Cajuns, "Laissez les bon tempo rouler." This statement is made in spite of many hours of long work and some other unpleasant happenings. All in all they were a good forty years. To clear the air, I started work at 22 years of age, completed forty years of service and spent 7 years in the military. This should add up to retirement at age 69, right. No wrong, the company granted service time for pensions during the length of our military leave, so my retirement was actually at age 62.

Blessed with good health and a sufficient pension we have been able to accomplish a few things which are the dreams of many workers when they retire. Although several concessions are now not a part of a new retiree's pension, the company has kept ours as is was when we retired, plus a cost of living adjustment every three years. Fringe benefits such as partial long distance calls, health insurance and most of the local telephone bill is also a great help.

There were many good times during my employment. Many of our close friends, some whom I have already mentioned were co-workers. Also as pointed out earlier there is a certain bond with strangers you meet who are or have been telephone employees, and we have encountered many interesting people in our travels.

In addition to friendly people, the company sponsors and encourages such activities as the Pioneers, which provided us an opportunity to get together at times in an atmosphere of fun rather than business. Additionally during my active career there have been times afforded for us to come together in small groups, Perhaps an office party or a meal on some festive or holiday occasion.

Many of the business meetings have had some fun attached. Some departments take this occassion to set up a bar and have a few drinks. This was not the case the last 12 or so years with the Auburn District, they were strictly business meetings. But

Luke Chastain, at most of these would not go directly into business after eating, but take a few minutes for a relaxing fun time, even if was allowing someone to tell an awful joke.

Many departments or offices at times had a get together, and this traditional continues in some case for retirees. Ralph Sligh of Birmingham has sponsored each year a reunion of Central Office People from the Sixth Ave Building in Birmingham. The attendance runs close to a hundred each year and appears to be growing as other people have requested to be included in this event in order to get to see old acquaintance.

The greatest chance to see old friends each year is the Annual Telephone Pioneer Assembly. It is rotated between the four cities of Mobile, Birmingham, Montgomery and Huntsville. This is done in order that people from all over the state will not have to travel long distances each year. Those of us able to do so attend all of them enabling us to see many old friends each year.

There are other groups all over the state which get together periodically. Perhaps one of the largest is in Birmingham, a group which meets once a month at local cafeteria. I attended this once and there were 40 to 50 people in attendance.

During the time I was working I help conduct a Golf outing for those in the Auburn District and others who cared to come. We usually held them in Auburn and for several years had a good attendance, something like 30 to 40 people. The Montgomery District also had a yearly golf outing and I have attended several of them.

The company at one time sponsored baseball teams and many of the people who were old timers when I started work were hired because of their ball playing ability. This has long since been discontinued, but from time to time there were some sporting events around.

I guess the biggest past time for telephone employees, at least the old plant people would be dominos. There probably isn't a single company building where a set of dominos can not be found in the break rooms and lounges. From that simple game however there have been numerous tales related concerning the games and the sometimes "side activity." I have two favorites, the first concerns a co-worker Milton Wright Jr. Milton was a die-hard domino player and in addition was the type of fellow that never strolled anywhere, he almost ran. As a matter of fact he moved in a similar manner in all that he did.

During domino games at lunch time we would go get a sandwich, that is if you didn't happen to bring your lunch and the games would begin fast and furious. Milton would become so engrossed in the game that he never looked around, but would reach for his sack, pull something out and eat it. That was no problem unless your meal sack get to close to Milton, because he would get in your sack without looking. One day someone brought an extra sandwich, cookies etc, the normal lunch and everytime Milton ate something they would slip something in his bag. He kept eating the whole time not realizing how much he was eating. The saying was if you had something you was not fond of, put it in Milton's

sack, he would eat it and never know what it was.

The second of these two stories concerns Tom Gary and Herman Scherer. They were among the "older ones" as we called them as some of them had ten to twenty years service when we started working. Tom was a domino player almost to the point of being a fanatic. Herman weighed well over two hundred and was over six feet tall. Tom was about 2/3 that size. Herman was also a person who would needle someone as long as he could get away with it.

One day a game became very heated and Herman started his taunting. As the game got hotter Tom was beginning to get mad. Finally with Herman still rubbing it in, Tom lost his temper and hit Herman on the side of the jaw. Herman looked at Tom a minute and asked, "Are you mad Tom?"

Later I heard Tom telling this story and he was asked, "What did you tell him?" Tom told this person he hit Herman as hard as he could and the sucker ask if I was mad, I told him, hell no, not a bit."

Some of the best times socially I enjoyed was in Auburn because of the Pioneer gatherings held. For awhile when the club was doing so well we had monthly meetings and there was always a fun time associated with each one.

These are only a smattering of the activities during the time I was employed and even now I enjoy getting together with some of my old co-workers. There were some good times.

As always in conclusion you think of several things to say, but I am going to depart from that normal and just simply say, "I enjoyed every minute of my forty years with Bell." (Well - almost every minute.)