



THE PARTY LINE ART BROTHERS

► Whadda ya mean . . . somebody moved the switch?

AS I heard about this story—it was one black night. A little cloud cover. No moon.

About midnight Lou, Chuck and Jim departed from Wendover. The convoy had slight modifications to keep tail lights from going on when the brakes were applied. Every man had a two-way radio. Each vehicle had two-way. Scanners monitored police, utility and other known radio channels that the Goshute Indians might use.

The convoy arrived at Ibapah about two in the morning. The lead vehicle checked out the community and found no activity. A terse “all clear” radio message allowed the semitractor—lights off—to move out from a holding point north. In a blacked out condition, it tailed in on the lights of an eight year old non-descript Ford and rolled through town to a secluded holding point a mile from the Ibapah Central Office.

Two months earlier, the Central Office had been seized by the Goshute Tribe. There are maybe 250 Indians enrolled in the Tribe. Maybe a hundred reside in the area. The Tribe Chairman had used a backhoe to pile a three foot pile of dirt around the front and sides of the 40 foot semi-trailer which houses the Class 4/5 digital switch. There was considerable resentment by a lot of folks, including Indians, *AND MY THREE EMPLOYEES*—against what has been termed “a bunch of renegade Indians” who had stolen our \$100,000 switch.

I was suffering considerable stress, not to mention legal fees.

Local inspection found the switch was well lit on the north side by an arc light. Now what? The guys decided that dousing the light would call attention to activities. So Lou acted as lookout outside the lighted area. Work commenced.

The Bureau of Land Management gave expedited authority to lease us a parcel of land butting the Indian property. Mt. Wheeler Power charged a grand for a revised power feed from

lines not on Indian lands. Just in case, we had stubbed in 200 pair to our entrance riser and routed the stub 20 feet across the fence to non-Indian lands. Tribe cops watched us that day, and were told it was so we could do testing on the lines from non-Indian property. Truth.

One tribe cop wanted a phone. Sure, pay a \$300 deposit. The last Tribe law enforcement guy ran up a bill, still unpaid. The cop said he didn't have the cash, but was expecting a lot of overtime from watching our switch (to keep us from moving it off the Reservation). I told him we would do all we could to keep his overtime coming in—for a while.

About 0300 lights were observed moving into the reservation from the north. All digging activity ceased and the guys locked themselves inside the CO. No vehicles were visible nearby, except those parked in front of two tribal homes just to the north of the office.

A vehicle turned into and went behind a house a mile north of the switch. Night glasses did not show anyone leaving the vehicle. Tribe police on stake out? Work continued but a constant watch was maintained.

High tech in action.

After twenty or thirty minutes, lights came on, as the vehicle moved on the road. Ear lobe speakers voiced quiet warnings. Faintly moving shadows around the switch vanished to the stillness of night. The vehicle moved slowly down the road. From time to time it stopped, perhaps in front of some of the ten homes along the three miles of road. After 15 minutes the lights topped a small hill and vanished from view.

Five A.M. The two 100 pair entrance cables were cut. The front end had already been jacked up a foot to allow the tractor to back under. The tractor was moved from its holding area to the switch where, with flashlights, it was jockeyed into position under the front of the semi trailer.

Minutes pass.

Chuck was up the power pole—hanging on with his hooks and cutting the hot 220 volt power drop to free the trailer from its last fixed connection.

The lights came on the front porch at the first house north.

Tribe Vice-Chairman Henry Pete came out. He looked the 500 feet towards Chuck who is wondering how in hell to look invisible hanging there on top of the pole under the biggest damn light in the world.

“What's going on over there” yells Henry. Chuck waves his hand, and yells back “It's OK, just working on the power line fixing this light” and proceeds to chop away. Henry stands there a moment, tells his dogs to shut up, and goes inside and turns off the lights.

Chuck climbs down the pole. Lou rolls up the cable.

More minutes pass.

Thirteen minutes after the semi was first backed up, the switch begins its very long 20 foot journey to freedom.

To do that requires it to move forward and then to the north, after a left turn. Then, the entire outfit had to back out 100 feet to get off Indian land.

By 0530 the switch was off Indian lands. It took a couple of hours to get it backed into position and leveled. About 9 A.M., an Indian cop came by and asked Chuck, who was splicing entrance cables, how he was doing. Chuck said “fine.” The cop went away. By 0930 the switch was turned up on batteries, but it took a while to get network blocks cut loose so incoming would work. By 1 P.M. commercial power was reconnected.

The first calls the Indians made was to their lawyer, screaming their phones had been cut off. The lawyer filed a FAX petition with the Public Service Commission saying we were *BAD* and should be punished cause someone moved the switch.

I'd hate to have to fire my guys as punishment. They might ask for a bonus or overtime when I hired them back again the next day. ■