

LIFE on the farm

By Dieter Krieg, Editor

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"Why don't those engineers who design these things ever think about us having to fix 'em!" I muttered to myself, shaking my head and getting angry.

My arm was just about getting numb as I kept trying to get a large nut loose in a rather tight spot within a whole mess of shafts and cogs on our corn picker. Neither wrench nor hammer was doing much for me. Most of my problem was a simple lack of leverage. "All those guys do back at the factory is design 'em, slap 'em together, and forget 'em. I'd like to get the bird-brain who engineered this to work on this mess," I said, with my only audience being a few ears of corn which were still in the machine.

I halted my efforts for a moment and stared out of the open end of the hay barn. The day was just as gray as my mood. A slight breeze, loaded down with tiny droplets of moisture, was sweeping across the fields, leaving everything it touched with a blanket of water. Farther away, the corn field looked as though it had already been through a corn picker - but it hadn't. The storm a few days ago tore the stalks to shreds and what remained was a raggedy, pitiful sight. It wasn't all that long ago when the stalks reached majestically towards the sky and large ears were displayed with pride.

The change in the field from one week to another was hard to believe - it was so awful - unless you had seen such damage before.

I had, and I stared at the gray and wet day gloomily.

The moisture-laden air rolled through the large, opened door and kissed my face. That's all that was refreshing about the day.

A tall blade of grass in the fence row brushed against the electric fence. Brzzzzzt! it went and the sparks were clearly visible under these dimly lit conditions. "Another job to tend to," I thought to myself, even though the cows wouldn't really be able to mess the corn field up much more if they did get out. But who wants to chase after cows through a corn field - standing tall or battered to the ground.

Observing what was going on outside wasn't making me feel any better. The broken-down corn picker still needed my attention. Back to work!

The first order of business was getting the 50-foot extension cord and a light to illuminate this poorly-lit working area.

Now, with the light in place, I wasn't having much better luck than before.

It was giving me some light alright, but depending on which way I positioned myself, it also caused a glare which was blinding. There just isn't much room to work anywhere on a corn picker!

I took another firm grip on the wrench and applied as much torque to it as I could. The wrench slipped and clattered its way down through the maze of steel and iron. My knuckles crashed into a grease fitting. With two fingers already having been pinched, and now a set of bleeding knuckles, I was developing a swell temper.

I nursed my hand briefly and wished I could just run this stupid machine off some cliff and hook up to a new one.

"Now where did I put that hammer," I wondered out loud. "It's got to be here somewhere. I brushed my boots through accumulation of hay debris on the floor. Nothing. Blood trickled slowly from my injured hand. I cleaned it up some more with a handkerchief, grease and all.

The hammer hung suspended from an edge of sheet metal. Right in front of my nose, of course! I grabbed it eagerly, as I wanted to "get even" with this contraption. I tapped the nut relentlessly and emptied the can of penetrating oil in it. I was going to get that dumb thing no matter what. Before "going in for the kill," I studied the situation closely. There had to be an easier way. Perhaps I could fit a piece of pipe onto the end of the wrench for more leverage.

But there wasn't enough room for that.

It was my move - and with nothing better to work with than I had all along.

I gritted my teeth and placed my wrench carefully. The handkerchief was wrapped around my knuckles for protection in case the wrench slipped again. The opposing muscle in my arm was also "put on alert" to respond instantly with a reversal if the tool let loose.

And let loose it did! But with the nut coming along with it! Victory!

But this moment of glory was short-lived.

What I was really wanting to get to was the cog in back of the nut, and that turned out to be solidly "frozen" to the shaft.

Nothing I attempted to do would loosen it.

Disgusted, I walked out to get the tractor. The electric fence was still buzzing the wet weeds. My boots slipped slightly on the clay which was slick as wet soap.

The tractor sometimes hesitated to start on a wet day like this. "Big John's" pistons and flywheel spun jerkily around and around, coughing now and then, and moaning a bit as though they didn't feel like working today. Then a spark ignited the engine to life and the windows in the shed trembled along with the tractor.

Shifting into sixth, I pushed the hand clutch forward and headed for the hay barn.

I hitched up quickly and was glad to get the ice-cold pin through the drawbar. Next stop would be the Woodbine Garage, just down the road.

"Big John" went thundering down the track as I simultaneously pulled the earmuffs down from my hat. This wet air was cooler than I had thought.

It turned out that the garageman was gone for the day. So I slapped the tractor into reverse, then back into sixth, and raced to Meek's Garage, just another mile further.

As is understandable, my corn picker couldn't be attended to immediately, but I didn't have to wait more than a few minutes. I felt good about that after having wasted so much time already.

The mechanic struck a match and held it to the nozzle of his acetylene torch. It popped on and the blue flame shot forth piercingly. Aiming the tool at the blasted cog, he had it off in no time flat. Then he cleaned the shaft nicely to prepare it for a new one. Now it wouldn't be long until I'd have it fixed. Or would it?

Arriving home again, I took the old worn-out cog and drove to the dealer with it.

"Got one of these?" I asked, while explaining whereabouts it came from.

The dealer examined the part from behind his glasses and reached for the equipment manual. Leafing through it, he found its number. Then he checked through his files to see if he had one.

"Nope - I'll have to order it for you," the dealer announced matter-of-factly. "I should have it for you by Wednesday."

"That's okay, I can't pick corn in this weather anyway," I said, bringing an end to a miserable episode of life on the farm. Besides, I have to clip the grass and weeds from underneath the electric fence.