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AUTOMOTIVE AND MACHINE SHOP SECTION

FERNANDO'S HIDEAWAY

By BRUCE PODZIOUS

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The Fernando that I am going to discuss is not a character in a song. Fernando is a machine operator at Detroit Diesel. Fernando's Hideaway was the inside of a machine and the object that he concealed was a tobacco can containing six small Allen wrenches. Every morning at starting time for four hundred eighteen (418) consecutive work days, Fernando would carefully remove four screws and take off a cover from the side of his borematic machine. Next, he would reach inside and retrieve his tobacco can treasure chest which he had hidden at quitting time the previous day.

On the morning of November 18, 1952, Fernando's luck ran out. As usual, he first pressed the starting button for the motor in order to cycle and warm up the hydraulic system for the machine wherein the tobacco can was hidden. Next, he removed the cover. As he reached inside, his left third finger was caught and amputated between a revolving "V" belt and a pulley. Fernando's Hideaway had finally been discovered!

It was almost incredible that a General Motors employee working in a safety-minded plant could perform a flagrantly unsafe act twice a day for four hundred eighteen (418) consecutive days without ever having been detected or corrected by his supervisor, his fellow employees or his safety department. It makes you stop and think, doesn't it?

We in the safety department did plenty of thinking. At first we consoled ourselves by saying, "It is difficult to control the human factor." Next, we reminded ourselves that the business of building Diesel engines is classified as heavy industry and serious accidents are more likely to occur in heavy industry operations.

Then came the thought that in spite of the fact that our safety program provided an hour and a half safety induction talk to each new hire, in spite of the fact that

supervisory safety meetings were regularly held, in spite of daily five-minute safety talks to employees, in spite of safety inspections, safety procedures, safe job instructions, safety rules, signs, slogans, bulletins,—in spite of all this and more, it could not be denied that Fernando's unsafe action climaxed an entire year of several serious accidents at Detroit Diesel. Somewhere we were missing the boat. Four conclusions were finally reached:

First: All people perform unsafe acts.

Second: If one employee with better than average intelligence and with a previous accident-free record was able to perform a flagrant unsafe act twice a day for nineteen months, it would involve higher mathematics to determine the number of unsafe acts that three thousand employees in the same plant would perform in the same time interval.

Third: In many instances a history of an employee's unsafe practices was discovered after actual injury took place. We needed a plan of action to detect and correct unsafe practices before an actual injury would result.

Fourth: The safety department needed help—plenty of help.

Early in 1953, the Detroit Diesel "Unsafe Practice Observation Plan" came into existence. Management, traditionally safety minded, accepted the "Unsafe Practice Observation Plan" as a supplement to the safety program based on the General Motors "Six Basic Principles of Safety."

It was decided to try the plan in the manufacturing division first. The energies and talents of thirty men were made available. These men were thirty manufacturing division foremen. Overnight the safety department had been enlarged 750 per cent. These foremen were the first recruits enlisted in an all-out war against the dangers of employee unsafe practices.

A letter from the works manager informed all manufacturing foremen that an