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In Their Own Words: Beady Eyes by Capt. John Wood, Ret.

Editor's Note: *Captain John Wood had a long and very distinguished career as a Texas Ranger in mainly South and West Texas. Not surprisingly, he had more than one humorous incident occur during dangerous situations. The one described below is just an example.*



Part of the following story originally appeared in Captain Wood's book, Texas Ranger In the Oil Patch, and is reprinted here with his permission.

The Permian Basin is one of the largest oil fields in the United States, and Midland sits right in the middle of it. Naturally, oil-field theft (and is) a major problem. At the time of this story, Captain John Wood was stationed in Midland as a Texas Ranger sergeant with Company "E".

John received information from one of his informants that two thieves were going to steal a load of drill pipe in broad daylight. The way the criminals figured it, no one would think anything about a load of drill pipe moving during the daytime.

John carried keys to all the gates of every oil site in his ten-county area. Just before daylight, he drove near the site where he suspected the theft would take place. Parking his car in the cover of mesquite trees, he started walking.

I got down on my stomach and commenced crawling through the brush real careful so as not to let the thieves see me if they were already close to the pipe. I began to get real nervous 'cause once before, when I had been out at that location, I'd killed a big rattlesnake. I carried a very sharp hunting knife on my belt behind my pistol, and I decided to keep the knife in my hand. Maybe I could kill any rattlesnake I come up on before he could bite me.

About this time, I raised my head up over a clump of dead grass and was hoping that I could see if the thieves had arrived yet. As I raised up a little, I was looking at a pretty black tail with white stripes on it, a sharp pointy nose, and two little beady eyes looking at me over the left shoulder of the biggest skunk I thought I had ever seen.

It didn't take but a split second for me to realize I was in for trouble. As I ducked, the pretty tail went up, and I got sprayed with the most foulest perfume I had ever smelt. If I hadn't ducked when I did, I would have got a real good face full of the horrible perfume. As it was, the awful stuff hit me on top of the head and down my back.

That was all of hunting thieves for me that day. I jumped up and headed for the car as fast as I could, but when I got to the car, I didn't smell any better. I guess that kind of perfume smells louder with age.



I got to the car and opened the trunk and took off all my clothes, except my underpinnings and boots, and put the clothes in the car and slammed the trunk lid down. Just then, I remembered that I had put my car keys back in my pocket, and now I stood there nearly naked with my keys locked in the trunk.

I looked through the window at the ignition and saw my extra keys in there. I felt pretty relieved about that time and started to open the car door. I found that I had locked all doors on the car, as was my habit. Talk about trouble and smell, I was the world's worst.

'Bout that time, I looked up and saw a couple of scrawny old buzzards circling over my head. Didn't bother me. I figured I stunk so bad even buzzards wouldn't have wanted me.



I worked on all the door windows and finally got one to lower a little bit -- down far enough for me to reach my long skinny arm in to unlock the door. 'Course, being out as much as I was, I always carried a change of clothes with me in the car. But I wasn't about to ruin clean clothes and have 'em smell as bad as the ones I threw in the trunk.

I started to drive off. I saw the thieves driving up, and they waved at me and then went on down the road. Guess they didn't want to get arrested that day by a nearly naked Texas Ranger who smelled to high heaven.

I called our radio station and told them to notify my office that I was on a stakeout and wouldn't be in till after dark. I couldn't go home, and the way I smelled, I couldn't stand to be in the car with myself. So I got out and found some sand and kept rubbing it through my hair and on my neck and any place I could reach, and finally got some of the foul perfume off me.

As soon as I thought it was dark enough, I drove home, jumped in the stock tank [pond], and took a bath as best I could with buttermilk and canned tomato juice and ever other home remedy for skunk spray I could think of.

I didn't have much hide left on me, and my hair was some thinner than it was early that morning--and probably grayer. I burned my clothes in a barrel behind the house. About midnight, I smelled a little better, but some things just seem to leave a lasting impression.

The next morning, my secretary asked if I had any luck the day before, and I told her, "Yes, bad luck." I never told a living soul about this incident nor the lost day's work till just now.

I still believe it would have been easier to have skinned a live rattlesnake than to come face-to-face with that skunk looking over its left shoulder at me in the oil patch.

For more of Captain Wood's stories, go to the museum's online gift shop to purchase his book, *Texas Ranger In the Oil Patch*.