

Old-Time Pipelining Glossary

by George Carney

Listed here are terms and phrases associated with the work of pipeliners until ca. 1940. After that time, many of the terms became obsolete because of changes in materials and equipment; however, several have been retained in the modern pipeliner's vocabulary.

Preparing to screw on the next joint of pipe in Southeastern Oklahoma in 1909.
PHOTO COURTESY OF EXXON PIPELINE CO.

The Crew:

back-up man: the worker on the pipe laying gang who holds one length of pipe with a wrench called a lay tong, while another length is being screwed into or out of it.

bronc, or *bronco*: a new worker on a pipelining crew

bull gang: common laborers who did the ditching and other heavy work on a pipeline construction job. Ditching gang members were also called ditchers.

bush gang: a crew of men that cleared the right-of-way for laying pipe; also called right-of-way gang.

cats: the older, more experienced pipeliners.

collar pecker, *collar pounder*, *collar knocker*, or *collar slapper*: the key member of the laying gang who beats time with a hammer – sometimes he used two – on the collar (coupling) into which a joint of pipe is being screwed by the tong gang. This action provided a rhythm for the tong men and kept the collar warm so that a tighter screw joint could be made.

connection gang: pipeline crew that lays field gathering lines and connects, or ties in, gathering lines to tank batteries located near oil wells.

dress-up crew, or *clean-up crew*: the gang of workers following the laying gang picking up debris left behind in the pipe laying process and repairing damaged fences.



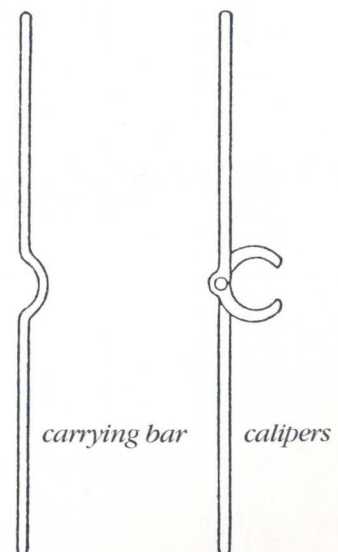
gang pusher, or *pusher*: the straw boss of any of the various pipeline gangs.
book bitters, *book men*, or *stokers*: workers on the laying gang who operated the lay tongs or hooks.
jack man: a member of the laying gang who operates the jack and jack board.
pipeline rider or *walker*: a worker who rides horseback or walks the pipeline looking for leaks in the line or washed-out sections of the right-of-way.
point man: the member of the pipe-laying gang who handles the ends (points) of the lay tongs; he takes the longest stroke in the pipe turning process.
real pipe hand or *screw pipe Johnnie*: a hard worker who is steady and efficient.
snapper or *snap grabber*: a member of a pipeline gang who looks for the easiest job.
stabber: a key member of the laying gang who held one end of a joint of pipe and aligned it so that the threads at the opposite end could be started into the collar of the preceding joint. Once the threads were started, the stabber called for the jack and jack board for support ("Catch it!") and then directed the spinning rope crew to begin the turning process ("Roll 'er!"). The term is used in modern pipelining for the worker who handles the line-up clamps.
stringing gang: the crew of workers who placed the joints of line pipe end to end along the pipeline right-of-way in preparation for the laying gang.
sharp shooter: a slender bladed digging spade with a short handle used by the ditching gang in digging the first layer of pipeline trench.
spinning rope: one or two ropes, usually one-and-a-half inch in diameter and ten feet long, which were looped around the pipe two or three times to be used in screwing the pipe while the threads were still loose.

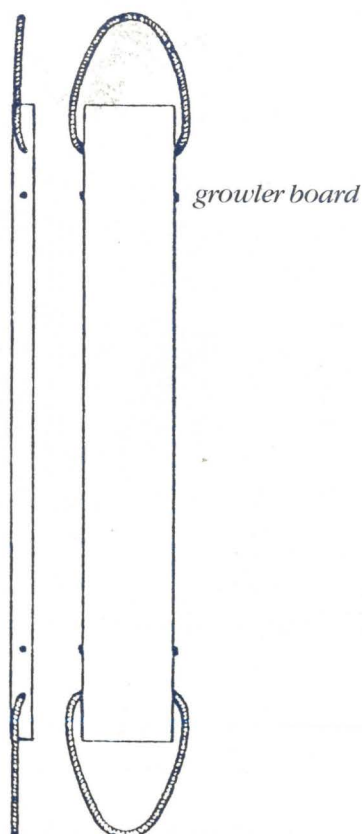
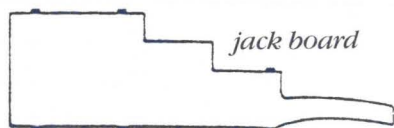
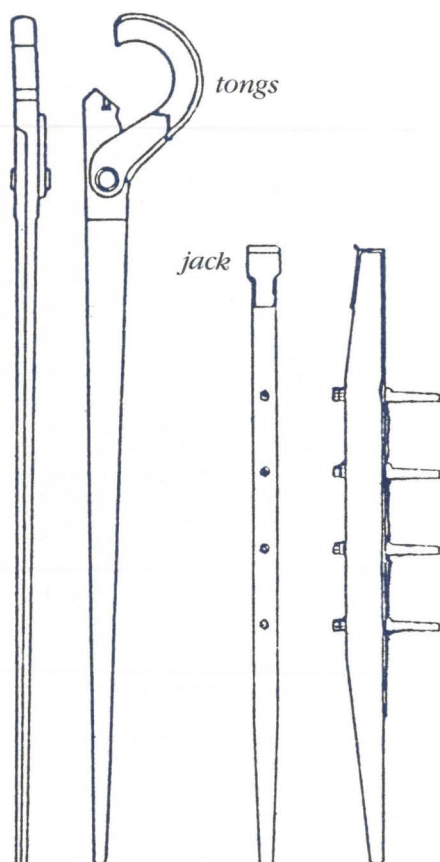
Their Operations:

to break in: a phrase used to describe the action by the tong gang when the screw pipe began to turn harder. All the tong men would hit the hooks in unison, or rotate the pipe at the same time.
to break out: the action by the tong gang when the screw pipe turned easily. The tong men would hit the hooks on alternating beats of the collar pecker's hammer, or half the tongs would be turning the pipe while the other half recovered.
to buck up: to tighten pipe joints with a wrench; also referred to as "making the pipe up."
to crumb out: to shovel out the loose dirt in the bottom of a pipeline ditch; to square up the floor and sides of the ditch in preparation for laying the pipe.
to drag up: to quit the job.
to flange up: to complete a job. The term derives from the use of a flange union to complete most pipeline connection jobs.
to have production: a phrase used by a line walker or rider when he spots fresh oil near a pipeline. It means that the worker has found a leak in the pipeline.
to hide the threads: to make up a screw pipe connection so that all threads of the joint are screwed into the collar.
to hit the hooks or *buck the tongs*: to screw in joints of pipe using lay tongs, sometimes called hooks.
to knock 'em off, *ring 'em off*, or *rattle 'em off*: phrases – special hammer-licks – used to describe the signal by the collar pecker that the pipe is made up and it is time for the laying gang to move on to the next joint of pipe.
to roll pipe: to turn a joint into the collar of the preceding joint by use of a rope, called a spinning rope, looped around the pipe two or three times. This was done in the initial stages of screwing the pipe while the threads were still loose and just before the tong men hooked on.

Their Tools:

bean joint: the joint of line pipe laid just prior to the break for a meal.
calipers or *carrying books*: tools resembling large ice tongs which are used to carry pipe.
carrying bar: the tool used to help move screw pipe from one location to another. It served the same function as pipe calipers.





chain tongs: a pipe wrench with a flexible chain to hold the toothed wrench head in contact with the pipe. It was used in connecting or tying in pipeline to a battery (a group of small storage tanks near the well). The chain fits around the pipe and is easily adapted to any size of pipe.

collar: the name used to designate the simplest form of union when laying a screw pipe; a coupling for two lengths of pipe.

coupling: a collar; a short pipe fitting with both ends threaded on the inside circumference.

doghouse: a term with several meanings in oil field vocabulary. In pipelining, specifically it was a canvas shelter over the bed of a work truck which provided shelter for the workers from the cold and rain.

dope: the name for paint used to coat pipelines to prevent corrosion. Ship-bottom red, a red lead paint, and black tar were commonly used. The paint was applied to pipe by the dope gang.

growler board: the board on which the jack and jack board stood. It provided stability and kept the jack and jack board, which held the pipe as it was being screwed, from sliding into the ditch.

bandy: a pipe connection that can be unscrewed by hand.

jack and jack board: two wooden boards used to hold the pipe after the threads were started into the collar by the stabber. One had pegs at various levels to accommodate the height needed for screwing the pipe (jack), and the other acted as a brace (jack board).

joint: length of screw pipe usually twenty feet long, in various diameters.

lay tongs, pipe tongs, scissor tongs, or books: various descriptions given to the long-handled wrenches that are used to grip the screw pipe and turn it. The head or butt is shaped like a parrot's beak.

lazy board: a wooden board placed across the ditch behind the collar of the last joint of pipe laid. It supported the pipe while threads of the next joint of pipe were being started.

marmon board: a wooden board approximately five feet long by three feet wide, with eye bolts on each end and two handles in the center. Powered by a team of horses or mules harnessed to the eye bolts, it was used by the back filling gang to move loose dirt into the ditch.

one-armed Johnnie: a hand-operated pump used to lift water out of a pipeline trench.

possum belly: a metal box fastened underneath a truck bed to carry pipeline tools.

right-of-way: the strip of land usually fifty feet wide for which permission has been granted to build a pipeline. The right-of-way gang clears the strip of brush and trees and prepares its surface prior to stringing the pipe.

