

Leonard Dobbs - Peak Oil Entrepreneur - Prolog

The President's announcement caused quite a stir, to say the least. The admission that Peak Oil was a real situation surprised many. Usage of oil was already over the production capacity of known and suspected oil reserves. What was truly amazing was the fact that there was no announcement of a plan to deal with the fact. So local political jurisdictions, corporations, businesses, private groups, and individuals began making their own plans.

What the oil companies did, without exception, was immediately triple prices from crude on up, and reduce production. The theory behind it was that the high prices and lower availability would lengthen significantly the time frame that petroleum products would be available in the future.

It didn't trickle down, it flooded down. Pump prices jumped to five times the price from the previous day. Independent trucking operations came to a near standstill and commercial trucking firms upped the delivery prices by two-hundred percent and added a one-dollar per mile fuel surtax to boot. Railroad freight rates tripled. Commercial aviation came to a near halt, though general aviation remained fairly stable, despite the huge price increase of avgas.

When transportation came to a near halt, riots broke out over the higher fuel prices, the attendant lack of food deliveries, and extremely high prices of what food was available. Going elsewhere to get the food didn't work for most because, even with the high price, the fuel for others wasn't going anywhere because it cost the carriers too much to run. A vicious circle ensued. The economy came crashing down.

Since the US tended to try diplomacy first, and action later, if ever, on most trade items, the attempts to secure additional supplies of crude oil overseas ran into the problem of needing to fight allies, not just third-world countries.

Japan, China, Germany, France, Italy, Portugal, and Spain all sent troops to various oil producing nations and simply took over the fields, facing little opposition from the locals in the face of their overwhelming, it is going to happen no matter what, attitude. The US found itself needing to fight the rest of NATO on the end of a long, expensive, supply line. The US backed off from the fight and bit the bullet. Nowhere in the US and its territories was safe from exploratory and production drilling for oil.

The Great Britain cut off all exports, as did Russia, including natural gas to Europe. India, too, cut off exports. It didn't take China long to take control of India's oil fields, with the threat of nuclear war with India if India tried to use the nuclear option to take the fields back.

Japan, as she had during World War II, took over the Malaysian oil production fields. It was only a matter of time before Japan needed to acquire more than Malaysia could provide, but went no further during the start of the crisis.

The announcement came just after Thanksgiving, that is, as winter in the Northern Hemisphere was approaching. By spring two billion people were dead from the effects of the

winter weather without heat, and starvation because of lost production and inability to ship what was produced.

When the winter in the Southern Hemisphere ended almost a year later, another two billion were dead of freezing, starving, disease, and violence over the other three causes of death.

Another year and the population of the world had fallen from over six billion to less than seven-hundred-million. The bulk of those were living between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn. Of those, most were living the same life they had led before the admission by the US President that Peak Oil was a reality. A rural, hand to mouth existence where winters were mild or non-existent and there was enough rainfall that one person could grow enough food for a family on a small piece of land.

Europe became feudal once again, with the oil from foreign holdings controlled by a few.

Russia, though it didn't fall back into communism, invaded and took control of all of the former Soviet Union nations, except for Germany. Russia then closed its borders, as did almost every nation that had control of any significant amount of the oil remaining in the earth.

Australia was a self-sustaining place and wanted little to do with anyone else. They kept a close eye on Japan, expecting a move from them at some point in time to take the resources they needed from Australia.

China, in the process of closing its borders expanded them first to lock in the oil resources of the South East Asia Mainland and sub-continent. Its troops were spread too thin to take on the Japanese for the control of Malaysia, Micronesia, and Oceania, minus Australia, for the moment.

Southern Africa and Southern South America were sparsely populated after the die-off, and under the control of European nations. The rest of Central and South America came under Brazilian control.

The rest of Africa and the Middle East were divided once again into colonies such as those that had existed in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, with the former British colonial activities split between the other European Colonial powers.

The remaining people in most of the industrialized world were able to slide back into a 1890's to 1920's lifestyle, where oil was used, but in much smaller amounts.

The country hardest hit by the events in the two years after the announcement was the United States. If the US had acted earlier, it might have taken the Mexican oil fields, but again it tried diplomacy. The refusal of Mexico to continue to export oil to the US prompted Congress to pass legislation early on to send most of the illegal immigrants back to their home nations.

The laws were aimed primarily at Mexico, but it was across the immigration board and illegals, of whatever nationality, were sent packing during the first year after the announcement.

It didn't matter much after that. The will was no longer there to have any foreign activities. Not even in Mexico.

The US had been developed and populated at a time when technology was on an upward curve of development. US citizens didn't have a history without technology. It was much harder for them to go back to a lifestyle of an earlier time that most of the rest of the industrialized world did.

What happened was a very sharp split between those that had access to oil supplies and the wherewithal to exploit them and those that didn't. Most of the major refineries in the US lay idle, if not burned beyond use by rioters. Even if they had crude available to them, they couldn't run, due to lack of electrical power to operate.

The national grid was down, and only areas with a local power plant using local resources for production had electrical power. Hydroelectric, geothermal, and wind-powered plants were the sources of electricity. Not a single nuclear power plant retained enough personnel to operate. All were either shut down normally, or scrambled safely automatically when the first anomaly in the operation occurred without a human to intervene.

There was plenty of coal available. The railroads weren't running so it stayed where it was. Only where a coal-fired power plant was at or within a few miles of the coal source, did it run.

Many American cities become wastelands, mined for items of use or worth, but having little or no population of their own. Others, with local power sources continued to function, but only if there was a viable rural farming community close enough to provide food for those within the city environs.

Some of the localities were very cooperative, between the urban, suburban, and rural areas. Others, were not so cooperative, despite each needing what the other could provide. Food for the cities and manufactured goods for the rural areas.

And then there were those that had seen the future before it happened and prepared for the events that occurred. Mostly rural enclaves of families, friends, and church members, set up to be as self-sufficient as possible. And there were others that adapted rapidly to the situation and learned that it was sometimes easier to take at gunpoint than it was to farm for food or work for anything else they wanted.

A few enterprising people, who also saw the handwriting on the wall, set themselves up to continue civilization in a manner they believed best for themselves and everyone else. Of course, there were also those unaffiliated people that prepared or adapted to the post easy oil world in unique ways. The story of Leonard Dobbs' post Peak Oil life perhaps best illustrates many of the results of the change from plentiful oil to scarce oil in the United States.

Leonard Dobbs - Peak Oil Entrepreneur – Chapter 1

“Lenny! I will not live like this any more! I’m leaving!”

Leonard Dobbs looked over at his wife of three years. The statement didn’t come as much of a surprise to him. Angela had made it known shortly after the marriage that she expected certain things in life and Leonard was required to provide them. Not indulge his hobbies.

“Don’t let the door hit you on...” Leonard leaned to one side to avoid the vase of fake flowers Angela picked up and threw at him. Moving calmly, but with just a bit of urgency, Leonard made himself scarce for a couple of hours. That was usually enough for Angela to calm down and become peaceable once again.

Two hours later, when Leonard returned to the house, he noticed immediately that the front door was standing wide open. “Uh-oh!” he said softly. It wasn’t a good idea to leave doors open in this neighborhood. Locking the doors of his truck with the remote, Leonard walked up to the porch steps, put his hand on the pistol he carried in the small of his back, and stopped.

“Angela?” he called, loudly. The gun came out when he heard rustling in the living room and two teenagers came running at him, empty handed. He made sure they saw the pistol, but made no aggressive moves as they edged past him and then ran off down the street.

Leonard sighed when he saw the pile of goods in the living room. Why anyone would want the stuff was beyond him. It wasn’t junk, as he often pointed out to Angela, but it certainly wasn’t worth stealing, in Leonard’s eyes. Of course, it would never occur to Leonard to steal anything, anyway.

After carefully going through the house room by room, pistol still in hand, Leonard decided that Angela might have meant what she said this time. All of her clothes were gone, as well as everything else in the house she valued, which wasn’t much. Leonard checked the door to the basement last, and a huge sigh of relief escaped him when he found it still locked.

Neither Angela or the teens had been down in the basement. Angela had no interest in his hobbies, and had not been down in the basement, or asked to go down there, since shortly after the marriage. Leonard’s worry was that she might have tried to destroy something of his in the basement. There wasn’t much out in plain view to attract her attention, but she could be pretty vindictive.

And the teens could have been a real annoyance if they’d made it down there and decided to trash the place. He was sure that they had intended to do the same upstairs, after taking their loot outside. It fit the MO of several other, similar, events in the neighborhood.

It took Leonard a couple of hours to get everything straightened up. Just as he was about to sit back down and watch a little television, the telephone rang. It was Angela. She was at her mother’s. “Send me some money to get a lawyer. I’m divorcing you.” She hung up before Leonard could say anything.

It was the way she was. She was going to divorce him, and expected him to pay for it. Funny thing was, while he wasn't particularly eager, he wasn't all that bothered, either. It was just the way she was. Leonard went to the desk that held the laptop and opened a drawer to take out the checkbook.

He started to write an amount down, but decided he ought to do it right. Angela probably had grounds for divorce. Leonard wasn't the best husband around. He was more interested in his hobbies than indulging in Angela's. All his buddies had declared her a real winner when they found out she was football fan and liked to drink beer and do tailgate parties when the team was in town. Leonard just wasn't a sports fan. At least, not conventional sports. He didn't have time for sports much.

Being a Long-Haul truck driver, with his own tractor and trailer, almost paid for, he wasn't home all that much. When he was he wanted to indulge his own hobbies. He'd probably neglected her, he decided. "At least she hasn't been cheating on me."

So Leonard wrote the check out for half of what he had left in the bank from the last paycheck. He went back out to his pickup and drove over to Angela's mother's. Then he was shocked. At least a little. There was Frank Hodges making out with Angela when Leonard walked into the house without knocking.

The two rapidly adjusted their clothing and Angela stood up. Frank stayed where he was. "Hey, buddy. What's going on?" Frank asked.

For some reason it didn't surprise Leonard that much. "Here you go, Angela," he said, handing her the check.

Angela's eyes lit up. "This'll do it and more!" She was suddenly up against him, thanking him the same way she usually did when he did something that really pleased her. Leonard didn't resist. It was probably the last time.

Angela was a touch flustered and looked over at a frowning Frank when she stepped back from Leonard.

"Uh... Sorry Leonard. That won't happen again."

"Okay," Leonard replied. "I guess that's it then. You'll send me the papers to sign?"

Angela nodded. "Sure. You understand that I want the house. Right?"

"Oh. I guess. Give me a couple of days to move my stuff."

"Sure. When do you leave on your next run?"

"Three days. It'll be enough time."

"Then I guess I'll see you."

Leonard nodded, and with nothing else to say, left the house. "Well, nuts!" he sighed, going back to the pickup. "So much for some range time this weekend, I guess."

It was still early and Leonard went to find a secure, climate controlled, storage facility. He made the arrangements and spent the next three days moving everything from the basement to the storage room. When he was done, and had taken a shower at the truck stop, he parked the pickup in another storage room, this one not climate controlled, stretched out in the pickup bed in his sleeping bag and went to sleep, his wristwatch alarm set for five AM.

He was up before the alarm went off, and called a cab company to get a ride to the trucking company's yard where he stored his semi truck and trailer between runs. It was the company he leased to. There he used the bathroom, got his paper work, checked his truck and trailer, climbed in, and headed out to pick up his first load of this trip.

Leonard found himself wondering what he was going to do, without the house, or Angela in his life. "Well, the Angela part is easy," he said to himself. He was the next thing to being abstinent, anyway. Might as well make it a way of life for a while. "Just have to rent a place, I guess, as far as housing goes," he added a couple minutes later.

He picked up the load that morning in the city and headed for San Francisco. He didn't like going into California. He wouldn't risk going into California packing the pistol, or anything else. He simply wasn't going to get arrested on a weapons charge. So he stopped in Reno and stashed the pistol and a few other things with a gun shop buddy. He'd pick them up on his way out of California.

Leonard was careful to only take loads to California where he could go in and out of the state through Reno. He gave a sigh of relief when he picked up his things at the gun shop in Reno after dropping the inbound load in San Francisco, and picking up a return load in the same city. He wasn't going back home. The destination for the load was Salt Lake City, where he had another load that was bound for Montana.

It was much the same the rest of the month. Load after load, place after place. He was in Houston when the President made his announcement. "This is not good," he muttered. He stopped and filled the truck using his company fuel card.

He'd picked up a reefer load at the harbor and fell in with a whole convoy of oilfield trucks that had also picked up some imported equipment. It was all long skid loads and there were a bunch of them. Curious, and not on a particularly tight schedule, Leonard stopped when the other trucks did for the night. Their over sized loads could not be moved at night.

"What is all this gear you're hauling?" Leonard asked one of the men standing beside Leonard at the salad bar of the truck stop restaurant.

"Oil refinery. Believe it or not. Turn key thing, except for an electrical connection, and Cat is supposed to be putting a couple of megawatt size electrical generating plants for this refinery and another just like it that's supposed to show up in another month. Some British outfit.

Don't know why we couldn't have built something like that here in the states. Really need the jobs."

Leonard listened and nodded, letting the talkative truck driver tell the story. "Going up to the oil fields in Oklahoma. Add some more refinery capacity right there in the middle of nowhere, amongst the wells."

"I see," Leonard said. "Interesting." He went to his own table, filing the information in the back of his mind. He thought about the semi-mobile, turn-key, refinery several times over the next few days as the price of fuel jumped up. It wasn't of top importance, however, when he got the load of frozen gulf seafood to its destination in Omaha, Nebraska and it was refused.

"I'm not about to pay that fuel surcharge!" the restaurant wholesale distributor told Leonard.

"Okay, Buddy," Leonard said. He called it in and after a ten minute harangue, was told by his dispatcher to hold tight. So Leonard did, sitting in the sleeper of the truck, watching the beginnings of the riots on the satellite TV the truck had as part of the sleeper package.

An hour later the wholesaler knocked on the side of the sleeper and Leonard went out to talk to him. "Okay. We're unloading. Your boss dropped the price back to something reasonable."

Leonard nodded and positioned the trailer at the loading dock. With the truck unloaded and cleaned, Leonard checked the computer and found his next pickup wasn't too far away. It was a strange load. He was to pick up two of the company trailers and take them home. It took an hour or so to get there and get the flatbed trailer and its dolly connected to the hitch on the reefer. A fuel tank trailer was piggy-backed on the flatbed already.

He didn't need fuel, but decided to stop at the nearest truck stop to top off the tanks before he headed home. His company fueling card didn't work at the pump and he went into the attendant's kiosk. "Card's not working," Leonard told the attendant.

"Can't you read?" the rather large man said, pointing out the window at a workman making a change on the pricing sign.

"Yep. I can read." Leonard did. "Cash only, fifteen dollars a gallon."

Leonard got on the cell phone and the truck's computer to tell dispatch about the fuel. There was another tirade and the dispatcher told Leonard, "Leave the trailers at the truck stop and lock it up. I'll wire your money we owe you to the truck stop, and then you're on your own."

"Don't you want me to get the trailers back to the shop?" Leonard asked.

"Not with fuel at fifteen a gallon," came the reply.

"But they'll just get vandalized, or more likely, stolen, the way things are going!"

“Tell you what. I’ll keep your pay and you can have the trailers if you’re so concerned about them. How’s that?”

“Sign over the ownership papers, fax me a copy, and send the originals to my PO box and you’ve got a deal.”

“You’re serious!”

“Aren’t you?” Leonard asked.

“Well... Now that you mention it... I think Arley would rather have even a little money in hand than the trailers out there. You’re not the only truck that we’ve shut down due to the cost of fuel. You’ve got a deal. I’m sure Arly will sign the papers.”

Leonard hung up the telephone, but stayed on the computer. He had internet access through satellite and began looking for independent brokers, hoping to get a load to get him home, at least.

He was more than a little surprised when the all-in-one woke up and started spitting out paper in fax mode not long after his conversation with dispatch. The documents were the copies of the ownership papers for the trailers.

Leonard wasn’t sure it would fly if push ever came to shove, but he was going to operate now as if it was fully legal. He made a couple of calls and got a box trailer load, guaranteed fuel at the end, and pay up front, not too far away.

He went ahead and topped off the large tanks of the Kenworth using his own money, before he headed for the load pickup location. It was a warehouse complex, way out in the middle of nowhere.

Three other trucks pulled in right behind him. The drivers were met by a middle aged man, dressed head to toe in black combat garb, including helmet with visor, and a clone of a Colt M-4 carbine.

“What’s going on?” Leonard asked.

“No questions,” said the man, his attention split between the four truck drivers and the entrance to the grocery distribution warehouse. “You take the load and follow us where we’re going, or get out now. And what the in the four seasons is that piggyback set up for? And a reefer. We wanted box trailers.”

“My reefer is a box when the chiller isn’t running,” Leonard said. “And I’m taking the other trailers home.”

The guy shook his head. "I don't know. Let me check." He turned away and it was obvious that he was talking into the boom mike that curved from his ear to the corner of his mouth.

"Boss says okay. But you get loaded last."

Leonard saw two more black clad, armed men push open three of the loading dock bay doors. "This is making me nervous," Leonard said. "Is this some kind of raid or something?"

The armed man shook his head. "No. We own what's inside and intend to get it before someone just takes it."

Leonard was still a bit unsure, but the pay offered was good, as was the promise of fuel.

He hoped the destination was within fuel tank range of home. "I'll go break down the trailers," he said, and climbed back up into the Kenworth to move it out of the way for the others to get to the loading docks. He moved over to where several other trucks and trailers were parked.

Before he could get out of the truck he saw two more of the group run around to the front of the building, carbines carried at port arms. Once outside he could hear a commotion from that direction. Again he hesitated, but then began to disconnect the flatbed trailer and its cargo of the tank trailer from the reefer.

The task done, Leonard fired up the truck and moved to position it where he could back up to the first loading bay that became available. It was a long wait, but finally one of the other three trucks pulled away from the dock and Leonard backed into the slot. He got out of the cab of the truck and climbed up into the warehouse. It was nearly empty.

The one of the other men handed Leonard a clipboard and pen. "Log everything that goes in. It'll go in the trailer."

Leonard watched one of the black-clad men on the forklift as he loaded pallet after pallet of canned and packaged food into the reefer trailer. When the first four pallets were loaded two up, side by side, and then next pallet went on top of one of the stacks to make it three high, Leonard stopped the driver of the forklift. "You're going to overload me."

"You want the money, or not?" growled the man. "You don't want to mess with us, bud. If I have to, I'll drive this rig myself and you can go hang."

Leonard's fingers itched to draw his pistol, but he backed off. The trailer was heavy duty, and could handle an overload for a while, if the road wasn't too rough and the speed was kept low. He wondered if either option would be open to him as he walked back to edge of the truck and watched the forklift driver keep loading.

The other drivers were standing around, their trucks loaded and the rear doors closed and locked when Leonard pulled forward so he could close his trailer doors and latch them.

“Let’s go!” one of the black-clad men said, waving a hand forward. The other drivers took to their trucks.

“Hurry it up!” the man said when he saw Leonard backing the reefer toward the flatbed.

Leonard did hurry when he heard shots fired, the sound coming from the front of the warehouse.

More men in black jumped down out of the warehouse and ran to the trucks. An armed man jumped onto the running boards of each of the other three trucks, and held their carbines in one hand. Several more got into black Suburbans that followed the trucks.

“Go! Go! Go! Go! Go!” yelled the leader of the group. He looked over his shoulder at Leonard. “Get on the stick, man! They’ll kill you if they catch you!”

“What did I get myself into?” Leonard asked himself as he connected the air hoses up between the trailers and then ran toward the cab of the Kenworth. He got it started up and watched the air gauge come up. The compressor was filling the lines of the flat bed trailer and he couldn’t move, yet.

The window of the cab was down and Leonard heard a battle royal break out. He saw two of the men in black run around the corner of the warehouse, but both went down with the floppy thud of a dead body.

Leonard killed the engine of the Kenworth and eased out of the truck on the side away from the activity. He took up a position behind the cab of another truck, keeping the engine between him and what was now a fire-fight. He heard the diesel engines of the three trucks roar in protest as the drivers floor-boarded the accelerators.

A few minutes passed, and the shooting sounds ceased. Leonard saw three ordinary looking men, except for the rifles they carried, come around to the back of the warehouse and climb up inside at one of the loading dock doors.

He also saw one of the men take a long look at the Kenworth and its odd trailer load out of a reefer, flat bed, and piggybacked tank trailer. Leonard tensed, but the man finally looked the other way and walked deeper into the warehouse.

A dozen pickups and some farm type grain trucks came around the corner of the warehouse and lined up at the loading dock. Each was loaded, the pickup trucks by hand, the larger trucks tall enough to load directly by forklift.

Leonard maintained a close watch on the activity, but made no move to contact the men working. When the trucks were all loaded and the drivers were taking them around to the entrance of the warehouse facility, Leonard tensed when the same man that had studied the Kenworth earlier, hesitated as he started to get into one of the pickups, and then started walking toward the group of parked trucks and trailers.

But another vehicle came tearing around the warehouse and drove right up to the man. Words were exchanged, and the man hurriedly climbed in beside the driver and the car took off, tires squealing.

Leonard stayed where he was for a long time, but as it started to get dark, he decided he'd better reconnoiter before he lost the light. There were the two men in black laying dead behind the warehouse. When Leonard got around to the front the place looked like a slaughterhouse. There were dead people all over the place, including several of the black-clad group, and even more of the ordinarily clothed attacking force. The three trucks and trailers were gone. From the looks of the skid marks, one or more of them had one or more flat tires, probably shot out during the gun battle.

Two black Suburbans sat on the rims, all the tires shot out and dozens of bullet holes in the bodies of the vehicles, primarily in the front fenders. There were several more vehicles that Leonard assumed were inoperable, as they were still at the site and were just as riddled with bullet holes as the Suburbans.

Feeling more than a little sick, Leonard searched the dead bodies and came up with several firearms still in working condition, dozens of magazines for the semi-auto weapons, and even more loose rounds. Then, feeling more like a simple thief and scavenger than a practical person making do, Leonard went back and took all the money from the bodies, leaving all the other personal effects where they were.

He went through the vehicles and found more weapons and ammunition, as well as a few other potentially useful items. Each of the Suburbans had an attaché case that contained Leonard wasn't sure how much money, along with a pistol with two spare magazines each.

Leonard finally checked inside the warehouse and found three more dead. After stripping them of arms and money, Leonard fired up one of the forklifts. The loading dock had a ramp, so Leonard was able to take several selected pallets from the warehouse and load them on the flat bed trailer, under the tank trailer. He tarped and strapped them down when everything that would fit was loaded.

Feeling like he was pushing his luck, Leonard got back into the Kenworth, fired it up, and left the scene behind him. He had no clue where he was supposed to have taken the load and didn't know who had wound up with the first three trucks.

After he was well away from the warehouse, Leonard slowed down to a more comfortable speed, considering the heavy load he was carrying, and also considering the other things that were now locked in the under the bed storage area of the sleeper. He didn't want to break down, or get stopped for speeding.

There wasn't much traffic on the interstates, but Leonard found a good place to get well off the highway to park for the night. He slept in his clothes, on top of the bedclothes, his pistol under the pillow. Leonard woke up several times, startled by night noises that normally wouldn't have bothered him.

Awake and up before six the next morning, Leonard put together a breakfast out of the remaining contents in the sleeper fridge, used the chemical toilet that the sleeper also boasted, and then watched the news over the satellite TV. It wasn't good. Apparently what had happened at the grocery warehouse yesterday where Leonard had been wasn't an isolated incident.

Leonard got back on the road and headed for home. He stopped often, topping off the fuel tanks on the Kenworth as often as he could, paying dearly for the fuel. He paid using the money he'd taken from the men, first, and then dipped into one of the attaché cases, keeping his own money intact and separate.

He stopped in every city along the way and converted the blood money in the second attaché case into gold and silver coins.

There were only a few other trucks on the road and Leonard was able to drop into a convoy headed past where he was going. There was safety in numbers, and for the two days it took to get home, Leonard was able to sleep easy, with the other trucks parked near his, all of them stopping at the same time and eating at the same truck stop restaurants.

The meal stop on the last day confirmed the rumors rampant on the CB. There was very little food left in restaurants, and it was as bad or worse in the grocery stores. Leonard fully understood that what he was carrying was worth a fortune. Or worth being killed over, as it already had been.

Instead of going to the company truck yard, Leonard stopped outside the city before he got home and parked the truck near a friend's old barn. Leonard dropped the stands on the flatbed, and pulled the reefer and dolly free. Stopping at the rear of the flat bed, Leonard unhooked the dolly and managed to get it connected to the rear of the flatbed.

He parked the reefer in the barn. Fortunately it had large doors on each end and he was able to pull straight through. Leonard dropped the stands on the reefer, unhooked, and backed the Kenworth under the flat bed trailer, hooking it up. He closed the barn doors and locked the barn again, replacing the key he'd used to unlock them back in its secret hiding place.

Before he went to the truck yard so he could get the tanker truck unloaded, he went by the post office. The ownership papers were, in fact, there, signed and dated for the day Leonard had made the transaction.

Using the company's two big forklifts, with the help of two of the other truckers, Leonard picked up the tank trailer and set it down on the dolly when another driver pulled Leonard's truck forward enough for the tank truck to clear the flat bed.

Both of the other drivers looked at the tarped load. One came right out and asked what it was. The other driver asked Leonard where Leonard's reefer was. Leonard's ownership of the flat bed and tanker were the talk of the drivers that were left working for the company.

Leonard just shrugged and said, "Private load. Owner doesn't want it known what it is."

“Do you even know what it is?” Petey asked, always one to try and annoy the other drivers.

“Do you think I’d haul a load and not know what it is?” Leonard asked.

Petey laughed and told the other drivers that had gathered, “He doesn’t even know what he’s hauling!”

“Any chance of another load like it?” one of the other drivers asked. “I really need some work.”

Leonard felt bad, but said, “Sorry. This was a one shot deal. Isn’t the company getting some local runs for you day cab drivers?”

All but Petey shook their heads. “I got one,” Petey said. “Unlike these two junk trailers of yours, Arley wanted those three custom go-anywhere motorhome chassis’ that him and his buddies were having built.”

“Way things are going, those are going to be scrap metal before Arley can do anything with them now. Big waste of money, even when it was doable, if you ask me,” said Duncan Jones, another of the company drivers. He spit a stream of tobacco juice to emphasize his statement.

The small group walked over to where the three large chassis sat, looking oddly out of place. Like they belonged on the Moon, or Mars, roving and taking pictures, gathering data and rocks.

They were Kenworth triple rail HD chassis’, with 1,200 hp Caterpillar engines and transmissions, and seven equally spaced axles. All the axles were steering type axles, with through pinions, except the front and rear axle, which didn’t need the through pinion.

The tires were super singles high capacity, high flotation, run flats with beadlocks. It could skid steer on soft ground, proportional steer, track steer with all the tires on each side tracking the one in front, and crab steer where all the wheels turned in the same direction.

“Big waste of money,” Duncan reiterated.

“Okay, you guys!” said Frank Dearborne, the day dispatcher. “Break it up! Those things are no concern of yours. What are you doing here?” The last was directed at Leonard.

“Just took the tanker off piggyback.”

“That’ll be fifty bucks,” Frank said. He held out his hand.

“So that’s how it’s going to be?” Leonard asked, taking his wallet from his rear pocket. He counted out two twenties and a ten.

“Thanks,” Frank said, a little more casual now. He stuffed the money into his shirt pocket. “Arley’s looking for any way to stay open. Keep some of the company fleet going, at least. Sorry about the independent leasers like you. Arley just can’t pay the price.”

Leonard took another look at the Kenworth motorhome chassis and had something of an epiphany. A vision into the future. “I wonder what he would take for those things, and some trailers and dollies?”

“I don’t think he’s going to want to sell them. You don’t have what it would take, sport. Though some trailers and dollies, I’m sure he’d sell. We have anything you could want. But believe me, Arley’s no fool. He’s not going to give something away for a few bucks. Not the way things are going.”

“I’ll wait a while and see what he says then. If he has a prospective buyer for the chassis’, let me know. I’ll make it worth your while if I get first crack at them.”

“You’re out of your mind... but... sure... If it looks like they’re going to be sold, I’ll let you know.”

The two men shook hands, and then Leonard got into the Kenworth and went back out to his friend’s property. He parked the truck, shut it off, and climbed into the sleeper. Feeling safe for the moment, he stripped down, took a sponge bath, and slipped between the sheets of the sleeper bed.

He had a dream that night, though he couldn’t remember exactly what it was, he did know he wanted those three Kenworth chassis’ more than before. As he prepared and ate breakfast, more of a plan came to him.

First he needed a base of operation. One that would be secure when he wasn’t there. The essentially abandoned barn his friend, Alex Coombs, owned wasn’t secure enough. But Alex’s main farm complex was a different story.

Alex had mentioned a time or two that if things got bad, Leonard would be welcome at the ranch, as long as he brought his own food and equipment. Well, he’d had that before he acquired the other two trailers, and the spoils of the little war at the warehouse.

Leonard parked the two trailers in the barn. There was room left for the truck, but that was all. He went into the city and stopped at the rental place. He decided he’d better check with the office on how to pay the upcoming rent for the two storage rooms.

The woman behind the desk looked harried. She set the phone down in the cradle with some force and then looked up at Leonard. “I hope you’re not here to try and get out of your contract.”

“No, actually,” Leonard said, “I was wondering how to continue it. The way things are going...”

“The owners have said no price roll-backs. Going to be no checks, or credit cards. Cash on the barrel head. And the rates are going up the first of the month.”

“How much?” Leonard asked.

“Double.”

Leonard whistled. “Double. That’s going to be tough. I’ll let you know before the end of the month.”

That put some urgency to finding a place of his own. The pickup had a tow bar and it took just a couple of minutes to get it hooked on the back of the semi truck. He headed to Alex’ place.

It had been a few months since Leonard had been to the combination farm, ranch, and anything else to make a dollar holding. There were subtle differences in the place that Leonard noticed immediately. The road ditch had been dug out and there was a new security fence running along the edge. The entrance was essentially a large cattle guard, the looks of which caused Leonard to believe that the grate could be moved fairly quickly to deny access to the place from the main road.

Though the grate was down, Leonard decided it would be polite to stop and ask for entrance, rather than just drive in. So he stopped the truck, walked over to the gate post that had an intercom box on it and pressed the button.

Alex’ wife Nan answered. “Who is it and what do you want?”

“It’s me, Nan. Leonard. Is Alex around where I can talk to him?”

“Oh. Leonard! It’s good to know you’re still okay. Alex was worried about you. He’s working in the main equipment barn. Just drive on back. I’ll let him know it’s you.”

“Thanks.” Leonard got back into the truck and drove through the gate and down the gravel driveway that split, one section going to the house garage and the other to the farm and ranch buildings behind the house.

Alex was waiting, with a big grin on his face, when Leonard climbed down out of the truck. The two men shook hands and Alex said, “You’re planning to come out here for the duration, I hope.”

“I know you’ve invited me, but I wanted to double check. Make sure you have room. I’ve got a project in mind and it’s going to take a lot of physical space.”

“I can’t afford to build another barn, but I have open space,” Alex said as they walked into the equipment barn. There were three men, all in welder’s garb, and the blinding light from the electrical welders was hurting Leonard’s eyes. He faced the other way and Alex did the same.

“Just open area would be okay, as long as I could have some shop time occasionally,” Leonard replied.

“I don’t see that as being a problem. As long as you aren’t planning on bringing the Queen Mary out here.”

Leonard gave Alex a wry look. “Almost,” he said, “But not quite.”

“Oh, this has to be good!” Alex said with a laugh.

“It’s a little crazy. And I’m not sure I can do it without your help.”

“Well, you know you have it. As long as it’s reasonable.”

Leonard grinned. “Sure. It’s mostly having a home base where I can leave stuff and know it will be safe.”

“You don’t really plan on continuing to run long haul, do you? With the way things are going?” Alex was incredulous. “I mean, I can spare some biodiesel... But not enough to keep you running for very long at a time.”

“I’d only need a little, just at first, if what I’m planning works.”

“Oh. Leonard, we’ve been friends for a long time. I have to ask. What about Angela?”

“Oh. Her. She’s divorcing me. Taking the house and half the cash up to the day of the split. I moved all my preps out of the house. I was hoping for room to keep them in out of the weather.”

“Of course. That won’t be a problem. You’ve got reservations in the shelter. There’s room for you and your stuff, I’m sure.”

“Okay. Good. That will take care of my personal preps. What about climate controlled storage for some... other goods. Over a semi load. And where can I park the truck till I go get my trailers?”

“Trailers? As in more than one? And one of them is loaded?”

Leonard explained how he’d acquired the two extra trailers. And just a little about the load he wanted to store.

Alex scratched his head and thought a moment. “Well... Have to split it up into several spots... But... Yeah, sure. We can do that.”

“Thanks, Alex. I’ll make it up to you. Just give me a little time.”

“Sure thing, bud. You want to go get your personal stuff now?”

“Yeah. It’ll take me a couple of days to move with my pickup...”

“No it won’t.” Alex turned around and yelled loudly enough for the three men using the welders to hear him. “Give it a break. We need to go move some of Leonard’s stuff out here before you know what breaks loose.”

The men began to put away the welding equipment. Leonard started to protest, but knew it wouldn’t do any good. He just sighed and went to park the Kenworth where Alex showed him. Leonard unhooked the pickup and drove it up to the equipment barn.

Three of Alex’s hands were climbing into pickup trucks and Alex was driving one of the farm’s bob trucks. When Leonard saw that they were ready, he headed out to the road.

It took only one trip by loading the bob truck and all four pickups full. Everything was taken down to the basement of Alex’s and Nan’s house. It would be put in the shelter later. Alex wanted to get the other load and the trailers moved before dark.

They didn’t quite make it, but were able to finish unloading the reefer and flat bed using the farm’s Bobcat skidsteer loader with a set of forks attached. Alex had been right. There were a few pallets stacked in a dozen different places in the barns. But all were at least marginally climate controlled in that the goods wouldn’t freeze in the winter time and should stay under eighty degrees in the worst of a summer.

Alex insisted Leonard fill up the Kenworth with biodiesel before he parked it and shut it down. “I’m keeping a record of everything I use, Alex,” Leonard insisted. “We can settle up at some time, but I do intend to pay my own way.”

“Sure thing, buddy. Just don’t worry about it now, okay?”

Leonard shook his head. “I’m not, actually. And that worries me.”

Alex laughed and the two men went to the house to clean up for the supper that Nan and the two teenagers that were Nan’s and Alex’s only offspring had prepared for the now extended family.

There was some quiet conversation over the dinner table, but the house policy was to keep it light. Serious things were discussed in the den.

Leonard was sure he’d had the same dream that night the next morning when he woke up. But he still couldn’t remember any of it. He spent the morning after breakfast putting away his gear in the shelter, which was where he would be sleeping, anyway, just as he had the night before.

After a light lunch, Alex and Leonard watched the news. The major satellite networks were still on, though two of the five local TV stations were down without power. They'd already used all their fuel for their standby generators.

There were riots in most cities, and many towns, protesting the lack of basic services and deliveries of food and fuel. Alex shook his head. "Are you sure you want to be out in all that?"

"Not on your life," Leonard replied. "I plan to pick up things after the worst has run its course. There are a couple of more things that have to go right, and a couple wrong, for me to fulfill my plan. Speaking of which, I need to go talk to another fellow. He'll be instrumental in this plan working."

"You got fuel in the pickup?" Alex asked.

"Yeah. I'm fine. Is there anything you need me to do around the farm before I go?"

Alex shook his head. "No. Leonard, you're pretty much on your own, as long as you've got this project going. If something comes up where I need an extra pair of hands, I'll sure let you know. That shouldn't be until harvest time."

"Thanks, Alex. I may not be back for supper. Don't wait on me. I'll get something while I'm out."

"Good luck on that!" Alex said and followed Leonard outside. The two took divergent paths, Leonard going to his pickup truck and Alex out to the barns.

Leonard didn't see much traffic until he got close to the city, and then most of it was foot traffic. He even saw a couple of horses. That was a business that was going to prosper. He was glad he was armed. Some of the looks he got were covetous of his vehicle with fuel to operate.

But he made it through the city, deciding it would be better to go around the city on his way back, even though it was a longer route. Leonard breathed a sigh of relief when he saw someone working at the place he was headed when he drove up to the gate.

It was a semi truck and trailer salvage and rebuilding business that the trucking company used from time to time when they needed work done on a truck or trailer. Gary O'Hare was a grouchy old man, but he knew what he was doing when it came to truck mechanics and metal working. And he trained his own crews to do it the way he wanted it done.

Leonard tooted the horn and Gary himself came over to the gate to open it. "Look what the cat done drug in. Leonard Dobbs."

"Hello to you, too, Gary. Need to talk to you about a project. A big project."

Gary locked the gate after Leonard drove through and then took Leonard into the office of the workshop and maintenance garage. "What kind of project?" Gary asked, rather surprising Leonard. It usually took Gary some time to get to the discussion at hand. He preferred to kibitz

quite a bit unless he was on an emergency job. From the looks of the storage yard, he should be working his tail off. It was full of various trucks and trailers in various states of disrepair.

“It’s a two parter,” Leonard said. The second part depending on the first.”

“Yeah. Ain’t that the way it usually is?” Gary said. He took a cigar out of a breast pocket and worked to get it ready to light.

“I don’t suppose you’ve seen those motorhome chassis’ Arley and his buddies ordered, have you?”

Gary spit a piece of tobacco out and took a couple of deep puffs from the cigar. “Actually I have,” he finally said. “Petey had one on his equipment trailer and stopped here to have one of his ramps fixed before he tried to unload the thing. Didn’t want to rip up a tire. Idiot backed into a stanchion on the way back from Kenworth. Interesting things, I must say.”

“Yes,” replied Leonard. “I thought so, too.”

“You have some kind of interest in them?” Gary asked, turning his head slightly sideways to look at Leonard. “Some big dollars there. That isn’t your standard frame, nor engine. Heavy duty all the way. The engines are off-road truck engines, not on-road. Horsepower to spare. But can run on four or five cylinders, besides full power of all six cylinders, for economy.

“You reckon one of them would pull two, maybe three, oversize trailers, loaded out to 80,000 each?”

Gary’s eyebrows lifted. “Oh, ain’t no doubt about one of them doing it. Wouldn’t be at all legal. And ain’t no oversize trailers available, anyway.”

“Part two of the project,” Leonard said.

Gary gave Leonard a long look. How come Arley or his boy Frank aren’t out here talking to me about this if’ en he’s going to do this?”

“Arley isn’t. I am. If I can work the deals.”

Gary was rolling the cigar in his fingers. It was a sign of interest, Leonard knew from past experience. Suddenly he shook his head. “Naw. You can’t pull it off. You ain’t got the dinero. And it’d be a big waste to throw a conventional cab on one of them at one end and a fifth wheel on the other.”

“If I can work the deal for the units, what would it cost me for you to put a simple bunkhouse kind of living quarters on them, with a few extra features, and then make some extra capacity trailers to pull with them.”

“More’n you got, I bet,” Gary said. “And besides, money’s getting up to be worthless pretty soon.”

“You know much about gold?” Leonard asked.

“Enough. Why?”

“If I converted my cash to gold, what would it take to convert one of the units, and make a sixty-foot custom combo trailer with a multi-compartment fuel tank belly, thirty-foot reefer on the top front and thirty-foot flat deck on the rear. Take a full 80,000 pounds total payload.”

“I’d have to supply the materials?” Gary asked.

“Yes. Premium stuff. I want heavy duty every which way you look at it.”

“I easily have the materials if I scrap a few things out in the yard. I know where I can get some other things... Probably need some cash to get some stuff. Not everyone will take gold.”

“Food is a possibility, too,” Leonard said.

“That’s good. Yep. I can do it if you can get one of the monsters and a floor plan for what you want the motorhome part to be like. Twenty grand in cash, twenty ounces of gold, and a year’s supply of food. Turnkey conversion of the prime mover and complete build of the trailer.”

Leonard held out his hand. “Deal.”

“How soon?” Gary asked.

“As soon as Arley gets hungry,” Leonard said.

“I hope it’s soon,” Gary replied. “I’m already getting hungry.”

Leonard got back into his pickup and Gary let him out of the work yard. He headed for the truck yard. He saw Arley’s H1 Hummer parked at the office and smiled. He parked beside it.

“Hello, Mr. Delmonico,” Leonard said when he went inside and walked over to Arley.

“Hello there, son. What are you doing back here? Thought you was finished with us.”

“Got a proposition for you, Mr. Delmonico.”

“Oh, really. And what might that be?” He chuckled.

“Can we talk privately?” Leonard asked.

Arley grinned over at Frank, then looked at Leonard and said. “Why, sure, son. Come on into my office.”

Arley sat down behind the desk, leaned back, and pulled out a cigar. "Give me the spiel and I'll ask you to leave politely, and then you'll leave and never come back."

Arley concentrated on the cigar as Leonard spoke. "I want the three Kenworth Chassis'. I'll give you a years worth of food for one person, for each one."

The chair snapped forward and an angry Arley barked, "Get out of here, boy! You're out of your mind!"

Leonard took no umbrage. It was the reaction he expected. He got up and started out the door of the office. Leonard paused, turned and said, "Keep me in mind, Mr. Delmonico. I'm out at Alex Coombs ranch." With that, he went out to his pickup and left. He checked a couple of his favorite restaurants on the way back but both were closed and he gave up and went on home.

He didn't expect the response he wanted for a while, so Leonard threw himself into the work on the ranch. He and Alex watched the news every evening. The coverage slowly began to change. Only reports from a handful of cities were broadcast. Cities that had working electricity.

Barely three weeks into the wait, Arley Delmonico drove up to the gate of the ranch. It was kept closed now all the time someone wasn't going in or out. Nan called Leonard on one of the business band handheld radios all the hands were equipped with, and told him.

Leonard and Alex met Arley at the gate. Even in three weeks Arley had lost weight. He still had a belly, but his face was showing some gauntness. "I'm willing to talk," Arley said. "About one of the motorhomes."

"Deal stands," Leonard said. "A year of food."

Arley shook his head. "Not enough. I want three years of food for my chassis'."

"Come back when you are hungrier," Leonard said and turned around.

"You can't do this!" Arley yelled. He looked at Alex. "Sell me some food, Arley. I'm starving. My wife and daughter are on the verge."

"Won't be any fresh until harvest, Arley," Alex said. "I'm sorry. We're eating off last years production."

Leonard was still walking away. "Wait!" Arley yelled. It was like a balloon loosing air. Arley sagged. "Okay. A year's worth of food for one of the chassis'."

"Two more years for the other two. If you wait, it'll be half a year of food for each. I'm not sure how long I can hold onto it."

Arley was entirely defeated. "Okay. Three years worth for the three Chassis'."

Leonard walked back to the gate. "You deliver the three chassis' to Gary O'Hare's place and I'll deliver the food wherever you want."

"My house, you goof! Where else?"

"Okay," Leonard replied. "Just thought you might want to spread it over more than one place. In case people see what you have and want it."

Arley was getting angry again. "What I ought to do is get my boys together and come out here and..."

His words faded and he took a quick step backwards when Alex and Leonard both drew pistols and had them pointed at him before he could finish.

"I wouldn't want you to try, Arley," Alex said. "This is my place. You come here to try and take anything, I'll shoot you like any one else that tries to attack me. People are going to have to work together to make it through this. That's what Leonard and I are doing. You'd better find some friends to hook up with that can help you make ends meet. And I'll tell you right now, if I am ever attacked, and they don't happen to say who they are, I'll come looking for you."

Arley frowned, but didn't say anything to Alex. To Leonard he said, "One year at the shop, a year at the dealership, and a year at home." With that he turned, got into the H1, and sped away.

Alex and Leonard put their guns back into their holsters. "I didn't like him threatening you like that, Alex," Leonard said. "I'm not sure what to do about it."

"We'll deal with it, if it happens. Situations like that are why we trained. I do think it's time to up the crossing." Alex went to a control panel attached to the heavy gatepost and pressed a button on the surface. The cattle guard like grate hinged up and covered the rolling gate.

"We'll start locking the bar gates at the other entrances, too. You want a couple of us to go in with you?"

"No. I don't think it's necessary. Could use some help loading up, though. And if I could borrow one of the bob trucks..."

Alex laughed and slapped his friend on the back. "You are a mess. Come on. We'll get'r done."

When Leonard got to the trucking yard, all three of the chassis' were gone. In his mind, Leonard crossed his fingers. If Arley had spirited away the units rather than taken them to Gary's, there'd be the devil to pay for Leonard to get the food back. He had to trust that Arley was carrying out his part of the deal. The phones weren't working any more. Not even the cellular system.

“They’re on the way,” Arley said when he came out to meet the truck when it stopped by the office. “You’ll have to unload. I sent Frank, Petey, and Duncan out with the rigs.”

“Smart move, Arley. Help me with the tarp.” Leonard thought Arley was going to refuse, but he finally crawled up onto the truck and helped Leonard roll back the tarp. The side boards had been removed at the ranch so the tarps could be loaded and unloaded from the side.

Leonard used the company forklift to take the pallets from the truck to a spot inside the workshop, back in one corner. From the looks of it, Arley only had to tarp the pallets and move a few things around and onto them to hide the fact that they were there.

Arley didn’t ask Leonard to help with that job, so while Arley did it, Leonard tarped up the rest of the load on the truck. He was finished and waiting when Arley came through the front of the trucking office.

“Find something to do until my guys get back and I can get to the dealership. Don’t come in until I come out to get you.”

Leonard nodded and drove off, headed for the city. He was just making a turn when he saw three of the trucking company’s trucks with equipment trailers headed back to the trucking yard. “They just better be there,” Leonard said and continued on his way toward the Cadillac dealership.

There just wasn’t very much going on anywhere that Leonard could see. People walking were hurrying, hunched over, like it was cold and windy. It was seventy degrees and calm. Those in vehicles were going slow, like Leonard himself, to conserve fuel.

Leonard parked down the side street from the dealership. He didn’t have to wait long. He saw the H1 pull into the dealership and he started the bob truck up again. People began to leave a couple of minutes later and he pulled into the back area of the lot. It was another few minutes before Arley came out. When he did, he motioned Leonard forward to park just outside one of the dealership shop bay doors.

With the small forklift the dealership used to unload parts from trucks, Leonard moved another third of the load to another out of the way corner. While he was, Arley went outside and came back in carrying one of the trucking tarps from the H1. This time he asked Leonard to help him get the pallets covered and things set around to camouflage it.

With that done, Leonard went out to the bob truck and secured the tarp over the last year’s worth of food destined for Arley’s house. Leonard went back to his parking place and waited for Arley to pull out. He did so, after about fifteen minutes, when one of the employees got back.

It was a different story at Arley’s house. There was no forklift. With the truck backed just to the edge of the garage door opening, the two men took two hours to unload each of the pallets, setting the items from the first pallet aside and stacking the items from the second pallet onto the now empty first one.

They did that until the last pallet was empty. Leonard left the job of putting the items from the first pallet onto the last one. He headed directly to Gary's and breathed a huge sigh of relief with the three chassis' came into sight. He stopped and talked to Gary a moment, making arrangements to come back in with a drawing of what he wanted, and partial payment for Gary to get started. Gary looked worse than Arley did.

Leonard went to Gary's three days later with a pickup loaded with two tarped pallets of food and the drawings. As soon as they had the food in the office, Gary took a few moments to open a can of soup. He ate it right from the can, without bothering to heat it.

"Aw, Man! This tastes good! Haven't had a good meal in days."

Leonard didn't know what to say. He simply nodded.

"Okay. Let's see what you want done with these monsters," Gary said, taking the computer generated drawings from Leonard as he set the empty can aside. Leonard stayed quiet as Gary studied the plans for the prime movers. "Little more to this than you implied at first," Gary finally said.

He looked over at Leonard and smiled. "Going with a conventional cab is going to make it easier. I have several to choose from that will bolt right on the chassis. And I know where I can get my hands on some hard plate to protect some of the areas a bit more than your basic aluminum sheathing. But there is going to be some traveling involved to get it. Not included in the original agreement."

Leonard nodded. "Shouldn't be a problem. I expect to put in some sweat equity, too."

"In that case, let's get started."

When Leonard got back to the ranch that evening he was hurting in places he didn't remember ever hurting before. He took Alex's good natured ribbing and ate the supper Nan had kept warm for him. After that he watched just a little of the news, which was about all there was, anyway, and then went to bed early.

Rather than drive back and forth every day, Leonard packed his camping equipment and some food in the back of his pickup and headed for Gary's for an extended stay. He worked every day with Gary, for five weeks. The harvest was starting and Leonard went back to the farm, the first Kenworth chassis no longer just a chassis. Real progress had been made and there was plenty for Gary to do on his own while Leonard was helping Alex with the harvest.

All during the harvest there was a group of people hanging around the entrance to the farm. Nan and Prissy, Alex and Nan's daughter, were selling small quantities of edible produce for cash. Higher prices than the goods had been worth in the past, but considering the value of the dollar now, it was essentially giving the food away.

But it kept the crowd calm and civil, unlike a few other places where locals took over farms and wound up destroying more than they managed to harvest for food. Alex made sure there was at least one of the hands within shouting distance, heavily armed, to respond if there was trouble.

All the hands went armed, even when they were in the fields, just in case they had to respond to a radio call from somewhere else on the farm. But, whether it was luck or the good planning, there was no trouble as the harvest finished up, the weather turned bad, and the crowd outside the gate finally broke up and left.

Leonard worked another week, helping press the canola crop to make biodiesel, and get a few batches run to refill the tanks lowered by the amount used for the harvest. Alex and his family, plus two of the hands were busy putting by the food crops. Much was home canned in glass jars. Some put in one of three root cellars to keep over the winter, some was dehydrated, and some of the meat, pork mostly, was smoked, while other cuts were canned, turned into jerky, or hung in a cold house for use in the near future.

When Leonard went back to Gary's for another extended stay, he was amazed at what Gary had accomplished. Many of the internals for the prime mover were installed, with more being fabricated on the floor of the shop to be hoisted up and set on the chassis when Leonard got back. Leonard didn't ask where everything came from. That was Gary's business.

Another month of work and the internals were done, and the outer body framework fabricated and attached to the floor framework. It was time to go get the materials for the skin of all three units that were to be built.

Gary put together a small work kit and some personal things and he and Leonard headed out in Leonard's Kenworth, pulling the reefer and the flatbed. Leonard was pleased to see that Gary was going on the trip prepared for anything. He wore, in addition to the old Colt 1911A1 pistol he always had on, a back up PPK .380 and a Gerber MK II fighting knife. Gary also had a collector grade M1 Garand rifle, and a wicked looking Mossberg 590 combat shotgun, equipped, like the Garand, with a bayonet.

There were several drums of additional biodiesel on the flatbed, with some gasoline for Gary's tools that needed it, primarily the welder/generator unit temporarily on the flatbed.

It was still winter, though it was a mild one. There were large numbers of people headed south. When they were traveling that way Leonard let them pile their belongings on the trailer, and climb on themselves, and took them as far as they wanted to go in his and Gary's direction.

Though many of the people were armed, there was no trouble on the way to the large salvage yard that was Gary's destination. When they arrived, they took a look around. The place seemed abandoned, so Gary cut the chain holding the gates closed and Leonard drove the truck through. Gary wrapped the chain back around the gate ends. He'd weld the cut back together when they left.

Leonard was amazed at everything that was in the huge yard. Not just automobiles, but semis and trailers, aircraft, boats, even what looked like military aircraft and NASA rockets. "If it ain't here, you don't need it," Gary said with a big grin on his face.

"Yeah," Leonard replied, giving a positive nod of his head.

It took three weeks of hard work to get the things Gary wanted from the salvage yard. It was cool, almost cold, most of the time, but that made the work a bit easier. The first thing Gary had done was rig up an A-frame lift for the deck of the Kenworth. It was used to handle the larger pieces so they could be cut up, and then loaded.

All the smaller stuff went into the reefer, and the larger sections on the flatbed. It was early spring when Gary cut off the A-frame from the Kenworth. Leonard backed under the front of reefer and checked the fifth wheel to make sure it was locked.

Leonard stopped just outside the gate. Gary's welding cables extended as far as they would go, Gary welded the chain link back together to secure the lot. It would take a detailed survey, if it was even possible, to determine, what, if anything, the two men had taken.

There were visible changes to be seen along the route on the way back to Gary's shop. Even fewer people, though those on the move were still all traveling southward. Everyone looked more gaunt and hungry. And dangerous.

They were stopped a couple of times at gunpoint. Leonard wasn't too worried. No one was going to want what they were carrying. It was a bit irking to be stopped like that, but Leonard thought it worth not getting into any confrontations.

Of course, the people stopping them could already see what was on the flat bed, they wanted to know what was in the reefer. Every time Leonard opened it, there was a growl of disappointment. A couple of men even took it upon themselves to climb up into the trailer and get a closer look to make sure there wasn't something hidden at the front of the trailer.

With disappointed, and often angry, looks, Leonard and Gary were waved through every time, load intact. They made it to Gary's yard with just enough fuel left for Leonard to get the tractor back to the ranch. The trailers would stay at Gary's until all the parts were used up.

Leonard checked in with Alex and picked up his pickup truck, and then went back to work with Gary until spring planting began. It was another grueling five weeks. For a man of Gary's age, he sure got around well, and worked from the time they could see in the morning until they couldn't see in the evening.

Disappointed the rig wasn't quite finished, Leonard left to help on the ranch at the agreed upon day. For a month and a half Leonard didn't get in to see Gary, for the work load on the ranch was now complicated by the need to stand guard over the animal herds, the truck farm garden, and the orchards, none of which were in good sight from the ranch building complex.

But finally, the spring ranch work done, Leonard high tailed it for Gary's. Leonard couldn't believe it. Not only was the prime mover finished, the heavy chassis rails for the first trailer were mounted on the running gear, as was the load plate and king pin.

"Man! You have been busy!" Leonard told Gary as they unloaded the two pallets of food to take into the shop. Gary counted out the second half of the cash, and the second third of the gold that he owed Gary.

"Yeah. This project is my life at the moment. Not getting any other business. Don't know what I'd do without you giving me this job. Even if I was making some cash, there isn't much in the way of food to buy. Every farm and ranch has people waiting in line to get what's available when the harvest starts. And the various greenhouses in the area have probably kept the people that are left from starving."

Leonard nodded. With what he was doing he hoped to improve those situations. It had to be much worse in areas without productive farms. What little news coming out of the cities was that the only cities not abandoned were the ones with locally generated electricity, good water supplies, and a ring of farms around them. And they were struggling.

"Are you going to have enough rod to do the job?" Leonard asked as the two went out to look over the prime mover.

"I think so. If you can find any more, get it. I've bought up every stick I can find around here locally.

"Okay. I'll put that on the list. Now, show me what you've done. And where did you find the paint?"

"Another side deal. Money might not talk anymore, but food and gold do. Anyone with either one has it made. If they can keep it."

Though he'd seen it as it was being built, the completed prime mover was a bit awe inspiring. Gary just followed Leonard around, a big grin on his face, as Leonard looked over the unit from front winch to rear winch and everything in between, inside and out.

"Have you tried it out yet?" Leonard asked after the inspection.

"Just moved it around the yard when I needed to."

"Open the gate. I want to see what this baby will do."

Gary did so, and then climbed into the front passenger seat after he locked up the gates. Leonard had eased the rig through the gates and eased it out onto the road, getting a feel for the steering. He eased the brakes on and the rig stopped, rocked slightly, and then settled.

Leonard checked all the gauges on the dashboard. There was a long stretch of straight road without a sign of any traffic. Leonard eased his foot down on the accelerator and the big rig

picked up speed immediately. He just kept pushing down with his foot and the rig just kept going faster, the only change in feeling when the transmission shifted was being pressed back into the air ride seat a bit harder.

“Uh...” Gary said, his eyes on the upcoming turn. He couldn’t see the speedometer, but he knew they were going fast.

Leonard kept his foot in it another second and then laid on the brakes. Without a swerve or a shimmy the rig came to a full stop, still a hundred feet from the start of the curve. Even with a load behind it, the rig would stop faster than his conventional Kenworth.

“Okay,” Leonard said. “Let’s see if the proof is in the pudding.” He put the rig in gear again and turned the steering wheel. They were off the road and in the ditch before Gary could react. But as soon as he turned the steering wheel, the rig was back up onto the pavement, the three foot deep ditch not a barrier at all.

Still grinning, Leonard decided to put it through a few more paces and headed for the dirt bike track not too far away. There wasn’t anyone else around and Leonard rolled right out into the dunes.

“You’re not!” Gary said, rather loudly for him.

“Sure am,” Leonard replied, again pressing the accelerator firmly. The suspension took the uneven trail like it was made for it. The suspension had a tremendous amount of flex, and even if one wheel was suspended, the others on that side were still grabbing dirt.

Leonard, after fifteen minutes of trying to find something the rig wouldn’t do, gave up and headed back to Gary’s yard. Once there the two men went over every little detail, looking for damage or anything that might have come loose.

“You do good work, Gary,” Leonard said. “Can’t wait to get that trailer done.”

“Well, we won’t get it done with you playing around all the time.” But Gary was grinning and Leonard knew there was no malice in his thoughts.

It took the rest of the summer to complete the first special trailer. And like the prime mover, the trailer proved out to be capable of anything Leonard might ask of it. Without hesitation Leonard hooked both the regular reefer trailer and the flat bed behind the large multipurpose trailer and took them out to the ranch.

The entire train was just a little over two-hundred feet long. Leonard thought it handled like a dream, though it took a little practice to keep an eye on the rear trailer monitors while watching the road ahead.

Gary got as big of a kick out of the mouth open stares of those at the farm when Leonard pulled the rig through the gate and took it around to park the flat bed and reefer trailers with the tank trailer.

Gary got as much praise for the work as Leonard did the idea. Actually rather more. No one there quite understood what Leonard's idea was. But that didn't stop them from heaping praise on him.

When things calmed down, Leonard loaded his pickup with the last of the year's worth of food and took Gary back to his place.

"I take you want me to start on another of the prime movers," Gary said when they had unloaded the food.

"I was hoping to," Leonard said, his stomach quivering a bit. Surely Gary wasn't going to gouge him on the other work. It simply wasn't like the man.

"Well, I got to tell you, the work is starting to get me. I'm going to need some help when you aren't around. I was hoping you'd okay getting another person or two to lend a hand. I know a couple of guys could really use the work. And we could finish the other two before things get completely out of hand in this country."

"How much more do you think..."

"Here now! I'm not asking for more pay! We shook hands on our deal. I'd be paying the help out of my end of the deal. I just wanted your okay, since this is... well... kind of a secret deal, isn't it?"

Leonard's sinking stomach quit sinking and came back up where it was supposed to be. "Oh. And, I guess it is a little secret, though I'm sure Arely and Frank have been telling people something about the chassis' disappearing from their yard."

"Well, what do you say? About the two guys. They really need help."

"Who are they?" Leonard asked.

"Duncan Jones and Petey Latham. Both of them have families and..."

"You think Petey would be of any real help?" Leonard asked. Duncan, Leonard knew, would.

"Gotta tell you. Only some. But he's lent me a hand before and can do some of the lighter work. He's a walking scarecrow and his poor family ain't much better."

Leonard felt himself nod before he'd made the decision with his conscious mind. "Okay. But what's Arley going to say if we take two of his best drivers?"

“You really care?” Gary asked.

Leonard had to smile. “No, not really. Just don’t want no repercussions coming back on you or the guys.”

“Well, the plan is to have them come here to live. I’m getting worried about being here alone. Someone figures out I’ve got food, and they come in the middle of the night, I’d have a hard time taking care of the thing by myself.

“Petey’s and Duncan’s old ladies, both of them, can handle things if need be. I’m assuming the three kids between them will be okay. I’d want to get them settled first, and then start work on the prime mover. We’ll more than make up the time with three of us working, plus you part of the time. Give me three weeks and we’ll be ready to work.”

Leonard nodded again. Okay. Do it. I have something I can do for the next three weeks, anyway, just occurred to me.”

The two men shook hands again and Leonard left. He went back to the ranch and shifted things around in the bed of the pickup and added three fifty-five-gallon drums of diesel to the load. That should get him where he was going and back.

Leonard headed for Oklahoma. It took him a week to get there and find what he was looking for. Namely, the modular refinery he’d traveled with for a while. He found it, and almost got shot in the process.

Those running the operation were surrounded by people wanting the fuels being produced and apparently had tried to take some by force. There was double security fencing all around the property, patrolled by guards with very large Rottweiler dogs running free between fences.

From a high spot nearby, standing on the cab of his truck, Leonard looked the place over. There were three horse head pump jacks rising and falling slowly, and the subdued hum of the powerful Cat powered electrical generation plant that ran the wells and the refinery.

There was a tank farm on the property and Leonard began to wonder just how full those tanks might be. He watched the place for two days before he approached the gate, and didn’t see any fuel leaving the compound.

It was when he was standing beside his truck, away from the other people wanting in the gate, that he was almost shot. It wasn’t that he was shot at, for he wasn’t, but a couple of the rounds the guards used to scare two men trying to climb the outer fence, came close enough to Leonard for him to hear them fly past at super sonic speed.

He ducked down, but held his ground as the guards ganged up and rushed those outside the gate. Leonard had seen them do that every few hours from his observation point. The guards just dispersed the group, with one or two usually leaving out of fear.

When Leonard made no move to get involved one of the guards, with a Rottweiler on a leash with him, walked over to Leonard, carrying a Colt M-16 or clone there of.

“Okay there mister. You saw your buddies go running. Why don’t you join them and there won’t be any trouble.”

“I’m not looking for trouble. I’m looking for the guy in charge. Looking to do some hauling for him.”

“Hauling?”

“Yeah. You know. Semi tank trailers? Haven’t seen many go in or out the last few days and I figure you might be getting full up in there and a needing room made in the tanks for more.”

“Are you serious? I don’t see no semi trucks,” the guard said. But he lifted a hand held radio to his lips, turning slightly away from Leonard.

“Tell the boss we got someone down here says he’s looking to do some hauling for us.”

It was a couple of minutes before the radio squawked again. Leonard didn’t have a clue of what was being said. The transmission was filled with static. But apparently the guard understood it. And it was a positive reaction.

“Follow me inside with your truck. Someone will meet you.”

Leonard jumped back inside the pickup cab and followed the guard. Another man waved Leonard over and Leonard drove over to him and stopped.

“Don ‘t want that truck any closer to the operation than it is, in case you’ve got a bomb in there.”

“No bomb,” Leonard replied, stepping out of the pickup.

The man glanced at Leonard’s holstered pistol, but said nothing about it as he motioned once again for Leonard to follow him.

They went into a well-built modular building, which, like all the other components of the facility, was on skids. “Boss,” he said to the rangy looking man sitting behind the desk in one of the small offices the building housed. “This is the guy.”

“Sit down,” said the man, and leaned forward to shake Leonard’s hand when he held it out. “What do you have for me?”

“I will soon be ready to run a truck, with double tank trailers, anywhere you need me to go.”

“Got lots of local boys with semis and trailers,” said the man.

“How come they aren’t hauling?”

“Who says they aren’t?”

“I think I’m wasting my time and yours, then,” Leonard said and stood up. “Sorry to have bothered you.”

“S’all right,” the man replied and turned to the computer on a side desk. “Come on back if you actually want to buy some fuel. See him out, Andrew.”

Not another word was exchanged as Leonard was led back to his truck, allowed out the gate, and drove away. Leonard was more than a little disappointed. But there was more than one way to skin a cat. He began to smile as he drove.

When he got back home, he got with Alex. “Need a favor, Alex,” Leonard said.

With a grin, Alex asked, “What this time?”

Leonard smiled, too. “Need you to be a regular broadcast station for me. I need some advertising.”

“You mean on the Amateur bands?”

“Yeah. Any band you think someone might be listening on.”

“Well, I don’t think the FCC will be coming after me. You write up what you want said, and I’ll have Prissy make a tape. Probably be better if a female reads it.”

“I’ll leave that up to you. I’m going to help Gary for a while. When I get back we’ll see if there are any results.”

Alex nodded. “You be here for harvest?”

Leonard nodded. “Yep. I won’t let you down.”

He worked with Prissy for an hour or so, until both were satisfied with the radio ad. “Thanks, Prissy. I’ll make it up to you one of these days.”

Leonard Dobbs - Peak Oil Entrepreneur – Chapter 2

Gary, Petey, and Duncan had been working on the second prime mover for almost a week when Leonard got there. He noticed the mobile homes that had been moved in next to Gary's. He could see where water and power lines had been run to the trailers from the shop, and fresh digging where the sewers were run to the shop septic tank.

Leonard pitched in for two weeks, marveling at the skill and determination of the men helping. All were several years older than he was, but worked just as hard. Even without Leonard, the work was going several times faster than on the first unit. Partly the manpower, but Gary knew exactly what he wanted done and didn't have to engineer a solution for every element this time.

There were fewer people waiting at the ranch gate when Leonard went back to help with the harvest. They were a bit more insistent and Alex had hired a couple more people just to stand watch and prevent anything from getting started very far before the others could come to help.

"How did the ad go over?" Leonard asked Alex the first chance he got.

"You won't like it," Alex said. He handed Leonard a handful of hand written notes. Response communications from the ad.

Leonard thumbed through them and saw immediately what Alex meant. Disappointed, Leonard set them aside and went to work driving a combine for the day. Later that night, before he went to bed, he sorted through the messages and weeded out the obvious cranks, and the obviously real interest messages, plus another stack for the not sures.

Each night he tried to contact one or two of the people, having some success. A good three-quarters of them were dead ends of one type or another, but three were contacts he wanted to follow up on after the harvest.

It was another good harvest, and Leonard received a share for his help. He loaded most of it up as part of the year's supply of food for the second prime mover and trailer, conserving the food from the warehouse as much as possible.

Gary and the others had made remarkable progress. The second prime mover was finished mid-winter and the second custom trailer by spring. Leonard paid off Gary the agreed upon amount and then had to insist he take a little more to share with Petey and Duncan. They started in on the third chassis immediately.

All during the time things were getting worse. Alex's ranch and farm was one of the few operating in the area and couldn't keep up with the demand for food. Companies were going out of business right and left and people were literally starving, many of them headed for a hopefully easier life south.

Alex, like the other producers, had quit taking cash. He was taking only precious metals, objects of value, or labor on the ranch in payment for his products. Among the objects of value

he took in trade was additional land and production equipment to work it. He had a group of people on the payroll strictly for security of the properties. Their pay was room and board.

When Leonard went to help with spring planting, and then returned to Gary's shop afterwards, the third prime mover was finished and work was almost done on the third custom trailer.

Leonard paid off in full, with another generous bonus. All three men refused the cash, and insisted the gold and food were payment enough for the work. And all three, though they didn't say it, were worried about how they were going to continue their existence without Leonard's work to do.

Leonard wondered much the same about them and talked to Alex. He got permission to move all three men and their families to property adjacent to the ranch, and a promise to give them enough work to keep the families in food.

By July 4th everyone was moved onto the ranch. Leonard had use a bit more of the gold from the cash conversions of the money in the attaché cases to get a well drilled and septic system installed for the three mobile homes. A generator would provide electrical power to pump water twice a day. Gary built an outside wood burning furnace that would heat all three of the units, using solar panels with batteries and inverter to power the fans to move the heated air.

The question that Leonard had been waiting for finally came up. "Now that you have them, Leonard, what are you going to do with them?"

"Good point," Leonard admitted. "Time to get back on the radio."

Leonard contacted all three of the people that had expressed interest in having their good transported. Only one responded. It was a ranch in Oklahoma that wanted to move a herd of cattle from just outside of Tulsa to Kansas City and Oklahoma City. Both cities were still holding things together, but were desperate for additional food, especially meat.

When Leonard asked about the ranches right around the cities, he was informed that they had all been hit hard early on and the herds and owners wiped out. "I have to tell you. I've got an armed camp here," the rancher, Tom Ingles, told Leonard over the radio. "It could be dangerous. But I pay in gold. Twenty percent up front and the rest when the loads get to the destination."

"Let me talk to a couple of people. I'll get back to you in a day or so."

Leonard went to look for Gary, Petey, and Duncan. "Guys," he said after he'd found all three at Gary's mobile home, discussing the future. "I have a proposition."

The three looked at one another and then Gary said, "Lay it out."

Leonard explained the situation with the rancher outside Tulsa. The first question was, "How we going to haul cattle?" Petey was shaking his head.

“Pick up six cattle trailers,” Leonard replied. Should be easy enough. Arley has at least that many.”

“In addition to the lead trailer?” Duncan asked.

Leonard nodded, and Gary said, “The rigs will handle it.”

“What about protection?” Petey asked. “Just the four of us, with that much equipment? Even without the cattle, we’d be a target.”

“I plan to take on some people to ride shotgun,” Leonard answered.

“How many?” Duncan asked.

“Two per rig and four out riders.”

“You know,” Duncan said, his enthusiasm beginning to show, “If we get all drivers, we could just keep going in those rigs. Wouldn’t have to stop at all. I know a couple of guys desperate for work. Ex GI’s. They can handle a rig. Even these, with a chance to practice.”

“That would make it better,” Petey said.

The four men sat and discussed the possibilities for over three hours, hammering out details acceptable to all of them.

Using Leonard’s truck, since it was diesel and they had some fuel for it, Each man went to talk to a few people that might be interested in such an endeavor. The results were mixed. Two of the men that Petey, Duncan, and Gary were sure of either weren’t around anymore, or refused. But a total of two drivers only, four drivers that could handle security, and three security only people were located and agreed to the terms.

Leonard was a bit worried that three of the nine people were women. But when he met each one his doubts faded. All were experienced truck drivers, and two of them were combat veterans from the Gulf Wars.

The hold up now was getting the trailers. Two were easy. Alex had them. Leonard and Gary went to see Arley.

“You’re out of your mind! I’m not about to consign four trailers and three dollies on the off chance you might make a buck with them!” Again, the reaction was about what Leonard expected. But Leonard played his usual trump card. Food. Arley, despite rationing what he’d already received from Leonard, was running low again. He’d traded some of it away for other things his family needed and he wanted.

“A month of food for three, guaranteed, and a full beef afterward, if we’re successful. And I keep the trailers.”

“You really think I’m going to agree to that?” Arley asked.

Leonard shrugged and he and Gary headed back to the pickup.

“Wait!” Arley called, taking a step toward the two men and the pickup. “Okay. But I want more. Double.”

“Through in the H1 and you have a deal,” Leonard said, thinking on his feet. They were going to need another vehicle besides his pickup. The H1 Hummer would be ideal.

“Are you out of your mind?” Arley as much as yelled.

“When’s the last time you drove it?” Gary asked.

“Well, with fuel the way it is...” Arley’s words trailed away and he thought about how much weight he’d lost and how hungry he was all the time. “Triple,” he said.

“Two months of food for three. Up front,” Leonard said, “And two beeves when we get back,” Leonard countered.

“That’s only double!” Arley protested.

Leonard looked at Arley for a long time. “I’ll throw in two ounces of gold. Again, when we get back.”

Arley perked up. Food was great. Everyone needed it. But a man of his tastes needed some other things. Gold would buy them. “Half the gold now.”

Leonard nodded. “Done. We’ll be back for the trailers tomorrow, with the food and an ounce of gold.” The deal done, Leonard and Gary went by each of the group that would be going to give them notice that they would be leaving in two days. Then they went back to the ranch and told Petey and Duncan.

They began to load the three prime movers with personal gear and supplies, including fueling them up from the ranch stock of biodiesel. Leonard insisted on transferring a couple pallets of the food to Alex in payment of the fuel, over Alex’ objections.

Alex’ two stock trailers were attached to what had become Gary’s unit. Two of the new people would be his crew, both of which had been working on the ranch. Petey and Duncan would be the prime drivers on the second unit with one of the security men that could drive as third member of the team. The third rig would be the unit the three women would use.

Then next day, the four men took the other two units in and picked up the four stock trailers at Arley’s trucking yard, and the H1. It was the first time Arley had seen the units. He was flabbergasted and couldn’t quit staring.

Leonard let him take a look in one of them. Arley was shaking when he came out and looked over the lead trailers. He said not a word there after, even during the trip in the H1 back home, with Leonard driving.

The food was unloaded and Leonard handed Arley two quarter-ounce Gold Eagles and five one-tenth ounce Gold eagles and said, "We'll be back with the beeves as soon as we can. Be sure you have a way to process them." Arley simply nodded and turned away.

Leonard shook his head and then started the H1 again, to lead the two rigs to each of the new team members' residences to pick up them and their gear. Leonard had made it clear that they might be gone for weeks, even a month or so and each had packed accordingly. Leonard would be providing the food for the trip. The weapons and ammunition from the warehouse shoot out were distributed to those that didn't have their own.

They headed back to Alex' ranch and unloaded everything and reloaded, each of the new people getting acquainted with the units and their operation. Early the next morning, with Leonard and Patrick, one of the security men, in Leonard's pickup in the lead, the convoy left the ranch, headed for Tulsa. Petey and Duncan with Jose were behind Leonard in #2 rig, the three women in #3 rig behind them. Gary with Mark, and Eugene followed in #1 rig. The H1 with the other two security people brought up the rear.

Leonard took it very easy initially, to allow all the drivers to get a chance handling the two-hundred foot plus rigs on good roads, under no pressure. They traveled that way the entire day. Leonard led the convoy into a rest area on I-44, which they were following on the way to Tulsa. They had not seen a single operating vehicle the entire day.

After a shake down debriefing, meals were prepared, with Leonard and Patrick using Gary's unit as their base, and the other two security men using Petey's and Duncan's. A sentry was posted and then everyone went to bed.

Up early the next morning, after a quick breakfast and coffee, the convoy hit the road again, this time at a rather more lively speed, though Leonard kept the speed just slow enough to allow the big Cat diesels in the prime movers to operate on only four cylinders for economy on the flats and down-grades.

The Interstate was blocked at the Miami, Oklahoma interchange. Leonard radioed to the others and they all came to a stop. After a short discussion, Leonard and Patrick climbed back into the pickup and advanced on the roadblock, both with weapons loaded and ready.

A rather fat man stood in front of the barricade, made with vehicles. He cradled a shotgun in one arm and held up his other. "What's up?" Leonard asked when he stopped and the shotgun toting man walked up to the driver's side of the vehicle.

"Road's closed to anyone not paying the tax," said the big guy.

"What tax?" Leonard asked.

“Local tax. Payable in food, goods, gold, silver, or fuel.”

“And if I don’t want to pay?” Leonard asked.

The big guy smiled. “Got six guys backing me up here, and six more on the East bound lane roadblock. We’ll blow you to kingdom come if you try to run the roadblock.”

“Fair enough,” Leonard said. “I’ll talk it over with the rest of my group.”

“You do that. But don’t take too long. We’ll come take what we want if you delay too long.”

“Sure thing,” Leonard said. He started the pickup and backed it around to head back to the convoy. It took only a couple of minutes of discussion for all to agree to Leonard’s plan. It was a simple one. They crossed the median, and the east bound lane.

Patrick cut the fencing with a pair of nippers carried in the pickup for just that purpose. After Patrick got back into the pickup, Leonard put it into low four wheel drive and nosed off the pavement into the roadside drainage ditch. He went through the gap in the fence and then pulled to one side to watch the other rigs do the same. Petey was driving #2 rig and hesitated slightly, but nosed down the grade and through the fence. He passed through without a hitch.

Eleanor, at the controls of #3, didn’t hesitate. She drove through, again without a hitch, falling into line behind the waiting #2. Gary was right behind, and the H1 followed. Leonard took up the lead again, heading cross country to get around the roadblock.

Apparently the big guy at the road block didn’t like the idea. Several men jumped into vehicles and tried the same thing.

Mike Horton, in basic charge of security, radioed Leonard. “I say we give them a taste of what they’ll get if they can actually catch up to us.”

“Do it,” Leonard replied. Anyone threatening him with firearms was fair game for reciprocal action. He upped the pace a bit when he saw that the long rigs were handling the slightly rough field without any problems.

Mike had Elmer stop the H1, got out and went to the back of the vehicle. He took his time taking out a case and putting it on top of the H1. Climbing up himself, he opened the case, took out the heavy rifle it contained, and slipped a magazine in place after opening the bipod up.

Taking into account the slight breeze, Mike took aim through the riflescope and gently squeezed the trigger. The pickup truck just struggling through the fence at the interstate came to a sudden halt, the big .50 BMG bullet going deep into the engine block, locking the motor up near instantaneously.

Recovering easily from the recoil, Mike emptied the other nine rounds in the magazine into more of the group's vehicles and people. He was sure he hit at least four of those manning the road blocks and disabled three vehicles.

Again he took his time and re-cased the Barrett M82A1 semiauto rifle and put it back into the back of the H1. "Let's go," he told Elmer, picking up the radio mike when he got back into the passenger seat of the vehicle.

"I don't think they'll be following us," he announced.

"Good," Leonard replied. He picked up the pace slightly, keeping an eye on how the rigs were doing on the open ground. Well past the blockades, the group reversed the procedure and got back up onto the interstate, again without a hitch.

It was smooth sailing the rest of the way. Before they got to Tulsa, Leonard cut off on side roads, to get to the ranch with the cattle. They were met at the gate by three armed men mounted on horses. The three riders did double-takes at the sight of the convoy, but let them onto the property, swinging wide the steel gate that blocked the entrance.

Tom Ingles, upon seeing the rigs was just as curious as his men. Leonard let him look the rigs over for a few minutes before getting down to business. While the rest of the crew kibitzed with the ranch hands, Leonard, Gary, and Mike talked things over with Tom.

The price discussed by radio was confirmed, and the delivery details explained. It was late to be loading so Leonard and crew over-nighted in the rigs again. But the next morning, the six stock trailers were loaded with cattle using a portable stock ramp. The only real problem was reconnecting the trailers after breaking them down so they could be loaded.

Leonard's plan using heavy-duty chain come alongs to winch the tongues of the dollies over to the pintle hitch worked, but the process was slow and awkward, and just a little dangerous. Some other method would need to be developed.

But the cattle were loaded and trucks and trailers reconnected by noon and the convoy left, headed for Kansas City. Leonard picked up US 75 and they traveled most of the way on it, picking up I-35 west of Kansas City. It was where Tom had told Leonard to beware. Much like the roadblocks at Miami, the entrances to KC were blocked and guarded, twice, at each entry.

One blockade was manned by basically bandits, looking to take anything they could coerce out of travelers going into or coming out of the city. The inner blockade was manned by citizens of the city to keep out anyone and everyone they didn't want to enter the city. Only those with acceptable business were allowed inside the inner ring of defense.

The initial meeting of the bandits' blockade went about the same as the one near Miami. Except Leonard couldn't go around the way they had at the Miami interchange. When Leonard talked to the man in charge of the bandits at the blockade, he took a hard line.

Before the man could speak, Leonard did. "We can do this the easy way, or the hard way. The easy way gets you a bit of food, a little silver, and no danger to your lives. The hard way means people die. Take a long look at the rigs behind me and decide if you want to take us on."

The man lifted binoculars to his eyes and studied the three rigs, which Leonard had ordered parked so they could be seen easily.

"Not your regular semi trucks, I take it," the man said, lowering his binoculars. "How many men do you have?"

"Enough," Leonard said. "And firepower for each one of them. Take a look at that car over there." Leonard pointed. "If anyone is behind it, have them move."

The bandit leader made a motion and two men shifted positions from behind the designated vehicle. Leonard tipped the microphone of the handy-talky on his chest and said, "The demonstration, if you please."

A fraction of a second, a hole appeared in the fender of the car, shaking it slightly, and then another round went through the doors to who knows where, and a third bullet went through the closed windows of the back doors of the car, shattering both of them.

"How much food, and how much silver?" asked the bandit.

"Mixed case of meat, vegetables, and fruit. A roll of silver dimes."

"Let them through!" called out the bandit leader. Cars were pushed apart and Leonard radioed the convoy to come ahead. Patrick got the case of food from the back of the pickup and handed it to one of the bandits. Leonard took the roll of dimes out of his jacket pocket and handed it to the bandit leader. "I expect that this will get me out, as well as in."

The guy didn't like it, but defending the blockade from the city side was problematical. He nodded.

Leonard and Patrick waited until all three units and the H1 passed through the roadblock before getting back in the pickup. When they stopped at the city blockade, there was some hasty radio traffic from the blockade to the city fathers, and then Leonard and his convoy was ushered into the city proper, with directions on where to take the cattle.

They probably wouldn't have become lost. They were accompanied by two motorcycle mounted police. They both hung around until after the man in charge of the herd showed up with the payment, also accompanied by two motorcycle police officers.

After a quick inspection and tally, the man handed Leonard a small cloth bag. It jingled. "Your pay," he said.

Leonard hadn't asked how Tom would get paid, and the man didn't offer up anything for Leonard to take back with him to Tom, so Leonard shrugged it off. The convoy headed back to

Tulsa to pick up the load to Oklahoma City. They left by the same route they came in and there was no trouble when they went through the bandit's roadblock. The individuals of the two groups just stared at one another as the convoy passed through.

They made it back to Tom's ranch and picked up six more trailer loads of the beef cattle and headed southwest this time, bound for Oklahoma City, for the same deal as the run to Kansas City, except they had six beef carcasses hanging in Rig #1 reefer, paid for with a little of the gold.

They earned their money this big time, this time. The area had turned into what most people incorrectly thought the 'Wild West' had been like. Three times they were attacked on the road, simple roadblocks put on the roads to slow, more than stop, travelers.

The first one caught the convoy totally by surprise. Patrick was driving the pickup while Leonard dozed in the passenger seat. They were on the roadblock just around a turn in the road before they knew it.

A shot rang out and Leonard came awake. It took only a moment to take in the scene and Leonard yelled to Patrick to drive around the block and keep going. "Roadblock and attack!" he spoke into the radio's mike and then dropped it to pick up the rifle clipped in a vertical rack in front of the dash.

It was one of the rifles he'd salvaged from the grocery warehouse fight. An original HK-91 with aftermarket 100-round dual drum magazine. Leonard braced himself and began to return fire the best he could. Which wasn't very good. The truck was just bouncing too much.

The team responded well, however, and the prime movers were very stable rigs. With two people firing through gun slits in the sides of each of the rigs, protected by some of the armor plate taken from the salvage yard, the attackers ceased their attack after only a couple of minutes. Not only was the suppressive fire effective, the rigs, even going off the road, were fast. Not so fast to cause one of the less stable stock trailers to overturn, but close.

The travel tactics changed after the first attack. The pickup was loaded onto the #1 rig flat bed portion of the custom trailer and Leonard and Patrick joined the team inside. The H1 on #3 rig, Mike and Elmer joined that team inside the rig. The three women, occupying the middle position, stayed with the same crew.

The next attempted ambush went much the same as the first in the first few seconds. But with two men in small roof turrets, each with one of the HK-91's with drum magazine, and two men at side firing port in the lead and trailing rigs, the attack came to a halt quickly. The convoy had overwhelming return fire coming from the lightly armored firing ports and turrets.

And Duncan hadn't hesitated. He blew right through the roadblock, a simple row of automobiles across the road. The heavy front bumper of the prime mover barely had the paint scratched in doing so.

The third attack went much the same as the second. There were a few holes here and there in the rigs, and one steer was hit and killed, but the Leonard and his crews delivered the rest of the cattle to Oklahoma without further problems. There was no organized bandit guards trying to accost travelers. There was a roadblock, but it was manned by city citizens.

Leaving, on the other hand, turned out to be a bit of a problem. Possibly one of the same groups that had ambushed them, or some locals in the know, or, Leonard wondered, the powers that be in the city, had an ambush a mile outside the city's roadblock.

Whoever it was, wasn't a good ambush planner, fortunately. The stable platforms the high flotation suspensions of the prime movers made, allowed those firing from them to cut down the attackers one after the other as the rigs accelerated through the ambush site. This time Petey was driving, and the blockade was much bigger, being a Fargo armored car. Petey chose to take the ditch well ahead of the blockade rather than try to knock the armored car out of the way, or stop.

The charging prime mover ran over probably a third of attackers, whom had arranged themselves in the roadside ditch.

When they were well clear of the ambush Leonard stopped the convoy and they all took stock of the situation. There were a few more holes in the aluminum sheet metal, but the important parts of the rigs were all protected with armor and came through without a problem again. They did repair a couple of the run-flat tires, but they were built to take abuse and after the holes were filled with foam and an external patch, they were ready to go again.

Leonard called a quick meeting and told the crews what he wanted to do next. "I want to see if I can set up a regular run with a small refinery south of here a little ways."

There a few shrugged shoulders, but no objections, and the convoy was on its way a few minutes later.

Two days of easy travel and they were at the refinery. There were several burned out vehicles around, including three semis with tank trailers. If anything, there were more guards around the place than had been there on Leonard's first visit.

Andrew, sporting an arm in a sling, met Leonard at the gate when he had Duncan pull up where he could turn around if he needed to.

"I know you," Andrew said, standing at the inner gate. "You wanted to haul fuel." He laughed. "At least you have trucks... Sort of... But stock trailers? Come on!"

Leonard just smiled. "I'll take nine thousand gallons if you've got it and a destination, if the price is right."

Even at the distance they were from each other, Leonard saw Andrew's eyes widen in surprise.

“I’ll get the boss.” Andrew turned and went toward the office structure. Leonard noticed that there wasn’t much activity going on in the refinery.

A couple of minutes later Andrew came back and let Leonard into the compound. When he took the same seat he’d taken on the earlier visit, the same man that had been across from him was there, too.

“Okay. What do you have to offer me?” the man asked.

This time Leonard noticed a name plate on the desk. George Reubens. “Well, Mr. Reubens, I have the capability of hauling from three thousand gallons to nine thousand right now, and if you want, I can haul fifty-one thousand at once, pretty much anywhere you want.

“Is that right?” George asked.

Leonard nodded. “From the looks of it, you’re having trouble getting fuel out of here.”

“How do you plan to manage that much fuel?”

“I’ve got three three-thousand gallon tank and utility trailers, and I can get six seven-thousand gallon trailers.”

“Full length triples?”

“Yeah.”

“Load like that would be a prime target,” George said.

“My people go armed. We can hold our own as long as it isn’t an armored military unit trying to take us down,” Leonard replied.

“You should see the rigs, sir,” Andrew said. “I think they might be able to pull it off.”

“Okay. I’ll give it a look.” George got up and Leonard followed him and Andrew back outside. There was only a small flicker of surprise on George’s face, but Leonard saw it. George was intrigued. He was silent as he looked over the rigs, taking in the heavily armed group of people guarding them.

“How much you want for the rigs?” George suddenly asked.

“Not for sale,” Leonard immediately replied.

“Tell you what,” George said, turning his back on the rigs. “You get six-thousand gallons of diesel, and three thousand gallons of gasoline to Denver before winter and I’ll have a deal for you for the full fifty-one-thousand gallons. Pay a premium for that load to go through. Have to be done this winter, or the deal is off.”

“Where is this big load going?” Leonard asked.

“New York City,” George said.

Leonard pursed his lips in surprise. “New York. In the winter. And you’re right. There would have to be a premium. Okay.”

A bit more discussion took place over actual pay rates and pay arrangements. It included full fuel loads for the three prime movers onboard tanks in exchange for some of the food they’d brought with them for trading, for just such possibilities.

So, with the stock trailers parked outside the compound, the three multipurpose trailers took on two-thousand gallons of diesel and a thousand gallons of gasoline, each. Leonard didn’t like leaving the stock trailers behind, but there was no real use dragging them behind. The next load would be more fuel, not cattle.

They had barely left the refinery compound when they were set upon by five pickups, traveling at high speed, firing as soon as they came into range. Mike took care of two of them straight away with the Barrett. Expecting trouble, Leonard and the crew’s had prepared for it before they left the refinery. Mike and the Barrett was one part of the preps. All four of the HK-91’s were in up in other turrets with the best shots handling them.

Everyone else not driving had a rifle or carbine at a firing port. And one of the most effective weapons in Leonard’s arsenal was turned on the rest of the attackers. That was the rigs themselves.

Leonard had instructed that if attacked, they weren’t to run. The drivers were to head directly toward the attackers, stationary or mobile. With two of the attackers’ vehicles already down, dozens of rounds pouring into them, and the three big rigs bearing down on them, side by side, at high speed, the other three pickups swerved off track and took off across country.

There were cheers in all three rigs. Hopefully, when they came back for another load of fuel the word would have gone around that Leonard’s convoy wasn’t something to mess with.

With only the single multipurpose trailer, the convoy was able to travel at high speed when they were on good roads. Leonard was curious about how the prime movers would do in the mountains. He found out quickly when they got into New Mexico and turned north to go through Raton Pass into Colorado.

He was smiling broadly when all three units topped the pass going full bore, the big Cat 1,200 horsepower engines growling softly through the huge muffler stacks as the fourteen tires on each unit stuck to the pavement like glue.

Unlike KC and OKC, Denver was essentially open. Only people that really wanted to stay were there, most having left the first winter with no heat. Leonard still approached the city cautiously, making radio contact with the people the fuel was going to and getting an escort from just outside of town to the service station in the middle of town that was to receive the fuel.

As soon as the trailers were off loaded, Leonard headed the convoy back to the refinery in Oklahoma. With what he'd made so far, Leonard surprised George by buying outright the identical load they'd delivered to Denver.

The stock trailers were hooked up and the convoy headed home to drop them off, unload the fuel, and make another deal with Arley for six tank trailers. Thinking about it on the way home, Leonard decided to go after more than just the six tank trailers.

It took four of the beeves, two-thousand gallons of the diesel, and a thousand gallons of gasoline to do it, but Leonard basically had Arley's entire fleet of trucks and trailers at his disposal for ten years.

It was actually less than Leonard was prepared to pay and he was happy with the deal. Alex had tank space so the rest of the fuels were off-loaded in his tanks, to be sold a little at a time to people Alex trusted and wanted to help out. Alex would get half the proceeds and Leonard the rest.

Leonard and the crews didn't lose any time. After loading plenty of food and other consumables, they picked up the six best fuel trailers and high-tailed it back to the refinery. Though they weren't using them, Leonard decided to keep the pickup and H1 on the flatbeds, just in case. If push came to shove and they needed the deck space, they would either tow them pup fashion, or drive them.

When they were at the refinery, waiting to be loaded, Mike took Leonard aside and said, "I was watching the skyline as we came in. We're going to be attacked again when we leave. And unless I miss my guess, there are going to be more of them, better armed, and more determined than before."

"What do we do?" Leonard asked. "You don't think we can bull our way through like we did before?"

"Possibly. No one was hurt before, but the limited armor the units have won't protect us against the lucky shot during a long running battle. And they might just try to light off the tanks this time if they don't think they can take them.

"I'm inclined to do a little recon and see what is up. See if we can't stop the attack before it starts. I've talked to Suzie. She's game to go with me to check things out."

Leonard thought about it for a few minutes, but then gave Mike the go-ahead. Their departure was delayed a day, the units parked close to the compound with the refinery guards around them while most of Leonard's crew got some extra sleep.

It took him a long time to fall asleep, thinking about Mike and Suzie off on their recon, but he finally did fall asleep. He came awake quickly when he was called to the living area of Rig #1. Mike and Suzie were waiting for him. Leonard breathed a sigh of relief when neither of them seemed the worse for wear.

“What did you find out?” Leonard asked.

“Enough to know we can’t take them on the run the way we did the other time,” Mike said. “We’re going to have to go in and clean them out before they can take up positions. We drop the trains and go full bore with the prime movers shooting everything that moves and running over anything that doesn’t. Kind of an elephant herd attack. But we need to hurry. They’re still sacked out, with just a couple of guards. As soon as we start moving, they’ll know something is up.”

Leonard nodded. Petey and Duncan had been listening, as had Patrick. They went to tell the others and start unhooking the multipurpose trailers from the prime movers in the light from the again operating refinery.

Leonard went to let Andrew know what they were going to do. He would tell George. Leonard didn’t wait. If it was going to work, it needed to be done immediately. He planned on doing it whether or not George liked the idea.

Leonard went from unit to unit and checked to make sure everyone was ready. When he returned to #3 rig, he took up a carbine and lowered the passenger side window of the cab. “Punch it,” he told Petey.

The big Cat growled and smoke poured from the exhaust stacks. The other rigs were right with them as they pulled away from the refinery, gaining speed with every second that passed. They were traveling side by side, with Leonard’s rig slightly ahead. When Leonard reached down and flicked on the powerful auxiliary lights. The world in front of them became like daylight.

A couple of muzzle flash appeared, but Petey, and the other drivers never wavered, as they approached the crest of the small hillock behind which the camp was set up. It was very much like a wild elephant herd attack. The heavy rigs knocked vehicles and people around equally destructively.

Leonard firing at everything that moved in his slice of the world outside. When they had driven through the camp all three drivers turned around and went through again, wrecking every vehicle that wasn’t destroyed in the first pass.

Leonard heard a yell behind him, but had to keep his concentration on the fight outside. It was only when they went back to the refinery that he had time to find out what the yell had been about.

Duncan had a bullet burn on his cheek. A fraction of an inch to the left and he’d be dead. Patrick was already tending to the wound and Leonard left the rig to check on the others. Mike had been right. Their armor was limited. Suzie, working one of the top turrets of #3 rig had taken a round in her arm. But she said she’d received worse and sat calmly as Eleanor wrapped a compression bandage on the entrance wound and another on the exit wound.

Everyone else was uninjured, thankfully. As the sun came up, and the prime movers were once again attached to their train of trailers, Leonard told George they were heading out and it was up to him and his men to mop up on the other side of the ridge. George shrugged. "No problem."

Five of the six seven-thousand gallon trailers were full of diesel, and the other with gasoline. They were the payload for Washington. Again Leonard had filled the multipurpose trailer tanks with a split load of diesel and gasoline for his own use. The convoy left the refinery soon after Leonard had talked to George. The crew watched a group of refinery vehicles head for the battle site. Leonard had a feeling there would be few, if any, survivors in the camp when George's men were through. They'd been living under the gun for a long time.

Leonard set a fast pace, wanting to get to Washington and back home before the worst of the winter hit them. He'd been in contact with Alex by Amateur radio, and the harvest had gone well, which reassured Leonard. He'd been worried about not being there to help.

They kept the prime movers' tanks topped off with fuel from the multipurpose tank in #3 rig, but sold a little diesel and gasoline here and there where people both wanted it and had the means to pay for it, mostly with gold and silver coins, which were becoming the common currency.

And, despite their total lack of inherent value, dollar coins began circulating for small purchases. Leonard had helped get it started, by accepting the coins as payment and guaranteeing to cash twenty of them in for a tenth-ounce gold Eagle if someone wanted. The practice spread, after many people did get the promised gold from Leonard and began to follow the practice themselves.

Leonard and the others were happy to get away from Washington, D. C. after they arrived. It was not a friendly place, and everyone was extremely careful while they were there. There was supposed to be a gun ban in the city, but Leonard refused to make the delivery if they had to disarm. One of the powers that be that were in charge had enough sense to make an exception and the delivery of thirty-five thousand gallons of diesel and seven thousand gallons of gasoline was completed.

There was a tense moment when the convoy was ready to leave. Leonard was told that they were required to pay a tax to do business in the city. Another thousand gallons worth of gasoline would just cover it.

Leonard said nothing. He simply walked to Rig #2 and had Duncan drive away, the other two rigs following close behind. Everyone was ready when they reached the roadblock they had to pass to leave the city. But though a whole line of people were lined up, with an awful lot of guns for a gun free city, no one fired a shot and the convoy left the city without further trouble.

They wasted no time getting home for the winter. When he arrived, Alex met him with a grin. "You're becoming a legend," he said. "Getting radio contacts for more loads, all over the country. Those with surpluses need a way to get them to whatever markets there are."

That winter Leonard made a couple of runs locally with a single rig, using two of the multipurpose trailers, with a crew of five. After many discussions, Leonard had agreed with Gary that pulling the set of conventional trailers behind the multipurpose trailers wasn't the best solution. What the business needed were more, oversize, purpose built trailers that could handle what two conventional trailers could. With no real DOT in existence, the trailers could be as big as it was practical to build, and that the prime movers could handle. Gary, Petey, and Duncan set about getting that done.

It would be a long process, but with the income Leonard was making, he was able to buy the necessary components and get them to the ranch. A new building was put up and all of Gary's equipment was moved to it so the work could be done there, under the protection of the ranch security teams.

Things were getting very violent in the US, and Leonard was one of the few people willing to leave a safe haven to move goods from those that had them, to people that needed them.

With a couple of additional drivers trained, as well as fabricators to help Gary, Leonard set off after the spring planting was done, while Gary stayed behind to supervise the construction of more trailers, and take care of Leonard's business. They had picked up numerous items on side deals on the earlier trips and Gary was selling them and the fuel alongside Alex's food products.

Two of the new trailers were finished and ready to go when Leonard left. A sixty-foot long, 15,000 gallon, multi-compartment fuel trailer, and a sixty-foot long, twelve-foot wide reefer/box trailer. The reefer, used as a box trailer when the refrigeration unit wasn't running, had a tailboard lift and carried a battery powered pallet handler. The batteries charged while the rig was on the road.

To make things easier to handle, the A-train dollies were discarded after the multipurpose trailers were converted to B-train style where a fifth-wheel was part of the rear of the trailer. As Gary had done on the prime movers, the fifth-wheel was cantilevered off the rear of the frame and designed to be stored between the frame rails when not in use.

With the changes, and the incorporation of the B-train fifth-wheel on all the new trailers, the trailers could be used in any combination without dollies, and the trailers could be dropped and the prime mover used to maneuver the individual trailers wherever needed.

With the new trailers behind Rig #1 and Rig #3, and two of the stock trailers behind Rig #2, the convoy headed for the first set of loads for that summer. There had been some discussion about splitting up and running the rigs individually, as Leonard had done locally. Leonard nixed the idea as too dangerous. There was security in numbers, and all efforts were taken to have loads and destinations close to one another so there would be the minimum of fuel and time wasted when one of the rigs had to deadhead when the others were loaded.

There was little trouble at first. But with the information exchange between the convoy and the ranch, people were beginning to figure out about where the convoy would be at any given time. That was the makings of an ambush. Or two.

The first one came halfway between Springfield, Missouri, and St. Louis, Missouri on I-44. The convoy was packing nearly full loads, all destined for a suburb of St. Louis that was holding on tenaciously.

Six-thousand gallons of diesel and nine-thousand gallons of gasoline from the Oklahoma refinery were in the big tank trailer.

The stock trailers carried one load of live cattle and one load of live hogs, from the ranch near Tulsa.

The big reefer, being used as box trailer, was partially filled with all the home canned goods the ranch could spare.

The reefer on Rig #1 multi-purpose trailer filled with fresh foods, milk, and eggs from the ranch under refrigeration. The reefer on Rig #2 held frozen meat from Alex's ranch, including beef quarters, hog cuts, and whole chickens.

All three of the multi-purpose trailers were again filled with split loads of diesel and gasoline, bought for resale by Leonard.

The convoy was rolling smoothly northeast on the Interstate southwest of Rolla. There was no warning this time. They came up on the roadblock around a sweeping turn. It was too late to stop, and the roadblock spanned the entire width of the Interstate property, fence to fence.

Twenty guns opened up on Rig #2, in the lead as usual. Petey was driving, and at Leonard's shouted order as he scrambled to get his rifle, Petey floored the accelerator and kept going. The bumpers had been beefed up even more than the original design over the winter, the experience with earlier roadblocks taken to heart.

#2 barely slowed down with the impact. #3 widened the opening slightly as the twelve foot wide reefer pushed through, like #2, increasing speed rather than reducing. By the time #1 got to the barricade everyone had weapons and was returning fire.

Leonard was on the radio with Duncan in #1. They'd taken a lot of rounds, but were still going. Leonard had Petey keep up the pace. Everyone in #2 was okay. After another mile, Leonard had Petey stop. The others followed suit and Leonard hurried out to check on everyone.

Mike immediately had the Barrett out, set up, and was prone behind it, covering their rear in case the attackers were following.

They'd been lucky and knew it. No one had more than a scratch, despite the numerous holes in the sheet metal of the rigs. Duncan and his crew were checking over the big tank trailer for damage. The crews from the other rigs were checking their units.

Finally, with the adrenaline rush fading, Leonard gathered everyone close to where Mike was so he could hear. "We got lucky, people. We're going back to using a lead scout vehicle, as soon as we find a place we can unload the H1. And at least one person will be on alert, armed with a rifle, in each rig to provide immediate response in case of more ambushes."

It was a somber group, well aware of their encounter with the ambushers had gone totally in their favor. A situation that was not likely to happen again.

It didn't take long to find an embankment that could be used as a loading ramp for the H1. With it in the lead, manned with three people, the convoy got on the way again, more alert and ready than before.

The rest of the trip to St. Louis was uneventful. The loads were turned over to the new owners, in exchange for gold and some manufactured goods.

The convoy headed back to Oklahoma to pick up another, nearly identical load, bound for Indianapolis, Indiana, another strong hold of the times. Leonard, when he wasn't on alert, kept thinking about ways to improve the operation, and make it safer.

This time the ambush came near Sullivan, Missouri, again at an overpass on I-44. Mike was able to give the rest of the convoy plenty of warning. The prospective ambushers, though there seemed to be more of them than in the last attack, didn't know how to set up an effective ambush.

It was in plain sight from a distance, and Mike stopped, used the radio, and stood ready to return fire if the ambushers started anything. Leonard, stopped well back from Mike, went over the trucker's atlas and found a way around the roadblock.

Not until the rigs were headed back the way they'd come, did Mike and Patrick fire up the H1 again and go after the convoy. They were back in the lead when the convoy left the Interstate to take side roads around the ambush site. It added a few miles to the trip, but Leonard and the others all agreed it was more than worth it.

Taking special care approaching the ambush site outside of Rolla, the convoy eased on through, without trouble this time. The signs of the ambush were still there, but that was all.

They stopped at the ranch for a couple of days to rest and recuperate and take on more food, and unload the farm equipment that Leonard had bought at St. Louis. Leonard's pickup was also unloaded, to make room on the multi-purpose trailer for flat bed loads.

Gary and his work crew had finished the oversize stock trailer so the two conventional stock trailers were switched for the oversize trailer. That would make the entire convoy much more capable in rough ground, such as they might encounter avoiding an ambush.

Work was started on another oversize tank trailer, and an oversize flat bed trailer.

Leonard said nothing and paid off two of the people that had gone on the last run. They didn't have the stomach for the gun work. With the money the crews were making, there was no shortage of people willing to go with Leonard now.

Leonard worked with Alex and Prissy on a communications code to try to help prevent the possibility of ambushers being able to pin down the movements of the convoy.

From the ranch, they went southwest to the refinery for fuel, and then to Tom Ingles Ranch to pick up the livestock, and by home on the way northeast to get fresh and frozen foods from Alex's ever growing operation. With the H1 in the lead, the convoy headed for Indianapolis, by way of St. Louis.

As another way to avoid the possibility of ambushes, doable now that all the trailers were wide stance and stable off the road, that is what Leonard did. He took the convoy off the Interstate and took back roads around suspected trouble spots, even to the point of literally going off any road and cutting across vacant fields to pick up a different road, in case they were seen taking a specific road.

It added miles to the trip, but they had no trouble on the way to Indianapolis. Actually, to a compound in Eagle Creek Park, built on the shores of Eagle Creek Reservoir. They weren't planning on going into the city proper. Their contact in Eagle Creek Compound warned Leonard against it.

The reason the Compound had developed over the last two years was the breakdown of authority in the city, and loss of services early on. Gangs had run wild and killed or driven out just about every honest, peaceful person there at the time of the President's Peak Oil announcement.

"We're careful here," Justine, the Mayor of the Compound, said. "We keep our defenses up all the time. We trade a little with individuals still living in the city. Mostly things we can't make ourselves. Those in the city just go from business to business, looking for anything they think might be of value to us."

"I see. Thank you for the warning," Leonard said.

As they were loading up to leave, Mike came up to him and asked for a private talk. "Sure," Leonard said, leading Mike a little ways away from the others.

"I heard a chance remark by one of the guys unloading the trailers. Something I think we should check out."

"What?" Leonard asked.

"Well, it seems that the Boone County Special Response Team has a Cadillac-Gage V-150 armored car in Zionsville. No military armament, but I think it could still be useful. Be safer checking things out than the H1. I'd like to check it out. See if it's available."

“I’m not sure exactly what one looks like, but if you think it would help us with ambushes, I’m all for it. You know how to get there?”

Mike nodded.

“Okay,” Leonard said. “You take us there and we’ll see what we can find out.”

It was late in the day when they got to Zionsville. The place was abandoned for the most part. The V-150 was easy to spot. It was stopped out in the middle of the main street, just sitting there. It was covered with graffiti.

Cautiously, Mike approached the vehicle and then looked inside. Everything looked intact, if dirty, from setting out in the weather with the doors and hatch wide open. When Mike tried the starter there was no response.

A set of batteries that would work were quickly swapped for the dead ones and Mike tried again. The engine turned over, but a quick look at the fuel gauge, working now with electrical power from the batteries, showed a possible reason the armored car wouldn’t start. The needle of the fuel gauge didn’t even come up off the peg.

Another few minutes and five gallons of fuel was added to the vehicle’s fuel tank and Mike, after priming the injector pump of the diesel engine, tried again. This time the engine fired, coughed, and then caught, rumbling quietly amid the cheers at Mike’s success.

“Let’s find the police station and see if they have some spares. And maybe a manual.”

It took a little while to find a telephone book to look up the address for the police station. Fortunately the telephone book had a map of the small town. The police station wasn’t far and the convoy, now plus one, went that way.

To Mike’s delight, he found most of what he wanted in the police garage. An extra set of run flat tires, an engine manual, and a basic operating manual for the V-150. There was a set of tools for it that had originally been carried on-board. They were loaded up inside with the manuals. The tires were handled with the pallet handler and manpower onto Rig #3 multipurpose trailer flat bed.

They didn’t see anyone the entire time. They were about ready to leave, when Mike was satisfied the engine and transmission of the V-150 were up to road travel. But he took Leonard aside again and said, “You know, Leonard, there might be some useful stuff in the police station. It’s abandoned, after all. What could it hurt if we took a look and salvaged whatever we could.”

Leonard had thought about trying to do some salvage, but it didn’t set very well with him. But Mike was right. The place was obviously abandoned. “Let’s do it,” Leonard told Mike.

The decision made, no time was lost going through the police station. Leonard was glad they did. Someone had beaten them to some things, obviously, from the way the inside was

trashed. But one room had defeated the salvagers or looters, depending on how you looked at the situation. The evidence room had been broken into and, Leonard suspected, all the drugs and weapons being held taken for use by whoever had broken in the first time.

But the heavy steel door and cross bars of the other room were no match to the portable welding unit that was part of the prime movers' basic equipment. Mike whistled loud and long at the treasure trove contained in the police station armaments room. Racks of weapons, case after case of ammunition, riot gear, soft body armor, everything a modern police force uses was there, in one quantity or another.

Leonard took it all, surprised the individual officers hadn't cleaned the place out when things went sour. But he would put it to good use. Most of it was useable by his own people, particularly the body armor and the heavier weapons.

Among the items most coveted was a Barrett M82A1 almost identical to the one Mike already had. He and one of the men that was a mechanic were discussing rigging a mount for the V-150.

It was getting dark and Leonard didn't want to hang around. They took up their positions in the vehicles, and Mike led off again, this time in the V-150 with two additional men, the H1 bringing up the rear with three men.

They didn't go far. Mike found a large open area, and for the first time Leonard had the drivers of the vehicles actually pull around into a circle for protection. Guards were posted and everyone took a turn looking over the V-150 before eating supper and turning in.

The salvaging of the police equipment opened a door. Not that the operation was a democracy, it wasn't, but Leonard preferred to have a consensus agreeable to what he wanted to do. He was reluctant to start salvaging on a regular basis, but could see the advantages for himself, his employees, and the places where the goods would eventually wind up when they were traded off, which most of the items would be.

So, despite the dangers Justine had warned him about, the convoy went into Indianapolis to see what they could find that might turn a profit in trade. Which was what Leonard and most of the group did. Oh, if they found something of personal appeal, it was taken and kept, with only a couple of the people only looking for themselves. Using the area telephone book they had hit likely spots and loaded up.

When they left the next evening, Leonard had to admit that they'd made a good haul, and only been shot at once. Leonard was taking Alex some equipment that would be useful on the ranch, and plenty of goods that those in rural areas would welcome in trade. Leonard had found that antique stores had many things that were useful in a limited fuel, limited electricity lifestyle.

With that in mind, and the goods to trade, Leonard had the convoy stopping in places, mostly small towns, where there appeared to be a peaceful group of people trying to stay alive and eek out a living. The trading and bartering became a standard, even on the trips with loads to specific destinations.

Word quickly spread, much as it had about the point to point hauls that Leonard was doing, about the trading stops. Prissy radioed Leonard a list of the towns near the route they were traveling that wanted him to stop.

A side benefit was that the localities that profited by Leonard's business were much less likely to assist in any ambush plans, and very likely to actively try and prevent them. At the least, Leonard was warned more than once by locals of potential sites to avoid in their area.

With the trading going on, Leonard was asked, and agreed to, carry mail to and from the locations the convoys were going. That task stayed small, for the convoys were only traveling around the middle of the country.

The last trip that summer was to Marietta, Georgia, a suburb just north of Atlanta proper. Leonard noted Mike's eagerness to get there with the load of fuel the town was asking for, in return for full loads of food stuffs going back north.

Leonard was situated now where he could buy loads he wanted for delivery where he wanted. He was able to make slightly more profit that way, and had more flexibility. Instead of much of the commerce going directly from buyer to seller, with Leonard just the transport, people and communities started contacting Leonard, through the ranch, to buy and sell goods that he would move where needed.

With the deal done in Marietta, again with no problems, Leonard sprung the news on Mike. "I've been talking to some of the locals. Kennesaw is just north of here. From some of the documents I found in Zionsville, Kennesaw has a couple of the V-150's that the government had sold or given to police units here and there.

"Kennesaw isn't abandoned, according to my source, but I'm hoping you'll be willing to try to do a deal for at least one of the V-150's.

Leonard nodded. He was as sure as he could be that the presence of the armored vehicle, and the word of it getting around, was helping their security. The convoy took the short trip to Kennesaw to look for the V-150's.

Leonard and Mike found them, all right. Mike's eagerness to find them had been transmitted to those that had the two rigs under their control. Leonard saw the smiles on the peoples faces when the convoy came to a stop at the edge of the town. There was a whole crowd standing around the two V-150's.

"I think I screwed up, Leonard," Mike said sadly.

"Yeah. So be it. Might as well hear what they're asking."

Leonard and Mike went to talk with the man that appeared to be in charge. He was. Introduced himself as Mayor and owner of the two armored vehicles. Leonard saw the disgruntled looks some of the group gave the Mayor at his implied ownership of the V-150's. It

gave him an idea on how to handle the situation. Leonard had doubts about the Mayor really being the mayor.

He sure wasn't going to do the trade that the Mayor wanted, which, when voiced, stirred a few more of his fellow citizens.

"We want a full delivery, like you took to some of the other cities, of food, fuel, and other things." The 'other things' weren't specified. "And a thousand ounces of gold."

There were gasps all about, except from the Mayor and a couple of those standing close to him.

Mike gulp and muttered another apology to Leonard. "I see," Leonard said, speaking more to the crowd than to the Mayor. "No deal. And we won't be back. You're blackballed."

"What?" the Mayor yelled, amidst all the other yells, which unlike the Mayor's, which was directed at Leonard, were directed at the Mayor. "Wait a minute!" the Mayor yelled, stepping forward. "You can't do that!"

"Sure I can," Leonard said. "It's my prerogative where I do business. I'm not about to aid and abet this kind of activity. People think they can gouge me and everyone will try. I'll give you fair value for the two rigs, and all the tires, spare parts, and whatnot that goes with them. Say, four-thousand gallons of diesel, two-thousand gallons of gasoline, and a hundred ounces of gold. And we keep doing business on a fair and equitable basis."

The Mayor blustered and threatened and cajoled himself right out of his position as Mayor. An impromptu election was held right there in the road, and the new Mayor stepped up and shook Leonard's hand. "You have a deal."

Now there were cheers all around, with the new Mayor and Leonard surrounded and pounded on the back for making such a good deal now and for deals in the future. The ex-Mayor and his cronies left hurriedly when a few people began looking at them with fire in their eyes, possibly planning some harm for them.

The deal done, the convoy entered the town, picked up all the items related to the V-150's, including a few things that Leonard wouldn't have asked for, but took anyway since the town decided it was part of the deal.

The fuel was off-loaded, and the rest of the day was taken up by those in the town bartering with those in the convoy with goods to trade.

Unlike the V-150 picked up in Zionsville, these two units were pristine, though their fuel tanks were empty. On orders of the ex-mayor, unless Leonard missed his guess. Nothing was said about that and Leonard had them refueled with some of the diesel in Rig #3's multipurpose trailer.

Feeling relatively safe, Leonard kept the convoy in Kennesaw that night. They headed out the next morning, with one of the V-150's on a multipurpose trailer and the H1 and second of the Kennesaw V-150's pulling tail-end Charlie duty.

Leonard, planning to lay over the rest of the winter at the Ranch, got word from Prissy that Rapid City, South Dakota was in dire need of food. Leonard asked the group and all were eager to help.

The convoy picked up everything they could at the ranch and dropped off the H1 and one of the Kennesaw V-150s. Next they went to the refinery and took on full loads of fuel. Stopping at Tom's ranch, they took on all the stock that he had for sale, and then headed North as fast as they could safely go.

It was already late fall, and a hard one at that. Winter came whistling down from the Arctic, catching the convoy in the middle of Nebraska. Snow was coming down almost too fast to see to drive.

But all the drivers were experienced, and the convoy kept rolling. They normally stopped at night, because of the danger of attacks. The chance of an attack was slim in the middle of a blizzard, so they kept going in the snow. The V-150's had no trouble making it, and neither did the prime movers, even with the heavy loads of their oversize trailers.

Leonard felt bad about the stock. There was nothing he could do. They all froze to death in the trailer. It was important to keep going during the cold weather so they could get them to their destination without them thawing. There wasn't room for them in the reefers, even if they could figure a way to do it.

The blizzard kept going south and the convoy kept going north in the bitter cold. They pulled into Rapid City in the middle of the night and just parked where they were. The V-150 crews took to the rigs to get some sleep while two people stood guard until daylight.

It was some surprised residents the next morning when they ventured out and found the convoy sitting there. Leonard was up, drinking tea, when he saw the approach. In his heavy Carhartt Arctic parka and bibs, shoepacks on his feet, he went outside to talk to them.

He could immediately see that they were desperate for the food. All five of them looked gaunt in their heavy clothes. Arrangements were made to get the cargos unloaded. With numerous apologies, Leonard was paid three-quarters of the agreed upon price for the cargo and delivery. "Some of our people just couldn't come up with much. We're barely holding on here."

Leonard nodded. "You can owe me for a while. Why do you stay here, in weather like this?"

"Our homes and lives are here," said one of the men.

But another piped up. "But now... there is very little of either left. We've been discussing a mass move south, but it's so dangerous out there. You are the only people willing to travel, seems like."

"There is no way to do it," said another. She looked around. "We'll probably all die out here in just a matter of a couple more years, going the way we are."

"Now, if we could hire you to move us..." said the fourth person, with a smile, obviously not meaning it.

"Well, why not?" Leonard said. "If you radio the details of what is needed to the ranch, we might just be able to do it next summer. That is, if you have a place to go."

"You're serious?" asked the fifth person.

Leonard nodded. "Need a few conventional trucks in addition to ours for the goods, and some busses for the people. Actual travel time would only be a few days, barring problems. Say, five ounces of gold per person, or the equivalent, and the rights to salvage what we want in the city, I'm sure we can do it."

The five looked around at each other.

"Everyone in the area is going to have to be told about this and make their own decision," said the woman.

"Of course," Leonard replied. "You just radio your decision and the particulars sometime before mid-spring. If it's a go, we'll need to do it late summer, early fall, to avoid the worst of the weather."

It took four days of cold, hard, nasty work to get the dead stock out of the trailer. But it was done before things started to warm up a little and they lost none of the meat to spoilage, though there was some loss in the moving process.

Leonard and the others were glad to be headed back south when everything was unloaded and cleaned up.

Leonard's plan again was to lay over at the ranch, but when they arrived, Prissy had several messages waiting for him. People all over the country had things they wanted to trade for the things they needed. Leonard talked to his crews, and all but one was willing to keep going. The one dissenter was easy to replace. There was a standing list of people that wanted to be a part of Leonard's operation.

So Leonard and crew set out again, in the midst of winter, At least they were going south. To Galveston, TX, to pick up three big reefers of frozen fish for distribution to points north. Leonard was buying it with beef and fresh foods, and would sell it in turn, where people would take it for what they had to sell.

Leonard Dobbs - Peak Oil Entrepreneur – Epilog

While he was in the Houston and Galveston area, he made a concerted effort to find the second turnkey, skid mounted refinery like the one operating in Oklahoma. There was a certain exploratory oil well in southeast Missouri that would produce useable amounts of fuel, if he could get his hands on both the refinery and power plant for it. The well had been capped after test pumping, as it wasn't productive enough, at the time, to be put into production. But any oil is more oil than no oil.

Leonard went off on his own, on foot, checking the names of the ships for a likely one. He found it, finally. There were even some people aboard. The Captain and half a dozen of the crew. It was like taking candy from a baby. The group was living on fish. For a mixed load of food and fuel, so the ship could head to South America, the cargo was his. But it would need to be quick. The first chance they had of getting fuel and they were gone.

Taking them at their word, Leonard expedited the trip they were on, and headed for Oklahoma for the fuel and back to the ranch for the food. As soon as he found the rig, Leonard had contacted Prissy. She was putting out the word that Leonard wanted drivers for a special run.

He would have liked to have made the move all in one run, but there just weren't enough drivers willing to take the chance, even with Leonard's assurance that there would be an armed escort the entire way.

So they took three runs to move the refinery to southeast Missouri. The oil well was out in the middle of nowhere, fenced off, the pump still installed, but without a motor. Which didn't matter much since they had no way of powering the refinery anyway.

Leonard put out the word, through Prissy and the Amateur radio network that he was looking for a Caterpillar multi-unit shipment on the highways of the US, somewhere. He knew it was like looking for a needle in a haystack, but it couldn't hurt any to try, he decided.

But with enough shaking of the haystack, the needle will drop out. It never occurred to Leonard that the power plant would be at one of the Caterpillar plants. He thought it was on the road, somewhere. It took only two trips to get the power plant from Peoria to the refinery in Southeast Missouri.

Now he had it, Leonard realized, but who was going to run it. It took some time, but Leonard found enough people with refinery experience, willing to move to the refinery site, to get it up and running the following year.

Leonard wasn't there when the power plant first produced electricity, or when the refinery produced its first gallon of fuel. He was in the process of moving everyone from Rapid City, South Dakota, that wanted to head south for greener pastures. He was able to round up more drivers and trucks than he had to get the refinery. Word was getting around Leonard's was the outfit to work for.

It was a convoy matched only by a military mobilization. Besides the three Kenworth prime mover rigs, there were eleven automobile haulers, twenty-three buses, and fifty-one semi trucks pulling double flatbeds or box trailers.

It took several days to get to Lubbock, with whom the Rapid City residents had arranged to take them in. To avoid wasting fuel, most of the trucks and busses were left where they would be safe, and the drivers that didn't opt to stay in Lubbock were bussed back to their homes.

With the Missouri refinery working, Leonard was able to sell fuel for less than he had to when getting it from Oklahoma. George saw the handwriting on the wall and eased up his pricing, too. The full production of both refineries was being consumed as quickly as it was produced, but Leonard refused to gouge in order to get more for the fuel. It was too important for the recovery of the country.

There were small cottage industries starting up all over the country. The few cities that continued to exist somewhat as before were the only sources of technical items, other than mining them in abandoned cities. Scavenging and salvaging could be a very dangerous occupation, and often as not, the specific item wanted wasn't found, anyway.

Mostly what was wanted by most of the rural areas of the country were medium tech things, or electrically powered items that could be converted to manual power. There was also a market for conversion units, where gasoline or kerosene was available. Gasoline motors to drive formerly electrical units, and kerosene for heating, lighting, and absorption refrigeration units.

Manual and gasoline powered washing machines. Manual sewing machines. Non electrical water well pumps. Small biodiesel plants and stills for making alcohol fuel were needed and wanted. Wood gas generators to convert light and medium trucks were marketable.

Those in the cities wanted food. Fresh vegetables and fruits. Meats. And preserved food of all types. Coastal towns provided fish. The fishing became better and better as the seas recovered from the heavy over fishing pre-Peak Oil. Those with oar or sail boats did well. Those with diesel powered fishing boats, when they could get the diesel fuel, did tremendously well.

Though firewood became a major commodity, the forests began to re-grow faster than they were consumed.

Some thought that the re-commissioning of several coal fired steam locomotives from railroad museums would compete with Leonard's almost monopoly of transport. Though it took a few markets away, where the tracks went through towns, Leonard got even more business than before taking things to and from rail heads.

Things returned to a 1890' – 1920's technical capability fairly quickly, with some specific higher technical processes and goods available in some areas, mostly cities.

One thing in particular was more similar to the fifteen hundreds operations. That was the acquisition of spices from where they were grown, brought to the US and distributed. Modern transportation, where available, was used, almost exclusively in the US, but the adventurous

souls that took up the trade at great risk, reaped great profits. The same was true for tea and coffee. Both were nitch markets, but very profitable, and very dangerous.

Though it was many years before the open areas of the US were as crime free as before Peak Oil, Leonard began sending out convoys composed of conventional trucks and trailers, accompanied by a well manned and armed V-150 and an equally well armed and manned prime mover with two or three of the oversize trailers.

Gary had completed several different versions of the oversized trailers that the prime movers could use so effectively. Years later, when Leonard's efforts in the time immediately after the Peak Oil announcement were recognized, the prime movers and the trailers were a big part of the monument.

End *****

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