

## Masters Workshop Proposed for Europe

*The following is a note from Nicola Pecorini, who is organizing the next Master's workshop. -Ed.*

Steadicam has certainly gone a long way since its creation. Thanks to the technological achievements and to the efforts and research of the first pioneers, practically all technical limits have been overcome, video assists exist that are more sensitive than the film stock, servo systems and radio systems are as accurate as possible, nuclear 12 volt batteries remain charged for years.

Two factors have fueled its development: the passion and enthusiasm of early operators who dedicated their best years and energies to the cause and to the workshop experience.

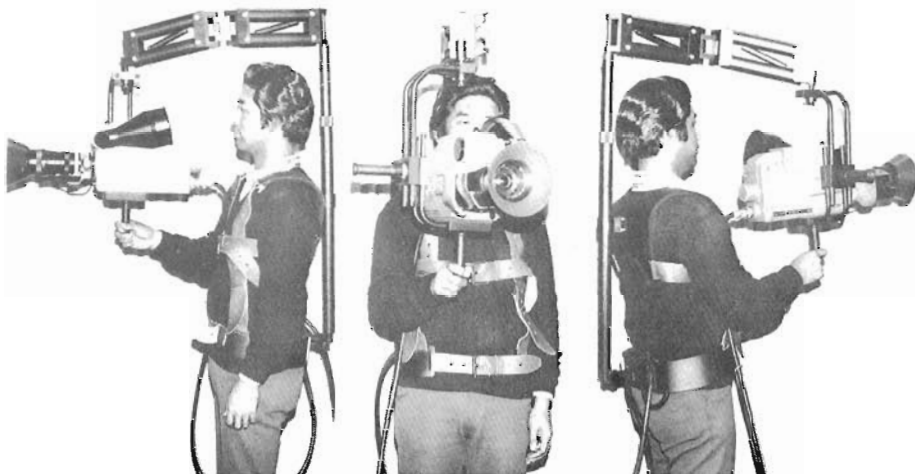
It's at the workshops, in fact, that we exchange experiences, technical solutions, spare parts, electronic gadgets; venture hypotheses to be experienced by the individual and verified at the next workshop. Without the workshops and the attitude of the participants, Steadicam would have had a tougher adolescence and wouldn't be so popular.

We want to raise the level of confrontation, research, aesthetics, to go beyond the current bounds: the goal is to advance the state of the art. The tool is the Masters Workshop.

The first ever Steadicam Masters Workshop was held in June 1988 in Rockport, Maine. With all the limits of a world premier, it has been a great success and nobody walked away unsatisfied and unrewarded. Unfortunately June is one of the busiest months in Europe and Rockport is not exactly around the corner. Few European operators were able to attend.

Together with the Steadicam Operators Association, we therefore decided to repeat the experience on this

*Masters continued on page 6*



## The Contraption Wars

### *Ripoffs, Copies, and Imitations*

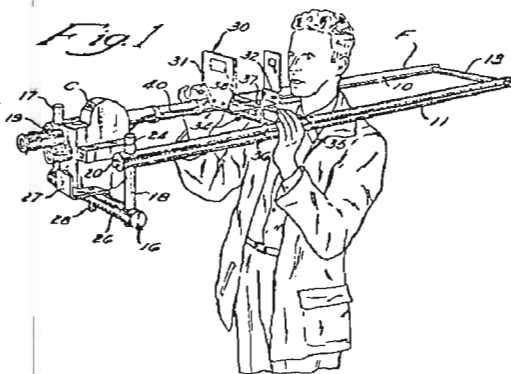
There are piles of onion skin, files of agreements, briefs, patents, lawsuits, drafts, blue wrappers, torts and retorts stowed all over my house in Philadelphia. In decorated folders are seven U.S.A. and forty-two foreign patents, plus divisional cases, continuations, re-issues and pending applications for a dozen more. I imagine that if all of this paper were rounded up and stacked, the pile would reach the roof.

More than just my 18-year stint as a sometime-inventor is documented here - the character of the whole great stream of human inventiveness can be inferred by examining its contents. We advance on the strength of what has been discovered before, with many small steps and just a few great leaps and much re-inventing of things now forgotten. Here around me are copies of hundreds of other-people's patents - the ghosts of earlier thinkers on matters related to the stabilization of cameras.

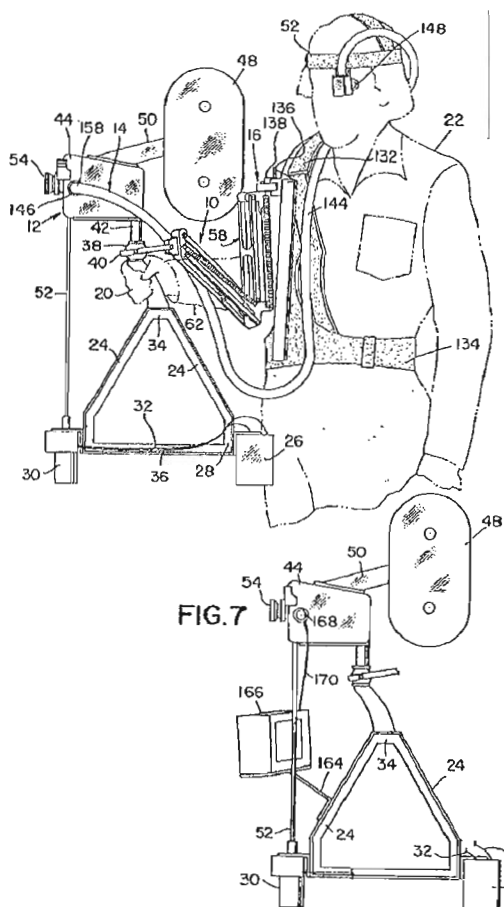
Here's good old Howard K. Dearborn, inventor. I once thought a great deal about this guy and his patent. My earliest "pole rig" version was abandoned partly because his ghost turned

up in my patent search. (I wonder if that's his likeness in the patent drawings, holding his invention? My draftsman sort of drew me, after all, including the period haircut!).

*Wars continued on page 2*



H.K. Dearborn c. 1960



G.W. Brown c. 1974

### Wars continued from page 1

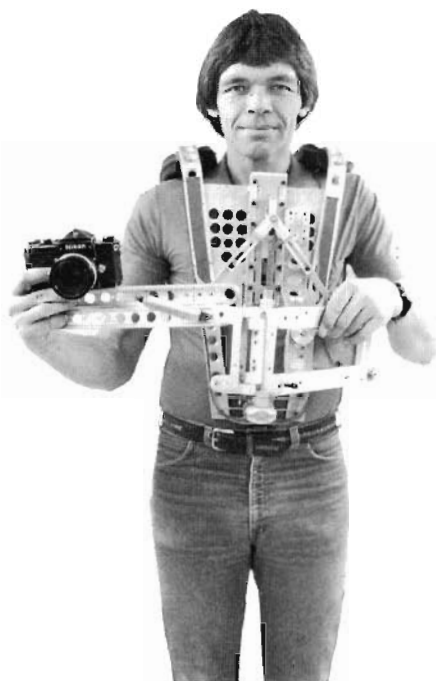
The Patent Office threw Dearborn and 45 other inventors at me, forcing me to "distinguish" over them all. Since then my own patents have been "cited" dozens of times against inventions that came later, and to the extent that these inventors' efforts were scuttled as a result, I'm sure they cursed my name, without necessarily believing that their work was in any way derivative. It is human nature to be convinced of the originality of one's own stuff. And now of course *all of us* lie in wait on the shelves in Washington to arise and irritate future practitioners of "the art," as the Patent Office calls it, and spur them on to invent around us; and the Stream will continue to flow on beyond even the memory of our obscure contraptions.

Meanwhile... Here's a chronicle of "The Contraption Wars," plus Bizarre Imitations, Astonishing Knock-offs and one shameful Excess of Defensive Zeal...

### Panavision

The Steadicam® patent describes perhaps the most fundamental mechanism known so far that permits a human-carried object to be in "controlled isolation" as we know it. To date, no other device has been able to approach these results without infringement (by combining: "expanded camera equipment, remote viewfinder, and pivotable/rotatable connections between camera, 'support means,' and operator"). Many, however, have tried...

Panavision was first up to bat. Chairman Robert Gottschalk had seen my early filmed demo and was evidently in a fever to devise a machine that could do the same trick. He stalled me by saying he was interested, and began what reportedly became a 2.4 million dollar effort to prevail over Cinema Products, who had quickly become my licensee. At first Panavision had no idea how we did it, and Gottschalk's engineers were instructed to make a prototype based on the spring-suspended fish-carrying devices Robert had seen on bicycles in the Orient. Friends in the business reported that the resulting gizmo, with camera suspended by bungee cords, made an appearance on "Black Sunday" for John Alonzo, DP, who later told the Academy Awards Committee that he had seen the "Panaglide"! (Yo!)



A pre-panaglide "missing link" from Tarzana



Craig DiBona demonstrates...

Check [this](#) out: *Industrial Espionage!* I'm shooting "Marathon Man" in New York - the scene where the truck explodes in flames on 76th Street. I never leave my prototype rig alone for a moment, but as the truck starts burning, one of the teamsters tells me there's a stream of gasoline leaking from the tank of my car which is parked up the street. *The gas is running down the street toward the fire!* I hastily drive away and find a repair place across town where they plug the hole somebody stabbed in my tank with an awl. *The moment I leave, guys with bent noses show up and take lots of photos of the rig!* (Wow!)

Another round finds us secretly demonstrating the Steadicam for John Boorman at Burbank Studios. Suddenly Gottschalk himself and an engineer are caught hiding behind the scenery taking pictures and are summarily ejected, protesting that they just "happened along..."

All of this info and more was cranked into the stream of prototypes being pounded out in Tarzana, with every attempt presumably being made to differentiate their work from ours, but the darned things kept turning out to resemble Steadicams if they worked at all.

By the time CP sold our first production version, one would think that even Robert would have admitted defeat, but the great human rationalizing powers I referred to earlier must have kicked in and post-flashed his mind, for



...tilting" a bottom-heavy Panaglide for lawyers

by the time the 'Glide appeared in Canada in 1976 on "Days of Heaven", he was proudly emphasizing that its arm used different springs than ours and its camera was silent and light. (The latter item is still its great virtue - see our letter to Panavision in this issue!) Haskell Wexler took over as DP and found it in the camera truck and soon sent some photos which astounded and angered us. We immediately authorized Weiser & Stapler, my trusty patent attorneys, to commence legal proceedings..

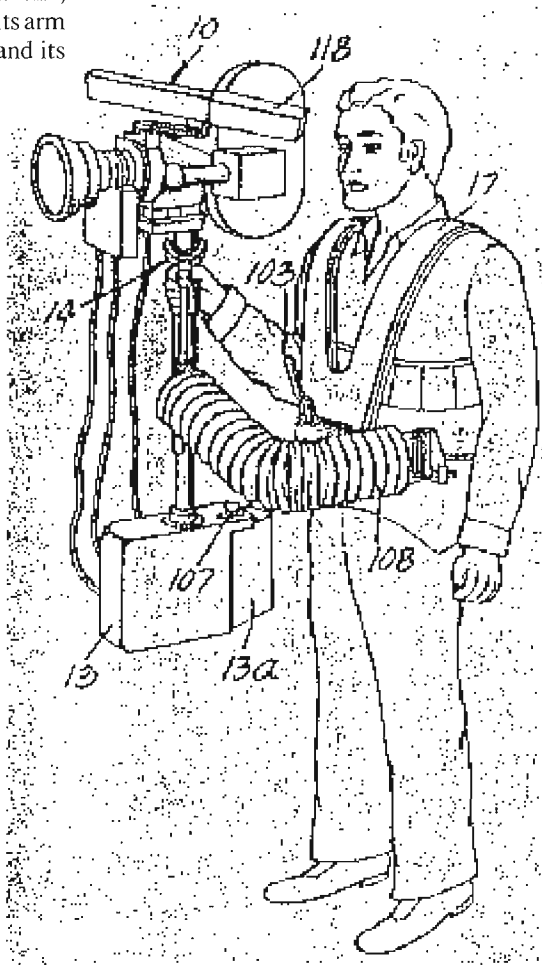
What a shock. I found it hard to believe that this legendary film-equipment guy and his famous company could do this to us - and more! For instance Gottschalk actually had the nerve to demonstrate the 'Glide in contention for the Oscar, and when the Technical Committee spurned him and voted for us, he persuaded the Academy Board of Governors to overturn the vote and delay our award for a year because of the pending suit. (One wit on the committee observed that perhaps Gottschalk should

have entered the Panaglide for some sort of religious award, because of its miraculous resemblance to the Steadicam!)

Finally his attorneys pointed out that these machinations practically guaranteed that triple damages would be awarded for the harm done to Steadicam, and he capitulated at last and settled out of court. Panavision has paid us a royalty ever since on all reported rentals of the Panaglide, and the Oscar was a shoo-in a year later because the Technical Committee was so steamed.

Incidentally, Gottschalk's attempts to patent the Panaglide were emasculated (as it were) by the priority of my patent, to the extent that the only allowed "claim" was for an LED level indicator!

This was World War I! After winning this one, we thought that no future infringer could even bring on a sweat! Indeed some of them proved to be borderline comical...



Pana-patent, c. 1976. Check the shoes

## Shinko

Suddenly, at Photokina in Cologne, friends began telling us of a camera stabilizer hidden in the booth at Shinko Electric. Various spies volunteered to get a look and collect brochures, and we decided to march on over there. Of course, Ed DiGiulio and I were recognized immediately, and they tried to cover the thing up.



Instructor from the Maine Shinko Workshop "treating smoothly"

Ultimately we had to bring suit in Japan, which is an experience in and of itself. It requires a Japanese attorney, deep pockets and lots of time, but the good news is that the Japanese generally respond fairly and will honor your Japanese patent if your claims have overwhelming moral force. After several years of expensive maneuvers, we received a beautifully hand written document of capitulation. Accompanying it was a wretched typewritten translation saying in part: "...we also stopig the production and the sale concerning the products which are doubtful to be any related with said both patents... our company desires to treat smoothly with sincerity based upon the respect of the industrial proprietary."

Looking at the photos, you may be less than astounded to find out that it was our arm patent that prevailed. Although the Shinko device appeared to be ineffective, we had to defend our "industrial proprieties" or leave the field open to others.

**Wars continued on page 8**





Continental Body-mount

*Wars continued from page 3*

The next installment was noticeably devoid of humour...

*Continental Camera*

This one required a real battle - long, costly, and acrimonious. Maybe the Steadicam patent is difficult to understand, or maybe attorneys tend to be overly optimistic about their clients' chances of avoiding infringement suits, but in many cases our adversaries seem to embark upon these unstable seas with about the same grip on reality as the Spanish Armada!

John Carroll and Ernst Nettmann believed their "Body-mount" was different. It sort of hung sideways, after all, and didn't use an actual arm, and their feelings were hurt when we concluded that they infringed and asked them to desist. Although we didn't believe that the device was of much use, or commercially threatening, it couldn't remain unchallenged, so I had to fly from an award ceremony for Steadicam at the BKSTS banquet in London direct to a rooftop shootout in LA mit attorneys in order to demonstrate infringement beyond a shadow of doubt. They weren't convinced.

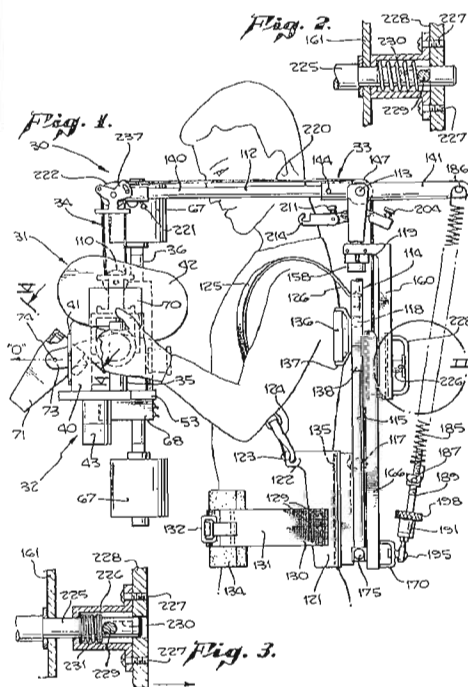
The result was a paper war that spanned years, and produced challenges to my patent which persuaded us to have it re-examined and reissued by the Patent Office in order to prevail

decisively over Continental. In the end the Body-mount was either abandoned or just withered away. We never got to court, and never had a formal surrender ceremony with ritual humiliations and pillaging, but eventually their attorneys must have advised slinking off, and suddenly it was over.

The course of this struggle provided a great lesson in obscure offensive and defensive maneuvers over intellectual property. Many people don't understand that even if a device is patented it may still be infringing on an earlier patent. Your application can only "claim" what's new and different about your invention, but if any aspect of what you're selling is previously claimed in someone else's patent, for example, you may get to meet the local version of the redoubtable Weiser & Stapler!

Unless of course you are a large global superpower...

**"One Bulgarian guy was terrific and strong like bull, but sweated so profusely that he had to frequently empty his shoes."**

Continental haircut, c 1980  
Who is *this* guy?*The Russians*

Patents in the USSR used to be of dubious value. I know. In the beginning we sold ten Steadicams to various Soviet studios and I met several eastern bloc operators at shows like Photokina. One Bulgarian guy was terrific and strong like bull, but sweated so profusely that he had to frequently empty his shoes.

Anyway, when Jimmy Carter pulled out of the Olympics and embarrassed the Soviets over Afghanistan, our current order for ten more units was instantly cancelled. We soon heard that they were building them in Bulgaria, and that they were made of iron and heavy as hell. The Russian operators supposedly preferred to use our old ones.



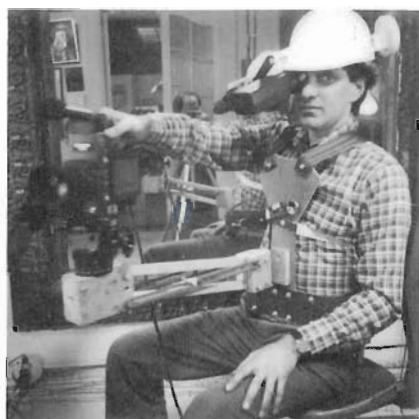
Bulgarian-cam in missionary position

Several years later I finally saw a picture of it on a brochure posted in the Soviet booth at the London show. The operator might have been the Bulgarian. (He looked damp!)

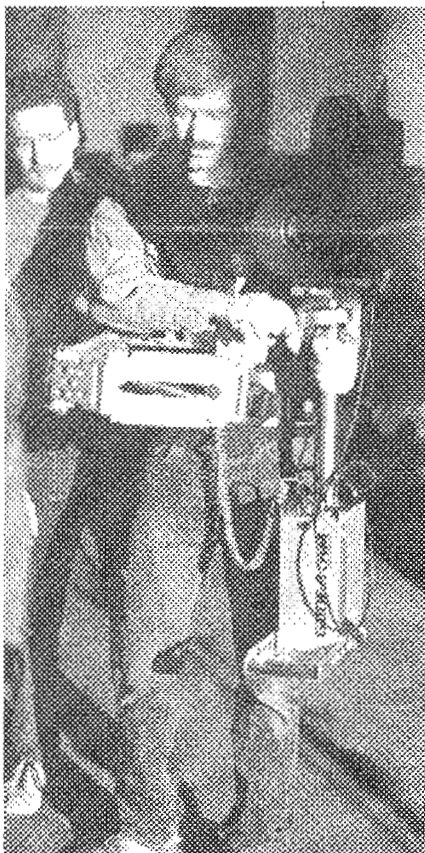
Rumours have foretold new Russian orders for years, but none have materialized. Perhaps perestroika will turn this around. I can assure you that we won't be suing anyone for infringement. I don't want any adversaries with nuclear weapons.

### Imitations

There have been an astonishing number of imitations, and some are quite sophisticated. When the original sells for as much as a pair of BMW's, there is definitely an incentive to build your own. As long as they aren't offered for sale or flaunted as rentals, I personally am for it. I can't answer for CP, but perhaps someday we can come up with an amnesty program and trade them in for the genuine article.



Whimsical-cam



Serious-cam

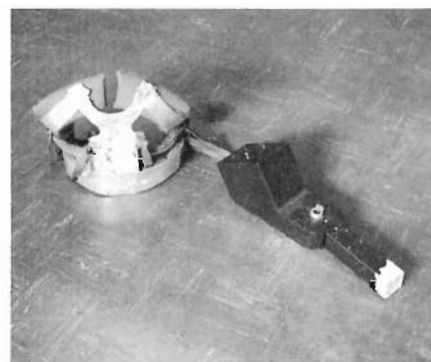
Some are whimsical and experimental, and others appear to be serious functioning machines whose owners should just lie low and not advertise!

Of the whole collection, the most interesting knock-offs are third-world. While in Bangkok to give Steadicam lessons, I discovered a brilliantly-made leather and aluminum copy of the vest, and a weighted, *featureless* dummy sled built in the machine shop of Thai filmmaker Prince Bhanu for the sole purpose of preventing his cameramen from 1. sweating up the brand-new CP vest, and 2. falling down and denting the real sled!

The vest was fabulous and much more desirable than the plastic and velcro one we sell, but it was way out of my price range - it cost the prince \$25 to build it!

The most remarkable of all imitations was built in Sri Lanka by a very gifted local engineer and machinist who copies (by eye) any piece of film equipment, including Elemacks, cranes, and lights for renting out locally. While there to work on "Indiana Jones II," I kept hearing about this guy and his copy of the Steadicam! One evening on the way back to the hotel in Kandy I spotted what looked like a Tulip Crane with an oversized rear end parked outside a shop along the main road. In the window was a profusion of film gear, and we figured this had to be "the guy."

I knocked at the house in back, and



"Practice" vest and sled for the Thai Steadicam Workshop

he opened the door and appeared to recognize me immediately (from *Cinematographer* articles, I heard later) because he started laughing hysterically.

After I strangled him for a while, he showed me his equipment including a fabulous Steadicam knock-off made of steel, canvas and an old Chrysler torsion-bar. He apologized incessantly because it was rusting, but explained that aluminum, velcro, titanium, etc. are unobtainable in Sri Lanka. Even lead can't be found, hence the huge crane weights made from lengths of railroad track. Can you imagine? For that matter, imagine working 12,000 miles from both CP and Seitz! ("Just kidding... Where's everybody going? Come baaack!")

*Wars continued on page 10*



Sri Lankan Steadicam awaits shipment of WD-40.





Garrett greets Sri Lankan inventor

**Wars** continued from page 9

### Trade Marks

Not only do we have to protect the bloody patents, but we must also stop unauthorized use of the the precious word "Steadicam®" or it may get to be as generic as kleenex.

For example, we must attempt to discourage the Hasbro Toy Company from selling "G.I. JOE -Repeater - the Steadi-Cam Machine Gunner."



Check *this* thing out - their designer must have seen John Ward's Steadicam arms in the movie "Aliens" This toy includes "Electro-mechanical machine gun and body mount." (Heden motors sold separately?)

### Jack Imes Jr.

As promised, the Wretched Excess of Defensiveness Award.

It wasn't deliberate. I was leaving on vacation when someone sent me an article from *Cinemagic* magazine titled "The Floating Effect" which offered plans for a home-made camera stabilizer using a crutch, a shower ball joint, hinges, and football pads. Just send eight stamps to Jack Imes, Iowa city, for complete xeroxed instructions. At first glance it seemed to be a joke - there was Jack in his big old shorts, looking very serious, like somebody's first ad in *Cinematographer*, but he's wearing a junk-caricature of the Steadicam!

Upon closer inspection I could see that he was serious, and that his cheapo version might work just fine with light cameras. He had it just right, and he must have been a very clever guy to come up with this just so his readers could "save \$16,000!" (Jack, what about the other \$24,000?)

Unfortunately I showed his article to my secretary, and jokingly said "We oughta go after this guy! Show this to Weiser, ha, ha." Then I left for Australia. I should have known.

She sent it to Weiser who landed on Imes like a Panzer division. Letters, threats, and demands followed in close succession. Jack never knew what hit

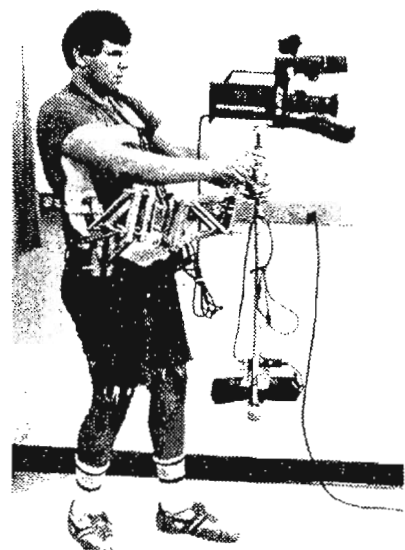
him. He sent back to us all of the postage he had collected, and all of the xeroxed sheets, and abjectly promised never to do it again or even to go to the movies for the rest of his life. It was pathetic. My stupid joke had escalated *in absentia* into WWII, and I am ashamed to admit that I have never been man enough to call him and set it right.

I just wake up sometimes in the middle of the night, picturing what this guy might have accomplished in this business if I hadn't been such a jerk.

Jack, I apologize...

Garrett Brown

*This concludes the Early History series. The next issue will be devoted to articles from our international members.*



Jack Imes Jr. and the floating effect

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