PARALYZED

One of the technicians at the 16'TT when I came to work was Virgil Justice. Virgil was well known to be able to sleep at the drop of a hat. I swear that I saw him one time in the tool crib (room were all the tools were stored) sitting on a stool with a telephone up to his ear – ASLEEP! I also think he occasionally took naps between data points on night shift.

One night on Graveyard Shift (midnight to 8:00 AM), drive control (building next door to the tunnel that converted AC power from the power company to DC power required by the tunnel motors) had a major break down. With the model ready to run and no chance of the tunnel running, the tunnel technicians basically had no duties for the rest of the night. Sometimes, a game of “knock” poker would break out but Virgil rarely participated. Instead, he went down in the “Snake Pit” (so named because of the tangle of instrumentation wires that hung from the ceiling) and arranged some data boxes as a bed and promptly went to sleep. In those days, data were stored on PAPER! – No magnetic media, so there were a lot of data boxes stored in the Snake Pit. After a period of time, the rest of the test crew quietly went down into the Snake Pit and was actually able to tie Virgil’s hands and feet together. Next, using data boxes, we walled off Virgil into a separate little room in the Snake Pit and left him to his dreams. I don’t remember what time he said he woke up but it was sometime during dayshift. Virgil later said that when he woke up in the dark and couldn’t move his hands and feet, he thought for a minute that he was paralyzed.

Bobby Berrier