

# Gusto Ship Yard, Schiedam, The Netherlands

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*Events (as remembered) during my employment in the period from around March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1966 till September 1<sup>st</sup>. 1974 by Joop (Alex) Wittmaekers.*

## **Application and First contact leading to my employment**

The advertisement in a Poly Technical magazine (September/October 1965), offering an interesting position with the MTI (Laboratory for the Dredging Technology), enhancing inspections and measurements on dredging installations all over the world, triggered my interests. Upon my written application for this position I received an invitation to visit the office in Delft and met with Mr. Hadjidakis. It turned out to a rather interesting meeting and I hoped and expected a positive reaction soon. However it was going to be something entirely different!

Within a few weeks I received a telegram thanking me for my visit to the MTI and pleasant meeting. Referring to my meeting with Mr. Hadjidakis I was informed that my application had been forwarded to Shipyard “Werf Gusto” (like MTI a member of the IHC-group) and the latter herewith invited me to phone their office in Schiedam in case I could be interested in the building of and working on offshore platforms. So I called and with Mr. van der Meer (head of P&R) a meeting was agreed upon. Upon presenting myself at the Reception I was met by Mr. Bart van Dam and guided into a meeting room (?).

There I was informed that “Werf Gusto” was in the process of building a Self Elevating Platform to be used for the building of a tunnel in the river “Rio Parana” in Argentine.

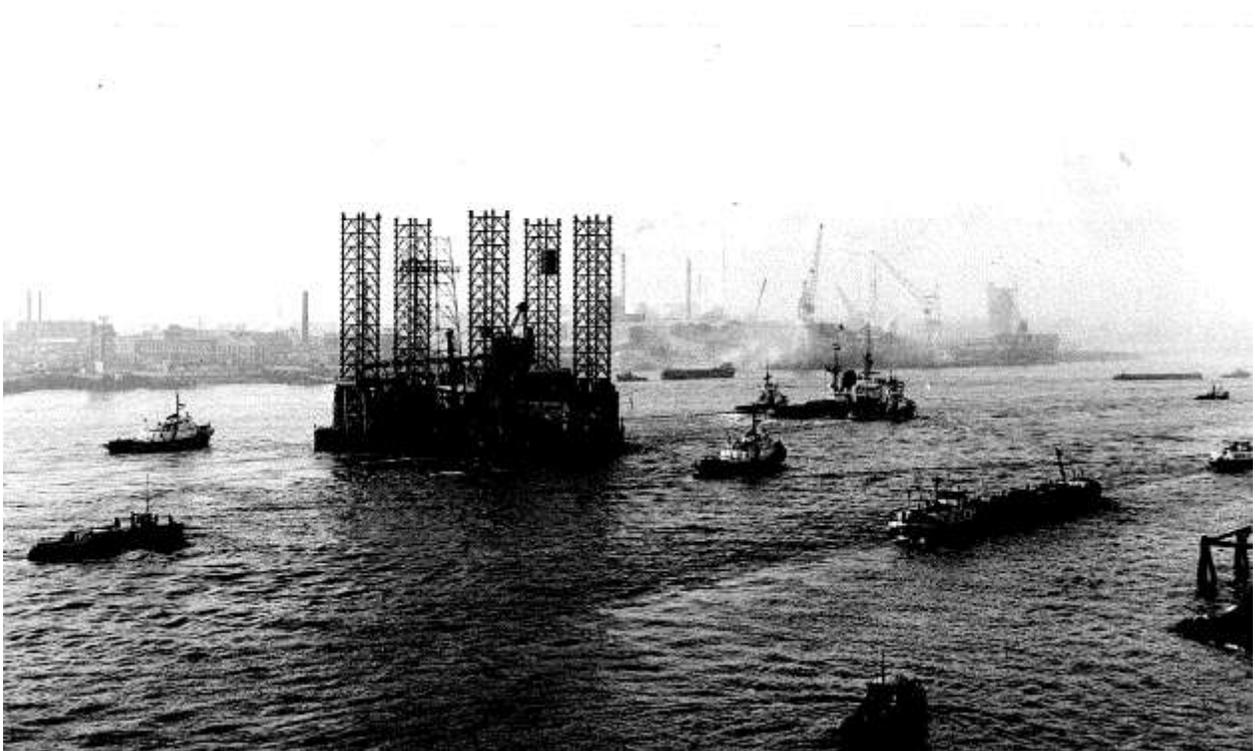


After completion of the platform it was to be transported to Argentine and under the supervision of a Gusto representative the platform was to be commissioned and the local crew trained to operate it. An additional condition would be that the representative would have to travel to the site in Argentine and complete the job without any interruptions. Also the local conditions on site were such that the representative would be living alone, so without his family! And that for an estimated period of at least 9

months! After some considerations and discussions with Truus, my wife, it was decided that I would give it a try and this resulted in an invitation for a “Psycho Technical Test”, for which a written invitation would be sent to me soonest.

This test was made somewhere in Rotterdam. It resulted in yet another meeting at the yard. This time I was met at the reception by Mr. Robert Smulders, who showed me around in the “Modellenzaal”. He then introduced me to a “Meneer Guus Smulders”. Mr. Guus informed me that the yard had decided to honor the discussed position to another applicant (Co Wijchers), but since I had made a rather satisfying test and also based on future production plans, I was offered the position of “Assistant Production Manager, Mechanical” (APMM). In actual fact I was to become the assistant of the APMM (Bram Vorster). I gladly accepted this position and Mr. Robert Smulders took me to a 5 legged drilling platform (“Ile de France”), which was undergoing some final tests just in front of the yard. He handed me over to Mr. Binnema, the Production Manager, Mechanical (PMM). All I remember of this meeting is how the enthusiastic words of Mr. Binnema about the beauty of building ships and platforms swept me completely off my feet. This was going to be my future carrier!! I was sure of that!

The “Ile de France” would be leaving the yard shortly, soon to be followed by the hopper dredging vessel, which was moored a little further along the quay. Built for a Chinese client the dredger would sail to its destination and then guarded by an IHC warranty engineer (Jaap van Keulen). During my first days as Gusto employee I met and talked with Jaap while he made the final preparations for this trip. It was a very interesting talk and I was sure: I had found my future carrier.



*“Zwarte Zee”, assisted by some harbor tugs, start the long voyage to Dakar, Senegal, W. Africa*

## Employed by “Werf Gusto”

On **March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1966** I entered my employment. And living in Schiedam! First in a boarding house close to the yard. The landlady compared me with her previous guest, Bernard Celand, and found me much bigger (?). By the end of March I was handed the keys to a brand new apartment at the “Gusto Square”. No, begging you pardon: it was the “Joh. Straussplein”, in the quarter of “Groenoord”, Schiedam. Also holding residence there were, amongst others: Bram Vorster, Leo van Putten, Co Wijchers, Leidi Boon, Ruud Hommel en Bart van Dam. All Gusto employees. And more!

It demanded some (if not a lot of) adjustment for our little family, Joop, Truus and little Fred (almost 2 years): from the attractive surroundings of Hilversum in the beautiful district of ‘t Gooi, where we had all come to this world and grown up, to the bare quarter Groenoord with its sandstorms sweeping over the newly built streets and impersonal apartment blocks. Not to mention the chloric tap water! But it was “home”!

## My introduction at the Yard

Since the “Ile de France” had left for its towing voyage to Senegal and the Chinese hopper dredger was about to leave only a few sections could be found on the slipway, for the car ferry, “Free Enterprise III”, although I didn’t know that yet. What I did know, however, was that just at the bottom of the top end of the slipway the office of Mr. Olde Monnickhof (?) could be found. The man in charge of safety in general. From him I (and every other worker at the yard) was instructed about what to do and not to do and to use and wear my personal safety equipment, such as hard hat, safe shoes, gloves, etc., issued by this office. And I proofed a fast learner. Just as I left the safety office a stepped alongside of the slipway and I heard a rattling sound followed by a loud “clang”. About 2 meters in front of me a pad eye dropped onto the stone floor and only after the loud clang I mean to remember hearing some voice calling: “Look out!” (“onder-uit” in Dutch). I don’t expect that a hard hat could have saved me for some kind of “head age” but it resulted in me wearing my hard hat with much more ease in all the future years.

Later, during my 40+ years working in and for the offshore industry this ease helped me a lot and during my many teachings/trainings, I have repeated this experience often.

During my first three months of my employment I rotated between several different departments, such as “purchasing”, “work preparation”, both mechanical and steel work, “machine shop”, “pipe shop”, “wood working”, “receipt, storage and distribution”, etc., etc. familiarizing me with the various disciplines necessary for the production of such beautiful products as ships, platforms and mono buoys. It also introduced me known to many colleagues which proofed a great help during my later profession as one of the yard’s service engineers.

## De Free Enterprise III.

The seagoing ferry, similar to the two already built by the yard for the same client but larger, was getting to the point of readiness when final commissioning of technical equipment could start, and in several parts had already started. For me they had planned to work on the hydraulically operated ramps and water tight doors.



From the wooden office shed of the APM (Bram Vorster), where also the mechanical foremen Oprel, Lissenberg, De Raaj and Ben Berkhout held office, I was loaded with drawings and diagrams. I was given my first assignment, being: to find on board the various machinery and systems indicated on those drawings.

I was very fortunate that nobody refused to answer my many questions. Mr. Vorster taught me that a “stupid question was one which was never asked”!

Mr. Binnema was indeed correct when he told me that “building a ship is beautiful!”

*<<<< Watching the sailing traffic go by from my office on top deck*

A “Porte Cabin” type of office was installed on one of the still open decks and from there I could compare the actual flow of pipelines with the drawings.

Interesting, but not always fun! I remember one foreman working for the steel working department suddenly collapsed and stayed down. He had died of a sudden heart stopping. This was my first time meeting with this kind of fatality. I was in shock for several days.

This project included for me the “sea trials” and the delivery trip to the new owners in Dover. Fortunately I didn’t get sea sick; that came much later! After that . . . . .

## **The Hopper Dredger “Geopodus IX”**

Provided with hydraulic operated gate valves and bottom valves this was my newest challenge. The hydraulic actuators and pump set were supplied by the Rotterdam based company “Van Rietschoten & Houwens”. With their commissioning engineer, Ton Hovius, I happened to have an unexpected bond: like me he was born in Hilversum and we found out that his grandmother was my grandmothers’ neighbor.

Hydraulics were new to me. So I had a lot to learn. Not just the functioning of the various directional valves and pressure regulating valves, etc. but also several practical tricks. Such as filtering the contents of the hydraulic oil reservoir through a pair of nylon stockings, which Ton talked Krama’s wife into giving to us!! It was a good laugh, but it worked and we caught a “foot full of blasting grit”. We never found out who at the pipe shop had been responsible for this extra work.

And again a fatality! Some worker was missed because he hadn’t come home and his family wondered what had happened. He was found at the bottom of the ships hold (the “hopper”). Apparently he had walked on top of one of the large pipes that crossed this hold and slipped off. I was very impressed with yet another dead co-worker. But I had to learn that it wouldn’t be the last one!

The first project for the "Geopotus IX" was the deepening of the entrance to Rotterdam Harbor and for the first three weeks I joined the ship as a Gusto representative to report the ship's performance first hand. And now I also have experience in sailing an empty ship through 10 Beaufort, making a tight turn around on the North Sea! Brrrr.....!

Meanwhile I was asked by Mr. Hage whether or not I could be interested to join the "Jack-up Division". In a meeting with "Mr. Guus Smulders", on board of the "Free Enterprise 3" during the sea trials, I had already ventilated that I had such a desire indeed. Apparently Mr. Guus passed on the message to Mr. Hage.

The contract for the design, building and supply of a drilling jack-up for the Caspian Sea (USSR) had been assigned to the yard and hence the need to find a technician to be trained to become a Gusto Service Engineer ("Jackman"). Well they found me!

But it would take about another 6 months before I could join Mr. Hage. First the "Geopotus IX" had to be completed and handed over, including the 3 weeks of warranty service.

Gusto had built two jack-ups, eight legs each and with a large crane for the account of the Governmental Department for Water Works in the earlier 1960<sup>th</sup>. A company named "Bitumarin" made use of these "Crane Islands", "Lepelaar" and "Kraanvogel", for the reinforcement and extending of the piers at IJmuiden, the entrance from the North Sea into the "Noordzeekanaal" to the harbor of Amsterdam. During my training I was invited a number of times to witness the jacking operations of these platforms. I was even from time to time allowed to pull the operating levers! Now a days they would call this: "Cool Fat", I believe!



# Lepelaar verhuist volgende week naar de noordpier

Reeds sinds 1931 zijn de als vestiging bedoeling op eiland Helderse kroon-landhuizen Lepelaar en Kraasvogel heerlijklijk aan het werk bij de haven van de eilanden Helderse kroon-landhuizen. Deze werkzaamheden zijn zeer belangrijk voor de vestiging van de haven van Helder. De Lepelaar is nu verhuist naar de noordpier. De Kraasvogel zal nu de haven van de eilanden Helderse kroon-landhuizen bedienen. De Lepelaar zal nu de haven van de eilanden Helderse kroon-landhuizen bedienen. De Kraasvogel zal nu de haven van de eilanden Helderse kroon-landhuizen bedienen.

## Nieuwe pieren zijn taboe voor wandelaars

De nieuwe Helderse kroon-landhuizen zijn nu verhuist naar de noordpier. De Kraasvogel zal nu de haven van de eilanden Helderse kroon-landhuizen bedienen. De Lepelaar zal nu de haven van de eilanden Helderse kroon-landhuizen bedienen. De Kraasvogel zal nu de haven van de eilanden Helderse kroon-landhuizen bedienen.

## IJmuidense zuidpier groeide in vijf jaar ruim twee kilometer



De IJmuidense zuidpier is nu twee kilometer lang. De pier is nu twee kilometer lang. De pier is nu twee kilometer lang. De pier is nu twee kilometer lang.



De bouw van de nieuwe Helderse kroon-landhuizen is nu in volle gang. De bouw van de nieuwe Helderse kroon-landhuizen is nu in volle gang. De bouw van de nieuwe Helderse kroon-landhuizen is nu in volle gang.

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**Een koninklijk bestek**

**Renaissance**  
Koninklijk bestek voor alle diners, met een prachtig koninklijk bestek van Helderse kroon-landhuizen.

**KELTUM**  
In aflever en jasmijnplant verkrijgbaar bij de post.

Beeldmerk van de Coning & Bogen B.V.

De IJmuidense zuidpier is nu twee kilometer lang. De pier is nu twee kilometer lang. De pier is nu twee kilometer lang. De pier is nu twee kilometer lang.

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**Doden in het verkeer**  
De IJmuidense zuidpier is nu twee kilometer lang. De pier is nu twee kilometer lang. De pier is nu twee kilometer lang. De pier is nu twee kilometer lang.

**Luchtmacht biedt Schenk en Verkerk een lift aan**  
De IJmuidense zuidpier is nu twee kilometer lang. De pier is nu twee kilometer lang. De pier is nu twee kilometer lang. De pier is nu twee kilometer lang.

**Marinevlieger - van fatale duikvlucht - naar huis**  
De IJmuidense zuidpier is nu twee kilometer lang. De pier is nu twee kilometer lang. De pier is nu twee kilometer lang. De pier is nu twee kilometer lang.



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**'Menselijk falen' oorzaak van vliegtuigramp in Japan**  
De IJmuidense zuidpier is nu twee kilometer lang. De pier is nu twee kilometer lang. De pier is nu twee kilometer lang. De pier is nu twee kilometer lang.

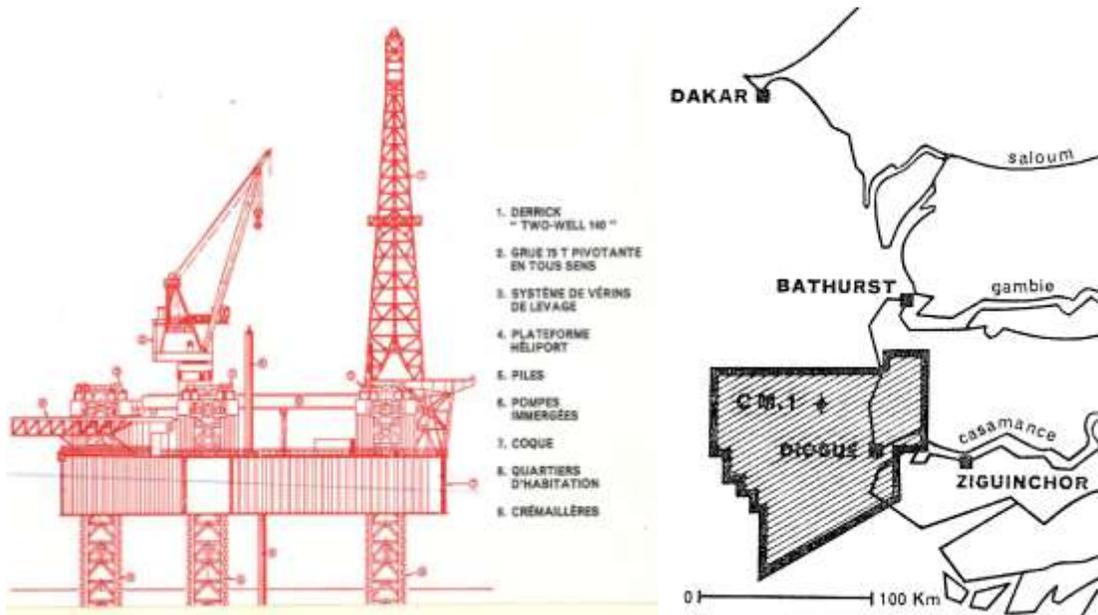
## The “Ile de France”, the first drilling Jack-up with 5 legs.

It was in April or second half of March 1967 that I officially joined Mr. Hage and in his office I was assigned the second desk. I was handed the hydraulic circuits of the jacking systems built on the “Ile de France” and a few months later I was sent to Dakar, Senegal. Somewhere offshore the coast of that country the drilling jack-up “Ile de France” was drilling in search of oil and/or gas. And I was to join Mr. Ken Cowley of Keelavite Hydraulics and assist him with the implementation of a small modification to the 5 jacking systems (one for each leg!) on that platform.

This was my very First flying experience and on this flight . . . . I lost my suitcase. A Swiss Air Caravelle brought me to Geneva and from there they took me by Lockheed Electra to Dakar, via Lisbon. Believe me when I tell you that it is a weird experience when you arrive at your destination after a very first flight and you see all the other passengers pick up their luggage from the carousel, but which still hasn't presented your own luggage.

While waiting I had already met Mr. Cowley and after filling out some documents regarding the missing luggage we took a taxi to our hotel, the “Croix du Sud”. Whow! They knew a lot about good food. . . . ! And the head waiter must have been a younger brother of our famous performer Toon Hermans. However the head waiter denied this, though with a wide smile.

A few days later, and fortunately after the arrival of my suitcase (from Rio!), we sailed with the Dutch registered supply boat, “Lady Laura” to the “Ile de France”. It took us about 16 to 18 hours and I had the impression that the platform stood there in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Some 35 km east of our location, as I was told, was the delta of the river Casamance. Some 90 km south of the border with Gambia.



Within a fortnight the modification was completed and would be tested during the oncoming jacking operation, for which Mr. Hage was planned to join us. However, different from our (the Gusto's)

planning, the drilling and testing of the well would last for at least another 5 to 7 weeks. I was therefore asked to remain on the rig and learn as much as I could about the drilling activities, including the testing and well completion.

This proved very interesting indeed and the “hardship” (of living on a “drilling rig”) I learned to live with. Fortunately the rig management and crew all were French! This, in those days, meant: before lunch could be served (yes “served”, and not “taken from a cafeteria”) a Ricard or other Pastis had to be consumed. And the soup, “Wine Snails” (Escargots) or other “Entrée” was followed by something exotic, such as “Lobster”, “Crab”, “Reine de Mer” (=big fish), “Lamb”, or “Wild Boar”, etc. And all this washed down with white or red wine!



*Marcel Gorias and Ken Cowley on deck <<<<<<*

After such a meal the “Siesta” till 14:00 o’clock proved very welcome. That this treat was something special was proven by the frequent visits (mostly on Sundays) of “Father Govers” (a Dutch Missionary) who was brought on board by a “Schreiner Airways” helicopter, flown by a Dutch pilot and his Dutch mechanic.

*It was tough, indeed! >>>>>>*



I was also given a chance to travel to Dakar for a few days and visit the former Dutch slave island of Gourée (in our maritime history Dutch “slave haulers” used to store the slaves on this island before shipping them across the Atlantic). I also spent a few days as guest of the Dutch helicopter crew at their station on the Northern bank of the river Casamance. What an experience that was: first an airline flight and now a helicopter flight. But also first time chasing monkeys, elephants and wildebeests by helicopter, etc. Amazing how fast a crocodile can move when approached by a noisy heli! And yes, I also picked up a lot concerning the drilling for oil activities.

But there was more to learn. Since I was scheduled to do a job in Baku, USSR, I had requested to be allowed to learn some Russian language. And when I finally returned from this trip to the “Ile de France” I knew how to read, pronounce and write the Russian (Cyrillic) alphabet. And was amazed how many words I recognized just by reading them out loud! Thanks to Tsar Peter they still use many Dutch naval expressions.

*Schreiner heli at Casamance Delta Base.*





<<< *The heli port  
base*

Another experience seems worth mentioning. Five days after returning to the rig I was informed by the rig manager that the “Lady Laura” was bringing us a team of English specialist to help us with the testing of the well. They would plant explosives on the sea bed and special tools inserted down the hole would register the echo’s trough the sea bottom. Based on these results they could determine the formations of the soil and plan further action, further drilling or abandoning this well. The English crew also had one Dutch member and, since we had a bar with Dutch beer on board, I was given permission to invite this Dutchman on board. He would be picked up by “crew basket”. Imagine my surprise when I found out that this Dutchman turned out to be my personal friend Leo, who’s first born I had held in my arms when she was baptized. We had a good time together, I promise you!

It is good to mention that in my 40+ years of travelling the world I have learned to “never say never”! This friend, Leo, I met again some 30 years later when I boarded a flight from Dubai to Amsterdam. Upon handing my jacket to the steward I happened to look at the person who was seated in the chair behind mine. It was Leo! The World is “small” indeed!

Finally Mr. Hage arrived on board for the jacking operation and the move of the “Ile de France” and after almost three months I could return home.

## Chazar (Co701) Schiedam

Upon returning from my trip to Senegal ("Ile de France") to the yard in Schiedam I started working together with Ken Cowley (whom I worked with in Senegal, on the "Ile de France") and his young colleague Tony Tufts, both working for Keelavite Hydraulics Inc. We commissioned and tested the four jacking systems for the "Chazar".

The Russian Newspapers announced the Chazar on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1967

Репортаж с Роттердамской судовой верфи

# «ХАЗАР» ДАЕТ ОТВЕТ

**В НИДЕРЛАНДАХ** в шутку говорят: «Если астригалась три голландца, то речь непременно пойдет о торговле». И действительно, голландцы любят и умеют торговать, понимают в этом толк, и, как известно, обит у них в этом не только.

Мы в до поездки в Голландию знали, что в советско-нидерландские торговые отношения, как говорится, «два гравуса». За последние годы с Роттердамской верфью сошли суда, построенные по заказу Советского Союза. Нидерландские фирмы поставляют нам оборудование для химической и пищевой промышленности, плавильной котлы, знаменитую голландскую сельдь.

Известно, что Голландия покупает у нас каменный уголь, цветные металлы, химические товары и лес. Не так давно Москву посетил голландский торгово-экономический делегация.

Никто не сомневается в том, что Советский Союз готов и в будущем расширить торговые связи со всеми странами, и в том числе с Нидерландами. А что думают на этот счет голландцы? На этот вопрос отвечаем по-разному. Но мы, пожалуй, не скажем ошибкой если скажем, что большинство представителей голландских деловых кругов не менее заинтересованы в том, чтобы торговать с Советским Союзом. Однако нам рассказали, что бывает и так: заходит речь о пролаже в СССР каких-либо конкретных товаров, а правительственные чиновники напоминают коммерсантам, что у Голландии есть определенные обязательства перед НАТО и «Общим рынком». И очередная возможная сделка повиснет в воздухе.

Некоторые голландские бизнесмены высказываются совершенно откровенно: ликвидация искусственных ограничений в торговле с социалистическими государствами соответствует национальным интересам Голландии, помогая бы стране разрешить многие затруднения в ее экономической жизни.

Но, на наш взгляд, самый убедительный ответ на свой вопрос о перспективах советско-голландских торговых отношений мы получили в Роттердаме, на судовой верфи «Густо». Тем более, что в день нашего визита заканчивалась подготовка к спуску на воду «Хазар» — уникальной плавучей установки для бурения нефтяных и газовых скважин, созданной по поручению ЦКБ.

Здесь намля не почувствовать, что находишься в самом большом порту мира. У причалов, припаркованных более чем на сорок километров, колышутся флаги множества государств. Встречаются здесь и красивые флаги нашей Родине. Далеко не первый год встречаются.

— У нас с Советским Союзом давние и плодотворные связи, — сказал заместитель директора судовой верфи «Густо» Роберт Смуландер. — Еще до войны мы выполняли советские заказы. Советам недавно отпраздновали в СССР тридцатилетие независимости «Нарский», «Выборгский» и «Испанский». А в ближайшем будущем в дальний путь в Калининском море отправится еще одно наше детище — «Хазар».

Должен сказать, что мы вполне удовлетворены установившимся сотрудничеством с Советским Союзом и надеемся на его плодотворное продолжение. Вы, возможно, знаете, что сейчас судостроительная промышленность Западной Европы испытывает чувствительную недогрузку. А наш портфель полон заказов. И в этом не последнюю роль сыграла сделка с СССР.

Конечно же, нам захотелось увидеть «Хазар». Сфотографировать его не так-то просто: высота «плавающего голландца» — 34 метра. А на его палубе мы почувствовали себя словно на плавучем острове: здесь разместились палуба для — с центральным пультом управления, лабораторией, радиорубкой, конвентной отапливаемой для команд в 30 человек и даже кладовкой. В трюм упрятаны ма-

шинное отделение, кодамам установка, надежная противожарная система, установка кондиционирования воздуха, ГДЭС, котельные и опреснительные установки, которые могут дать 20 тонн воды в сутки.

— В отличие от американских плавучих буровых установок, которые могут работать только закрытых задвижек и на небольших глубинах, — рассказывает берт Смуландер, — наша действа на глубинах до 60 метров и к тому же в любую погоду. «Хазар» способен выдержать самый большой шторм, возможный на 1 июня.

— Мы довольны «Хазаром» добавляет управляющий Фир «Густо» П. Биннема. — Надеюсь, он понравится и советским бутикам. Что же касается голландско-советского сотрудничества вообще, то лично я не вижу причин, почему бы нам не сотрудничать. Я за такое сотрудничество.

— Уже в Москве мы прочли сообщения корреспондента Т/Ирина Кошкотова из Гагга о том, что буровая установка «Хазар» сошла со стапелей. Три ветских судна взяли ее на борт и двинулись в дальний путь к Пискаемому морю.

Г. СУАДЕЦ  
С. ЗАХАРОВ  
Роттердам — Москва.



Это и есть «Хазар»!

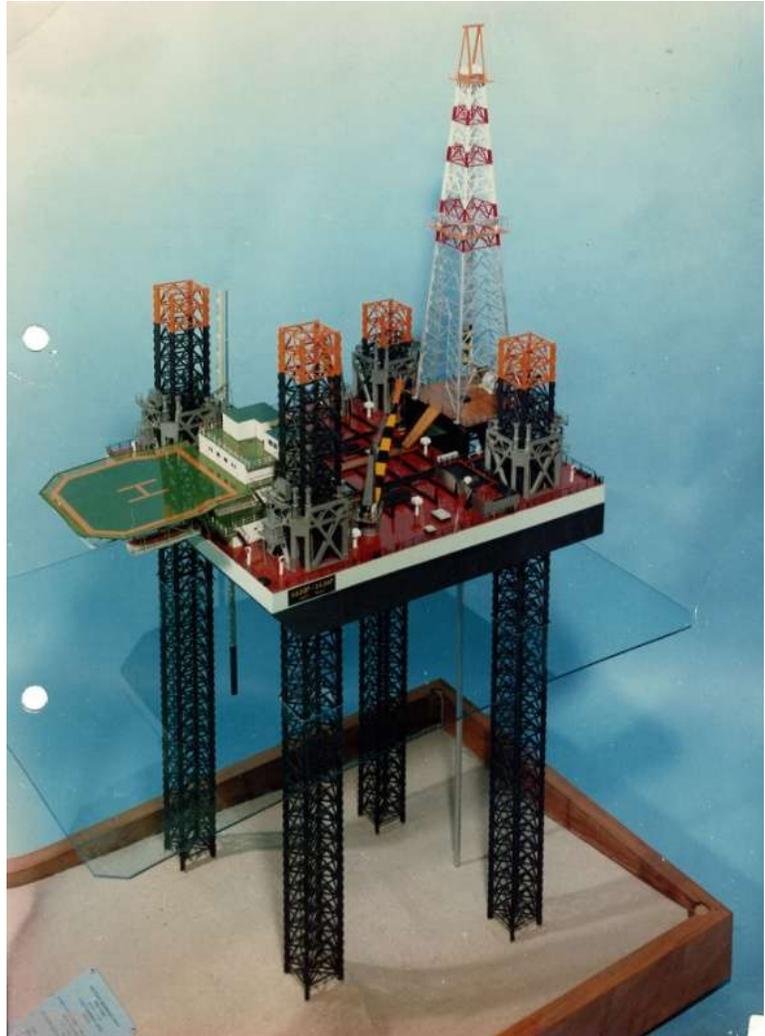
3 страница ■ 3 сентября 1967 года ■

*Hans de Ridder, just coming from the drill floor, walks toward Mr. Binnema, having a deck meeting with a.o. Bram Vorster, Mr. Vriezen, Hans Rusche en Leen Konings (R&H) >>>>>>*



The contract was between IHC Gusto on the builder side and Machino Import on the side of the client and called for the designing, building and commissioning of a jack-up platform equipped with a complete drilling installation. The pontoon, or hull, was to be assembled out of three pontoons, since transportation of the unit to the Caspian Sea would be subject to maximum size in width and length. The assembly was to take place in Baku, the capital of the Azerbaijan Soviet Republic. And upon assembling the unit should be subjected to an over-all testing of all systems on board. It was stated that a (dry) well with a depth of 2000 meters should be drilled offshore.

*The three pontoons: the middle section which included the engine room and accommodation and the two side pontoons, each containing two jacking systems and two mooring winches.*



*Scale Model van CO701: "Chazar"*

In order to prove to the client and to our self that the jack-up systems really worked, the three pontoon sections were assembled and temporarily connected (bolted) inside the dry dock #8 of our colleague yard, Wilton Fijenoord. Special supports were constructed under the leg footings ("Spud cans") to provide safe support of the weight onto the dock floor once standing on the four legs. A special bed cast from "Araldite" formed a perfect support contact with the bottom of the spud cans.

We then planned also to do some jacking and Mr. Hage returned from a trip overseas to perform the First couple of jacking strokes, whereupon I was allowed to continue and complete the test. Proud as a dog with 7 . . . . . !



Translation from local news paper:

At Wilton Fijenoord shipyard:

**Soviet drilling platform nearing completion**

Rotterdam (ANP) — The drilling platform “Chazar”, which is being built at the Gusto shipyard in Schiedam in commission for the Soviet Russians, has reached the stage to be tested tomorrow and will be transported to the graven dry dock at Wilton Fijenoord.

After the tests of the platform the “Chazar” will be split up into three sections and returned to the Gusto yard.

There the three sections will be prepared for the tow to Baku at the Caspian sea, via the Baltic sea and the Botnic Gulf. The planning is such that the tow may start in September and thus stay ahead of the frost.

The “Chazar” is being built by the cooperation of the IHC Holland and Wilton Fijenoord

The communication with the Russians improved rapidly. They helped me a lot with my study of their language and even refused to speak to me through an interpreter!

When I was their guest at their apartment they also taught me how to eat their traditional dish (“Plov”) and to drink their national drink, Vodka!

For a person who was scheduled to live and work for at least 9 months (it turned out to be 11+) this proved an important knowledge.

And in return I invited them to my apartment and introduced them to Dutch Bols and Beer.



## Baku, Azerbaijan

And on the 27th of December I departed for Baku, together with two technicians of R & H, Aart Ligthart en Joop Biemans. (we soon found that Joop Biemans had to become: "Little Alex

We spent our first night in the USSR in Moscow, Hotel "Russia". A monstrous concrete and glass building with some 6000 rooms (so we were told) on the brink of the Red Square. Amazed about the length of the line waiting for admission into the Lenin Mausoleum. What surprised us most was the wedding party, including the white dressed bride, in that line.

The following morning we took a flight from the national airport of Moscow to Baku. We flew a "turbo-prop, Ilyushine 18". It was my third flight and upon arrival I failed to find my hand luggage! Don't ask me how I managed that! My suitcase made it and with my shaving gear packed in my hand luggage this couldn't make me happy! It was my "Samsonite" briefcase and it arrived four days later. But without the Playboy magazine, which my brother had presented me with for my long stay away from home!

We joined Mr. Vriezen in the Hotel "Intourist". Room 451 for me, next door to Mr. Vriezen (450) and Aart en Little Alex shared Room 449, on the 4th Floor. The room contained 2 beds, 2 arm chairs, a table, a 2-door closet and 2 chairs. On the table stood a small lamp and a radio. The radio was more like a speaker with a regulator to turn down the sound, but never completely off! Always local music, even in the night! There was a way to silence this speaker: knock it hard, very hard, onto the table. But that only lasted for a single day; the following day the sound was back on. We found out that this "radio" also contained a secret microphone, through which the security people in Room 100, on the first floor, could listen in and thus secure our safety!!

We also found out that as soon as we left the hotel, for a walk or other, we were recorded by the door man and this recording was checked with the reports made up by the "followers", persons stationed outside the hotel who had to follow us and report where we went and when we returned. This was again checked with the recordings by the door man. Strange that we still didn't feel happy and or grateful for being so good taken care of!!!! We just didn't give it any attention; all we wanted was to hand over our

project to the client and get out of there as soon as we could!



Back to our First working day in Baku. That morning we met our interpreters (Alla, Tanya, Zima and, as only male, Isar) and with a couple of “Wolga” sedans we left for the ship yard. It was made clear to us that our passports needed to stay at the hotel for registration with the police and authorities. Upon return from the yard the passports would be returned to us.

*On this photo from left to right: Mr. Vriezen, Torben, Tony, Paul, Herman, Aart, Helmut, and the interpreters: (German) Zima and (English) Isar, Alla and Tanya.*



Mr. Vriezen had arrived already two months earlier in Baku, together with the Gusto welding specialist, van der Vlies. But v/d Vlies had fallen ill of home sickness and had been replaced by a welding (NDT-) specialist from Denmark, Torben Kiersing. So when we arrived the three pontoons had been connected (bolted) together and the welders were completing the connections from inside the cofferdams.

On the mooring/assembling pier the yard had installed an old generator, which would provide us with electric power for the lighting and welding. It was a good thought to bring our own personal flash lights! On the jetty we had an old hut for the storage of our assembling materials, such as hydraulic jacks and welding rods. For our lunch meal we were expected in the “restaurant” on board an old ship moored along the same pier. We were served Borsj with Bread! Borsj is a kind of soup with cabbage, chunks of potatoes, a little meat and a lot of fat. After a week we decided to bring our own sandwiches from the hotel. For this Mr. Vriezen bribed the head waiter

with a box of Dutch cigars!



*Assembling pier/jetty with our “Lunch Room” alongside to the left.*

A few days later we invited our interpreters to the New Year party in the hotel restaurant for which Mr. Vriezen had booked us a table. It was a night to never forget, with a lot of reasonable food, lots of Russian champagne and caviar, life music, etc. We had a good time and didn’t realize that this was to be the beginning of a real tough period which would last for nearly a full year.

A rough and difficult time indeed. With our daily fights to prevent the disappearance of our welding rods, tools, etc.

Almost daily we could see unknown persons walking away with our Dutch supplied welding rods, which was explained with the remark that these electrodes were of such high quality that the locals couldn't live without them anymore. *So just be proud and don't complain!*

*Torben on the jetty >>>>*



It also happened more and more that our transport (our cars) wouldn't show up in the morning. The contract with our client had made the yard responsible for our transportation and therefore Mr. Babayev, the yard director, had arranged for the two or three Wolga sedans to pick us up in the morning and bring us back to the hotel in the evening. However Mr. David Babajev liked using these cars for himself and thus we often had to wait. It also gave the client the possibility to determine whether or not we were present at the yard. This proved to be handy for them in case they had to entertain special guests on our project without us being around!

Mr. Babayev also locked our passports in his safe at the yard and when we insisted to have control over our own passports he told us that in his strong box the documents were safe. When we argued that in case something happened at home, with our family or other, and we had to travel to our homes in a hurry we would need to have these passports immediately. But Mr. Babayev argued that in such cases we could find replacing female partners in Baku. No problem! In case I had done to the man what I had in mind I would still be somewhere in Siberia, for sure. (and I had entertained this man in my own home!)

*Our team expended and for our transportation we managed to get use of a minibus. Mr. Vriezen kept use of one Wolga! >>>>>>*





<<<<<< Trainees, interpreters, Tony and Torben  
guided into the minibus by our driver

Also a personal cook was arranged: Mosa! A Russian (or Ukrainian) woman of about 40 years of age, who had experienced the misfortune to not have been shot to death in the “Great War” (2nd World War) but was made prisoner by the Germans. Upon returning home, at the end of the war, all these prisoners were sent to labor camps in Siberia by Stalin. When Nikita Chrushev granted them amnesty they could return to their homes. However their income could never surpass the 65 Rubles per month. A medical doctor as well as our driver or our welders were paid 90 to 100 Rubles p/m. So Mosa was very happy with her new assignment and we rested assured that she would “fight” for us. Mr. Vriezen also added some Rubles to the meager budget she received from Babayev, which allowed Mosa to make our bus driver bring her to the market and buy fresh food products.

She worked every day, since we also ‘worked’ every day and on Sundays she would bring her little daughter.



*Aart, Herman, the little girl, Helmut, Alex (Joop) and Paul*

*Spending some time with daughter of Mosa, the cook>>*



But most people were very friendly and kind. Such as the chief electrician. He planned to celebrate his birthday and invited Aart and Little Alex, but also me(!) to join the party. Two of our interpreters, Alla and Tanya, had also been invited. It turned out an unforgettable evening with lots of food, drinks, music and dancing. A number of different tables (borrowed from their neighbors!) filled the living room and sagged due to the weight of all the splendid food and drinks. It was fantastic!

I was allowed, no, even urged, to play the piano and when we Dutch started singing “Aan de oever van de Rotte, tussen Delft en Overschie, etc . . . .” all our Russian speaking new friends sang the old Russian folk song. And we just met, only two weeks ago!!

My own 28th birthday was oncoming and Mr. Vriezen proposed that we would make a party. At the hotel seemed a bit dull and on the platform proofed unlikely, since the freezing cold, accumulated when the platform (the three barges) were towed through freezing cold Russia could still be felt inside the accommodation. So, what could we do? I talked to our friendly electrician and it was decided that the party was going to be arranged in his apartment. My condition was that I would pay all the costs for food and drinks (and possibly others). Actually this idea came from Mr. Vriezen! Mr. Matweh Machalov, the head engineer for our client, who also had spent some time in Holland and at my house, asked me to arrange for the “western Drinks”, such as Gin and Whisky; they would take care of the rest. Even, when I had booked a phone call to my wife, he arranged for the call to be transferred to the apartment of the electrician. It turned out to be a wonderful evening and everybody enjoyed it tremendously. The following day, or was it some days later, when we all met again at the yard, I asked the electrician and Mr. Machalov to inform me about the expenses of this wonderful evening. No reply!! A few days later I asked again and was answered with the question: “Do you wish to remain friends with Juri and the others?” When I said that off course that was my wish Mr. Machalov said to be happy with the answer and advised me to never mention this item (the costs for the party) again. In all my years travelling the world I have never again met with such warm hospitality!



*People everywhere love  
“GEZELLIGHEID”. Even in  
the USSR!*

*<<< Female engineer from  
Moscow (?),  
Machalov, Ina our  
interpreter, Alex, Mr.  
Duel of KaspMorneft  
and Roma, Jackman to  
be trained by me.*

In the mean time our team was strengthened with other specialists, Dutch, English and German. Although the locals didn't like us westerners very much, we all were soon accepted. Not only the Dutch and British but even the Germans. TV reports showed a protest demonstration on the "Maliveld" in The Hague and a protest demonstration of London dock workers. The Americans were even worse: TV showed a white American police man beating a black person over the head. One feature showed the life of an East German engineer. How splendid life was in the DDR! How nice his house with nice stove and furniture. He even had a car. A Trabant or Wartburg! For some persons in the USSR it hurt: "they lost the Great War (in the USSR that was the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War) and look how they live". Much better than we do! That's what they told me. The good thing was that they were not overheard. Sure, it was all propaganda, but if one wouldn't know any better . . . . ?

*We couldn't let our relatives at home know how our life really was, here in the "workers' paradise". All our mail was censored! Note the closing flap on the letter envelope, which has been steamed open and after the contents were checked closed again with some glue. It often happened that some letters arrived home glued to the envelope. >>>>>>*



Also telephoning home was a luxury, which, besides costly (however paid by Mr. Vriezen) also rare. Each request or booking had to be placed before 09:00 in the morning and in case the call would come through it wouldn't be before 01:00 at night! More often than not the call wouldn't come through at all and we wondered what the reason for that could have been. Here my knowledge of the Russian language came in handy. One day, Tony and myself had booked a call to talk to our wives; his in Hinckley (UK) and mine in Schiedam. Upon returning to the hotel from the yard we went to the telephone exchange room (which was officially not allowed) and I asked the old operator (lady, wrapped in blankets) whether or not our calls would come through that night. She informed us that my call would but the call to Hinckley couldn't be made, since the cable between Holland and England was damaged. I told her that I couldn't believe that and she then told me that Moscow didn't have an English speaking interpreter available. When I said that Tony and his wife both spoke English and were in no need for an interpreter she smiled and said: "Oh, you, bandit, you know very well that here in the USSR they must make sure that only good things are said and in case something bad would be said the interpreter would disconnect the call." And she was not kidding!

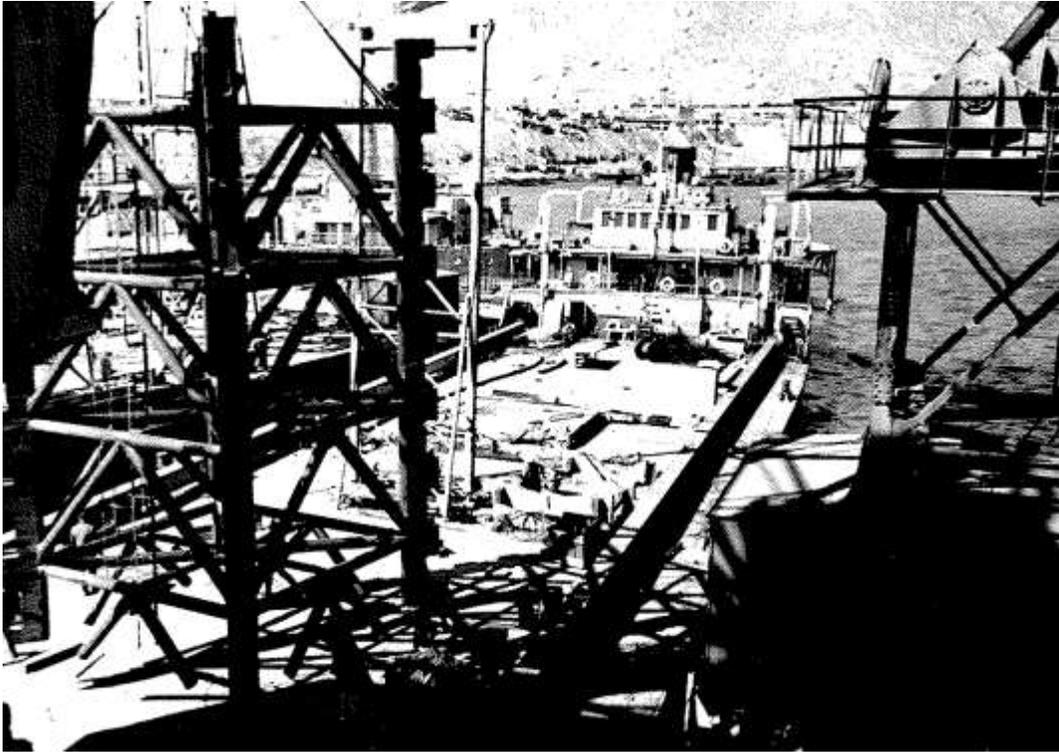
One day we met a group of German tourists who also stayed in the hotel. They heard us speaking Dutch and English and apparently they were very enthusiastic and choose to tell us all about the enormous progresses made here in the USSR. Like that beautiful drilling platform they had visited that afternoon. A

real gem of technology, they called it. Mr. Vriezen then informed them on the reason of our presence in Baku!

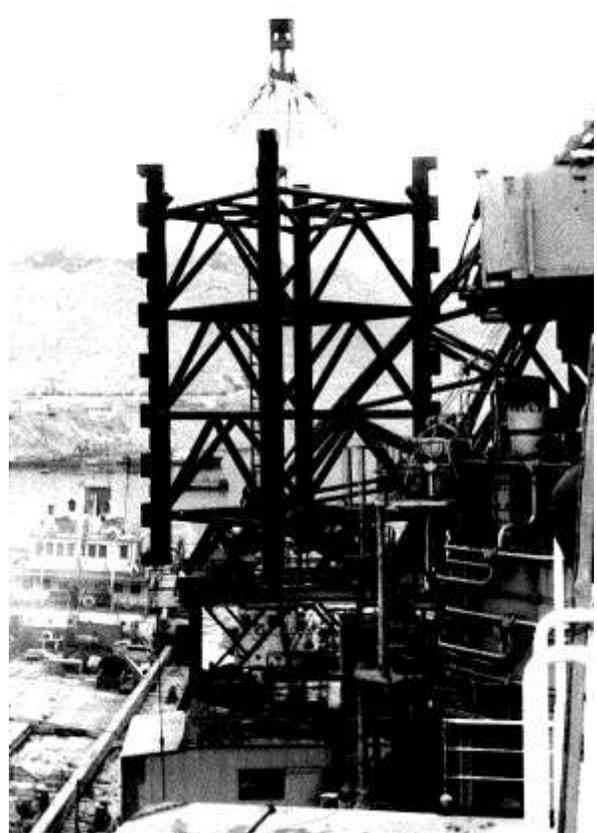
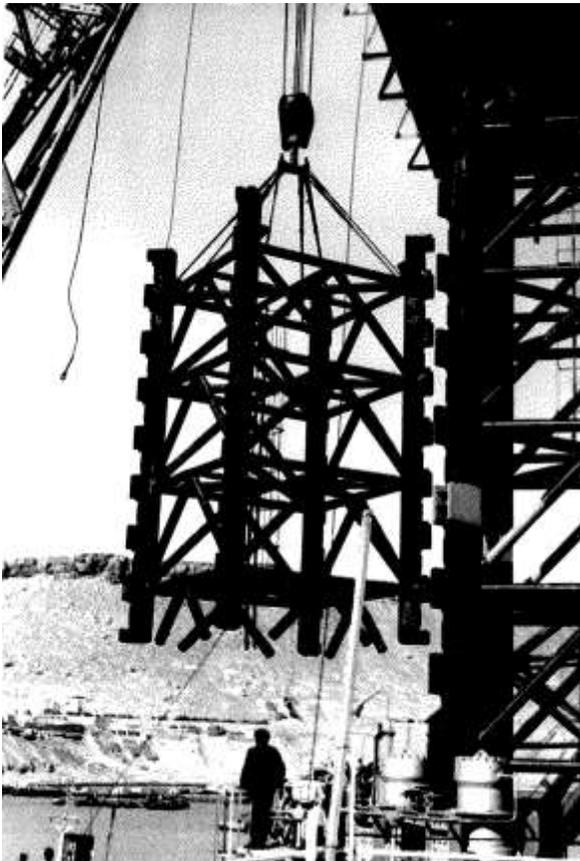
After the completion of the commissioning of the jacking systems and the welding of the first additional leg sections, I was asked to set the four legs on the bottom. They now were our anchors and we no longer depended on the poor mooring wires the yard provided us with. This was my first real jacking operation! The second leg sections were installed and welded. After some small preloading the hull was lifted out of the water, high enough so that the welding on the hull could be completed. And the trip to the full completion of the legs (94 meters) continued.

*Work platforms installed* >>>>>>>>>





*Leg section brought to the site on the deck of transport ship*





*Almost there.*



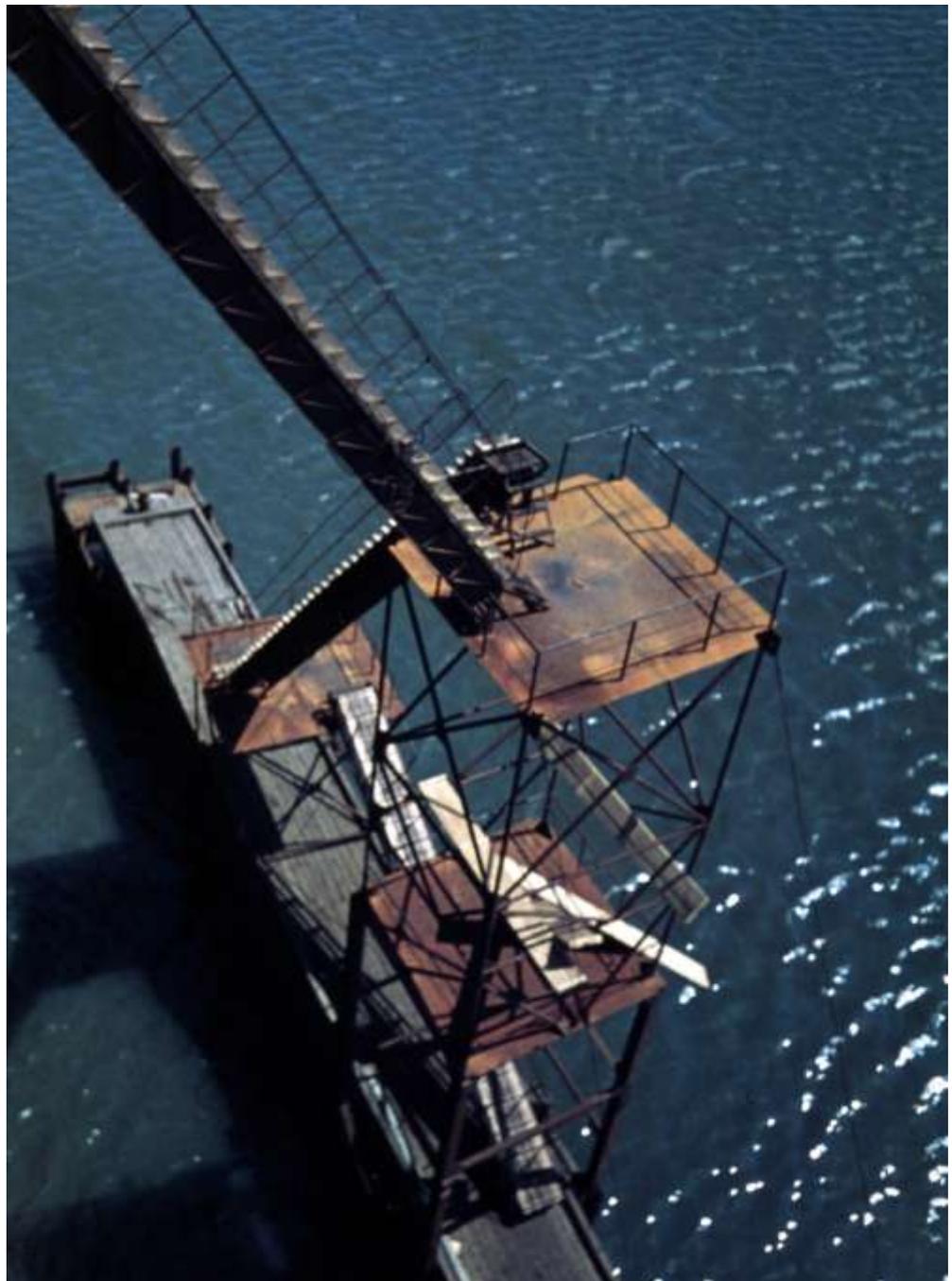
*In place and ready for adjustment and welding.*

Therefore the leg sections, each about 65 tons and 10 meters in length, were hoisted onto the top of the legs, aligned and welded. Upon acceptance of the welding tests the work platforms were disconnected and brought to and installed on the top of the last leg extension. The hull was then jacked up so that the top of the jacking structures were just below the welding platforms.

At first our access to the platform was through a gang way. Then, when higher, through a stair case tower and then the gang way. But when we were really high up the yard installed a complete drilling tower from which the gang way was installed to the deck. With some 10 meters of leg in the water this brought us up from the jetty to our deck some 65 to 70 meters higher.

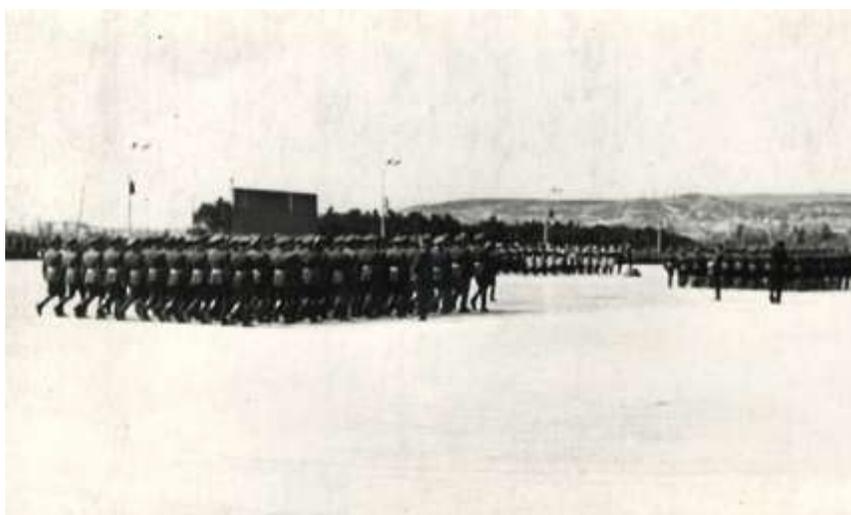


*And all that time  
special water  
pumps were  
needed to  
provide us  
cooling water for  
the generator  
diesels (and  
other) and when  
the wind came  
from the North  
the dumped  
cooling water  
sprayed over our  
access, and the  
passing over the  
stairs of stair  
tower and  
drilling tower  
was a wet job!  
But not as bad as  
when they  
dumped the  
contents of our  
sewage tank!!  
>>>>>>*



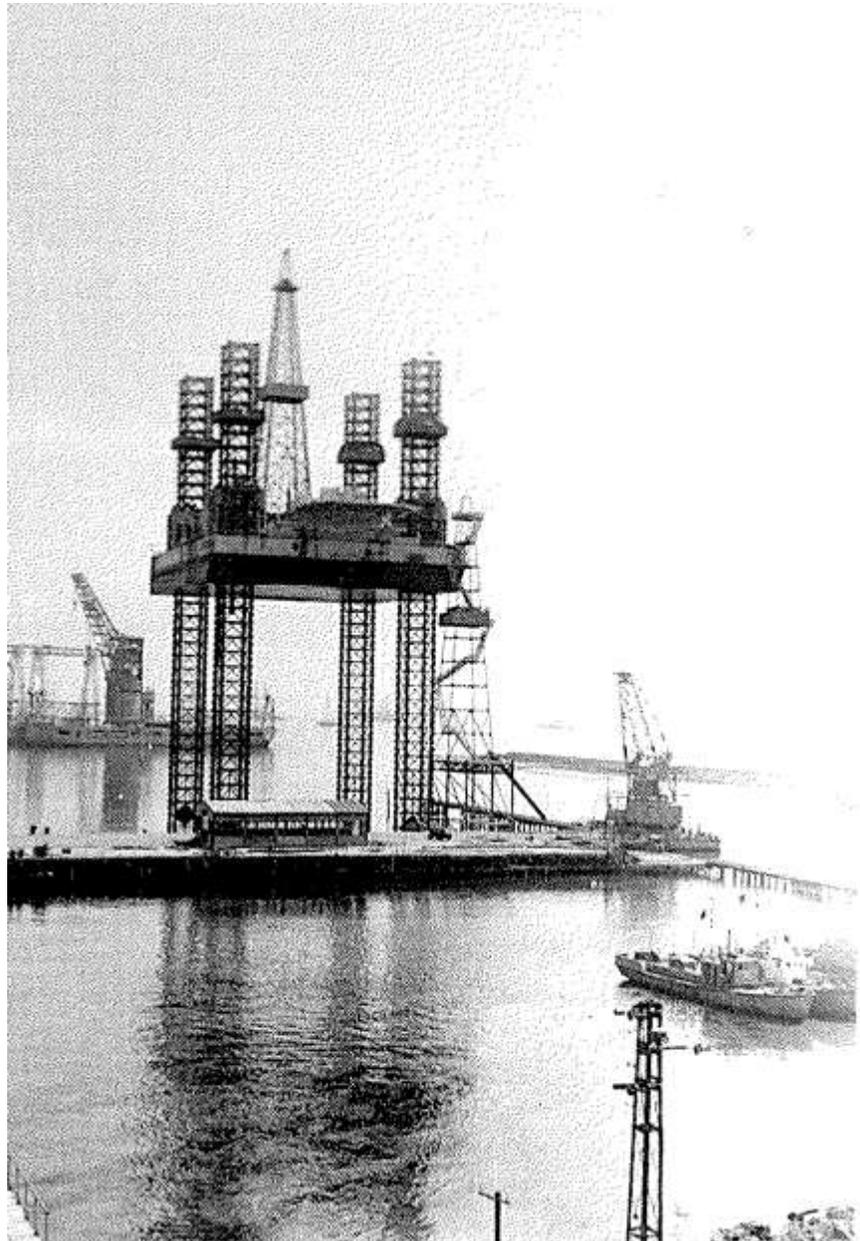
*And on May 1<sup>st</sup> we were issued special tickets to the "Grand Stand" for the May-Parade!*

*After showing the tickets and our passports, which were returned to us just for that purpose, at least 3 times, we were admitted to sit down on the stone stairs in front of the Government Building at the Parade Square.*



*Welding of final leg sections. Access onto the deck through stair scaffolding and an original Baku drilling tower, with wooden stairs going around the tower.*

*Just imagine: they rejected the German made derrick which we supplied! They judged the cage ladders “unsafe”.*



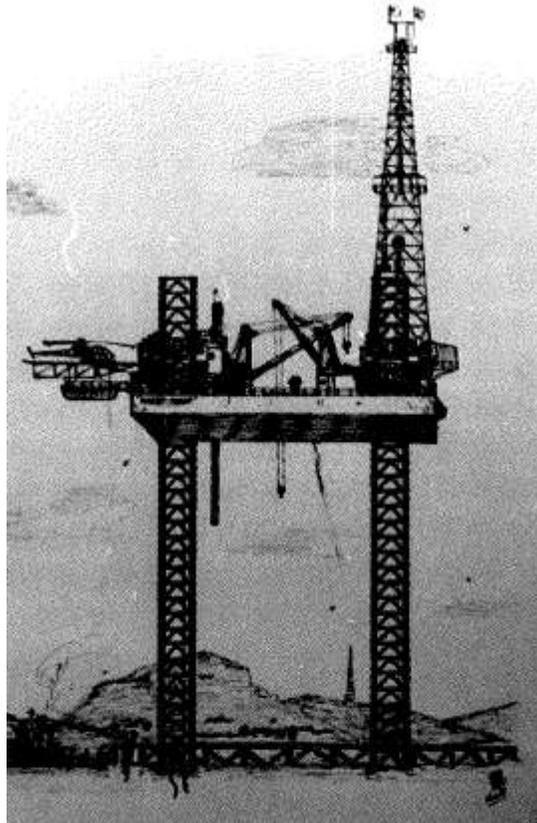
For the “final height test” we had to climb to the end of the leg. This was planned to be done during day light, but like almost always later in my carrier, by the time all the shore connections were removed, the gang way pulled onto the deck, all required personnel on board, etc. etc. it was almost dark when the jacking started.

We made it to the top without further problems. But during the second “pontoon lowering” stroke I noticed a slight glitch on the pressure gauge connected to the upper part of the jacking cylinders of leg #4. I stopped and Tony and I went to leg #4 to check. We soon found that the wide spray of hydraulic oil which made our approach to this leg rather slippery came from a blown o-ring. This was bad luck,

indeed! On top of that the wind started gaining in strength. And all this at about 80+ meters above water! In the dark!

*And since the “full height jacking test was done at night time: a personal sketch of our platform almost at full height!*

>>>>>>



We managed to install a new o-ring and when pressurizing of the line didn't show any leaking we continued jacking down.

This moment also meant the completion of the assembling of the platform and its four legs. In celebration of this achievement a party was thrown by the client. We were all invited by the “Minister of Erection”, as he was introduced to us by one of our interpreters. It was an evening to not ever forget!!!

### **Chazar (701) The Lub Oil Problems for the “Werkspoor” Diesel Engines**

After jacking down we were confronted with a new problem. Already for some time we had warned the client that the “Werkspoor” diesels required a change of engine oil upon reaching the 1000 (or so?) hour working mark. We were promised the supply of this oil, but for the acceptance of the locally supplied oil “Werkspoor” required proper certificates; chemical and technical analyses. They were promised but never supplied. (nor was the oil!)

We were however shown a “marmalade jar” with a little oil and was proudly declared to be best engine oil in the world. But we insisted in receiving the proper certificates and thus . . . we had a problem. In the end (after discussing this subject for at least a week!) Mr. Vriezen (and Gusto) agreed that we would supply the oil from Holland, providing we would receive all necessary support from the client (which was

the USSR government!). In order to organize the supply and transportation of the oil Mr. Vriezen agreed to return to The Netherlands and since all work had ground to a stand-still I was invited to join Mr. Vriezen. Mr. Vriezen had been in "The city of Winds" (Baku) for almost 9 months and I arrived there 7 months earlier! Also Herman Klumper, the Werkspoor diesel mechanic, decided to return home. His replacement (Lou Snoek) had already arrived and appointed, after Herman completed his 6 months! but he fell subject to a very strange virus. He spent several weeks in the "Hospital for the oil workers" and now was only too happy to leave this place after just over 6 months and see his own medic in Amsterdam. The diagnoses was: lack of vital vitamins!

But getting out of Baku wasn't as easy as we expected. At the "Intourist" office in the lobby of the hotel Mr. Vriezen had booked the flights and a few days later I was asked to pick up the tickets. But as soon as I had returned to my room, with the tickets, I was requested by telephone to return to that "Intourist" office and bring the tickets. At that office I was asked for the tickets, which I was not willing to do without been given a plausible reason. I was informed that the flight had been "over-booked". A large delegation had to fly that same flight and we were the

unlucky ones to have been kicked off. Needless to say that I didn't give them our tickets.



The following morning, on our way out of the hotel, we were stopped again and asked for our tickets. Again we refused! But Mr. Vriezen and I were not going to the shipyard. We went to the office of our client, "MorNeft". At the front door an (in my eyes) old man holding a much out of date gun, tried to stop us, but Mr. Vriezen just pushed him out of our way. When we arrived near the office of the logistics manager, Mr. Levitian, a secretary lady tried to stop us with the information that the boss was not in. But also this kind lady was pushed aside. When we opened the door, we were welcomed by a very friendly Mr. Levitian. Mr. Vriezen informed him about our dilemma and he stood up and asked us to follow him. I witnessed this part personally. The rest of the story Mr. Vriezen told us upon his return to the yard. Together with Mr. Levitian he had gone to the Baku head office of Aeroflot, the air transport organization of the USSR. The message from a secretary that the boss was too busy, didn't stop Mr. Levitian, dragging Mr. Vriezen and his interpreter (Alla) behind. He almost "kicked" the door open to a huge office with behind a huge desk: the boss! Shocked at first, but soon with a big smile the director of Aeroflot Baku jumped up to meet his long time friend, Mr. Levitian and his guests. After a glass of tea the problem was explained. The director was not amused and said that he would find a solution to the problem. There was indeed a large delegation coming for that flight and the easy way out would be to bump several passengers off that flight to give them sufficient seats. But the director came up with yet another solution: we will fly a larger plane. And so it was arranged!

Mr. Levitian smiled from ear to ear and asked Mr. Vriezen if KLM would do the same for her clients. Mr. Vriezen answered: “No, definitely not. But then, when your seat is confirmed on a KLM flight, they wouldn’t bump you off to make place for any large delegation. And if they would, they would ask you and compensate you for the inconvenience”. They all laughed about it. And we had our seats on the planned flight!

Organizing the purchase and delivery of the oil was done in a record time. It was agreed that Mr. Vriezen and myself would return to Baku as soon as we received confirmation of the oil arriving in Moscow. That took 3 weeks!

It took the oil much longer than expected to arrive at the yard in Baku. Nobody from the Ministry of Import had arranged for a means to load the oil drums into the airplane from Moscow to Baku, so they decided to transport the drums by train. But then they would need a forklift to load the train in Moscow (possible!) but also one in Baku to offload the drums from the train. And this proved to be too complicated! So after many days the oil finally arrived at the yard in Baku by trucks all the way from Moscow!

## The Spring Revolution of Prague

In the mean time political Europe (even the World!) had been upset by the USSR invading Prague. Now, try to imagine how we felt. And “we” stands for everyone in our team, Dutch, English and German alike. For so many months we had endured the most irritating and awful remarks and corruption of our project. And now this: the treacherous attack on a foreign country. As a thief in the night! Not a fighting nation but a nation only protesting against the harsh oppression endured from the Soviets. We were enraged, really! But what could we do? Walk away from this project?! That would not be an option: we couldn’t leave without our passports and we would leave a very important problem for our employer. So we stayed and waited some more for the oil to finally arrive at the yard.

A few weeks later we learned from “Radio Moscow”(in English) the real reason for the occupation of Prague. *“When you see that along the doors of your neighbor’s house some smoke rises into the air, you will naturally become worried. You will try to warn your neighbor. But he seems not to hear you, so you knock a little louder on his door. He still doesn’t react, so you knock the door down and extinguish the fire yourself!”* Now we knew!! As I already mentioned: we had to carry on and complete this project!

## Chazar (701) Testing offshore

As soon as the oil was finally supplied the diesels were dealt with and the “Chazar” could be jacked down into the water, legs pulled and fully retracted and the voyage to the “test location” could begin. For this jacking operation Mr. Hage had come to Baku, together with Ken Cowley of Keelavite. Tony Tufts, the regular Keelavite technician, also had returned to Baku from a few weeks at home.

While we waited for the client to get it all organized some extra moral support arrived from Gusto: Mr. Gus Smulders, together with the IHC agent in Moscow, Mr. Huvelle, came to Baku for a few days. And from Mr. Huvelle we learned how wonderful life was in the USSR! That really everything was possible

and available here! We were ready to “keel hole” him! But he proofed his point and within a blink he arranged for us beer, champagne and caviar. Yes, really: caviar! These Sturgeon eggs are produced and processed here in Baku, but NOT for the local market. For the Export only! Caviar must generate “hard currency”! But that night we enjoyed it all. Some night it turned out to be!!

When finally all the arrangements were made and the jacking operation could begin, it turned out that Mr. Hage had fallen down with high and unexplainable fever. He had to remain in the hotel and bed. Ken Cowley, however, joined us on board.

Leaving the assembly site proofed more tricky than we had anticipated. The water depth was only about 5.5 meters and the leg penetrations into the sea bed was an average of 4 meters. With a nominal draft of 4.5 meters it gave us only one meter, minus some spare of about 0.5 meter (at the ship yard much debris could be expected on the harbor floor). It would certainly take a lot of caution to get the legs free. In the closed environment of this shallow harbor we could neither count on some swell or waves to rock us free. But we managed, thanks to a lot of patience. Finally we were on our way to the testing site, some 50 km south (about 5½ hours) and out to the open sea. Only 6 meters deep and expected penetration of 5 to 6 meters. We had three (3) tugs, in tandem, and they brought us on location and in position. The leg lowering and preloading completed we achieved a leg penetration of approximately 10 meters on all legs. We jacked up to approx. 8 meters above the waves and the drilling test could commence.

*Three tugs in tandem >>>>>*



During the tow we “sailed” on one of the tugs



Tony Tufts and my (smoking) self

Construction Manager Mr. Bagiev, Slavik Machalov and Roma.

According to the contract we were obliged to proof the well functioning of all systems on board, including the drilling equipment and therefore had to drill a hole in the seabed with a depth of 2000 meters. Since a drilling operation becomes hazardous when the drilling strikes gas, oil or any other combustible it was guaranteed by the client (USSR ministry of Oil) that the hole to be drilled would NOT strike any of such. And with such guaranty who could be worried?!

The location was only 3½ to 4½ hours sailing by little supply boats, but how far away that was we experienced when we became dependent on just these supplies for food. The name Baku means in the old local language “City of Winds” and the weather stations recorded an average of 296 days per year Beaufort 6 or higher. The Caspian Sea being an enclosed sea, the wind often swept up the waves in no time. It was therefore that a general rule was in effect: wind forces of 6B or more would keep all ships to the ports and as soon as the wind speed would drop to below 6B and this fact was reported to Moscow a message from Moscow would allow sailing again. So the little “supply boat” often waited for permission to sail out for many days. Often more than one week!

“Supply boat” is a too big name for the little ship. Actually it was a small crew boat with a cabin for 6 to 8 passengers and a mechanical rudder mechanism (wheel connected to chain and cables moving the rudder from port to star board), with a small open deck at the bow and one at the stern. On these open decks our supplies used to be stored from the moment trucks had transported them to the loading dock till the moment the boat crew had thrown them into a basket to be hoisted up onto our deck.



Sometimes these provisions, such as raw meat and paper bags with bread, would lay in the sun for days before they could be safely stored into our refrigerators on board of “Chazar”. During the sailing trip to our location the waves often splashed over our provisions against which the paper bags could mean not much protection. Mr. Vriezen at one time even forced them to dump all the meat into the sea! They hardly had to push the rotting junk: it almost crawled over board by itself! This supply system often left us waiting on board and I often told the (true) story of us being fed on three whole chickens! Then I would follow with the information that this was for 40 persons! As much as Moza did her utmost, the quality of these food supplies was very low. I lost more than 15 kilograms; part of it I could miss, indeed, but . . . . . !

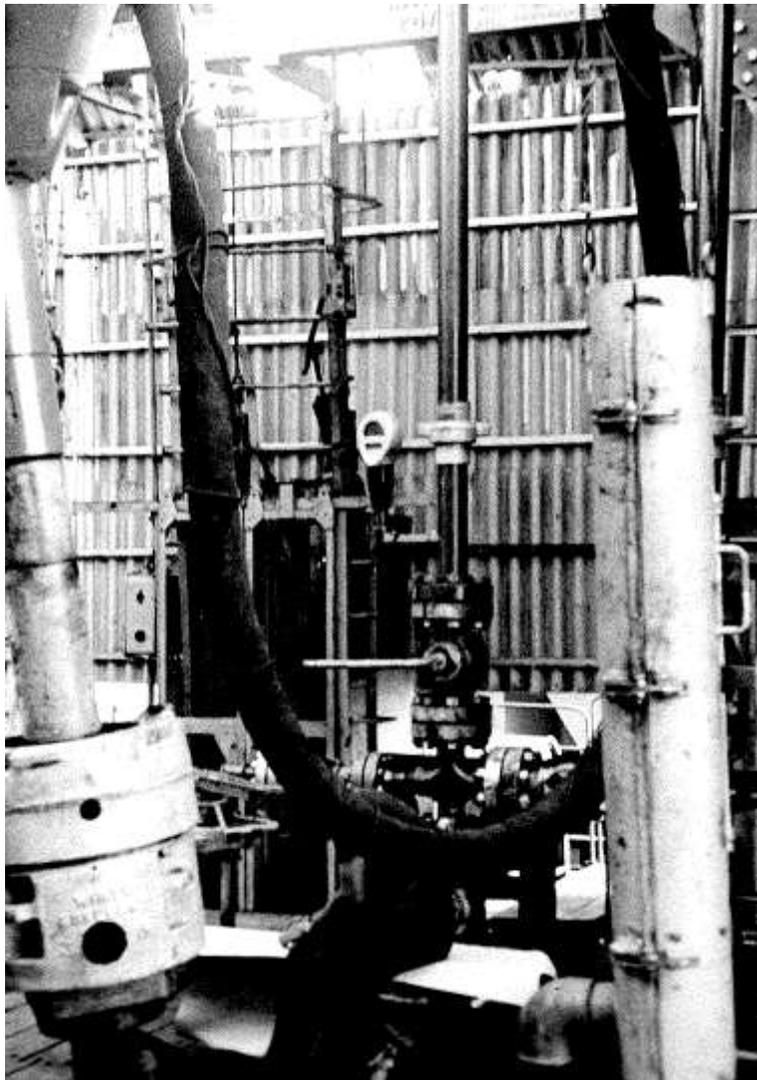
*Getting on board by*

*crew basket*



One Baku engineer, when he came on board by crew basket, shortly after putting his boots on the deck, collapsed. He did no longer breath! Immediately the “medic” checked him and started to pump the man’s breast en blow some air into him. He soon was pushed away by someone who knew better and did the same thing, but without result. The man had died, probably due to the stress of being suspended from that crane and high above the waves. The work on board came to a stand still for two days.

Our mailing address remained at the hotel “Intourist”, so at intervals one of us would sail the supplyboat to the shore, collect the mail and return by following occasion. I have sometimes waited on shore for days and days, reporting daily at the offshore transportation office before returning to the hotel. During one of these trips to the shore the chain wheel broke off the steering wheel and the boat was rendered out of control and subject to the waves. Captain and all passengers fell sea sick and while I operated the throttle of the little engine the mechanic operated the mechanical steering boom inserted into the hollow end of the rudder shaft. This time the 4 hour trip took us almost 6 hours!



*<<<< When I returned to the “Chazar” I found this engineer from Moscow making measurement sketches of our drilling equipment. I took this photo using my new Russian photo camera and the shutter startled the man so he almost fell of his seating.*

Finally we achieved the required drilling depth (1996 meters was gladly accepted!). The string of drill pipe was broken down to 12 meter joints and fastened onto the pipe rack. Also all loose items of any importance were sea fastened and the loading sheet made up. After proper ballasting the platform was ready for jacking down, just waiting for the tug boats and Mr. Hage and Ken Cowley. However Mr. Hage was again knocked down by some kind of aggressive virus and he even ended up in the "Oil Workers Hospital". So it was all up to me!

We hooked up the mooring cables to the buoys and picked up some slack. I lowered the platform into the water and after giving the mooring system some tension I started with pulling the legs out of their penetration. Pulling the legs, penetrated some 10 meters, had to be done carefully. Pulling is achieved by increasing the draft but when that is done too drastically and some legs would "pop-out" the platform could easily end up with a too large inclination and thus jam the legs which remain penetrated. Therefore a little swell is usually very welcome. But that day the sea was like a mirror. Then only patience helps. When I explained to the captain of the "Chazar" why it was taking me so long to get the legs free he immediately ordered two tug boats to run circles around us in order to make for some waves!!!

### **Chazar (701) Job completed!**

Once the legs had been fully retracted and the three tug boats hooked up and the mooring system released we were towed back to Baku. "Chazar" was to be jacked up on its first official drilling-for-oil location, not far from "Neftiany Camni", or "Oil Rocks", North East of Baku. But first we were asked to bring the platform to a sheltered location in the bay of Baku. There the platform was to be loaded with the usual supplies of tools, drill pipe, casing, mud and other chemicals and, most important, with food supplies. This would take about a full week. Jacked up and preloaded properly we left the platform for the new owners and our whole team left for Baku. And I was proud to report to Mr. Hage about the job I had done. He was released from the hospital and had witnessed our performance from the balcony of his hotel room.

After taking on all necessary supplies we (Mr. Vriezen, Tony and me) moved "Chazar" to its drilling location where it was jacked up and prepared carefully. However the penetration was a lot more than was anticipated (actually about 13 to 15 meters) and once we had it jacked up to its working position we had only about 3 to 4 meters of leg left above the jacking structures. Tony thought of something funny: he went to his cabin and put on the lifejacket which he had found there. When he returned to the canteen and said "Good Night" to all of us, it frightened the captain so much that he reported his panic immediately to his uncle, the Minister of Oil in Moscow. We had to control ourselves to not burst out in laughter.

After the usual checking and survey of the jacking systems and the position of the platform the job was declared completed. A hand-over party was arranged, for which several big shots had flown over from Moscow. And like magic all kinds of luxury food and drinks were available. Even Caviar! And lots of Vodka!!

*The following day we set off for Baku and soon we were again in the best of spirits, probably due to a few alcoholic drinks. And with nice and tasty snacks, cheese and sausage. And a lot of speeches and toasts.*

*We toasted to the health of our Queen and our wives and our children. Yes, may be we had a little more than a “few” alcoholic drinks.*

*Everybody was so relieved that we finally finished this project.*



Our Russian counter parts thanked us for all the help and affords but one of them, an older electrical engineer, who spoke a little German, informed us that there had been one downside to the whole project and our cooperation. We wondered what that was. We could mention a dozen shadowy items, but were in a too good mood to mention any. We were then told that our Russian friends were hurt every time we called them “Russians”! They almost all originated from Azerbaijan or any other USSR republic and though they could all be called “Soviets”, they would NEVER be “Russians”. We were a little shocked. He told us this in German, but for sure some of the real Russians (from Moscow!) must have understood. But they just smiled! We apologized and promised our friend that we would call them “Azerbaijani” from now on! Another toast and everybody was happy again.

Three days later, on December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1968, we (Mr. Vriezen and myself) landed at the new Schiphol again. Tony had left Moscow a few hours earlier on a flight to London.

### **Chazar (701) Warranty Service**

During the following 1 ½ years I visited Baku and the “Chazar” for two more short periods. Each time to support and supervise the jacking operations performed by Roma Rezaijev, the local engineer I had trained 1968.

The first time it was some day in June 1969. When we returned to the hotel in Baku after the move, I was informed by telegram from Mr. K. Toxopeus, that my wife had been given a bed in the Nolet hospital in Schiedam to await our second son who was on his way a little earlier then expected.

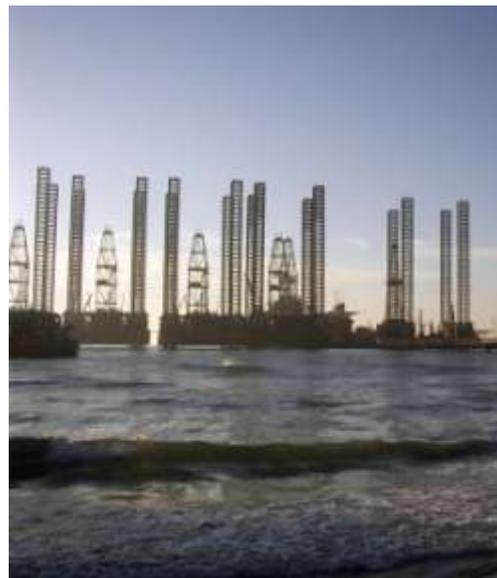
For the second trip, in February 1970, I was asked to discuss the matter of the payment of my pocket-money with the representative of the Ministry in Moscow. I had to deal with her without the support of an interpreter. The deal with Gusto was \$10 per day, but that caused some problems. I therefore was asked to accept the equivalent amount in Rubles. We agreed in 10 Soviet Rubles per day and since I was not allowed to take any of these Rubles out of the country I was happy to meet Mr. Gus Smulders again on my return to Moscow. And handed him these Rubles.

During my first warranty trip everybody on board of “Chazar” was excited. A small transport ship with a crane came along side the “Chazar” and would bring the long awaited Werkspoor spare parts. They had been ordered more than a year ago! Interested in this offloading operation I watched it while hanging over the port side railing. I remember clearly that Mr. Machalov stood to my right side. The deck hands on the boat wrapped a single steel sling around the two big wooden crates, one on top of the other. I warned Mr. Machalov that two slings would be much better and safer, but he either didn’t understand me or just didn’t listen. And with just a single sling the load of about 300 kg was picked up and started to rotate. And rotate, and rotate, until the steel wire was fully unwound and the strands started to part. The crane driver saw it happening and in order to let the load drop on the deck, rather than into the water, he swung the boom back to the boat. Thus it happened that the two crates dropped onto the edge of the boat and like an explosion the crates burst open and the so long wanted spare parts dropped into the Caspian Sea. Mr. Machalov cried and cried big tears!

By the time divers could go down and look for the parts it was a few days later. The quickly worsening weather and seas prevented any diving sooner. This was before we left this drilling location. Remember the leg penetrations of about 13 meters, of which the top was some thick soup. No way they would even be able to find a complete diesel engine, let alone small things such as bearings and camshafts.

The last time I visited “Chazar” we moved it to a location in the eastern part of the Caspian, near “Krasnowodsk”, or City of Red Water. We weren’t granted a visa for this USSR republic, so we had to return to Baku sailing with one of the tugs.

*And on **20 December 2005** I shot the following photo’s of the “Chazar” and its 4 clones, laid up just south of Baku. Notice that on the clones (copies of the original) the legs look much heavier than on the original. Probably since the high tensile steel used by Gusto to construct the legs (HSB) was not available when the clones were built. To achieve the same (or similar) strength the wall thicknesses had to be increased, thus making the legs more heavy. Thus also causing the hull to increase little in size.*





*December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2005, just south of Baku, Azerbaijan.*

## The life of a Gusto Service Engineer

While I spent almost all year 1968 in Baku, Werf Gusto had appointed two new service engineers; Hans Rusche, former marine engineer and George Nikkels, who had changed Heineken (yes, the well known beer giant) for Werf Gusto. They both had worked on the “Cowrey 1”, ordered by Shell Nigeria. And George had spent some time in Warri, Nigeria, for the final commissioning and jacking service. I remember that he was even attacked by little airplanes during the Biafra war, while hiding behind one of the 4 legs of Cowrey 1. He wasn’t hurt, but one of the legs was punctured by a rocket.

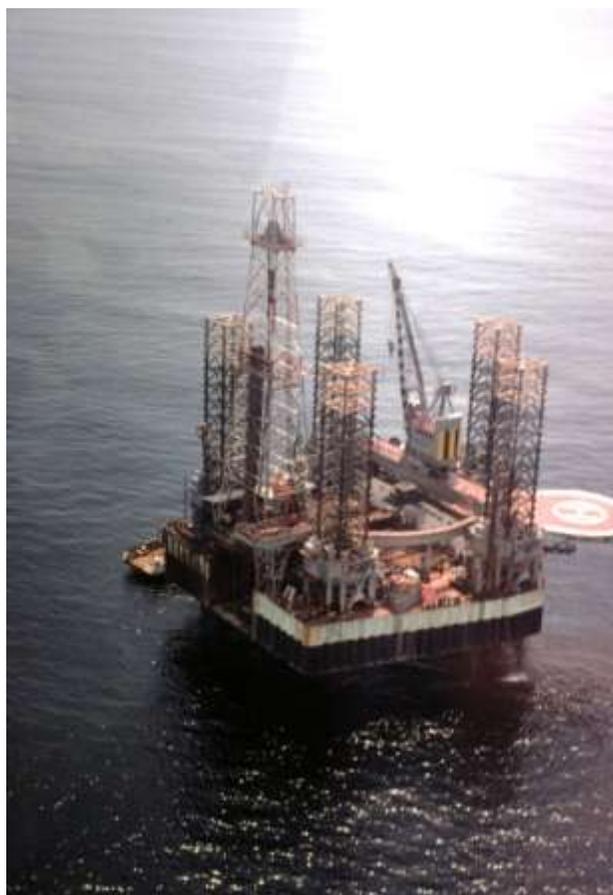
On or around December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1968, Foramer announced that the “Ile de France”, now drilling in Gabon, would be up to a move around Christmas. Preparations should be made and the first thing to do was: obtain a visa for Gabon. Application for a visa was a personal issue, so I had to travel to the Gabon Embassy in Paris. I had just been away from home for nearly a year, so I was allowed to take Mrs. Wittmaekers, my wife, with me to Paris.

On December 24<sup>th</sup> I flew to Paris, where Tony Tufts (who envied his colleague Doug Kingman, who was at that time on his way home after spending some time in Nigeria with George Nikkels) joined me for the continuing flight to Libreville and Port Gentil in Gabon. However the connecting flight from Libreville to Port Gentil did not fly that night: It was Christmas evening and, like in UK, everybody is supposed to celebrate Christmas with a “Christmas Diner” on the night of the 24<sup>th</sup>. Also on the 25<sup>th</sup> there was no flight to Port Gentil and Tony and I experienced our first tropical Christmas on the beach of Libreville, Gabon.

When we made it to Port Gentil on December 26<sup>th</sup> we were taken to the “Ile de France” by helicopter

*Clear view of the overall lay-out:  
the 5 legs, the derrick, the  
accommodation building with heli  
deck and the circular crane  
support with the rotating bridge*

>>>>>>



When we got off the heli we were asked for the reason for our arrival. The move had been postponed for at least another few weeks! But we were welcome nonetheless. Maybe the management in Paris had other plans. It was also to become our first New Year celebration in the tropics!

And on January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1969, we were home again in UK and Holland. On January 5<sup>th</sup> I received a telephone call from Ms Zondag, who informed me that I was expected to fly the following day to London and then travel to Lowestoft to catch a boat to the "Sedneth 2", ready for a move of location in the British part of the North Sea. Sedneth 2 was a drilling jack-up with 5 legs, just as the "Ile de France" and with similar jacking systems as on the Chazar. So I should be able to deal with it! And on January 12<sup>th</sup> I was back in Schiedam after a successful move of the Sedneth 2.

It struck me how calm the "Sedneth 2" reacted to the 5ft swell; it hardly rolled at all. Where the "Ile de France" rolled up to 5 degrees both ways in 3 ft waves! I learned that the reaction of a rig, or any other floating object, (rolling/pitching) depended not only on the height of the waves/swell, but also of the period of the sequence of these waves. I have passed this knowledge and experience many times during my trainings later in my career.

Only to meet Tony again in Paris on the January 16<sup>th</sup> 1969, to apply for our visa to once again travel to the "Ile de France" in Gabon. On January 26<sup>th</sup> I was back in Schiedam again, but this time after the successful move of the Ile de France. After that I went to the Ile France several times, to move it in the field, but also to prepare her for the tow around the Cape to Madagascar. Then to prepare her in the bay of Tuléar for drilling in the Street of Mozambique, move her twice there and once back to Tuléar to prepare her for the return voyage to the African west coast. I received her in Point Noire, Congo, and prepared her for drilling off the coast there. And at some moment I prepared the "Ile de France" for rounding the Cape again on her voyage to Abu Dhabi, where she would be drilling for ADNOC. By that time I had completed the training of one of the French crew members, Marcel Gorias, to do further jacking. The only time I visited the Ile France again was years later when the helicopter which brought me to the Sedneth 2 landed on its helideck to drop off some mail.

In the mean time Hans Rusche worked on a number of SBM's, Single Buoy Mooring units, being built in Schiedam as well as on the Gusto yard in Slikerveer. He later joined the company specially set up for the installation of these buoys offshore the many coasts all over the world.

## **The Japanese connection**

IHC signed a license contract with Sumitomo in Japan. And on the Kawasaki Heavy Industries (KHI) yard in Kobe, Japan, they were building a jack-up barge with 4 legs. The "Kaiyo". All hydraulic components, cylinders, valves, pumps and controls for the unit had been supplied and installed by the KHI hydraulics company. We were informed that it all functioned very well, but they requested our support for the jacking trials.

I was the lucky guy to be sent off to Kobe. Sometime in November, 1969, the flight (JAL) flew from Copenhagen via Anchorage to Tokyo. Since we passed over the North Pole I was issued a special certificate, like all passengers on that flight, to remember this moment by.

The day after arriving in Tokyo I was met by a Sumitomo representative (Mr. Yamamoto) and we took the "Bullet Train" from Tokyo via Osaka to Kobe. I was escorted to the Oriental Hotel, where a room was booked for me. The following morning I was picked up and escorted to the yard, where I was issued safety helmet and white, cotton gloves! On my request a yard manager, Mr. Matsemura, supplied me with the hydraulic diagrams of the jacking systems, which I studied

Kawasaki-IHC-Gusto >>>>>



<<<< *Jacking hydraulics*

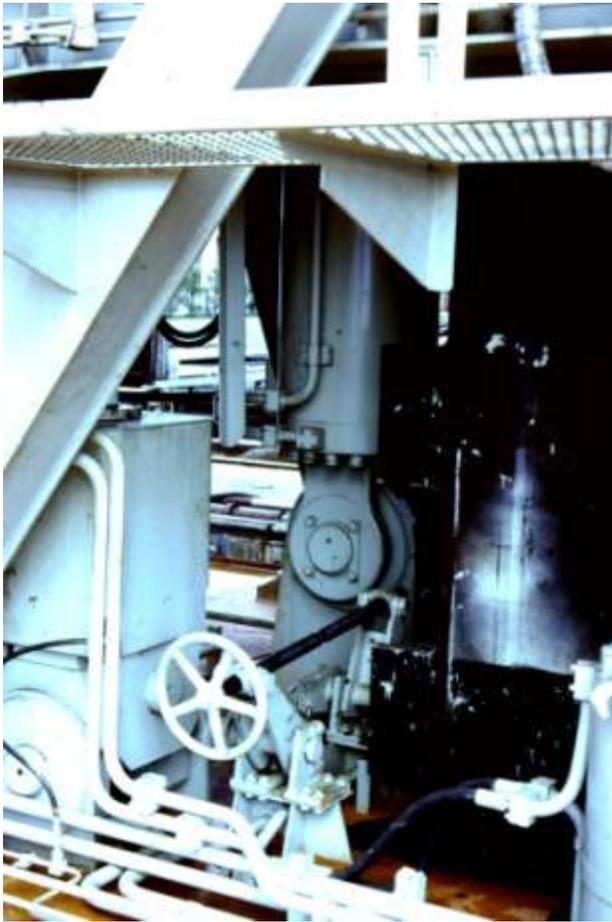
One remark I remember clearly: the servo system (used for the operation of the control valves) hadn't been completed with a micro pressure filter. In answer to my remark on this Mr. Matsemura informed me that "their specialists had said: Not necessary!" My answer to that: "Our specialists say: Very necessary!" didn't make an important impression. But I was later proven correct!

One evening I was sitting at the bar of the hotel and having a drink. And watching the TV, which was set on the wall behind the bar. But not just TV like we had in Holland. No, this was color television. On the other side of the bar an American was having a drink and in dispute with a Japanese lady(?). His voice was getting louder and louder, she apparently kept her calm, till all of a sudden she left the bar, stamping her feet. We were the only two guests in the bar and since I wasn't in the mood to socialize with him I kept watching the television show. "Hey", I heard him call me. I admit now that I was being rude and I didn't react. But he kept calling me, so at last I turned and said: "Good evening!" He blinked and informed me that I was speaking with an English accent. So I told him that I had learned English at School in Holland. And I returned to the TV show. He was silent for a while and then asked me: "You like that shitkickerpicture?" He had to repeat that for me and then he explained. I was watching a Western or Cowboy movie. Cowboys work among and with cows and the cows shit on their boots. Hence the name for a cowboy movie: "Shit Kicker Picture". I smiled and decided that I had seen enough of the movie and of him. I left the bar!

A week or ten day later the jacking trials were started. They had studied our instructions very carefully and written out the jacking operation, step by step. It was all in Japanese symbols, so I couldn't check the steps, as they had written them down. I tried to explain the jacking operation as I would do it, but they religiously believed in their written schedule. One jacking foreman read out loud the first step, followed by a command that sounded like "Go!" The Jackman sitting in front of the control panel operated the various handles and buttons as ordered. Fortunately the yard had scheduled to test the jacking system for themselves before the official trials.



<<<<<< Jacking trials with Kobe in the background



*Hand wheel for leg fixation wedges*



For the official hand-over trials also the president of IHC, Mr. Harry Smulders, was also expected to attend the ceremony.

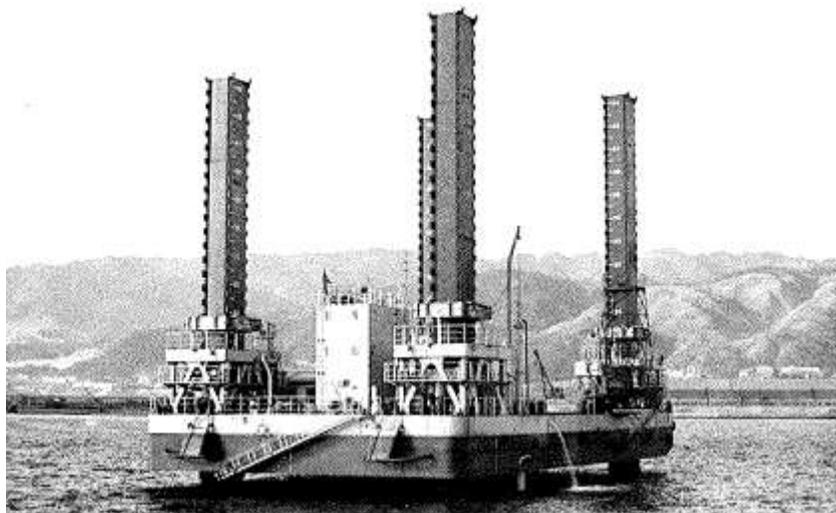
Again and again I tried to introduce my own method of jacking the way Mr. Hage had shown me. Of checking the positions of the jacking traverses, the hydraulic pressures, the indications from the limit switches, etc. and then deciding which action to take. But they stubbornly stuck to their written out schedule read out loud followed by "Go!" And the Jackman following these commands "blindly". It was a nerve breaking operation for a while. The poor Jackman just followed orders without using his own brains! Then, all of a sudden, the control valves were refusing to act on the commands. I had noticed that something was wrong immediately and slammed the "emergency switch". I informed them about this and told them what I thought was wrong: they had lost servo pressure! And I told them what I would do about it: "open the relieve valve adjuster of this system fully, so that the dirty valve could be flushed clean. And then re-adjust to the correct pressure setting". I expected that some debris had corrupted the servo pressure relieve-/control valve causing the pressure to completely drop. This failure was just the reason why we (Mr. Hage and Keelavite) had decided to install a micro pressure filter in the

servo system. But the Japanese mechanic did just the other thing: tightening the adjustment screw more and more causing the debris to crumble and be flushed out, upon which the pressure shot up to the much higher setting. They nearly blew up the whole servo system, including the catch cylinders. I could see what was happening and effected the emergency stop again. Mr. Matsemura apologized and informed me that he had given orders that all my suggestions had to be followed from then on. The test was postponed, the system corrected and retested. And a week later the official jacking test was successfully done in the presence of Mr. Harry Smulders, just two days after I received orders to return to Schiedam!

In January I was again in Japan, at the same KHI ship yard, in Kobe. Mr. Matsemura welcomed me again and handed me some presents. The same as were presented to the guests of the official hand over trials. I was very surprised and pleased. He thanked me again for all the help I had given them. This was also confirmed in a letter sent to Gusto in Schiedam. A copy was handed to me.

The Kaiyo was handed over to the owner and was being towed to the port of Sakaide, on the island of Shikoku. A bridge was planned to cross the water (sea) and connect the island of Shikoku to the main island of Honshu.

With the Kaiyo some soil samples of the sea bottom were to be drilled to check and decide on the correct bridge support structures. They had planned to have me live on the platform, but since it was designed and built for a Japanese crew there was no bed large enough to fit me. Even the "French bed", which they brought on board specially for me, was much too small.



So I was booked into a hotel in Shikoku and every day I was picked up in the morning and returned to the hotel in the evening. I spent there about 3 weeks, which also covered my 29<sup>th</sup> birthday. To celebrate that day they took me to visit the Himeji Castle on my way back to Kobe. For the help they said to have received from me I was presented with a beautiful geisha doll in a nice show box. She still decorates a corner in our house.

## The Single Jacking System

In the mean time, at the yard, a more simple jacking system was thought about: the “single jacking system”. The bigger units, such as Chazar, “Ile de France” and Sedneth 2, were all equipped with the so called “double jacking systems”, which consisted of Working Catches operable by Working Cylinders (double stroke length) plus Holding Catches operable by Holding Cylinders (single stroke length). Also the smaller jack-up were till then equipped with these double jacking systems. This double system made the units jacking faster, but also were more expensive. Therefore the study and design of the single system.

The single jacking system consisted of Working cylinders only and had jacking frames instead of jacking structures. Another remarkable difference was that in the single jacking systems the jacking cylinders (were always the Working Cylinders) were connected to the jacking frame through the rod side and to the deck structure through the cylinder bottom side. In professional language: Annulus Side (to carry hull weight) was up and Full Area Side (to carry leg weights) was down! And the very, very simple units were equipped with a pump set and local manual hydraulic control panel for each leg. The disadvantage of this set up was that the jacking operation was much slower and the communication between the 4 operators at the legs proofed rather complicated. I was therefore asked by Mr. Hage to design a functional central control system.

And I came up with a proposal which included all necessary functions and interlocks and safeties. This plan was then also discussed with R&H and after several discussions and corrections R&H was asked to translate the result into a practical control system and panel. Several weeks later I was asked to go to the “Sluisjesdijk” and check the provisory panel R&H had built based on my design. They did well: just one little slip and a proper PO could be issued for the first COP to be installed on board of the “Teledo”, a jack-up with 4 legs built (and already supplied) to “Compania Construzione Generali”(CCG) based in Italy.

The originally supplied platform with its 4 manual hydraulic operating panels was on a job in the bay of Augusta on the Italian island of Sicilia.

*The owner of C.C.G. was a fan of James Bond, 007*

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The limit switches originally had only a indicative function, but in the new ("semi automatic) control system much of the proper functioning of the controls would be based on the input from these limit switches. We therefore had to come up with a much more reliable set up.

With knowledge and experience of the French language, it proofed easier for me to learn Italian than for the Italian engineer to make himself understandable in English. Hence: I now also speak Italian!

*It proofed it made it a lot easier  
to get the job done >>>>>>>>*



## Single Buoy Mooring systems

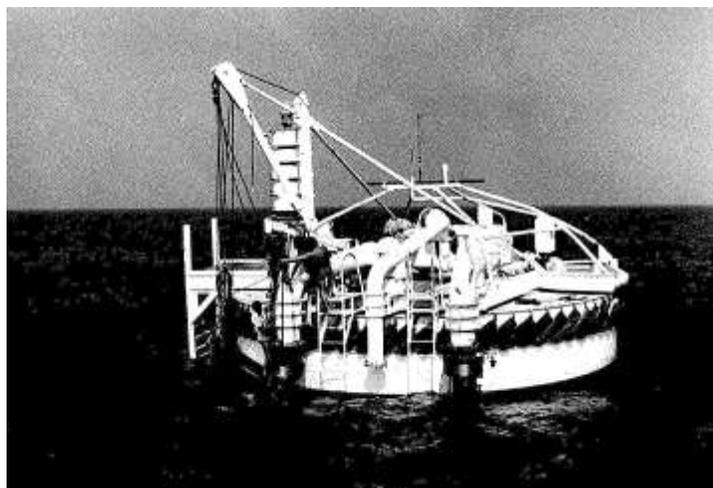
Meanwhile Co Wijchers was still in Argentina and jacking the jack-up "Rio Parana", installing tunnel sections in the river.

In the same period three small jack-ups to be used for building of the new bridge between Rio and Niteroi (Brazil). George Nickels was in Brazil at the building yard to supervise the building. I witnessed the acceptance tests of the 3 x 4 jacking systems: pump sets and manual operation panels, built in Apeldoorn. These jacking systems were of the single jacking type.

At the yard in Slikkerveer a number of oil transfer- and mooring buoys (SBMs) were built.

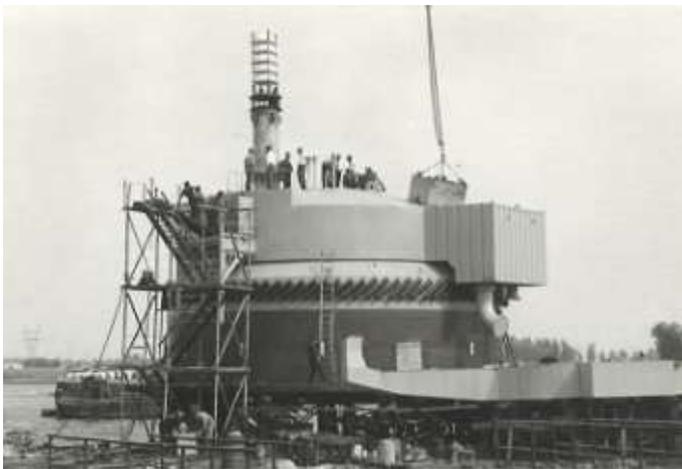
One of them was loaded out on a transportation vessel, bound for somewhere in the world, just to change course outside the piers of Hook of Holland, to deliver the buoy in Ashkelon, Israel. I was asked to report to the SBM office in Rotterdam, where I was informed of the secret mission of

*installing this buoy just offshore the  
Israeli coast. >>>>>>>>*



Mr. Maari, one of the bosses of SBM, was from Egypt and this project had to be kept secret for him. But it just happened so, that when I returned from Israel and stood at Schiphol at the belt bringing the luggage from the flight from Tel Aviv, Mr. Maari came up to me and asked how the job had gone. Some secret!!!

One of the buoys built in Slikerveer was the one for "Canaport" in St. John, New Brunswick, Canada. Out in the open sea and in the winter cold the buoy would accumulate frozen splash on top and thus become too heavy and submerge. Therefore this one was equipped with a hood with heating pipes, while under the hood we installed an engine room with burner and pumps.



When the construction and installation of the equipment was completed we tested the heating system in August 1969. With an outside temperature of 25+ we heated up the system till inside we reached 72 C. The cold beer which we had after successful completion of the tests we never tasted; it just

evaporated! After testing the buoy was lifted onto the transportation vessel for its trip to Canada.

Later that fall I went to St. John to assist the contractor with the installation of the buoy in the Bay of Fundy. The divers had a very difficult and dangerous job fighting the strong tidal current of about 4 knots.

*Port of St. John, New Brunswick >>>*



The tide often reached 10+ meters! I remember that one of the local divers, in his professional life he was with the Police force, was swept away with the tide and never found again!

## **Further experiences at the Service Department**

One time, it was coming close to Christmas, I was again required on the “Ile de France” for a jacking operation. We managed to have her jacked up just in time for us (Doug Kingman of Keelavite and myself) to be back onshore to catch the flight to bring us home for Christmas. But the rig manager was very nervous and uncertain. The legs were set on the sea bed which contained a lot of gravel. And Mr. Giraud feared that when washing in the conductor pipe (beginning of the well to be drilled) the gravel would slip away and the legs would lose their hold. I pleaded with him and proposed that we would fly the helicopter to the shore and wait there for his approval before the office would give us our tickets and we could fly home on the last possibility to reach home in time for Christmas. Or, if necessary, the helicopter would fly us back to the Ile de France. In case we had to wait for the results of the installation of the conductor pipe, the following day, we would be arriving in Port Gentil too late. He agreed and Doug and I sat in the helicopter. The pilot started the engine but stopped it again pointing at the figure of Mr. Giraud coming on to the helideck. I opened the heli door and asked Mr. Giraud what the matter was. He said that he had changed his mind and wanted us to stay. When I asked him why he at first let us go he answered that he expected that we would have left anyhow. I said that this was bull and that if he would have expressed his wish we would have stayed. Oké, he said, than now I say that I want you to stay. Sure enough we arrived the next morning, only 2 hours after our flight had left. No flights during Christmas day so we had a few days in Port Gentil. I signed the consumption tickets with: “Merry Christmas. Alex, Foramer”. We even rented a small car and again signed the ticket. This time with “Happy New Year”, since it was already Christmas day. Much later I met Mr. Giraud at the yard in Schiedam during the construction of the drill ship “Pelican”. He said that he was sorry for messing up with our Christmas, but I assured him that we have had a good time.

After successful drilling offshore Gabon (I went there many times for the jacking operations) Foramer, owner of the “Ile de France”, acquired a contract to drill for oil and/or gas off the West coast of Madagascar.

And some time in 1970 I was send to the “Ile de France” to assist the owner with the preparations. For the tow around the Cape our engineering department deemed it necessary to shorten the legs with about 10 meters. On a ring rail at about 10 meters above the deck of the Ile de Frans a bridge with a revolving crane was installed. With this crane (properly ballasted) the leg sections could be taken off the legs and installed on supports mounted on the deck.

The Smit International tug, “Zwarte Zee” (Black Sea), towed the unit to South Africa, where the “Witte Zee” (White Sea) took over the tow and continued to the bay near Tuléar on Madagascar. Meanwhile I had returned to Holland and a few days before the tow was due in Tuléar I flew to Tananarive, the capital of Madagascar. Again I arrived without my suitcase. This was a double set back. I had decided that after smoking for 11 years the time had come to get rid of this bad habit. After many trials (all failing!) I had managed to put my hands on some pills, which should help me. And those pills, you already guessed, I had packed in my suitcase. So the first thing I did was buy some smokers and a box of matches! I didn’t travel to Tuléar, since on the Ile de France, nor in the Foramer stores onshore they could find my size of work-clothes. Besides the tow with the “Ile de France” was delayed for a few days, due to some heavy seas off the South African coast.

Three days later my suitcase was delivered at the hotel and I arranged my flight to Tuléar, where I arrived just the day before the tow arrived. I was put on a supply boat and transferred to the Ile France and I jacked her up on its 5 legs. Again I assisted the owner with the adding of the leg extensions to the legs, lining up, etc.

*Airport facilities during a stop-over. >>>>>>>*



After several weeks the “Ile de France” was ready again to do some drilling and she was towed to a site further north in the Street of Mozambique. Meanwhile I was joined by Doug Kingman, one of the hydraulic specialists from Keelavite, Coventry, U.K. It would be a tow we would not easily forget.

All during the tow, (abt. 1½ day) the weather was nice and the sea very calm. However the platform slowly rolled some 2 degrees. The waves where almost nothing, but it was the slow swell (the remains of

some heavy seas further north in the Indian Ocean about a week previously) that made us roll so much. Not much for the platform but for the expected hard sea bottom it seemed rather much. We sailed in circles for a day and a half and the Surveyor for the Insurance (a Noble Denton captain) even went overboard in a life boat to physically measure the swell: not more than 30 cm!. On the second day of circling around and waiting for improvement the captain of our master towing boat (supply boat, "Stefaniturm") decided to change the towing wire. The new wire was laid on the aft deck in large loops. The "Stefaniturm" approached us with her stern and we made the connection. When the towing wire started to slip over the stern it caught the first mate around the waist and killed him instantly. Unfortunately he stood on the wrong side of the bull work. He was only 28 and had just received his Masters' papers. He was picked by helicopter from the deck of the Stefaniturm and swiftly transferred to the shore. Later we received information that he had been killed instantly. It was one of my worst experiences in all my carrier!

But we still had to put the Ile de France on her legs. I had noticed that the rolling was not constant; she rolled to a maximum of 2 degrees and then the rolling died out till almost nothing. And I concluded that this rolling was caused mainly by the frequency of the swell, which was so close to the natural frequency of the unit. And I calculated that I could prepare the jacking systems in such a way that I could put the legs onto the sea bed at the moment of smallest rolling. Even in case I couldn't touch the bottom in time, so before the rolling restarted, the touching would shake the unit and disturb the rolling pattern. I discussed my plan with the Noble Denton representative and with the rig manager. They both agreed and after sending everybody out of the jacking control room (just me and Doug Kingman remained) I succeeded in just doing what I had planned. Although the shock shook me up more than I had expected, the platform fell quiet and before the rolling could pick up again I had sufficient weight on the legs to keep her quiet. That night we all had a stiff drink!

After drilling in a total of three locations the Madagascar adventure was over: no oil, nor gas. And the Ile de France returned to Tuléar, leg sections got chopped off and the platform with the leg extensions stowed on the deck was towed back to the African west coast. Congo, Point Noir, this time. The water was shallow so they didn't extend the legs. The leg sections were stored onshore. When they arrived I was waiting for them. But before I was required on board I spent a day or two at the house of one of the Foramer staff officers. The following day he showed me to the market. I remember the table with "dead baby bodies". But it were no babies, but skinned monkeys. Gruesome! On another table a small crocodile (about 1.2 meters long) wrapped in rope was at display and for sale. I believed it to be dead and when it blinked an eye I got a real shock. Like "National Geographic" in real time!

A few months later the "Ile de France" again was towed to the east side of Africa, but the tow didn't stop before they arrived in Abu Dhabi. Again I awaited the tow, assisted with the preparation for drilling. But this was my last time jacking the Ile de France. Further jacking was done by Mr. Marcel Gorias, former chief engineer of the platform. Only once, many years later, on my way to the Sedneth 2, my helicopter landed on the heli deck of the Ile de France. However my eyes could not catch any person I knew.

An SBM installation in Zouetina, Libya, needed some repair work on one of the bogies of the turn table and I was the lucky one to be sent there. I didn't like the country very much because of the way the local

people I met in the streets of Tripoli were looking at me. It's difficult to explain, but I could feel a lot of hatred towards this tall, white man. So I was glad that my transport to Zouetina (by car!) was arranged for the following day. In Zouetina I felt much safer and was soon introduced and engaged in the job at hand. The required parts had been sent and arrived some time ago and the job was completed without much difficulty. However there is one memory of this project that is worth mentioning. The installation of the SBM in Ashkelon, Israel, was done by a contractor company, which was a split off from Micoperi. They carried a different name, but among the close circles of the project it was well known (I spoke in Italian with the Italian project manager for this contractor!). The first person I met on the site for the repairs in Zouetina greeted me in Italian and embraced me as if I were a good friend. I thought he was going to kiss me, but all he did, with his face close to mine, was whispering "Shalom" into my ear! We laughed and completed the job without further mentioning of our previous engagements.

Somewhere in the Rotterdam harbor the two crane platforms built by Gusto for "Rijkswaterstaat" had been jacked up and for a minimum of maintenance a small size team was hired. The cranes were dismantled and sold separately. Every now and then one of Mr. Hage's team of jacking engineers was required to visit the platforms and perform a little jacking. Just to prevent the jacking systems to "freeze up". Meanwhile Rijkswaterstaat was in the market to sell these platforms. Finally one of them, the "Kraanvogel", was sold to the "Offshore-Company" and used to do drilling work for a.o. Shell. The second platform, the "Lepelaar", was brought to our yard and was transformed into a "work-over" platform. The man in charge for the client I recognized! It was Mr. Yitzhak Greenbaum, who happened to have been also involved in the Ashkelon project. I was urged to keep the secret safe and worked on the renovation of the jacking systems. One morning, we were almost done with the job, we came to the yard and found the jetty empty. During the night, or very early morning, the "Lepelaar" had been towed away. Nobody seemed to know where to! Well, I did, but had to keep my mouth shut, until I met with the Lepelaar again a few years later.

## **Suleiman Vezirov**

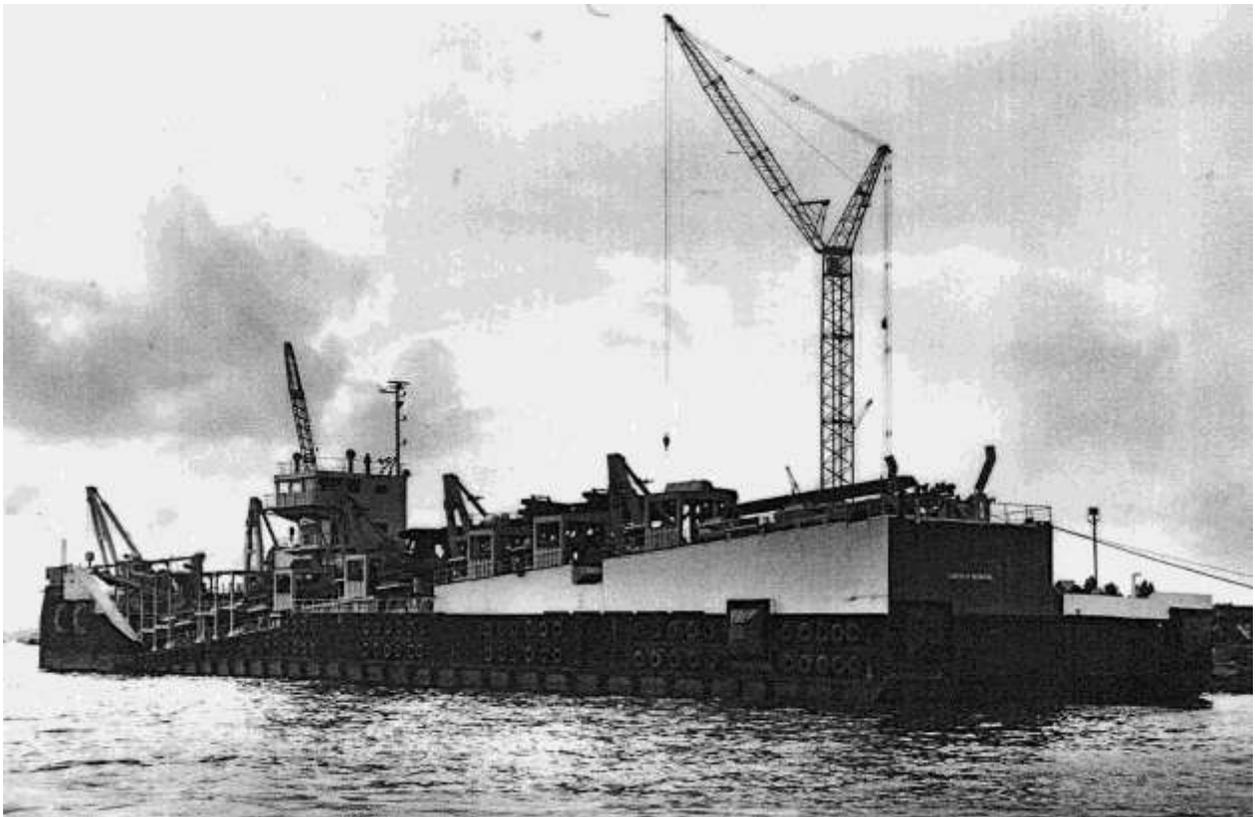
Meanwhile my family had grown a little; we had now two sons. And it became more and more difficult to leave home for only God knew how long a period. Often I would leave for 2 to 3 weeks and finally returned after 5 or 6 weeks. Sometimes even later. Believe me that it is getting on to you when your son of just 2 years blocks the toilet door in fear that his daddy will leave home again. (see also my letter to my two sons, which I wrote two years later!)

So I was rather thrilled and honored when asked to become the project coordinator for the engineering and building of a pipelaying barge for the USSR. The facts that I had USSR experience and had some knowledge of the Russian language helped a lot. The "Suleiman Vezirov", that was the name of Co904, was to be built and assembled from two pontoons, each 107 meters long and about 12 meters wide. The pipe handling equipment came from CRC and the tensioners came from SAS Gouda. One pontoon was to be built at the Gusto yard in Slikerveer, while the second pontoon would be built at the yard of our IHC partner yard "The Klop" in Sliedrecht. The generated power for the unit would come from the Wartsila diesel engines.

The completed barge would be equipped with 8 mooring- (or propulsion-) winches with steel anchor wires of about 65 mm in diameter.

With the assistance of Govert Rutte for the overall planning I did my utmost to keep the design- and production drawings produced and released on schedule. But the project coordinator (me) reported to the project manager (René Raaymakers), who happened to be also the head of one of the three design offices. So reporting to him that his drawings were getting delayed didn't help much in preventing the final production of the S.V. to also slip behind schedule. Time and time again I had been calling for decisions and time and again the calls remained unheard. It had been such a frustration that I had decided that I would only continue on this project on the condition that I would get the opportunity to complete the project in the Caspian Sea. I was granted this wish, providing I would continue to use my positive influence and contacts with the "Russians" so that the project could proceed as smooth as possible. If I remember well it was then that Ton Thoolen got appointed "Project Coordinator".

Meanwhile I continued joining the "Russians" for their instructions in pipelaying by and at the office of R.J. Brown & Ass., in Rotterdam (the "Goldfinger House"). Basic knowledge of pipelaying proofed an interesting asset in my later carrier when working for SAS Gouda on pipe laying barges all over the world.



The deadline for delivery was September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1973, but we couldn't make it. Not only due to the two production stops caused by the striking workers, but also caused by the missed opportunities in the beginning of the project. It didn't prevent the yard management to stop me taking my holiday leave that august 1973. At the last moment (about one day before I was due to leave for Yugoslavia, where our

friends had installed our “Alpenkruiser” on a nice camping) I was informed by Mr. Paardekooper that I had to remain available. “We can’t have such an important link in our relation with the client just leave to enjoy some holidays. They (the “Russians”) will not accept this on top of the information that the deadline can’t be made”, was the argument used by the management. It was a difficult message to bring home to my family but our son of 4 had the solution: “You know what we should do with Mister Paardekooper: tie him to a chair with a long rope!” But it didn’t help much.

In between the above there were still the odd jacking service trips to the various jack-ups, which formed for me very welcome interludes.

## Back to working as Service Engineer

At one time it became clear to me that I preferred to work outside the yard. Back to my job as Service Engineer. And to illustrate my reasoning for this change I herewith give you a (translated in English) letter, which I wrote to our two sons from a trip to the “Ile de France”, in Abu Dhabi.



*Ile de France, January 11<sup>th</sup>, 1974, Abu Dhabi*

*Dear Freddy and Michael,*

*I promised mama that I would try to write you a real letter whenever I could find the time for it. And today, after working all day on some hydraulic tubing I found this time. The tubing must be finished before the testing can start and that's what I am here for.*

*It has been hard working, but in the evenings I found a few hours of free time. And I used this free time to continue writing about the adventures of our two little friends, Wimpy, the little monkey, and Brown, the little bear. I like writing these stories and from mama I learned that you two also longed for a new adventure of our little friends.*

*From mama I also learned that you miss me very much. And I understand this very well; I miss you two also very much. On my little desk in my cabin I have your photo's and I like looking at it. And when I do it is as if I can hear you asking me: why did you leave us again, Daddy?*

*Well my dear boys, it will be difficult, but I will try to explain this to you.*

*When daddy, like the past two years, is working at the Gusto yard, I have to deal with so many people who all believe that they know everything so well. Yes, better than me! And therefore I can't do the necessary things the way I want them to do. Think about this person, Mr. Paardekooper. What a trouble maker he has been for me (and us). It even happened that because of him I had a fight with uncle Bram Vorster. Well you will understand that working this way for me wasn't nice at all. Also sitting in on all those meetings was a terrible experience for me. A meeting is a get together of several persons who give ideas and meanings when they sit together. Things, ideas and/or meanings which they could have given outside of these meetings, but didn't do so. Everything said at those meetings is recorded, written down, and then they can always say that they gave the information and the others could never claim that they didn't know about it. I don't like this way of working with other people very much. Not at all!*

*When I work far away from home, in Africa or like now in Abu Dhabi, all they can tell me is: make sure that the job is completed and safe. Safe also often means that the work needs to be done fast! That isn't always easy, but fortunately I have no problems with so difficult persons like that terrible Mr. Paardekooper, etc. on my trips far away from home I am my own boss. Like here on the Ile de France; the boss tells me to wear a hard hat and safety shoes. But how I do my job is completely up to me. On top of that; when I am working outside our country I get paid more money and therefore papa and mama could buy that nice new radio.*

*Dear boys, I hope that you understand now a little better. Of course I don't like to leave you and mama, that you must miss me, but I also love my job very much. I love being important for the clients of the yard and to be appreciated by them so much.*

*So, actually that is what I have tried to write to you for so long, but it was difficult to find the time and the mood just to do that. I am glad I did and I hope that you understand my life a little better.*

*I will soon continue with my story about Wimpy and Brown, but not today. I have been called to come to the dining room for the evening meal. After that I will go to bed early and will think about you two.*

*Good night. Kisses from papa XXXXX*

Therefore I expressed to the Gusto management my wish to prepare myself for the assembling and completion of the Suleiman Vezirov in Astrakhan and Baku. The coordination of this project was taken over by Ton Thoolen.

### **Third Generation Pipe Laying Barge, “Viking Piper”**

While the Suleiman Vezirov waited for its transportation to the Caspian Sea a new “Third Generation Pipelaying Barge” started taking shape at a number of different shipyards in the Netherlands. At our Gusto yard an odd looking jack-up was being built:

*The “Assembler”.>>>>>>*

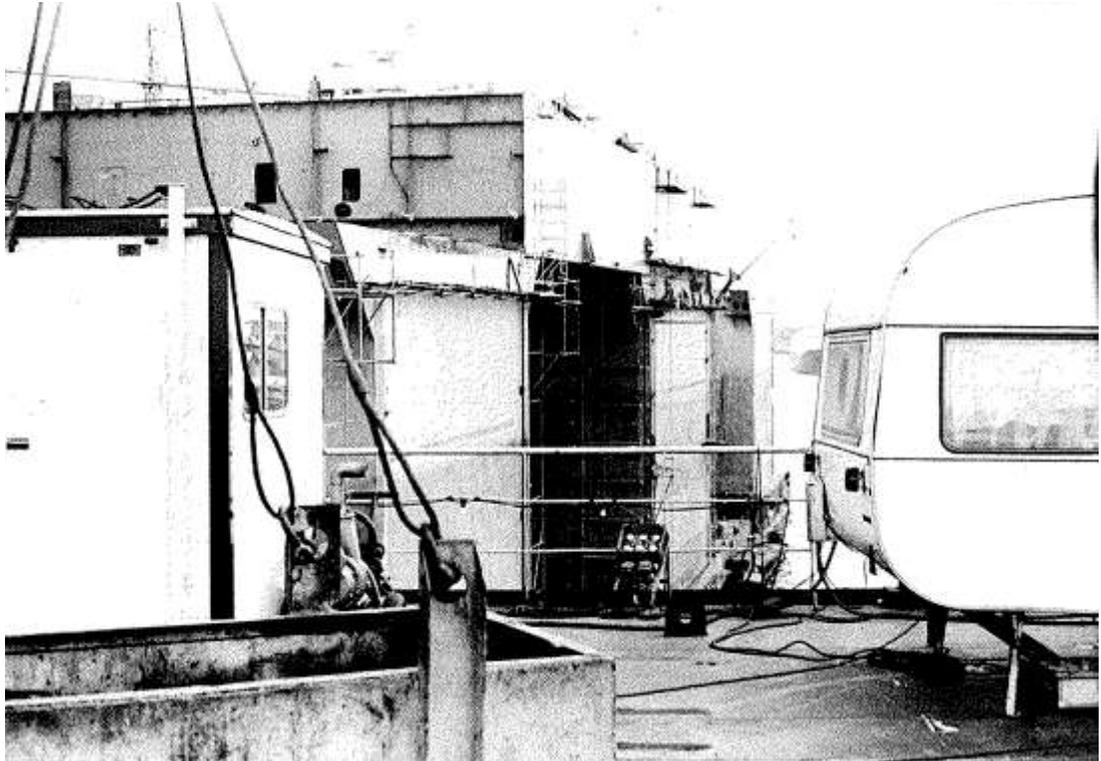


It was going to be used for the installation of the columns, bracing pipes and deck-sections onto the two “floaters”, which formed the support for this semisubmersible barge. The sections would be presented at our yard, where I would lift the Assembler high enough so that the sections could be connected to the lifting devices underneath the hull of Assembler. Then lifted by the Assembler the sections could be

prepared for final installation and connection to form the final semi sub. This was an ingenious plan, but there was something wrong with the Assembler that we hadn't expected. During testing of the hydraulic jacking systems it was noticed that the main jacking cylinders lost pressure. A leaking piston seal? A leaking connector? No, it was something internal! It took a while, but we found the problem: the jacking cylinders didn't leak oil past the seals, but through the steel bodies! And not just one, but more cylinders failed us thus! There was no time to wait for newly fabricated cylinders, so we called for a 24/7 jacking survey and I was appointed to provide this service.

*For that purpose a small camping caravan was installed on the main deck of the Assembler and for 6 days (the time it took the workmen to prepare the section for "mating") I was housed there.*

>>>>>>



By means of a "cooking-alarm clock" I made sure that every hour, day and night, I would get outside and make my tour around the 4 jacking panels, check the pressures and when necessary adjusted the pressures by pumping some oil.

### **Observations during my solitude on "Assembler"**

It was interesting to see, in all quiet and peace, how the workmen of our yard worked. How at the very last moment they would storm through the gate and punch their timing cards. How they then "relaxed" walked to their changing room, from where they resurfaced again and walked to the "Alimak" elevator and waited in line to be lifted on board. Just in time to enjoy a cup of coffee before they had to stand in line again to go down again for their breakfast break.

*The open deck was also useful for short meetings, discussing test results with Bureau Veritas, Mr. Willemse.*



*There was plenty of spaces which the supervisors could not see from the deck and where some “workers” could have their lunch and little siesta.*





I have often thought about this time and these scenes when many years later (2002 till 2004) I visited the huge Hyundai shipyard in Ulsan, Korea, and when people asked me how in heavens name the Koreans could handle so much work for so much less money, it must be a cheap labor country! I could give them at least one reason! The Koreans, proud to work for “their shipyard”, arrived at their working location in time to start working as soon as the horn blew and they would not leave before the horn would blow again for their coffee (tea) break, etc. And the yard management made sure they were well motivated!

After the completion of the “Viking Piper” the “Assembler” was cut in two (2) halves and after adding two jacking systems and legs to each half pontoon the “Mer d’Iroise 1 and 2” were created. Later Jan de Vries recommissioned the two jack-ups in Le Havre, France.

*The Jack-ups were used for  
accommodating commissioning crews  
>>>>>*



## Lepelaar, owned by “Netivey Nepht”, the Israeli National Oilcompany

And I was sent to the “Lepelaar”, which did some work-over jobs in the Gulf of Suez, for the Israelites.

*I found Lepelaar laid up afloat alongside a jetty in Abu Zenima on the west coast of the Sinai peninsula.>>>>>>*



After extinguishing a burning oil well at sea the client had experienced some serious problems with the hydraulic jacking systems. They had just managed to lift the legs sufficiently to tow the unit to this jetty. I was therefore invited to check the systems out and hopefully come with the proper remedial suggestions. A hydraulics specialist from Tel Aviv joined me on my inspection tour. Apparently one of the pumps, a gear pump, kept seizing up. Not just at one but on all of the 8 legs. The local specialist informed me that time and again he had supplied them with a new pump, but they kept seizing up. There must be something wrong with this type of pump. What he didn't like about them was that the steel gear shaft rotated in the aluminum housing, without any ball bearings. In my (not so long) hydraulic experience I had not come across such a problem. The same pumps we had used on the “Chazar” and several other platforms! Therefore I decided to search for the reasons elsewhere. I asked the crew to find me 8 Cola bottles, or something alike. After cleaning the bottles we drained one bottle of oil from each and every jacking system. I urged them to have these sent to “PAZ” (means “Shell” in Hebrew!), the local oil company based in H and have these samples tested both mechanically as well as chemically. There was nothing I could further do in Abu Zenima and therefore asked them to bring me back to Tel Aviv. The following day Mr. Danny Allergand of Netivey Nepht, the owner of Lepelaar, called me in the hotel. He thanked me for my suggestion to have the hydraulic oil tested: it turned out to contain a large percentage of diesel fuel. Thus the lack of lubricating quality and therefore the seizing of the pumps. Could I please write my report and include my advise how to correct this problem. They also asked me if I knew somebody who could supervise this job for them. I said that I did, but added that this person was leaving for the Caspian Sea soon in order to complete a job already started almost 2 years ago. When I got back to the yard in Schiedam I completed my report and it was sent it to Israel.



*Work-over platform "LEPELAAR" in the Gulf of Suez, near Abu Rodeis and Abu Zenima*



Just at that time we estimated that the tow with the two sections of the Suleiman Vezirov was already sailing the river Wolga and closing in on Astrakhan. And all that time no word from the HR department so it was getting high time that I could come to terms with the head of the HR department about the conditions for the oncoming job in Astrakhan and Baku. I informed Mr. Houtaar, head of that department, that I wasn't willing to make the same sort of trip like I had made in 1968. That time the trip consisted of seven (7) months out, three (3) weeks at home followed by another 4 months in Baku. His reaction to my remark was: "What do you propose?" And I said that I wanted no more than 3 months out, followed by three weeks at home. I could see that he was calculating something and he then blurted out the question: "12 weeks! Do you have that many –snipperdagen-?" I told him to put the job there where the sun couldn't catch it and stomped out of his office. That night I sent a letter to Mr. Allergand in Tel Aviv!

And this time, it was now summer 1974, I was allowed to take my holiday leave. We drove to Spain and enjoyed three weeks in the sun. Upon coming home I found a telegram from Dr. Kish, the president of the National Oil Company of Israel, with an invitation to come to Tel Aviv asap to discuss the terms for future cooperation. But on the door mat I also found a note from Gerrit Simons, my boss, telling me to get my things packed again and be on my way to the Ile de France, through the office of Foramer in Paris. Well, the "Lepelaar" would have to wait a little longer. I sent a message to Dr. Kish to inform him about my latest obligations for Gusto.

After a successful jacking operation of the "Ile de France" and on my way home I had to change flights in Paris. There I used this opportunity to phone Dr. Kish in Tel Aviv. He urged me to proceed to the ElAl desk where a ticket would be waiting for me. He would be very pleased if I could visit him as soon as possible. And so I did and later that day I was on my way to the Middle East again. I was met at the airport of Tel Aviv and escorted to a nice hotel where I was given the schedule for the following day's meeting.

When I flew back to Amsterdam I had received a contract, already signed by Dr. Kish, for one year, with an option for two more years, to first bring the "Lepelaar" back to operational followed by supervising the platform in support of work-over and drilling activities.

As soon as I returned to the yard I asked to have a word with my boss, Gerrit Simons, and told him about my new plans. He said that he felt sorry for the yard that I would leave them, but he then mentioned that he would not let me leave "before he himself would leave". He had given his notice also and would leave on September 1<sup>st</sup>. That night I signed my contract with the Israeli National Oil Company and sent it to Tel Aviv. And that, after 8½ years, was the end for my employment with Gusto Shipyard on **August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1974**.

But it turned out to NOT be the end of my dealings with Gusto and with what became of Gusto. Such as MSC, Gusto Engineering and SBM, up to and including SBM/Gusto MSC and GustoMSC all the way up to **August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011**.