

CO 701, “Chazar”



IHC Gusto Ship Yard, Schiedam, The Netherlands

Preparation of Jacking Engineer Joop Wittmaekers

After joining Werf Gusto on March 1st, 1966 and being trained to function as the assistant of the assistant production manager Mechanic (Bram Vorster), I was enlisted into the team of Mr. J.F. Hage. Part of this training involved the hydraulic systems for the gate valves and bottom valves of a 9000 m³ hopper suction dredger, “Geopotus IX”. As a member of the “Hage-team” I witnessed the jacking operations of the two crane islands, “Lepelaar” and “Kraanvogel”, used for the extension of the piers at IJmuiden. In order to get acquainted with offshore- and drilling equipment I was sent to the “Ile de France”, which was drilling offshore Senegal. During this trip I also studied my course in the Russian language, so far that I could read, pronounce and write it. It was a good start.

When I returned from Senegal I was asked to support the production department of Mr. Vorster with the installation and commission of the four jacking systems of the newly built drilling jack-up “Chazar”. Five “Russians”, client representatives, had come to Schiedam: Mr. David Babajev, director of the assembly yard in Baku, Mr. Matweh Machalov, head mechanical engineer, Mr. Houseinov, chief engineer for Chazar, Mr. Filippov, head electrical engineer and Mr. Arudjev, captain of Chazar. A small army of translators and interpreters necessarily assisted with the communication between these Russians and the yard. I was also granted permission to ask them to help me with my study of the Russian language. As it turned out in the end I was able to often assist the translators in finding the correct technical English equivalents for the Russian words used by our guests. You see: once you know how to pronounce the Russian words often you might recognize the meanings, especially in marine terms (think of Tsar Peter the Great, who studied shipbuilding in Holland, many years ago!)

There was just one problem: my first name is Joop, from my second Christian name: Josephus. It happened that one of the Russians asked me for my name and since only direct colleagues called each other by first name I replied: Wittmaekers. No, they wanted my first name, so I gave them “Joop”. That shook them enormously and I was asked whether I would have a different name. They could not use this one! So I informed that my first Christen name was Alexander and from then on they all called me “Alex”. When I asked for the reason I was directed to the Dutch translators and they informed me that “Joop” sounds like a rather bad word in the Russian language. I found out that this Russian word means “making love”, which is not too bad, but not a term used when calling for the attention of a co-worker.

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 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 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 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 !

A local newspaper printed the following: *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

Translation:

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, but my shaving gear I had packed in my hand luggage! 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!

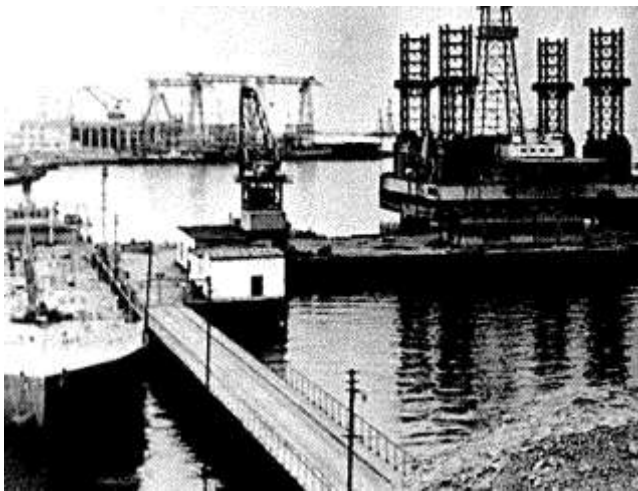
Back to our First working day in Baku. That morning we met our interpreters (Alla, Tanya, Zima and, as only male, Isar) and with a couple of "Wolga" sedans we left for the ship yard. It was made clear to us that our passports needed to stay at the hotel for registration with the police and authorities. 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, live 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 fight 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!*

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.



A full minibus. Mr. Vriezen still used the sedan "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. 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. 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

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, enz” 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!

In the mean time our team was strengthened with other specialists, Dutch, English and German. Although the locals didn’t like the Germans very much, they 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 a German engineer; how splendid life was in the DDR! 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.



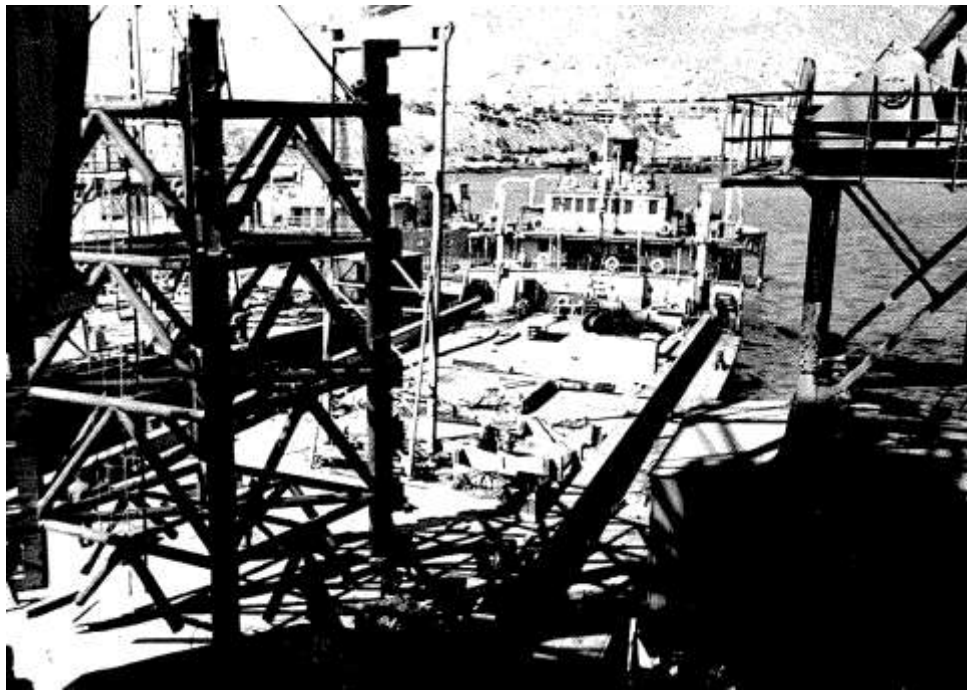
Also telephoning home was a luxury, which, besides costly (however paid by Mr. Vriezen) also rare. Each request or booking had to be placed before 09:00 in the morning and in case the call would come through it wouldn't be before 01:00 at night! More often than not the call wouldn't come through at all 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 they informed them on the reason of our presence in Baku!

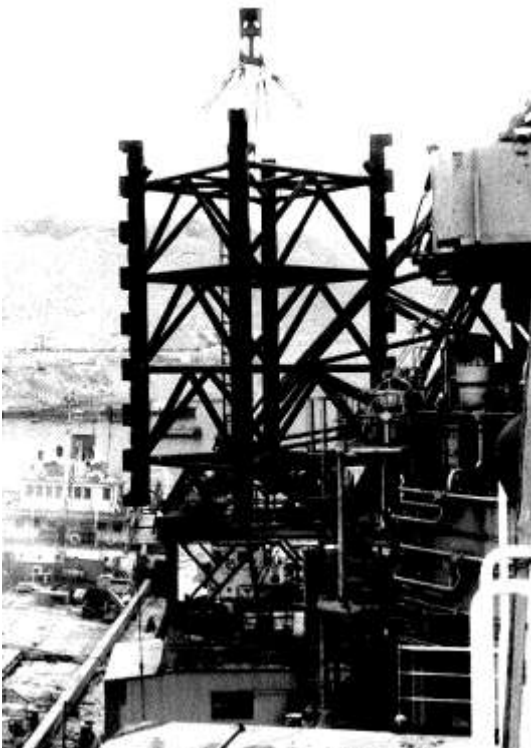
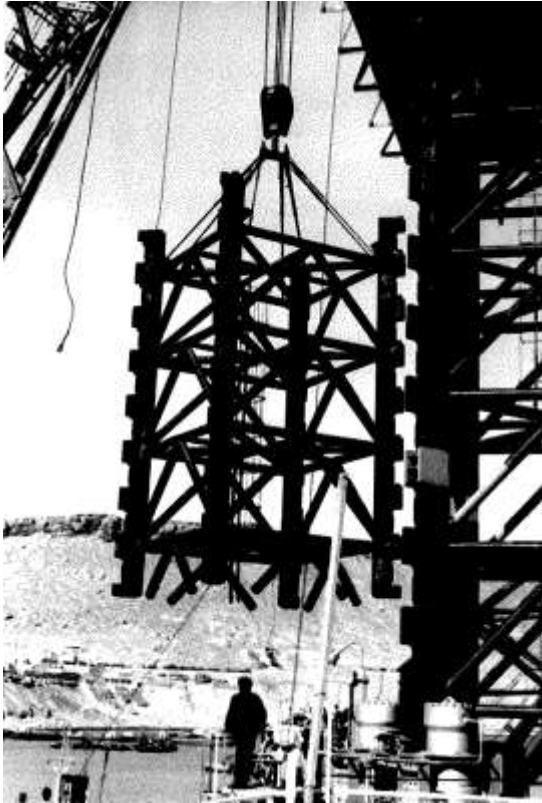
After the completion of the commissioning of the jacking systems and the welding of the first additional leg sections, I was asked to set the four legs on the bottom. They now were our anchors and we no longer depended on the poor mooring wires the yard provided us with. This was my first real jacking 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



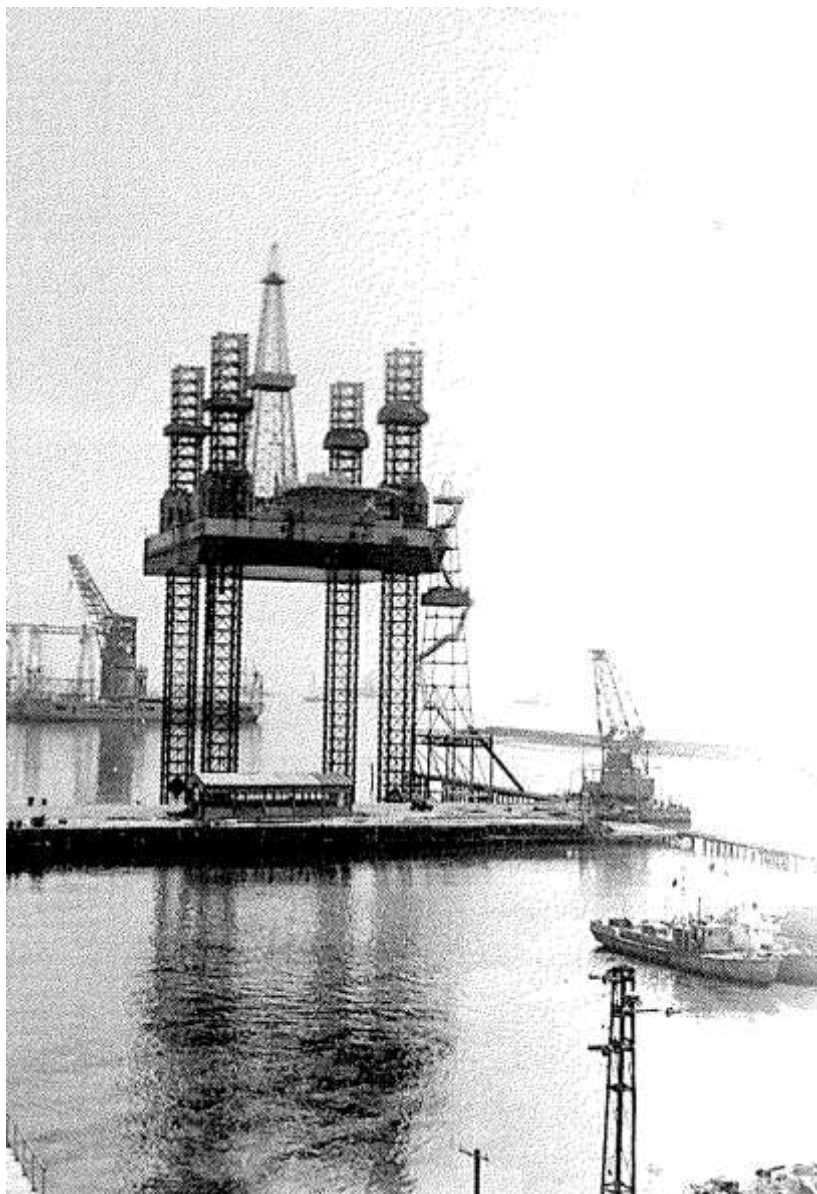
Leg section brought to the site on the deck of transport ship



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!!





*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.*

*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 career, 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!

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

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!

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 proofed to be too complicated! So after many days the oil finally arrived at the yard in Baku by trucks all the way from Moscow!

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

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 combustibile 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.

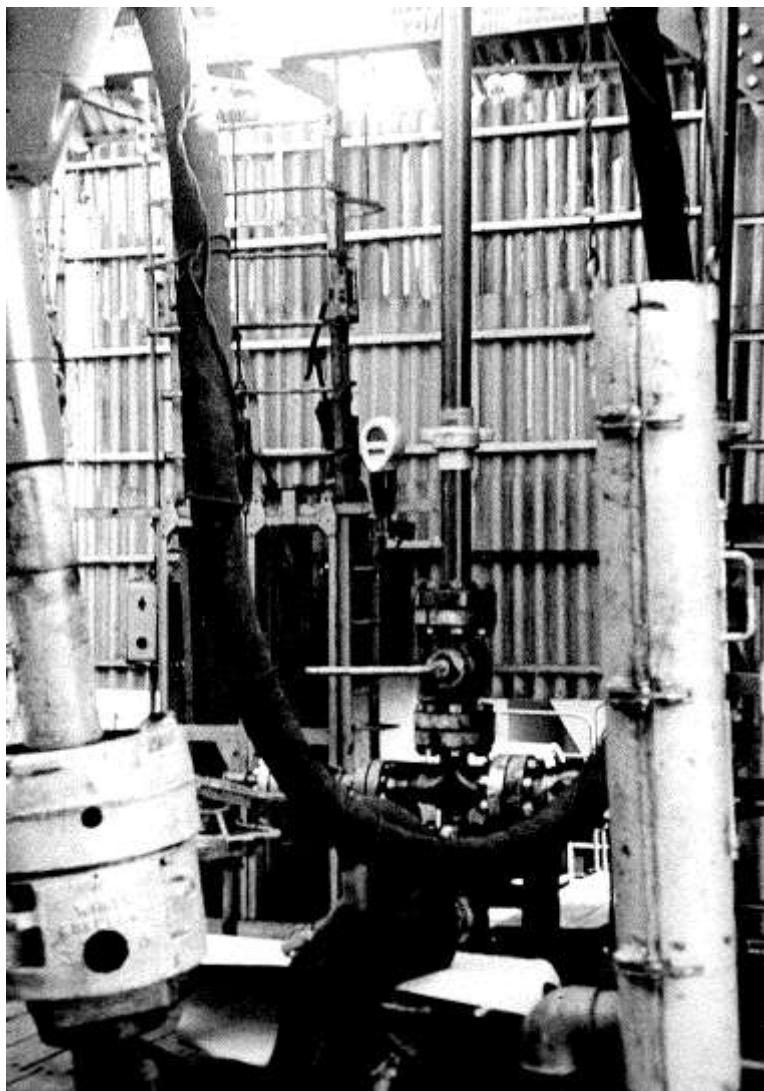


Sometimes these provisions, such as raw meat and paper bags with bread, would lay in the sun for days before they could be safely stored into our refrigerators on board of “Chazar”. During the sailing trip to our location the waves often splashed over our provisions against which the paper bags could 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 !



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 off 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 3rd 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 all arranged before I left for Moscow and Baku, but for the last trip 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 this 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 20th, 2005, just south of Baku, Azerbaijan.

Report and memories assembled and written up in December 2014 by:

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