

MMS OFFSHORE GULF OF MEXICO  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: B.B. HUGHSON

Date: June 24, 2002

Place: New Orleans, Louisiana

Interviewer: Tyler Priest

Side A

TP: This an interview with Mr. B.B. Hughson at home in New Orleans. The date is June 24, 2002. The interviewer Tyler Priest. We are talking about offshore Louisiana and Shell in the early days, in the late 1940s. So you were with Shell in Wyoming?

BBH: No, actually, I started in California.

TP: What year did you say?

BBH: 1942.

TP: So, you graduated from Berkeley?

BBH: Yes, U.C. Berkeley.

TP: And you started in 1942?

BBH: Yes, in petroleum engineering. But, I had worked three summers for Western Geophysical in the Valley to put me through the school. I got sixty cents an hour, or sixty-five. But anyway, that was big money then!

TP: So, you were taking petroleum engineering, not

Geophysics?

BBH: They did not have geophysics. I had dropped two petroleum engineering courses and replaced them with two seismology courses given by Perry Bowerly who actual wrote a book. So I studied earthquake seismology and spent three summers working in the Valley on western crews. The firs geofoams weighed 12 pounds. And what a headache! They had hand-cranked wheels. But the last year, they had one you put on the ground with just a plank and a power wheel. The instrument crew consisted of me and the operator. I had to do all the grunt work.

TP: Then you joined Shell?

BBH: Shell offered me a job the April before I graduated. I asked for a deferment. The draft board gave me three months. I was surprised, but afterthat I thought, well, I will be drafted every six months; but Shell kept me out. And I worked there in Los Angeles and Sacramento. I ran gravity surveys all over the Rockies.

TP: They sent you down here in 1948?

BBH: In 1948. January of 1948.

TP: Tell me about the leases on 24 and 27 again. They sent you down here as a staff geophysicist?

BBH: No, I was a straight geophysicist, I think. Actually, up there I was assistant seismologist. And I never could get a promotion up there! When I came down here, I was a geophysicist.

They made a study. They had an outside outfit to study their salary school and you put down what you did. So, I supervised geophysical crews running the surveys. I interpreted all the results, looked them up. I made the residual maps. I made the mass \_\_\_\_\_. I told the seismic crew where to go. So anyway, instead of grade<sup>6</sup>, I came out grade 9! And then, I was area gravity supervisor.

TP: Did Shell have its own seismic crews at this time?

BBH: Oh,

TP: You were not contracting from GSI?

BBH: No, not at that time. In fact, they made the own equipment over in the lab.

TP: With Burton?

BBH: Burton made a lot of it, yes. Yes, I knew him.

TP: Now, where are the Shell camps?

BBH: Camps?

TP: Did you have camps for guys who were working on the seismic crews?

BBH: We had a house boat.

TP: A house boat? O.K.

BBH: Yes, a real house boat. I have got a picture of it. We worked on the offshore part with little boats and an air boat. Any place you could run a boat belonged to the state Louisiana had much along the land but you could run anything that was damp with the air boat. So, we ran gravity surveys on land. In offshore, we f started using levers and then we got a Shell surplus boat, an 85 foot ex crash boat from the war, and we operated offshore with it. One assignment was running our recognizance map over the Gulf out to 600 feet using celestial navigation. We worked 24 hours a day on it.

TP: When was that?

BBH: That would be about 1950, 1951 maybe. Probably 1950.

TP: So, to go back to the state sale. Was it in 1948?

BBH: Yes, it was 1948. They could not get any refractions in there; the mud had not compacted and it was too soft. They did get a few little shallow wiggles. Nobody had any confidence in it. And Roza made the map. He was a geophysicist.

TP: Roza?

BBH: Roza. Freddy Auk and Beaux Dykstra put in a bid. It was either five or six dollars an acre, without getting permission from New York. The first well was marginal and the second one was good. They had so much oil there that they were forgiven! In fact, that built the Shell building. In 1954, Dykstra threw a party for everybody that had 10 years or more in the Roosevelt Hotel. We had an hour of drinks. We all had a steak dinner at the Roosevelt. They had Ted Lewis' band, top hat and all. They had two Marx brothers there entertaining.

TP: Really?

BBH: Yes. And Chris Owens was there doing her dance. For dessert, they had baked Alaska for one thousand people with the red coated waiters coming in doing a jig with trays and Ted Lewis playing the music. That was a fabulous party. That was celebrating!

TP: Did they give block 24 and 27 the same sale?

BBH: No, 27 later down here.

TP: About 1950?

BBH: I think was 1960.

TP: Really? It is still in state water though, right?

BBH: Oh, Well, the state originally did not have any boundary, but then the government saw all the money were making, so they moved them back to three miles.

TP: A series of challenges . . .

BBH: Well, the gambling boats stayed out 12 miles off of California because that belonged to the states. They

were in high seas, but for some reason it did not apply here. Now, Texas had a different gradient.

TP: Two and ½ miles.

BBH: Yes. But anyway, for the 60 sale we shot refraction. We drilled the salt dome. But prior, we had a gravity survey that showed it and we outbid .

TP: Now, are you talking about 27?

BBH: For 27, down here.

TP: I thought 27 was earlier, but maybe I am wrong.

BBH: No, they had wells down on the north border, but I remember, of course, I ran the survey way early. The refraction was when I was in the marine group and that was January, 1958. But anyway, they outbid Texaco, I think, \$19 million to \$27 million or something 1 that and they got it. But they had the rail on the north border of it, so they were looking down their throat, more or less.

TP: Would you consider 24 to 27 to be one large field?



BBH: No, I do not think so. There was a big fault up here. I was shooting down there in the 1950s and I still could not see it on the seismic. It was an interesting spot.

This one over here, south pass 69, was in the 62 sale.

TP: Tell me that story again.

BBH: O.K. There were no reflections around , so we had a gravity survey on it in about 1950 that showed . Then we shot refraction across it which outlined it. There were so many things for sale in 1962 that McAdams was the top dog on starting the bids. He would not bid on it, but I pestered him so much he finally said, "Well, to keep you quiet, I'll put in a bid." And they put in \$150,000, which was a pretty small bid. Nobody else bid on . So, they got the lease. They did not drill it for four years. They had a five year lease. Then, they drilled it and they drilled 19 straight producers.

TP: So, what was it about that that looked promising to you?

BBH: Well, it is a salt dome in this country. Lake Washington, Garden Island Bay, and all of these big domes offshore all produced. And it was hard to believe that a dome in that country would not produce something.

TP: Why did McAdams . . .

BBH: Well, it was one of the things that he had section maps on. This was blind; well, not blind, but you did not see anything around it. I think Roger Callie, who was the marine division geologist, first said, "I never heard of a dome down there that didn't have oil." Well, anyway, we got that one.

TP: What other fields do you remember? Did Bay Marchand come later?

BBH: Yes, that came later. That was put up for sale . . . I think it was under Robinson, before Dykstra.

Yes, that dome there, it was a huge dome.

TP: Was this before 1948?

BBH: No.

TP: About that time, maybe?

BBH: Right around that time, yes We had the dome mapped and exploration wanted to bid on it. But Robinson said, "Well, we can't bid on everything." So they bid on the

other one here and let that go. And this one I think we had with Hubbell.

TP: Did Shell eventually get in?

BBH: Yes, Mike Forrest made a map on the south flank and there is, I see, one Shell lease there. They also had a blowout there. I have got pictures of it. They had a blowout over at \_\_\_\_\_, too.

TP: That was in 1949, right?

BBH: Yes, about then was when they had a blowout.

TP: That was in Main Pass 69?

BBH: Yes. They had a blowout. They ran down a barge with airplane propellers on it to build the flames away so they could work on it. Yes, those are the two f we had offshore. We had another one up in Mississippi. But anyway, it was interesting country. It has all sunk now.

I do not remember them all but we bought quite a lot of acreage at that time. We did not know what side of the dome would have better chances than another side. So they put in fairly normal bids on a whole lot of stuff

and then when we got all of these and we shot a proximity survey. Are you familiar with those?

TP: No.

BBH: You drill a hole down through the harder pressures and stop when you hit the geopressures because that is when you set a pipe and the money picks up. Then we would go up to the top of the dome and shoot an explosion into well and move the seismometer up on a Schlumberger cable. Then you could map the size of the dome. Then, we would move into a better position. But you could drill a hydropressure well there in maybe five or six days. It was very fast, and then they would move into a better position.

Not every one produced. We used to call them by numbers before they put names on them. The procedure was that they would shoot a loose seismic grid, then they would have a guy make a map on it, and then I would assign a number to it. I wrote it up in my looseleaf book and then we would detail it.

TP: This was your general procedure in the 1950s?

BBH: Oh, yes. I was there from 1958 through 1962. I ran the

marine geophysics group.

TP: What did you do between 1948 and 1958?

BBH: From 1948 through 1952, I ran the gravity work. In 1952, I had polio. I was 33 years old. But after that, I went on party 18 onshore. It was a marsh crew. They also worked out in here in shallow water - the marsh crew. I was there, I think, 1-1/2 years or so and then I was promoted to be the Baton Rouge division geophysicist. I had as many as four land part running. There, we had The crew stationed out across the country.

I was on the crew back here in Baton Rouge. They had a state sale every 30 days. They would publish it and you had to put a bid in in 30 days. There was one field . I do not see it on here. It was a little one in here that was put up for sale. We shot it. They would run the records by motor boat up Venice at night. I would drive down to, they called it the jump, to have a beer with the operator that brought up there records. They were still wet. Then, I would drive back to Baton Rouge and hang them up over the top of my door in the house to dry them. Then, I would go down to the off in the morning, work up that day's data, and then do it over again. And that crew was working continuously but

they had two crews.

I made the map and the procedure was that you turned it over to the division and they looked it over. Then they sent it down to the review seismologist in New Orleans and he would look it over for us. But, there was not any time on this so they sent the map right down to the review man. He said, "No use reviewing that." They got it and they bid on it in the 30 days. We shot interpreted it and got a decision in 30 days. And they got the lease. Again, this when they outbid the California company. The California company bid \$300,000, Shell bid \$350,000, and we got the Discovery Well. The whole procedure was three months. From the time they got the lease until they had the discovery was 60 days.

TP: Are you talking about the little field right in here?

BBH: Yes, right in there some place. It was not very big. Anyway, that was speed. Now, with all of the processing and stuff to go through, you never could do that.

We had it in Lake Ponchartrain over here - the same thing. I made the map on the crew. The crew was in Industrial Canal. I went out there at dawn. You could not shoot at night, so they would be out there by

daylight. They would shoot until it was dark. I would come back and look at the record and interpret it in there and I made the map and incorporated whatever other stuff was necessary. Then I took it down to the big manager's office and we laid it out on the floor. He and Beaux Dykstra were on their hands and knees looking at it and decided to bid and they got it.

TP: In Lake Ponchartrain?

BBH: Yes. They got a little gas, but that was not anything colossal.

TP: So in 1958 you came back to marine?

BBH: I was division until then.

TP: The marine division was created about that time?

BBH: Jerry Burton was the first manager. That is September, 1954.

TP: What magazine is this?

BBH: That is the Shell interoffice . . .

TP: I have not seen this. I do not even think they have this at Shell. So, this is a New Orleans area publication?

BBH: Yes, that was our first one. Jerry Burton still alive.

TP: Is he? He was the first President of the Pectin Company.

BBH: Yes.

TP: Is he in California?

BBH: Yes, he is in California. I have got his address and phone number. I talk to him once in a while on the phone. In fact, he was the area geophysicist in the 1950s.

I remember they told the story about shooting down here in West Delta. It was rough and the crew said they could not shoot. Old Burton, he looked out his window and said, "It doesn't look rough to me." He got on the airplane and went down there, he got on the boat and went out there in East Bay and they almost lost their drag cable because it was so rough. He said, "Well, you are right," and they went back.



On block 27, when they bid on that dome, Burton went out and took the log of the well of the water and he did not even let Schlumberger look at it. Oh, they were secretive on that thing.

TP: I See Jerry Persig in the picture.

BBH: Yes, he was the first marine geophysicist. That is Cowie McArbor, who was our first paleontologist there. They are all dead.

TP: I was talking to Jerry O'Brien about the 62 sale and he was telling me about the work that the paleontologists did.

BBH: Well, K\_\_\_ L\_\_\_ took his place.

TP: So, you came back to the marine division in 1958?

BBH: In January, yes. I took Persig's place.

TP: This was a critical time because there was a downturn in the offshore business at that time and there was some debate over how deep you could go.

BBH: Beaux Dykstra was opposed to it.

TP: I have talked to a lot of people about this. It just seems so strange because he, more than anyone else, was responsible for these early shallow water successes.

BBH: He wanted to make money and he did not think the economics were such that you could make money out there in 600 feet of water. So, when the prospect at West Delta, what I call 225, came up, the group had a meeting and could not decide what to bid. Finally, I asked him, "What would you bid on it? What do you think its worth?" He said, "I wouldn't give you a nickel for it."

TP: West Delta 225 you said?

BBH: No, it was not West Delta 225. We assigned it by prospect number.

TP: Prospect 225.

BBH: Well, we drilled four or five holes on it and they got only one lousy little well. McAdams, I guess, wanted to drill some more and I did not think that we could. But anyway, I did not agree with him and I ended up getting kicked out. But they did it and they held the lease for a while.

TP: When did they get the lease?

BBH: They got it in 1962. I think they gave to the production department because they had a little well on the east side. They eventually dropped it. Somebody else picked it up and Mike Forrest was hired as a consultant for that outfit. They ran a 3D survey, the way they can do now, and they got a pretty good discovery on the way down the north flank.

TP: This was later?

BBH: Yes, he wrote me a letter about it and I have got all the details. He was hired as a consultant to review it, but our success was lousy.

TP: can you tell me how you prepared? 62 was a big sale where they opened up everything that was nominated, right?

BBH: Oh, it was a terrific sale.

TP: So how did you get ready for that?

BBH: Well, we shot like mad.

TP: Was there a limit on how deep you could shoot?

BBH: I believe we shot out to about 600 feet but I may be a little faulty.

TP: Because they were getting the Blue Water I ready?

BBH: Mr. Charlie had come in, yes. As I say, we did not know which flank to bid on, so they just bid what we considered nominal at that time on all the flanks. Then they drilled a quick hydropressure well, shot a proximity survey, and moved into a better position.

There was another dome that we had with Humble at that time. Partners on. And they had production on the thing through the hydropressures. We would run a proximity survey and we postulated that it had deeper possibilities. They did not want to go deeper into the expensive part, but we convinced them to and we dug down there. Damn if we did not hit salt in about 300 feet more! But luckily, we went through salt. It was a ledge and we came out underneath it. I do not remember how much we found underneath, if anything

There was another interesting thing that happened down there. There was a salt dome called flat top. It had a

flat top on it. Anyway, Shell acquired a sulfur lease on it.

TP: When was that?

BBH: Maybe 1960 or 1962. I am not sure. It must have been in there someplace. That was during my stay in the mar group. So anyway, Shell was going to move in a big rig to test for sulfur and I shot refraction on it. I calculated that the salt was only 400 feet deep. What are you putting a big rig in there for? Why don't you drill a shot hole rig? You know, a seismic shot hole rig? So, O.K., they put in a shot hole rig and they sent Don Dessitel, who died a couple of months ago, out there to sit on it. Well, they got to 400 feet and Dessitel reported no salt. The top manager called down, "You don't know what the hell you are doing down there" Blah, blah, blah. Well, as I recall, they hit salt at 420 feet. He never called back. He did not say come back. Nothing. But anyway, there was no sulfur.

There are a lot of interesting stories during that period. Carter Gregory was Ph.D., Caltech. I think Hollycamp was an area geophysicist. Anyway, Carter was on my back any time he could. He a good friend, but he still bugged me. I remember one dome that we did not

think much of our location on at all. So finally, the big manager asked him and he said, "Well, Carter, where would you drill?" And we proposed a spot. He said, "I suppose it is as good as any place."

He was a very bright fellow, but details were not too good. He did not like our map on one prospect, the 101. He bitched about it. So, the manager said, "Well, Carter, you make the map." So, he made a map with thousand foot contours on it. There were two levels; that was his mistake. So, we had a helper that was going to fix up the map to send in to make a profile. The guy comes back and says, "You know, I didn't realize we had thrust faults down here." He had made his fault trace on the shallow map down dip from those other ones. He had a zone through there. But he was an interesting character!

One day, I had a blackboard that was either 12 or 16 feet long. I used to hang maps on these. It had a magnet that would hold the map stuff on it. Anyway, he came down one day and he wrote on there in, I think it was German or Italian, "The green tree of life is covered with shit." He wrote it there in German. So anyway, we erased that off. I got Al Lepointe, who studied French, to put a message on there in French. And then, at the

end of it, we hung a map over it. Well, Gregory comes down and he looks at that. He spoke French, also. Anyway, he went over and pulled up the map, and it said, "Good Dr. May, kiss my ass!" Anyway, yes, that what I thought!

We got him one day. When they moved the marine group out to Veteran's Highway they put a whole list of people's names and their room assignments. Well, one fellow, they never even told him he was transferring in the marine group and his name appeared. We put his name down on the bottom of the list and gave him a room assignment. He came down and saw that. He thought he was way above that. He was so angry. He wrote out resignation and started up to see the vice-president. So, one of the charters ran out and said, "Carter, it was just a joke. Don't take it seriously." And, do you know, he came down and he took me to the Playboy Club for lunch. He said, "Well, you really got to me that time!"

Anyway, this is not helping you much. [Looking at pictures). We had a tripod for a while. We put a land meter out here. That is not a very attractive looking thing; it is a one-story houseboat cross planks. It would sort of fold.

TP: These are photos of seismic operations?

BBH: No, this is all gravity. That was one of our triangulation stations. Anyway, that is a motor vessel Ruth, that we used in the deeper water. There was an area off of Timber \_\_\_\_\_ Bay that was dead seismically. I was where the old Mississippi River used to be. We ran gravity over that and there were not any salt domes. I think we surveyed 29.7 miles at night from shore with towers. We rented commercial scaffolding and put up a 54 foot tower. We put a transit up on top at night and we tracked the boat and surveyed out that far. For light we got a thing called a kytoon which is a combination of bloom and kite, and we hung up a flare. We put a bridle on it, dumped it in fuel oil, and lit it and sent it aloft. That was bright enough for them to see that far. The boon was not strong enough to pull up a light cord.

TP: So, you are doing this at night because you had so little time?

BBH: No, you are doing it at night because you could see the light at night 29 miles. In daytime, you would not see it.

TP: So, it was much easier.



BBH: Oh, yes. We did everything at night.

TP: But on land, you could not do it at night.

BBH: No, they would not allow you. They were not shooting anything. You could not shoot at night, but you could run gravity surveys any time you wanted.

Then Romberg developed a remote controlled water meter and we were the first ones to use that in East Bay. I do not know whether you know him but he developed a zero link spring gravity meter with Romberg at the University of Texas. When he graduated, he applied for a job at Shell and they offered him about \$200 a month. He said no, he wanted \$250. So, he went back to school and got a Ph.D. and developed the water meter and organized his company. He is dead now.

He came out to the boat and was going to adjust his meter so it would handle the quarter inch vertical movement because the bottom was so soft. He locked himself out of that meter. He had not had it patented yet, so he fixed it up so nobody could get in very easily. Well, he said, "I locked myself out. I can't get in." Anyway, he there and he thought and he thought and he thought. Finally, he got his drill, measured around, drilled one

little hole and got it open. He dusted and had to fill up the hole.

TP: These are great old photos.

BBH: This is the Higgins boat - 29 foot... it had a telestern, half tunnel stern, so you could go into shallow water. He used to rent that for \$8 an hour. No standby time.

TP: Hydroplane?

BBH: Yes. This was our water vessel, Ruth, that we got. had a big ball with mirrors stuck around to reflect for the seismic. But then, they used show hand which was a system where they could get a distance at the shore hand station. This was one of their shore hand boats that we got. But then radus came in. It is a phase interference system. So then a commercial outfit came in with that and it took over everything. So, this was an old boat that we had. We did Lake Ponchartrain with that, the gravity survey. Anyway, that was before I had polio.

I used to like to go out and work with them. We had an eye beam sticking out in the back of the boat and the trolley on here with a chain and then a cable. You

could wheel it out and put a pin through the hole there and lock it, and then lower it down and bring up. Then, bring it back and put her on the tires. We had a winch hooked up there. It had a pretty good sized cable and we had about a three foot winch that would bring it back. But, we had to measure depth so we got an air hose and just put it alongside of the electric cable. And then we got a pressure meter, a big one, and cylinders of, I do not know- nitrogen or something... or maybe it was air. Anyway, we would open up the thing and blow a bubble out the bottom, then turn it off. And the pressure gauge would be a function of the depth of the water pressure at the end of that hose. That is how we measured the water depth.

TP: Innovative.

BBH: Oh, yes. Well, it had not been done before.

Here I am again. I was better looking then. Anyway, was fun.

TP: Those are great old photos.

BBH: Those are marsh buggies . . .

TP: Oh, a marsh buggy. I did not realize they were so big.

BBH: Yes, I think they had two engines. They kind of tore up the marsh, too.

TP: How long did Shell do gravity?

BBH: Oh, they stopped in 1943 or 1944, some place in there.

TP: But you still did some in Places where you could not reflections?

BBH: Oh, no. They got reflections most every place else and they covered everything. A fellow named Leroy Fennelson took my place. He ran it for a while. He was real good at making mass analysis because on \_\_\_\_\_ Island, there was an overhang in the salt which he detected with the gravity survey and got them, they drilled down and went through, I think, 10,000 feet of salt before they came out. He was so nervous when they were drilling that would not even let his wife put salt on the table. But they came out fairly close to where he said.

These are organization charts. The marine division was fairly small then.

TP: So, Ronnie Knecht was . . .

BBH: Well, he took McClure's place. Perry McClure. He was the first one, he was the second, I think. No, Burton was first, McClure next and then Knecht.

TP: That right, because he was the one who . . .

BBH: He handled the 62 sale. In the 62 sale, we made big folio books with the gravity surveys and the seismic Surveys.

TP: The gravity surveys from earlier?

BBH: Oh, yes. We had already done those, but the mass analysis and everything was on a big book where he had everything together. Then McAdams wanted it small so he could take it to the sale and we made him a small one.

TP: I heard Knecht went over to London with some of the maps of prospects.

BBH: I remember we went to New York.

TP: I think Jerry O'Brien said he went over to London.

BBH: He may have. I do not know.

TP: They were in a briefcase which was padlocked to his wrist.

BBH: Yes, well, I do not remember that, but that could well have been. On the crew, we had a fellow, A.B. Cunningham, who was the first party chief. He was not much of a technical man, but he handled the operations pretty well.

When they came out with magnetic recording, I needed somebody that had a little electronic knowledge. Hasenpflug was real interested in hi-fi sets at that time, so we put him out there. Originally we recorded on paper. Then they had a thing called a Reynolds machine where they recorded on film. And they had a machine called the Zelda T. A fellow in the lab invented it. And then, magnetic recording came in and that was processed analytically on a machine that they had, but when they were able to digitize a big change took place; then the world all opened up.

TP: They started recording digital in 1961-1962, right?

BBH: Yes, well, it was after I was there. It was a little

later when they went digital but we did sometimes shoot long offsets that we could analyze the Zeldas and see the multiples effects. They improved tremendously when they were able to digitize.

One thing came out of it: we detected shale up at 5,000 or 6,000 feet, and we put a bid on it. Then, somebody else did, and they wondered what we were doing. Well, it was shale all right. I think there was another one that interpreted that had a dip reversal, but it was not in the same elevation. So, I did not recommend it, they did not bid on it. I think 13 other companies did. Again, the message came down that we did not know what we were doing. But they drilled a bunch of holes but nobody ever found anything. Thank God!

Well, here is 1948.

TP: \_\_\_\_\_ was the exploration manager.

BBH: Yes, he reported to Robinson in 1948.

TP: E.G. Robinson was the head of the area while in Zurich.

BBH: Here is Carter Gregory. He was an area geophysicist. They had a division in Shreveport. They had one in Lake

Charles. They had one in Jackson, Mississippi.

TP: Jackson and Tallahassee, it looks like.

BBH: Yes, they had one in Tallahassee, too, for a while, but they closed those down. Here I am. Gravity.

TP: Gravity and magnetic.

BBH: Well, we did not drill any magnetic. Yeah, I am some kind of geophysicist! Anyway, I had two crews there. This was the Robert Wray crew. They used a diving bell in the water.

End of Side 1



Side 2

TP: This is interesting.

BBH: Well, this is the area staff. McClure had taken over for Burton. Persig is still there. You look at that, that was 1957. Now, this is 1980.

TP: O.K. I see Bill Bronan is division exploration manager.

BBH: At that time, yes. I was not in there.

TP: After the 1962 sale, where did you go? You were in the marine division from 1958 to 1962 . . .

BBH: Yes, after 1962 I went out to what they called the southeast division. I was out there about 1-1/2 or 2 years. Then I was put back in the marine group making maps. I made maps until 1970. Then I was sent over to The Hague and I worked over there for two years in Holland. I got to see data all over the world: Senegal, Thailand, New Zealand, Greenland, the North Sea, and offshore Venezuela. It was a most interesting assignment. I should have stayed another year. They offered to let me stay another year, but I did not.

I came back. I was on the shelf making maps until 1977. Knecht formed a group onshore of several old-timers and would operate like a small company onshore where we had authority to lease and drill and everything. We got some gas field, but not too much. We had a partner, U.S. Steel, for a while.

TP: Was that when it was Marathon Oil?

BBH: I think it became Marathon Oil. They wanted to expand and we could not. When they had an offshore sale, would pull in people to help. So, they had some guys who were retired that came in, plus I was called down to make maps twice. That is when I made Auger.

TP: What can you tell me about some of the other discoveries that you made maps for? I mean, up to and including Auger.

BBH: Before, I was just supervising other maps. Mike Forrest was part of the group. He was very good. He started on a land crew out in Louisiana under Al Beaujois. He had just got off of the training program. I moved the crews in Baton Rouge so they could work with the geologist but anyway, when I was doing the marine stuff he was assigned down there. When I left Baton Rouge, Flowers took my

place.

TP: Do you remember the bright spot development?

BBH: That came after. Forrest has written papers on it. My education was petroleum engineering. That's why I took a lot of chemistry, a lot of civil engineering, a lot of mechanical engineering, and some geology. I took some seismology. I did not have the math background that was needed. I was getting kind of old so I did not pick it up too far out there on Veteran's Highway off I-10, Mike Forrest first noticed amplitude normally associated gas.

I did do one thing: When I was in Baton Rouge, I thought I was going to be sending things to the division to make maps. So, when I was on the crew I would go over and get all the old data out of the file and make the whole thing. It seemed like a better way of doing it. We started doing that and some of the geophysicists started picking logs.

TP: That's when you went back and looked at the logs to correlate?

BBH: Well, you can. In fact, I was assigned to shoot out a

lead one time and it looked kind of funny to me so I pulled out the logs and checked them over. I said, "Hell, they've made a mistake," and they had.

But Mike really was dedicated. My God, he just loved to work! At two o'clock in the morning, he would be down there still working. And if he was going fishing with somebody, he would work down there to two o'clock and then go out and park in front of their house and go to sleep in his car. They would wake him up and take him fishing!

I went to his wedding. Oh, what a party that was! They had Prima's brother's band.

TP: Louie Prima's brother?

BBH: Yes, it was Leon, I guess. You should not invite geophysicists to come to a party where there is alcohol because they drink everything. I never have seen a gal in a full wedding dress do the limbo and Bobby did!

I used to give parties out here during the 1960s. The whole marine group would come out. We had a coffee fund and had nickel coffee. We would hully gully for it. It was a game. But anyway, they used the profits from the

coffee fund to have a loan fund. so, Bill Marcelis who was a scout, kept the money and he would loan it out. He would charge, I think, a quarter or something per dollar. Maybe it was twenty-five cents per five dollars, between paydays. Anyway, I figured out one time that he was charging 200 and some odd percent! But anyway, with the profit we would throw the party. I had as many as 100 people out there in the yard. We would barbecue steaks and stuff. It was kind of fun. Even the guy that became the Shell president came to them.

TP: The guy who became president when?

BBH: Of Shell. He became president in the 1970s, I guess

TP: John Bookout?

BBH: John Bookout. He came. Jerry Burton was there. It was fun.

TP: The marine division with Shell was really an exceptional organization over time.

BBH: According to that, the 80 organization was extremely large. I cannot imagine what they all do. I think maybe now they have cut back. There was a big cutback in 1986

or so. I retired in 1985. But they called me back and I worked with consultants .

TP: With Auger?

BBH: No, I think that was the year before. I think I got called back three times. Before, when I was still employed, was Auger, I think. Later I got cal back again, and then again on an offshore Texas, worked until September, 1987 as a consultant. But there was a slow down in 1986, I guess. By then, Forrest was exploration manager or something.

TP: That is right.

BBH: I think Forrest got to be president of Shell Offshore or something.

TP: Yes, before it became Shell Offshore, he was the head of the offshore division.

BBH: He is up in Tyler, Texas.

TP: I interviewed him.

BBH: Oh, did you? Yes, he is still around.

TP: It was great. He talked a lot about the 62 sale and the 68 sale.

BBH: In the 62 sale I had such a small group there that they brought in some guys and Billy was one of them that came in to make a map. He made some. He was a very bright fellow, but his map making ability was not quite as good as Forrest or Rick Skolson. He could sure make a speech and had a wonderful sense of humor. He gave me that oak tree I have out there; it was a little small thing. He used to live over here. He used to borrow some equipment.

When he came to Louisiana from Midland, Texas, when I was in Baton Rouge, he had trouble with his car. He had to get rid of it. He bought another one, I think, in Alexandria and he ran into a pipe . . . he checked to make sure the spare was there and he came on to Baton Rouge and he got a flat. He found out the spare was the wrong size wheel. But he was sent to the Baton Rouge division and then a little bit down in New Orleans with Hollycamp who was a review seismologist. And when he came back, he said, "If they ever transfer me to New Orleans, I'll quit." But he did not. You could tell which ones were going to go someplace. And I had some good ones; there was Forrest and Flowers and Al Beaujois

was a real smart fellow. Rex Goldsten became the chief geophysicist for Mesa. He was on my group on the sale.

I do not remember too many of the fields we got. I know there were some out in the west . . . prospect 87. I think it was dry. We could not find anything. And there was another one, 88, that had an odd shape to it. We did not find much there. I still belong to the SEG and about the only thing I can understand is the advertisements. But, my God, what they can do now! Underneath the cell, on sides. We could never get anything there.

TP: You are talking about sheer waves now?

BBH: Yes. I studied there in all different ways when I took seismology, but we did not use sheer waves. We tried to cancel them out. With the first cable they used offshore they would mount a seismometer on a float. They had a cable with weights on it to hold it down. This thing would hang up, I think 18 inches or something, above the cable. They would drag it and the float was slightly tilted, so they would come up when they would drag it and then it would go down. Of course, the sheer waves were canceled out by the water. That is what they did with the levers when they first went offshore. They used to



stop the cable by backing up the reel and have it lay dead in the water while they shot. They learned a lot but it was all kind of hand made out there. Then the start. But the paisley cable came in . . . George Pavey I think, was there and everything got so much better.

We used to shoot 50 pounds of dynamite.

TP: Did you do any vibracize?

BBH: I did vibracize work onshore, but offshore, we would shoot shell dynamite. We had two boats, one shooting dynamite. They would have to tie the dynamite on a balloon because it got too low in the water, you created a bubble and then the bubble would col and you got another bang. And you got your record over again. So, he had to make it to be sure that the bubble would come out reversed in the air so it would not get a bubble collapse.

One time, they did get their charges mixed up on the back of a boat and they blew one up. I think they kil somebody. I think it almost blew the back of the boat off. But after that, there was a firm rule: you make up one charge, not two. You could imagine making it up ahead of time, back there in the water, screw it off and

one of the lids blows off! What we dealt with is not really quite so good.

Of course, holes cost so much more than they used to. Well, everything does, but drilling a hole out here is another improvisation. I think they put the Auger platform in. Of course, they had already drilled a test hole, a floating rig. The Auger, I think that first was something like one billion one or something to sit the platform up. I do not remember that map. On that sale, there was another lead I thought was pretty good. I do not think they ever drilled it, but I do know that Shell Has leases on it.

TP: That was the big area wide sales when they got Auger and all those others.

BBH: Well, that was huge. We did not have any shooting out there but Western had shot it all on a spec bas So, they bought, which was lucky. . . they decided to buy all of Western's spec data out there, in the deeper water. And then they brought me in and then two guys that had retired - Wes Ogden and I have forgotten the other guy - but anyway, we worked on the sale quite hard and quite steadily. I have never made maps so fast in my life! It was fun.

TP: A lot of those leases in those area wide sales were pretty speculative. There was not much time. They were cheap.

BBH: Well, yes I will tell you, one of the fun parts of job at any place in the world is to get 5,000 kilometers of new data and work it up from scratch where you do not know anything. That is really fun. It is a big puzzle and it is a lot of fun to unravel it.

TP: I'll bet!

BBH: I got pretty good at it. I made a map during the 1970s out there for a sale. Old Mike was handling the sale, as I recall.

TP: Was this off of Texas?

BBH: No, it was off of Louisiana.

TP: In the western part?

BBH: Yes, the western part. West Cameron. It was kind of a low relief thing. We thought it had bright spots on it. But anyway, old Mike looked at it and said, "Hell, no." I guess he had too many other things and he turned it

down. Anyway, several years later I got a call from a geologist downtown. I had never met him. He said there had been a discovery on that thing by a competitor and they thought Shell had gone back to check to see how come they did not have it. The guy said, "You made the map. You were about right, too." They wanted to know who the guy was.

TP: That was nice of him.

BBH: It was nice of him to do it, yes. I would love to go down and see current maps on things and see what they look like now. I was part of the good old days. Yes, I really was.

TP: You sure were.

BBH: People give me things. George Samuels who used to be an area geophysicist, would give me things. He dead now, but several guys have kept files like this and given them to me. So I have accumulated stuff. I do not know why I keep it. I guess because I have room.

TP: There the Bay of Marchand . . .

BBH: This is 1970. Up in Mississippi, they had . . .

TP: The Cox well . . .

BBH: Yes, that is what this is. When I was overseas, I still liked to follow everything.

TP: Well, if some day you do not know what to do with it, one thing we are doing is organizing an archive of any material. So, if you do not have anything to do with this and you do not know what to do with it, we can always take it and archive it.

BBH: O.K. If you want, we have got a retirees group in exploration. Anyway, it is kind of fun to up with these guys. I do not know of too many people that do.

TP: Shell has an offshore reunion

BBH: 1958 . . .

TP: Oh, there you are.

BBH: Yes, Mike gave one in Galveston the other day.

TP: Yes, I went down there for it. I talked to the group about the Shell history.

BBH: They brought me back a picture. When I had polio, I got over it in a few months. They were very nice to me; they came by. I did not lose anything. They gave me months to recuperate. But anyway, after 20 years or so I started noticing weakness developing while I was overseas. I was getting weaker. In 1980, I started getting literature to read. I started to have what they call postpolio syndrome, where you go backwards and end up where you were. So that is what happened.

We organized that little company by ourselves out in an area that used to be called Fat City. So, they would call us the Fat City Oil Company!

TP: These are great. I think I will shut off the tape.

BBH: O.K.

THE END

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of Mexico Oral History

Project

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