

HHA# 00481

Interviewee: Barnette, Alfonso

Interview Date: October 6, 2001

OFFSHORE ENERGY CENTER

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: ALFONSO BARNETTE

Date: October 6, 2001

Place: Houston, Texas

Interviewers: Tyler Priest

Side A

TP: This is an interview with Mr. Alfonso Barnetche for the Offshore Energy Center's Hall of Fame induction. The date is October 6, 2001. The interviewer is Tyler Priest from the University of Houston.

You were beginning to talk about PEMEX.

AB: Well, as you know, PEMEX is owned by the Mexican government. The industry was nationalized in 1938. And I have been a petroleum engineer since 1935. So, I used to work with the former companies, with Sinclair Oil Company and Administracion General del Petroleo Nacional. And in spite of having started to study petroleum engineering with five other students, I graduated first because I stayed one more year in college in order to also be a civil engineer. So, I am the first petroleum engineer who graduated in Mexico, in the National University.

TP: In 1935?

AB: In 1935. So, I worked three years with companies. And then one day, the industry was taken over by the government. I became a member of PEMEX and I worked 30

years. I retired after completing exactly 30 years of service with PEMEX, Sinclair and AGPN. That was in 1965. How many years ago? That was 35 years ago. But I have always been doing some petroleum engineering work.

TP: And when you started with PEMEX, your mission was to collect all the geological and drilling data from the nationalized companies?

AB: At the beginning when I was working for PEMEX; yes. I worked as a geologist and then I became one of the petroleum engineers. In 30 years, I finally became, for the last 18 years, a petroleum engineer in charge of production and exploration drilling of PEMEX.

TP: I didn't realize that PEMEX's first offshore well was way back in 1959. The Santana field? Is that right?

AB: Santana. Yes. It was in 13 meters of water. But anyway, it was a complete platform from which many wells were drilled.

TP: Did you draw on experience in the Gulf of Mexico, what the companies were doing in the Gulf of Mexico at the time, as a model for what you developed out there?

AB: I don't remember who designed the Santana platform but I think it was McDermott.

TP: Was it McDermott? O.K. Thirteen meters. And it was quite a successful development, right? Forty producing wells?

AB: Yes.

TP: What else can you tell me?

AB: I used to go, at vacation time, to Lobos island. It is an island between Tuxpan and Tampico. I always thought that that island had something to do with petroleum because it was an elevation of the bottom of the sea, and sometimes these topographic features are related to the geology. So finally, I ordered a seismograph survey. It was a dome.

TP: A salt dome?

AB: No, it was a dome but not a salt dome. We drilled a well and it became productive.

TP: Which companies were involved with that?

AB: PEMEX, really. There were no platforms in that case. Well, we made kind of a platform and drilled the wells from that platform built out of the material excavated from the coral reef.

TP: So you built an artificial island or you drilled on the island itself?

AB: On the coral reef, we made four walls with piles. I don't know what the verb is but we excavated some of the coral material and put it inside these four walls.

TP: Oh, I see. So, an artificial reef of some sort?

AB: An artificial place to install the drilling rig.

TP: O.K. That is interesting.

AB: I believe it is still producing.

TP: Really? So, it wasn't a very large development? It was mainly just that one well?

AB: I am not sure.

TP: That is interesting. Are there any interesting stories that you can tell me?

AB: I think it was 12 years later, after my retirement, I was called by PEMEX to work on the development of the Bay of Campeche.

TP: And you sought out Brown & Root? How did you come...

AB: Along with Brown & Root.

TP: How did you chose Brown & Root? How did you come to Brown & Root to help you?

AB: Well, at that time, there were not many people doing offshore work. I think it was McDermott and Brown & Root.

TP: And you formed a company, Proyectos Marinos?

AB: Yes, Proyectos Marinos.

TP: That was an incredible development.

AB: Yes, it was done very rapidly. The production -- I don't

remember the exact figures — but from 500,000 barrels a day to 3.5 million barrels per day.

TP: And they have recently been redeveloping in one of the fields, right?

AB: During the last six years, it has been Cantarell.

TP: What special problems did you encounter or challenges with Cantarell Development? You put a lot of platforms out there in a very short period of time, didn't you?

AB: That's right. Well, what I am trying now is to convince PEMEX to go after some more oil offshore in deep water.

TP: In the central Gulf of Mexico?

AB: Well, there are many places in the Gulf of Mexico where you can find oil fields, I think. But it has to be proven. We had to do a lot of work before.

TP: PEMEX must see what is happening on the northern side of the Gulf with deep water. They must be very interested.

AB: PEMEX, they are producing a little more than 3 million

barrels a day. Their aim is to reach 7 million barrels per day, at the end of this six years. One year has gone already! But I think they want to do it.

TP: Going back to the Cantarell development, I have to ask you: There was a spectacular blowout that Brown & Root was involved in helping to deal with the Ixtoc blow. Do you have any memories of that time or any memories of that had that spectacular fire?

AB: Ixtoc blowout has nothing to do with Cantarell development and it was a deal directly handled between PEMEX and Brown & Root. The work done by Brown & Root was not included in Proyectos Marinos contract. I have no memories of that fire. But I remember something interesting. We were very confident that we were going to find oil offshore in large quantities, that before the discovery well for that area was completed, we had organized Proyectos Marinos to design some of the necessary platforms. We had to increase production from 500,000 barrels to 3.25 million barrels per day. Somewhere, I had mentioned the number of platforms . . .

TP: In Cantarell? I have it somewhere, too. I think I have

it in here. I can't find the number of platforms. I know it was a lot because I know Brown & Root was building several platforms at a time at Greens Bayou and people said that was one of the most unbelievable...

AB: 90 platforms.

TP: I remember people at Brown & Root talking about how that was an unbelievable project because there was just so much going on.

AB: When developing the deep water areas, I think, many more fields there, big fields, will be discovered.

TP: Do you remember the operation on Sombrero for Brown & Root? The big Sombrero that they had to try to contain the oil that was coming out of the Ixtoc well. That was quite a job that people did to kill that. You have to hand it to everyone involved.

AB: I don't remember the name of the way used to control the Ixtoc well.

TP: Ixtoc.

AB: Ixtoc. That's right. It took quite a while to control the well. The only way to keep that well was drilling two directional wells and then injecting water through them.

TP: And it took something like nine months or something. That is amazing. Is there anything else you want to add about your offshore experience?

AB: I hope PEMEX will go into the developing of the Gulf of Mexico in deep waters. I think they will because I think in the Gulf of Mexico, we could find so much oil that we compare that area with the Middle East ...

TP: Do you think they are that large?

AB: Oh, yes.

TP: I remember a geologist from Shell saying, "I know there is oil. I just know it in my bones, there is oil all the way across the Gulf."

AB: One of the fields, the Cantarell field, has become the largest oil field in the world. And seismologically, there are many other structures similar to Cantarell, by

geophysical work, but they have to be drilled in order to really see.

TP: You can't get oil until you drill the well.

AB: That is what we are trying to do.

TP: Are there any other stories you would like to tell about your experience with the offshore?

AB: Not now.

TP: Well, it has been very nice talking to you, and congratulations on your induction into the Hall of Fame. It is a nice honor.

AB: Thank you very much.

**THE END**

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