

NEWSREEL RELEASE.

OIL WELL FIRE IN PERSIA.

While the world waits on the results of Mr. Harriman's visit to Tehran to ease the oil deadlock, and while the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's staff in Persia were being subjected to difficulties and indignities, a small group of British and Persian volunteers were fighting to put out the first major oil well 'blow-out' to occur in Persia in forty years of the Company's oil production.

Well Number 20 at Naft-Safid blew out at 5 a.m. on May 1st as drill pipe with a 'fishing' socket was being pulled out of the well. Gas immediately enveloped the rig and the pumphouse, and the well, with a gas surface pressure of 2,430 lbs. per square inch, caught fire, the flames leaping 470 feet into the air.

This was the first fire in a drilling well the Company has ever had. Being therefore inexperienced in blow-outs, the world's foremost oil well fire expert, Myron Kinley, was immediately asked to come to Persia. On May 4th, 60 hours after leaving Texas, he arrived after a 7,500 mile flight. He brought with him twenty-five years of experience in fighting over 250 oil well fires and blow-outs all over the world.

Under his direction special equipment was made in the Naft-Safid workshops. With this equipment, British and Persian volunteers worked in intense heat and no little danger, clearing away the wreckage of the derrick, rig and drill pipe surrounding the well-head and in the cellar.

The main obstruction on top of the well-head, which was causing horizontal as well as vertical flames, could only be removed by dynamite. A 350 lb. charge was packed into a forty-gallon oil drum previously placed in a tank through which water was constantly circulated. E. C. Martin, Anglo-Iranian Field Superintendent, packed the gelignite into the drum under Kinley's direction. This took place under a special steel canopy which was pushed by an armoured caterpillar tractor as near as possible to the fire. After the tank holding the charge had been pushed as close as possible to the flames, the fire-fighting party retired to safety, and Kinley exploded the charge on May 16th.

This explosion blew off the top of the well-head and released half a mile of 4½" steel drill pipe which was down the hole. This was blown high into the air by the gas pressure. When the dust of the explosion cleared, it could be seen that there was one single flame ascending vertically, thus greatly easing the next stage of the operation.

Meanwhile, a new approach road, sheltered from the fire by a hill, was made, and 22 miles of 8" water-pipeline was laid to bring water from the Karun river to the fire. By May 22nd it was possible to pump huge quantities of water

on to the well cellar, and for the first time since the outbreak an approach to the cellar could be made. Kinley and Barker (Acting Chief Drilling Superintendent, Central District) advanced to the well cellar to examine the situation. The blow-out preventor had been blown off by the May 16th explosion and the well-head was severed just above the main valve which was still in place, though damaged.

On May 27th, twenty-six days after the blow-out, the next assault was made. A 500 lb. charge of gelignite, cooled by hoses, was suspended from a crane jib ten feet above the well-head close to the flame. Hoses played about a million gallons of water on to this "bomb" to keep it cool and prevent a premature explosion. When the plunger was pressed the explosion snuffed out the flame like a candle.

Then began the long and difficult business of capping the well with its terrific pressure of escaping gas. The cellar had to be excavated to allow a close approach to the well-head. Then part of the outer casing had to be cut away to get at the inner casing from which the gas was issuing. After days of delicate and difficult work round the casing which was spraying high-pressure gas a thousand feet into the air, a Cameron valve specially flown from England was pulled through the gas jet, bolted on to the casing hanger and finally shut. No.20 was under control.

The operation was made difficult by the intense heat - slow oven temperature within 350 yards - and by the ear-shattering noise which made speech impossible. (Note for Sound Effects: The escaping gas sounds like the thunder and scream of several jet engines.) At any moment a spark or extreme heat might have re-ignited the gas. The ground trembled and shook within fifty yards, giving a frightening impression of the tremendous forces below the surface.

This episode shows dramatically and beyond doubt that the oil business is not just a matter of collecting profits, but is sometimes a tough fight against the overpowering forces of nature calling for all the guts and know-how which experienced oil men can bring to bear. No major oil company can be operated without this knowledge and experience.

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