

Wild Catting In Cambay Basin

o R.C. Garg

G.G.M. Retd. , ONGC

Few will be prepared to believe that the 1st wildcat well in now famous Cambay Basin of Gujarat materialized as a way out of a tough transportation situation by an young Geophysicist in the year 1957.

It was the month of August 1957. The 1st deep exploration well at Jawalamukhi was under drilling. A party of Russian Experts for conducting electrologging surveys in the well had arrived and were awaiting the arrival of OKC-32 logging unit from USSR. The consignment had arrived at Bombay Port but was misplaced in the thousands of tons of other equipment discharged by the ship.

Shri B.S.Negi, then Suptdg. Geophysicist ordered me to proceed to Bombay to locate and dispatch the unit to Dehradun by goods train. I had my misgivings for I had till then not seen a port or even an actual ship, save in pictures. Mr. Negi, as was his want, will not take any excuses. He briefed a bit about the mission, the clearing agent and the liaison official, one Shri Raj Kumar, whom I had to report and take help of.

In Bombay I got a berth in Hotel Majestic at the entrance to Colaba Causeway, a very convenient location as far as Port and other offices were concerned. The hotel at the time was being operated as M.L.A. Hostel by Maharashtra Govt..

With the help of our clearing agent M/s. Gujdar & Co., I went around the warehouse, railway siding and jetty etc. where the ONGC consignments were dumped. After two to three days of moving around huge wooden boxes and other equipment I finally located a high wooden box the numbers of which matched with the numbers in the invoice document. It was lying near the jetty area along a service rail track. A few other boxes and my task was over. I asked the clearing agent to dispatch these boxes to Dehradun. Next day I visited Railway's Ghatkopar yard to confirm if the consignment was loaded on the train. Happily it was.

My task accomplished I telegraphically sought permission of Shri. Negi to return to Dehradun. After two days I got the reply. I was asked to continue in Bombay till further orders and to look after the duties of Liaison Officer. Shri Raj Kumar I gathered had already gone on leave and was not to be found. Fortunately the Liaison Officer was functioning from a room in the local office of Geological Survey of India at Phirozshah Mehta Road in Fort Area. I got the key to the room from the Geologist In-charge Shri Burjor Mehta. Now onwards, till 1st week of November, I was in the thick equipment import, its warehousing and its dispatch to various destinations. I also came in contact with several high ranking authorities of O.N. G.Directorate who visited Bombay Notable amongst them was Chief

Soviet Advisor Mr. Zagrebians, and Director of Geology Shri L.P.Mathur.

Shri Mathur was a particularly lovable person. He was very kind to me and enquired About my liaison problems. When he learnt that we (i.e. clearing agent and me) were facing problems in getting enough flat-bed railway wagons for transports of heavy equipment, he asked me to come and see him at Western Railway Guest House where he was staying, the next day at 9 a.m. It so happened that G.M.(W.R) was Mr. Mathur's cousin. He took me to G.M/s Office where I explained our difficulties to him. The G.M. immediately instructed the D.G.M. (rolling stock) to attend to our needs on priority basis. This meeting with G.M. (W.R) helped me tremendously later on when a full ship-load of drilling equipment including the rig and accessories reached Bombay port a few days thereafter.

As it happened there was no official information about arrival of this ship. It was Mr. Zagrebians who, a few days earlier during the course of a visit to our warehouse at Ghatkopar, had indicated about it. He also mentioned that the equipment is destined for Cambay. When the ship arrived it was allotted a jetty in record time.

Soon as the ship arrived I had telegraphically requested for dispatch instructions but received none. Two days later the clearing agent informed that the unloading has been completed and we have to clear the port berth in another two days time for which a full rack of flat-bed wagons as well as dispatch instructions were immediately needed.

I went to W.R. office with necessary papers, met the D.G.M. (rolling stock) and applied for one rack of wagons. The rack was allotted. I asked the clearing agent to load the rack and await dispatch instructions. Frantically I sent more telegrams to different authorities.

As the luck would have it several dignitaries were on visit to Bombay at the same time. Notable was Mr. Iqbalchand, Secretary, ONGC. I contacted him for instructions. He did not have any but tried his best to contact Member (T), Mr. A.M.N.Ghosh on phone at Calcutta but failed. After he left Dr. A.K.Dey reached Bombay on way to Hyderabad. I contacted him in the hope that he may have some idea about the destination but he too had none. He however reflected that there is some difference of opinion about the drilling at Cambay I was disappointed. I knew what Mr. Zagrebians had verbally told me but I wanted written instructions, particularly when likelihood of difference of opinion was strong. Dr. Dey left Bombay by noon. In the afternoon about 4 p.m. the clearing agent's man came and informed me that the rack was loaded and ready to move except for dispatch instructions. He also told that after

midnight the rack would start incurring demurrage charges at a heavy rate. This I could not afford.

I requested him to wait for my instructions till 8 p.m. I patiently waited in the office till 8 p.m. in case some instructions are received telephonically. I was also contemplating on the decision I might have to take if the instructions are not received. My only clue was what Mr. Zagrebians had told me. There were no contrary instructions so far except the hunch by Dr. Dey. At 8 p.m. sharp I dialed clearing agent and asked him to move the rack to Cambay.

Next day the whole rack arrived at Cambay. There was a commotion in the ONGC office. No body seemed to know how and why the equipment reached Cambay. It was

Mr. Zagrebians who asked the Manager Cambay Office to offload the rack and organize rig building at site Cambay No. 1.

The world now knows that Cambay Well No. 1 opened gates of a new petroliferous basin in India and for ONGC a road to success.

The difference of opinion about taking up drilling in Cambay Basin, till then discounted as a petroliferous Basin, continued till Ankleshwar Well No. 1 in 1959 proved a commercial hit. Under the circumstances the unexpected arrival of a full consignment of a deep drilling rig in Oct 1957 at Cambay decidedly lowered the scale in the favour of optimists and a petroliferous basin took birth in a few years earlier. Who knows it wrote the ONGC's fete in golden letters.