

Capping Phillips's Bravo

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At approximately 10:00 P.M., Friday, April 22, 1977, a production well of Phillips Petroleum Company blew out during a routine well-maintenance operation. The well, Bravo 14, part of Phillips's Ekofisk field in the North Sea, spewed a 200-foot-high jet of crude oil into the sea at a rate of 16,000 to 18,000 barrels a day. Despite high winds and rough seas, the 112 workers aboard the platform were evacuated by work boats. By early Monday, an oil slick, 12 by 15 miles, had built up northeast of the platform. Within 36 hours, the blowout, which threatened fisheries and the environment around the North Sea littoral, attracted a press corps of more than 100 reporters. After several attempts, the well was successfully capped and shut in on April 30. By that time, as much as 200,000 barrels of oil had spilled into the North Sea.

Overview

In 1977 Phillips Petroleum Company was ranked 22d in *Fortune* magazine's listing of America's top 500 industrial companies. A significant factor contributing to that ranking was the oil production from Phillips's North Sea oil and gas fields, particularly those in the Norwegian sector.

Innovator in Offshore Drilling

As one of the early bidders on leases in the North Sea, Phillips drilled several "dry holes" before hitting it big. In fact, the company was very close to abandoning its test well drilling when it struck what is referred to in the oil business as "a dinosaur" at Ekofisk. It was the Norwegian authorities' refusal to release Phillips from its drilling commitment that resulted in the "one more try" that made the big discovery.

In developing the Ekofisk field, Phillips engineers pushed the technology envelope for offshore oil field exploration and production. To accommodate production facilities and to store current production until an undersea pipeline could be built, the company designed and built a giant one-million-barrel concrete storage tank and oil tanker loading facility. Designed to float when empty, the tank was towed 180 miles out to sea and set down on the seabed within a few feet of its intended location.

Phillips used the several acres on top of the tank, which was about 60 feet above sea level, as its production center. Phillips developed the field by establishing a number of production platforms, each of which housed 10 or 15 wells. Some of the platforms were connected to Ekofisk Center by catwalks. The Bravo platform, housing 15 wells, was connected to Ekofisk Center. By the time of the blowout, the top of the tank could have qualified as one of the most intensively developed pieces of real estate on earth, and the entire Ekofisk operation was producing hundreds of thousands of barrels of oil a day.

Another innovation by Phillips was the development of gas injection technology: natural gas produced concurrently with oil production is injected back into producing wells and not flared. A gas pipeline was later constructed linking the field with the European gas grid at Emden, Germany. Additionally, an oil pipeline was constructed to connect the field to storage and refining facilities at Teeside in England.

At the time the Bravo platform's 15 producing oil wells accounted for a substantial part of the total production from Ekofisk. Ekofisk, in turn, accounted for a substantial part of Phillips's total production and was regarded by the financial community as a key factor in the value placed on the company's equities.

For Phillips, the prospect of a blowout of a well at its Ekofisk field could be an unmitigated disaster. The relatively small loss of production would be insignificant, but the potential for environmental damage and the loss of confidence by the financial community could have serious consequences for the company and its shareholders.

Blowout On Friday evening, April 22, 1977, a crew was performing a routine workover of a well on the Bravo platform. During such a procedure, heavy drilling mud is pumped into the well to neutralize down-hole pressure while the well is being worked on. At approximately 9:00 p.m., mud began to flow from tubing at the top of the well. Measures taken by the workover crew to halt the flow were ineffective and by 9:45 p.m. the well was out of control.

A plume of oil and gas thundered into the sky. As much as a thousand barrels of oil were being spilled each hour into the sea around the platform. High pressure natural gas mixed with the oil needed only a spark to set off a monumental fire and possible explosion. As a precaution, Phillips took immediate steps to spray the platform continuously with sea water from tenders and nearby fireboats.

The men on the platform quickly abandoned the rig and were taken by workboats to safety. The workers were so well-drilled and rehearsed in emergency procedures that not a single injury occurred. Nonetheless, word of the disaster spread quickly and within 36 hours reporters and television crew members had converged on Phillips's Norway headquarters in Stavanger.

Some of the public relations implications of the blowout were immediately apparent. Some were not. Oil spilling into the sea in the heart of such a vital fisheries area threatened an important North Sea industry. The time of year made the potential fisheries consequences even more severe since fish eggs were hatching into fry. The spill threatened the entire North Sea littoral. Uppermost in the public's mind were visions of black, viscous waves of oil killing sea life and fouling shorelines.

Implications and PR Response

Neither Phillips nor the Norwegian government was prepared to handle the onslaught of news people from ten countries that descended on the small Norwegian coastal city of Stavanger. Reliable sources were initially so scarce and facts so unavailable that reporters were interviewing each other — on the basis of pure speculation and rumor. Of course, the action was 160 miles at sea.

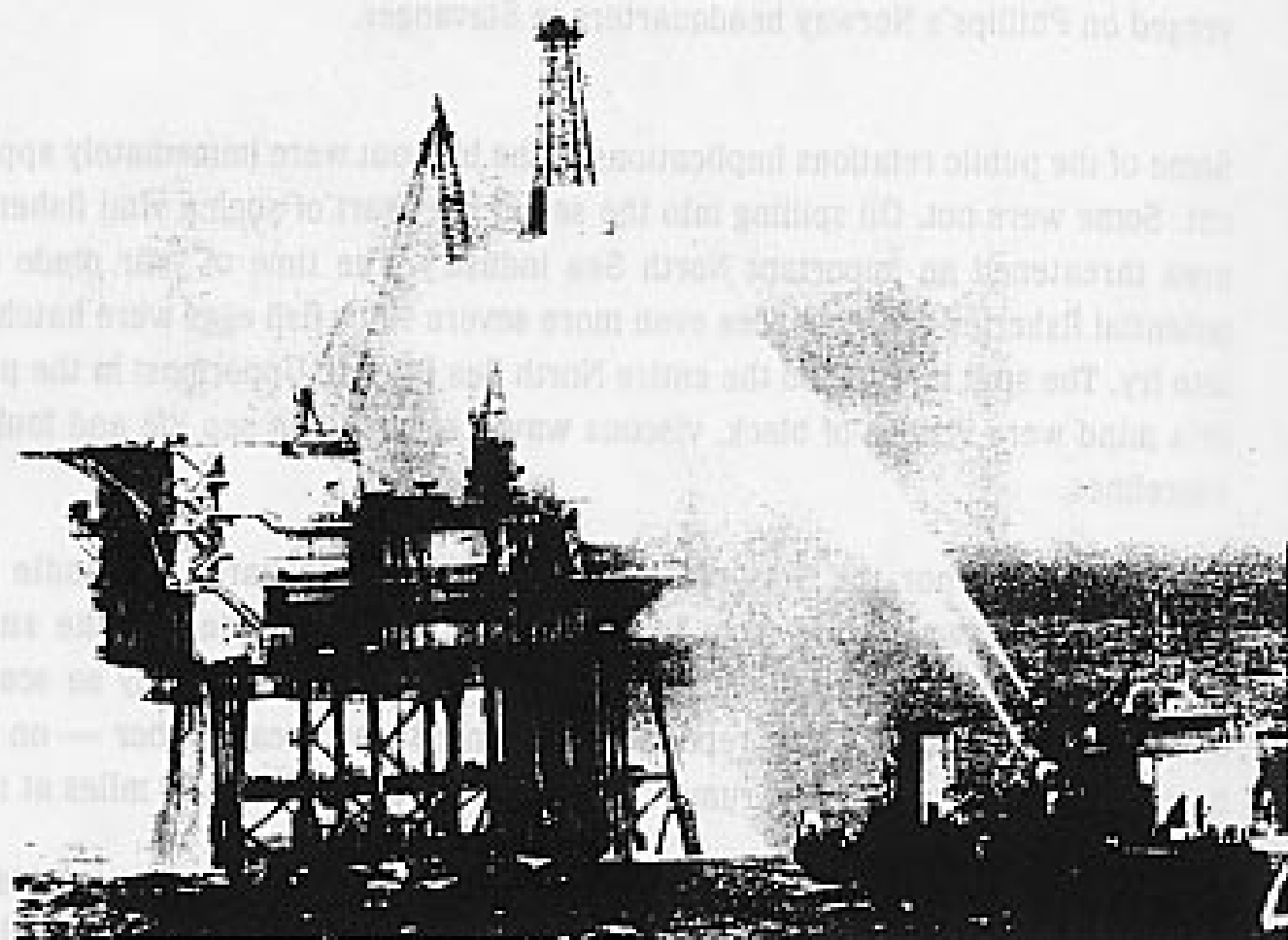
Reporters were totally frustrated by the lack of information. For television reporters it was doubly frustrating — no pictures available to go with their words. To make matters even worse, from the media's perspective, the Norwegian Navy threw up a blockade around the site that kept enterprising reporters who had chartered small boats or planes away from the site.

Phillips's headquarters in Stavanger was primarily a production management facility staffed with petroleum engineers and other production personnel. Phillips's Norway executives, while possessing outstanding technical qualifications, had little or no experience in handling the media. The Norwegian authorities, under whose jurisdiction the blowout fell, were equally inexperienced in handling such a large press corps.

News of the blowout arrived at Phillips's corporate headquarters in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, late in the evening of April 22. Within a matter of hours, a Phillips jet

with engineering and production experts on board was dispatched to Norway. En route the plane stopped briefly in Houston to pick up Asgar (Boots) Hansen and Richard (Coots) Hatteberg, two of the best and most experienced blowout fighters from the Red Adair Company, a well-known oil-well fire fighting firm.

The group arrived in Stavanger at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, April 23, and immediately began an assessment of the situation. Working late into the night, the group formulated their plan and prepared to fly out to the platform early the next day.



Phillips's Bravo 14 well blows oil into the sky.

Early Sunday, April 24, a five-man group comprised of Phillips and Adair experts landed on the Bravo platform. They were able to stay on the platform for only about 20 minutes, but were able to make their on-site assessment, after which they returned to Ekofisk Center. Hansen and Hatteberg immediately began to assemble and check out the equipment they would need to cap the blowout.

Call to Action Back in Bartlesville early Saturday morning, I was getting ready to build a brick patio when the phone rang. It was my boss, Tom Boyd, manager of public relations, who said he needed to see me at once and was coming directly to my house. On arrival, Boyd gave me a quick rundown on what little the company knew and said, "Get your bag packed, get to Stavanger as quickly as you can, and get a handle on the public relations situation."

This was just like being back in the army: I had a mission-type order to proceed to a distant location and do what I had to do to get the job done. I was filled with a sense of adventure, excitement, and even anticipation, but was also struck by the magnitude of the task before me.

Within hours I was on my way. Before departing I called my friend, public relations consultant Sid Gross, in New York to see if he could go with me and be part of the PR team. Sid readily agreed and said he'd meet me at Kennedy Airport shortly before our flight time at 7:00 P.M. that evening.

At Kennedy Airport, we discussed the situation and agreed that we would need to set up regular briefings for the media and, above all, keep the matter in perspective. The best way to do this was to keep the facts flowing to the media in a timely manner.

On the first leg of the flight to Norway, we reviewed what little information was available and discussed in general terms the necessary actions needed once we arrived. We had little, if any, appreciation of the physical layout of the port of Stavanger or whether a suitable site was available for use as a media center. Notwithstanding this, we did have a good appreciation of the fact that we would need to do all we could to help the media cover the story.

We arrived at London's Heathrow Airport early Sunday morning on April 24. On the connecting SAS flight to Stavanger, we recognized the *New York Times'* reporter R. W. (Johnny) Apple, Jr. It proved to be a fortuitous stroke of luck. Apple had recently taken over as the *Times'* bureau chief in London. Always one to be where the action was, Apple chose to cover the blowout story himself. Gross and I took the opportunity to introduce ourselves and to offer our assistance once we got to Stavanger and had a chance to get our collective feet on the ground.

Apple pumped us for what little we knew. He then regaled us with stories of other disasters he had covered, particularly those where PR people had stood in the way of reporters getting to the facts. We were both sure that he had embellished the stories to put us on the defensive. By the time we arrived in Stavanger with a few scotches under our belts, we had become old friends.

Upon arrival in Stavanger, we were met by a Phillips driver and taken directly to the Atlantic Hotel. After registering and dropping off our bags, we proceeded directly to Phillips's offices for a meeting with Phillips's Norway president, Gordon Goering. Members of Goering's staff briefed us on the situation and told us that offers of help were pouring in from all over the world. These offers ranged from the legitimate to the wildly irrational.

**On-Site Damage
Control**

Our first task was to draft a response to such offers that would not give offense, but at the same time inform callers that the situation was under control and being well handled. Following is the response we used:

We appreciate your offer of assistance. Phillips, however, has employed the Red Adair Company of Houston, Texas, and given them the responsibility for bringing the well on Bravo platform back under control. Mr. Adair is recognized as the foremost authority in this type of work and we have every confidence that what can and should be done is being done.

If callers persisted in trying to get Phillips to "do something," we followed with:

I'll be happy to pass your name and phone number along to our people and they can contact you if they wish further information about your suggestion (process, etc.).

At the initial briefing we were given the facts as of that moment and the rate of flow of oil into the sea. The briefing also covered the actions already taken by the government of Norway and Phillips and Adair personnel to get the capping process underway and to deal with the environmental consequences of the spill. In short, we had enough information to put together a fairly comprehensive press briefing. However, we didn't know where the press were, how many there were, or how to contact them. Even more important, we didn't know who was in charge of media relations — Phillips or the Norwegian authorities. These were questions we pursued Sunday night.

Goering was greatly relieved to have us there. Phones were ringing constantly with calls from reporters. Operational people, needed to support capping efforts and deal with environmental problems and other essential tasks, had been pressed into service to deal with the press.

While I proceeded to sort out relationships and responsibilities, Gross gathered a considerable amount of background information from Phillips's engineering and production staff. Gross also set up and instructed Phillips operators on how to answer calls from reporters.

Initially, we responded only with a prepared statement that gave the basic who, what, where, when, and why. We also had the operators record names, affiliations, and local phone numbers of callers so we could compile a media list. Later we were able to equip operators to respond to a wide variety of questions with preapproved responses. This freed Gross and I to organize and carry out other essential tasks.

During a call late Sunday to the Norwegian Petroleum Directorate, I learned that Dr. Hans Christian Bugge, head of the Norwegian State Pollution Board (SFT), had been appointed by the Norwegian government to head a special action committee in Stavanger. Bugge, appointed by Norway's environment minister, was positioned to have authority over the handling of the oil spill, including responsibility for handling the media. While having outstanding scientific and technical credentials, Dr. Bugge had little or no experience with the media, particularly in the numbers now present in Stavanger. Not surprisingly, Dr. Bugge was pleased and relieved to have Phillips provide a public relations expert to deal with media relations.

Working late into the night, Gross and I put together plans to hold a press briefing at 9:00 A.M., Monday, April 25. The only place we could find big enough to hold a press briefing was the main lobby of the Stavanger airport. We got the word out through the Phillips operators who were taking calls from reporters, but did not know how many would show up the next day.

Among the documents we prepared were:

- A current description of the spill, its dimensions, location, and direction of drift.
- A description of the preparations underway by Phillips and the Adair Company to get the capping operation underway.
- A description of the cleanup steps being considered by Phillips and the Norwegian government, together with the commitment that Phillips was prepared to underwrite the cost.
- Fact sheets about Phillips's operations in the North Sea, including general information about the discovery and development of the Ekofisk field.
- A schedule of press briefings to be held twice each day at 9:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M.
- A listing of Phillips and Norwegian personnel playing a role in the management of the situation, together with a brief description of their responsibilities.

We knew there would be considerable interest in the press briefing scheduled for 9:00 A.M. Monday. What we weren't prepared for was the crush of media people who began arriving at the makeshift press center at 7:00 A.M. It was a mob scene. Gross and I, assisted by some helpers, were trying to set the stage by arranging

First Press Conference

chairs at the front of the room and putting a makeshift rostrum in place on a table. There were media people everywhere. As usual, the television people were jockeying for the best camera spots. The print reporters were sniffing around trying to identify anyone who might be a possible source.

By the 9:00 A.M. start time the press crowd had become quite unruly, with some reporters showing outright hostility. In my brief introduction, I listed the hand-outs we had available and then introduced Dr. Bugge and Goering. Based on earlier instruction, Dr. Bugge specified that the first 30 minutes of each press briefing would be conducted in Norwegian. He would lead off with a statement in Norwegian, and answer questions posed in Norwegian before turning to English.

This practice absolutely infuriated 90 percent of the reporters in the room who were used to speaking in English. In fact, all the Norwegian reporters spoke English fluently as a second language. The English speakers regarded this as a ploy to give a time advantage to Norwegian reporters at the expense of all the others. Try as we might, we never did succeed in getting Dr. Bugge to change the order and it continued to be a source of irritation throughout the week.

Other factors irritated the media. The room itself was cramped and crowded. The public address system was inadequate and people in the back had difficulty hearing. No raised platform was available for those conducting the briefing and some of those speaking chose to remain seated. This made it nearly impossible for television reporters in the back to zero in on the speaker. Added to this, was Dr. Bugge's predilection to take questions from the front row at the expense of others in the room. As a result, a few highly vocal reporters in front were allowed to dominate the meeting.

By the time Goering got up to give his prepared statement and answer questions, many in the room were shouting questions with premises that suggested the company and the government were stonewalling and stalling. Reporters were leaving the room to phone in bits and pieces of what they learned and the entire process degenerated into an unhelpful mess.

Results from that first briefing in the form of radio and television newscasts and from wire copy convinced us that the straight story was not getting out in the form we were telling it. It was clear that resourceful reporters were listening in to company and government radiotelephone conversations, consulting "experts" in their own countries, and talking to people on the street. Anyone with oil on his or her shoes was automatically an "expert."

Reporters were taking fragments of information and weaving them together to make stories that in many instances simply didn't square with actual circum-

stances. Some of these stories greatly exaggerated the actual and potential impact and distorted the known facts about the blowout. If something hadn't been done to keep the situation in perspective, a tremendous amount of misinformation would have been disseminated that would have been virtually impossible to correct after the fact.

Right after the briefing, I was besieged by television reporters with requests to go on camera and deliver a capsule version of what had been said at the briefing. It was a role I would play a hundred times before the week was out. In addition to giving stand-up interviews to television reporters on the ground, I was also doing voice-only actualities to radio and television stations who were calling directly to Phillips from the United States.

Damage Control: Battling Misinformation

Of all the reports we saw following the initial briefing, the two that stood out as accurate and factual were the Associated Press and the *New York Times*. John Vinocur, Associated Press bureau chief in Paris, was covering the story in a very factual, straightforward way, without hyperbole. And, of course, Johnny Apple was performing up to standard.

The accurate, unembellished coverage by Apple and Vinocur prompted me to do something that violated one of the cardinal rules of public relations. It says: Never confer selective benefits on a few reporters because the others will eventually do you in. However, I concluded that if AP and the *Times* got it right the rest of the media would follow.

Getting together with Vinocur, I told him that I would be pleased to arrange background technical briefings with knowledgeable members of Phillips' engineering staff. Even more important, I would, in every instance possible, give him a five-minute break on any new development. I did the same with Apple. When Vinocur experienced difficulty in getting his feeds to Paris over overburdened phone lines, I "loaned" him an office and access to Phillips's telephone system.

Another problem that surfaced at the initial press briefing was a lack of depth in the information available. In some instances aspects of the blowout were described in "oil patch" language that was foreign to many of the reporters. We tried to cure some of that at the Monday evening press brief, but it still wasn't enough. Somehow, we needed to do a better job of describing technical matters in plain English.

That evening, when we discussed some of the shortcomings with Goering, he said that perhaps it would be better if he didn't participate and instead sent produc-

tion engineering personnel. I told him that wasn't the answer. He absolutely needed to be there. We resolved the matter by identifying an engineer who could describe equipment and processes in lay terms and pressing him into service. I asked Gross to work with him in getting additional background information ready to hand out at Tuesday morning's briefing.

In the meantime, I was fielding calls from Bartlesville and Phillips's headquarters in London, both of which wanted to be filled in on the day's happenings. It was good that I had taken comprehensive notes during both press briefings that day because they provided the detail being sought in Bartlesville and London. It was well past midnight by the time I finished my reports and it was to be a pattern followed in successive days.

All during the day on Monday, advance preparations to cap the well continued both in Stavanger and at Ekofisk Center. Aside from preparing equipment and moving workboats into place, there really wasn't much to report to the media. We had to try to satisfy them with background information and secondhand reports about the size, dimensions, and location of the oil spill from the Norwegian authorities on the scene. In the view of both print and television reporters, the biggest problem at this point was lack of pictures.

Early Tuesday, April 26, 1977, a six-man team of experts boarded the Bravo platform. They began work at 7:00 A.M. and continued working until about 1:00 P.M. when the weather changed. The winds died and the sea calmed to the point where oil and gas were falling directly down on the platform, making it dangerous to continue to work. The crew was forced to leave until more favorable conditions returned.

By the 9:00 A.M. start of Tuesday's media briefing, the media ranks had swollen considerably overnight. We estimated the group of 150 to 175 reporters was now crammed into a space that was cramped and crowded with 100 the previous evening. The room was overheated and uncomfortable. We sought relief by opening the doors, but airplane noise drowned out speakers' voices.

The only saving feature of the briefing was the additional material we prepared the night before, along with an excellent assessment of environmental impact prepared by Norwegian authorities. By this time we also had an expert on oil spills present to answer questions. Lt. Commander Frank Boersma of the U.S. Coast Guard was brought in to give expert advice to Phillips regarding cleanup. Boersma was quite valuable in placing the spill in perspective and in describing the degree of effectiveness of the various techniques that might be employed in containing and cleaning up the spill.

Partly due to physical conditions and partly due to lack of authoritative information, the media were still pretty hostile and unruly during the morning briefing. It was clear that we needed to find ways to satisfy their needs in covering the story. Following the morning briefing, I persuaded Phillips's operational people to give us several seats on the next helicopter going to Ekofisk. I wanted to get a company contract photographer and motion picture cameraman on board to get still and motion picture photography of the blowout.

By the time of the evening briefing we were able to distribute still photos of the blowout. Necessary processing time for motion picture film delayed availability of motion picture clips until the next day. While this was not completely satisfactory to the media, it was seen as a helpful measure.

Right after the morning briefing, Apple took me aside and told me he had tried to hire a helicopter to take him out to the platform, but had been unsuccessful. He asked me if he might hitch a ride out on a Phillips helicopter. My initial reaction was no. Then, on second thought, I told him I would discuss the request with Goering. The more I thought about it the more I was taken with the idea. With Apple reporting an eyewitness account, there was a better chance of keeping the spill and the attempts to shut in the well in perspective.

By the time I got together with Goering, I was convinced that it was the wise thing to do. By getting Apple out to Ekofisk Center we would be assured of fair-minded reports driving the story. Goering accepted my rationale, but still was quite reluctant to permit a "civilian" to, in effect, break the blockade around the platform. Gross agreed that it would be a good thing to do and together we persuaded Goering to go along. Apple was on the next helicopter flight to Ekofisk Center, arriving there early in the evening on Tuesday.

Apple filed his first story from Ekofisk Center, 160 miles at sea, by telephone to New York. He stayed at the Center for the next 48 hours and filed several stories that were bylined on the *Times*' front page. Fortunately, few in the media noticed that they were being beat on the story until much later. Dr. Bugge raised a mild objection when he learned of it, but decided not to make much of a fuss. Apple's stories were excellent. He ingratiated himself with Hansen and Hatteberg as well as the Phillips people at Ekofisk Center and they provided him with lots of color for his stories.

After the evening briefing, Gross and I returned to Phillips's headquarters to prepare for the following day. While walking through the engineering offices, I heard something disturbing. If I heard correctly and understood what I heard, the

Blowout Preventer

workover crew had installed the blowout preventer upside down. The implication to me was that this might have resulted in the blowout.

I went directly to Goering's office to ask what this was all about. He told me that a blowout preventer looks the same right side up or upside down and that the workover crew had mistakenly installed it in the upside down position. He quickly added that it was not significant in the capping process and was unrelated to the blowout. I told him that we would need to brief the media on this the next day. Goering and his general counsel were appalled at the suggestion. I pointed out that with the media monitoring radiotelephone traffic, the chances of keeping a lid on this were nil. If the media "discovered" the error, it would be far worse than if Phillips volunteered the facts and placed them in perspective.

Tense moments followed when I was asked to leave Goering's office while he and his counsel conferred. After a while, I was asked to return and told that in the counsel's view we should say nothing about this. At this point I suggested that the matter was of sufficient importance that it should be decided in Bartlesville, rather than here. After more private discussion, Goering decided to disclose the information on Wednesday morning.

With the matter decided, Gross and I began at once to prepare for the next morning's briefing. Working with Robert Archambeault, the chief of operations for Phillips-Norway, we prepared an explanatory statement to be used the next day along with a large drawing of a well head showing a blowout preventer installed on top of the riser from the well casing. Archambeault was to give a technical explanation and then he and Goering would field questions.

The questioning was intense and probing at the briefing on Wednesday. Many in the media were looking for someone or something to blame and the upside down blowout preventer looked like a good bet. Goering and Archambeault's handling of the questions was superb. At the end of an hour's questioning, it was clear that they had convinced the media that the blowout preventer's orientation was not a factor and would not slow down or impede the efforts being made to cap the well. In fact, a most surprising occurrence happened when Archambeault finished his briefing — the assembled reporters spontaneously burst into applause.

Capping the Well: To shut in the well required several highly coordinated activities to be performed
The Plan in sequence. If unsatisfactory weather conditions or technical difficulties were encountered at any stage, the entire process had to be aborted, delayed, and started from the beginning. Following are the steps that had to take place:

1. A crane barge to do the heavy lifting had to be moved into place within 50 feet of the platform and anchored.
2. The control crew of 8 to 12 men would board the platform to connect and test water and drilling mud lines.
3. Using hydraulic pressure, an attempt would then be made to close blind rams on the blowout preventer.
4. With the blind rams holding back the pressure, a spool, bonnet, and valve assembly (commonly called a Christmas tree) would be swung in place over the blowout preventer and bolted into place.
5. Drilling mud lines would then be attached to the valve on the side of the blowout preventer and the barge would pump drilling mud into the well until zero pressure was achieved and the well was "dead."

On Wednesday, crews worked to prepare to shut in the well. Shortly after noon however, work was stopped due to crew fatigue, and a decision was made to delay shut-in attempts until Thursday.

By Wednesday, a substantial amount of information was becoming available regarding the possible environmental impact of the blowout. Fortunately, most of the news was good. Much of the light crude that was spilling into the sea was evaporating due to wave action. The spill that had earlier been feared would cover a vast area was confined to a relatively small area and was fairly stable in size.

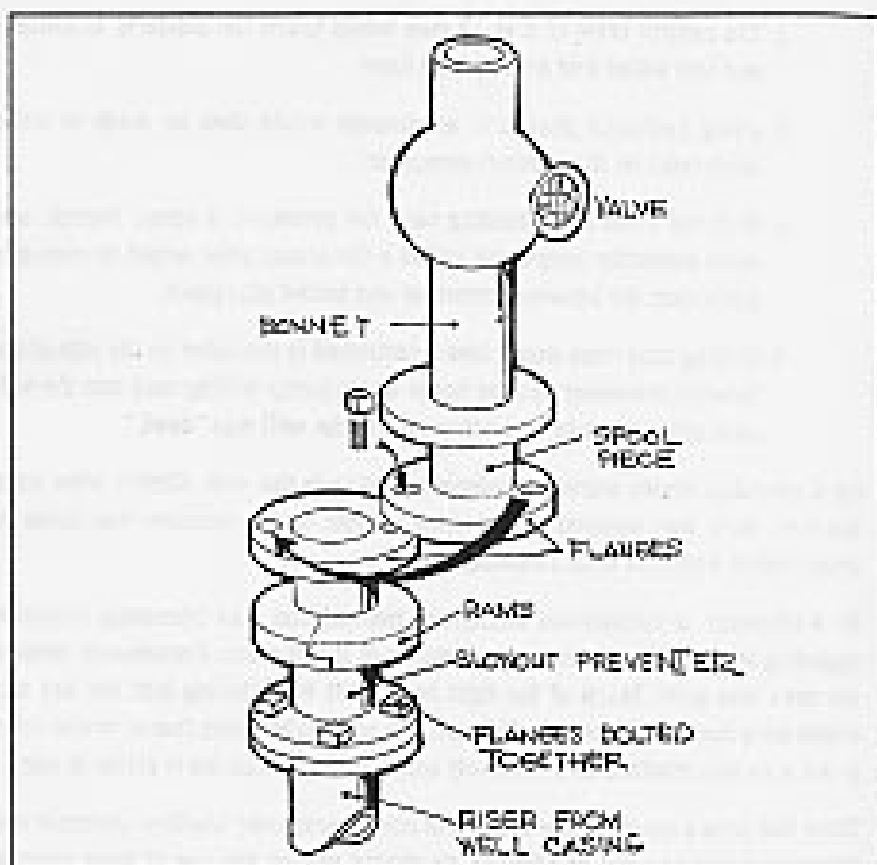
There had been a considerable amount of controversy over whether chemical dispersants should be used or whether we should rely on the use of more conventional, but more costly, pick-up methods. As it turned out, both methods were used extensively. At the height of the cleanup operation, Phillips deployed 25 vessels that used skimmers and booms to pick up hundreds of tons of oil. More than 60 tons of chemical dispersants were used to break up more than a thousand tons of spill. Evaporation and wave action eventually virtually eliminated the remainder of the spill.

While environmental data was reported, media attention was more intently focused on efforts to shut in the well. By Wednesday evening, news that the crew had not attempted to cap the well that day was greeted by disbelief and concern. The media couldn't understand why it was taking so long.

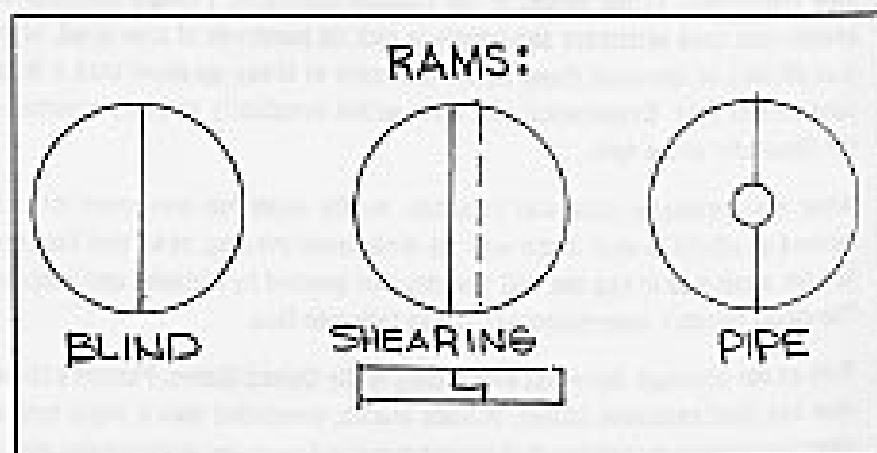
With all the coverage the event was getting in the United States, Phillips's chairman and chief executive officer, William Martin, concluded that it might help to calm the situation by sending Red Adair himself to Stavanger to personally assess

Illustration shows the blowout preventer assembly, which is used to bring the well under control. The illustration shows the well head, positioning of the blowout preventer, and the spool and bonnet assembly.

Diagram used at a press briefing to illustrate the device that would be used to bring the well under control. The illustration shows the well head, positioning of the blowout preventer, and the spool and bonnet assembly.



Three different types of rams that might be used to reduce or stop the flow of oil.



the situation and offer his advice and counsel. We got the word that Adair would arrive in Stavanger on April 29 and we should be prepared to handle the press when he arrived.

Three attempts were made to close the well on Thursday, April 28. The first attempt was made at 6:30 A.M., the second at 6:40 A.M. and the third at 10:40 A.M. None were successful. Descriptions of the failed attempts given to the media at the evening briefing on Thursday cast a pall over the room. Technical descriptions of why the attempts had failed didn't do much to satisfy the media and the stories filed that day reflected the disappointment at the seeming lack of progress.

The rams used in the first three attempts to shut down the well were unable to withstand pressure at the well that was estimated at more than 4,000 pounds per square inch. Specially fabricated rams made in California were being flown to Stavanger, but had not yet arrived. The new rams were designed to withstand pressures of up to 6,000 psi.

Early Friday, a fourth attempt to shut in the well failed. A description of the failed attempt at Friday's morning briefing added to the earlier sense of disappointment. Questions by the media suggested that the government's and Phillips's efforts were too little too late.

In fact the only good news we had to report was the time of arrival of Red Adair and that he would be pleased to meet with the media. Adair was due to arrive at Stavanger at 1:00 P.M. and depart shortly thereafter by helicopter to go to Ekofisk. Our plan was to make Adair available at plane-side for about 20 minutes. He would then be flown out to Ekofisk, make his personal assessment, and meet with the media for a longer period at the evening briefing.

Promptly at 1:00 P.M., Adair's plane pulled up to the gate just outside the room where our press briefings were held. All of the reporters ran outside to get a glimpse of Adair coming down the ramp. Those who might have seen *The Hellfighters*, the John Wayne movie about Adair's exploits, may have been a bit surprised when the plane's door opened and out stepped a diminutive five-foot-three-inch, slightly paunchy man.

Even so, Adair was an imposing figure. Wearing a Texas Stetson, plaid shirt, jeans, and cowboy boots, he literally swaggered down the steps, waving as he acknowledged the cameras below. As soon as the first words were out of his mouth, the tension was gone. Adair quickly had reporters disarmed and laughing.

Initial Failures to Shut In Well



A Norwegian worker finishes preparations of a valve to be used in the attempts to cap the flow of oil from Bravo 14.

Red Adair Assesses Spill

Among the points he made were these: "This is just another blowout. I've seen a lot worse. Boots is havin' a little trouble, but he does the best he can with what he's got. The blowout preventer works just as good either way. We'll just have to put a little somethin' extra on top." In answer to the question, "What if the next attempt fails?" Adair said, "If you don't have any more faith in me than that, I'll just go on home. Anything that needs to be fixed, we'll fix it. This sort of thing happens at least once in every [oil] field. I plan to stay till it's finished. You can have the best equipment and men in the world and these things still happen. One thing I can tell you, this here Phillips Company is an industry leader in safety."

When asked why Phillips brought him here when Hansen had things under control, Adair replied, "Boots is dang near blind and his face is all swole up, but he's doin' fine. I'm just here to back him up." Asked what his fee was for being there, Adair said, "I can't hear you!" This got a good laugh that accompanied Adair as he boarded the waiting helicopter and flew off to Ekofisk.

Finally, Success

The blind rams from California had been expected to arrive in Stavanger Friday night. When they didn't get there, preparations were made to attempt to shut in the well using conventional rams that had been modified. At 11:00 a.m. Saturday, April 30, the rams were closed and the well shut in. Immediately the crew connected a drilling mud line and began to pump drilling mud into the well. By 3:00 p.m. enough mud had been pumped into the well to reduce well pressure to zero. Phillips's news release issued at Bartlesville at 12:30 p.m. CDT on April 30 expressed the feelings of many people in Stavanger. In the release, Bill Martin said, "We at Phillips owe those men a great deal of thanks. They had a difficult, tedious, and dangerous job to do. The work was made even more difficult by the changing weather conditions in the North Sea. We will now concentrate our efforts on cleaning up the remaining oil film. I know that many people in Europe and around the world share our concern about the effect of the oil film on sea life. At this moment there is no indication of significant adverse effect." A *New York Times* story on May 3 noted that "The oil slick from the eight-day Ekofisk blowout had virtually disappeared." Maritime experts soon determined that the spill had no impact on the marine environment.

Aftermath

Media reaction to the blowout was greater than Phillips or anyone else could have expected. An earlier blowout of a gas well in the United Kingdom sector went virtually unnoticed. With 100 reporters on site in the first 36 hours, a figure that quickly grew to 175, Phillips and the Norwegian authorities had their hands full in handling not only the blowout, but the press as well.

The Norwegian press comprised no more than 15 to 20 percent of the press corps covering the story. The event could accurately be characterized as an international interest story with reporters assigned from around the world to cover it. The ecological and environmental concerns evoked around the North Sea littoral by the early confusing stories probably served to further heighten interest and to prompt editors around the world to seek coverage.

In addition to the press corps in Stavanger, Phillips responded directly to hundreds of media inquiries from around the world by telephone. It was not uncommon to do 20 to 30 feeds a day to radio stations and to answer questions from newspapers and wire services around the world. Also involved in answering press inquiries were Phillips public relations representatives in Bartlesville and London, who were fed the latest information on a continuing basis throughout the week.

The openness, candor, and responsiveness of Phillips and the government of Norway to the legitimate needs of the media were repaid in terms of accurate, balanced, and factual reporting of events.

The voluntary disclosure by Phillips of the inverted blowout preventer did much to create a climate of trust and understanding. Although the inverted blowout preventer was not that material to the capping effort, failure to voluntarily disclose it, followed by accidental discovery by the media, could have had a disastrous effect on Phillips's credibility. After the capping of the well, I received a letter from Apple, who said, "I know as well as you do that there were moments of tension and conflict. But the important thing, and the one that impressed me, was that Phillips made a real effort to show me the situation in detail, and that made what I wrote for the *Times* much more authoritative."

Although regarded by some as a public relations ploy, the arrival on the scene of Adair did much to defuse the tense atmosphere. As an authoritative and credible expert, he was able to characterize the blowout as "no big deal." By the time the well was capped on Saturday, the press was considerably mollified and ready to do wrap-ups on the ecological aspects. However, by then, the spill was getting hard to find.

Neither Phillips, the media, nor the Norwegian authorities were prepared for an incident of this magnitude. Initially, many mistakes and missteps were made, but Phillips and the Norwegian authorities adapted quickly to the realities of the situation. Because of its willingness to deal quickly and candidly with the media, Phillips came out of the event with only minor damage to its reputation. The company got credit with many in the world's media for honesty and openness. It got credit with the countries around the North Sea for handling the emergency in a

timely and competent way. It got credit with those concerned with the environment for a massive and major cleanup effort that began concurrently with the spill and continued until the job was satisfactorily concluded. And finally, Phillips got credit with the governments around the North Sea for technical competence in handling one of the ever-present risks in offshore oil development.



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