

Personnel

In the early years, the UK's hydrocarbon industry was dominated by foreign companies. These companies brought with them their own workforce, including many Spanish and Mexican workers, who had experience constructing the highly specialised installations the industry required. This was coupled with an initial reluctance among the local populace to work offshore. Many of the first British engineers recruited into the industry had backgrounds in the mining industry, as they had knowledge and skills (e.g. experience working with high voltage cables) that could be transferred to the oil and gas industry.

Early crews on MCP-01 were predominantly contractors with some St Fergus-based staff, and changed weekly. After completing initial training, the first intake of staff at St Fergus, then still under construction, spent one week offshore during a nine-week shift rotation. Permanent crews were established once the compression work began in 1981, and they were seconded to Ekofisk to gain experience working with compression facilities. When the industry became established, the demographics of the personnel began to change. Approximately 60% of the workers on MCP-01 were from eastern Scotland; the rest northern English with a handful of southern English. This was unusual; many of the other platforms were a mix of men from the west of Scotland and northern England, especially Teesside. The vast majority of the crew were male; the two female caterers who joined MCP-01 were the first women to work on a British installation in the North Sea. One of the first female divers in the North Sea also took part in diving operations off MCP-01, an event notable enough to be filmed for a news bulletin. The first woman camp boss in the North Sea, was appointed on MCP-01 in 1987. Women are still very much a minority offshore; in the annual Inland Revenue offshore worker's survey of 1996, it was estimated that about 26,850 people were employed offshore, of which 1.6 per cent were women and 92 per cent were UK nationals.

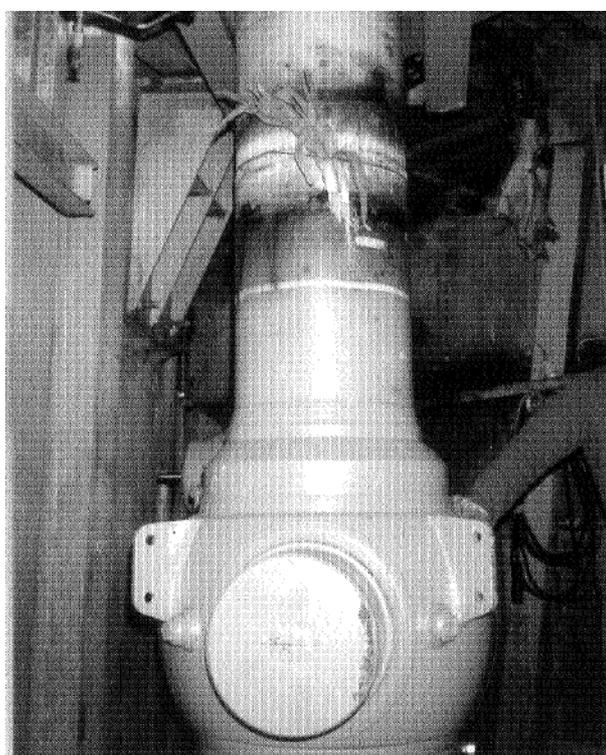
Before going offshore, each crew member was required to undergo a week's safety training involving fire-fighting and sea-survival courses. Total was one of 13 companies who, in conjunction with Oil & Gas UK (formerly UKOOA) had sponsored the Offshore Fire Training Centre (OFTC) at Montrose, managed by the Offshore Petroleum Industry Training Board (OPITB). Later the training was far more focused; people concentrated on a training programme relevant to their role, and it rarely took longer than a day.

Helicopters left from Longside Airfield, near Peterhead, for the 45-minute flight to the platform. After the platform went Not-Normally-Manned in 1992, the incoming crews would contact St Fergus when they arrived at the platform and control would be formally handed over to them. Customs officials came from Peterhead to check the crews returning from MCP-01. It was considered a good practice run for trainee customs officials. MCP-01 itself

was also used for helicopter landing practice, usually on Sundays, with the landing crew giving the pilots marks out of ten using homemade scorecards.

Life on board

Shifts on MCP-01 mirrored those on other platforms; two weeks off, then two weeks on, working 12 hour, seven-to-seven shifts. The night shift was considerably smaller than the day shift; before compressors there were only four people on night shift, and even later on, none of the maintenance crew routinely worked night shift. The platform was operated 24 hours a day, every day of the year, which meant that crew often spent holidays away from their families. In the 1970s and early 1980s, communication was via telex, radio or ship-to-shore for both business and personal communications. The crew booked a weekly slot to call home and if it was lost then there was no opportunity to reschedule.



Two barrier valves were installed on the 18" external riser, one topside and one underwater, after which they were monitored for leaks for 24 hours. A supervisor received a verbal report of a leak at the new topside valve and went to deal with it, to discover there was indeed a leak.

MCP-01 had a reputation for being one of the better platforms to work on. At a time when many North Sea platforms were crewed by hundreds, MCP-01 generally had about eighty people on board at any one time. Fifty of them were operational crew; the remainder contractors, although there was rarely any distinction between 'them and us'; the abiding memory was of a small, friendly community. Many of the crew remained on MCP-1 for years, both operational and contractors. One of the deck foremen, Jock Smith, who worked on MCP-01 from the beginning until the early 1990s, always joked that he would have to be carried off. On his final trip offshore, he broke his leg and was indeed carried off. Upon his death a year or so later, his family arranged for his ashes to be scattered on the platform.



CHRISTMAS MENU

Oysters • Smoked Salmon Mogador
Open Melon Baskets • Medallion of Foie Gras and Melba Toast

London Particular Soup

Cranberry Sorbet

Select Scampi Quo Vadis
THE TURKEY with Chestnut Stuffing
Chipolata • Cranberry Sauce

• Butterfly Steak Poivre Vert • Roast Haunch of Venison Grand Veneur

Buttered Brussels Sprouts • Stuffed Beef Tomatoes
Parisienne Potatoes • Biarritz Potatoes

Christmas Pudding and Rum Sauce
Strawberry Romanoff • Baked Alaska Flambe

Stilton Cheese

Coffee • Mince Pies • Christmas Cake • Hand Made Chocolate Mints

*Christmas feast 1984, complete with sculpted
mermaid.*

of one drink with Christmas Day and New Year meals, but this was stopped in the late 1980s. Even alcohol-free beer was prohibited because it contained traces of alcohol. Wives' visits also came to a halt around the same time. Previously, the spouses of workers on the platform had been allowed to accompany them for one, day-long visit to the platform. The intention was to help the wives appreciate how their husbands spent half their lives, and also to allay some of their concerns.

The recreation room was new at the time; in June 1980 it had been refurbished and enlarged, providing facilities for snooker (on a half-sized table), darts, slightly more comfortable chairs and a TV, though how good the reception was still depended on how good the weather was. The crew had also built a small gym. Newspapers arrived once every three or four days and films changed weekly. People and perishables arrived via helicopter, whilst all other supplies and machinery was brought by supply boats and lifted on board using a crane.

In 1981, an anonymous offshore worker compiled his own tongue-in-cheek 'Good Food Guide' to the North Sea that was printed in *Roustabout* magazine and *Tom!Tom!*. MCP-01's French cuisine was described as 'excellent' and given marks of 8/10 for food quality and 6/10 for food choice. Of the twenty or so platforms informally surveyed, MCP-01 came out above average and many former workers on the platform agree. Sodexo was, for many years, the company responsible for the catering and housekeeping on the platform. On average, each week the crew on MCP-01 ate their way through 60 pounds of bacon, 60 dozen eggs, half a gallon of tomato sauce and, less regularly ordered but an essential part of the French-themed food, four dozen snails. Bread was baked daily. No alcohol was permitted on board, with the exception

*Wives' Visit
to MCP-01,
May 1987*



Recreation facilities were extremely important as initially all the accommodation was communal. In the last few years before MCP-01 became NNM (Not-Normally-Manned), individual cabins were provided, with their own TVs, and the social activity onboard noticeably declined. Entertainment for Christmas and Burns Night was provided by the crew, for the crew; a mix of comedy, music and song. Total provided small prizes for the raffles, usually items such as pens and photographs of the platform.

Health & Safety

Training and safety equipment were provided, and Total has a good record of Health & Safety. Until the early 1990s, the platform required a Certificate of Fitness to be issued from Lloyd's Register to remain in operation, undergoing regular independent inspections. However, working offshore on a remote platform brings with it hazards. Over the twenty-one years, there was one incident resulting in fatalities directly involving MCP-01. In February 1998, James Kiloh, a member of a maintenance team checking for damage after a storm fell , into the Moonpool, inside the breakwater wall. One of the crewmen aboard the Fast Rescue Craft, Anthony Doherty, entered the sea in an attempt to rescue him. Both men quickly succumbed to the freezing winter sea temperature and died of exposure. Mr Doherty was posthumously awarded the George Medal, the second-highest civil decoration awarded for bravery.



The memorial service commemorating the first anniversary of the Piper Alpha disaster was held on MCP-01. MCP-01 was only 25 miles from Occidental's Piper Alpha platform, and gas from the latter was sent to St Fergus via MCP-01. As soon as the operators on MCP-01 realised there had been an explosion, the flow of gas through MCP-01 was increased to reduce pressure on the line

from Piper Alpha, and continued to do this until the pipeline ruptured due to the heat. MCP-01 flared the gas and by 6am had got rid of all the gas from the system. During the subsequent investigation, some of those on duty on MCP-01 that night were called as witnesses, though the conclusion assigned no blame or criticism to them.

Compression facilities were taken out of service in 1987. They were no longer needed because the supply from the Frigg Field was decreasing. Total considered the options for MCP-01, one of which was removing the compressors and reverting the platform to its original as-built condition. Following the Piper Alpha disaster, companies began to reduce the number of people offshore. It strongly influenced the decision to convert the platform to a Not-Normally-Manned installation, meaning that there was no permanent crew on board. The last person to step off the platform once the conversion works were finished in December 1992 was one of the maintenance supervisors, John Flett. Maintenance teams were regularly flown in to ensure the platform remained operational and safe, but otherwise the entire platform was run by the staff at St Fergus.