

John's Homepage

by John H. Mitchell

North Sea, 1974 - 1976

<http://home.earthlink.net/~john280z/photos81.htm>

Note: These photos are scanned-in 30 year old photos, not 100% quality.

The Barge



This is a Barge, Brown & Root Pipe Lay Barge "BAR 297".

It was designed to work in the Gulf of Mexico, and not during the winter storm period of the North Sea. Its 300 feet long, 90 feet wide. Crew size is about 125 persons. 32 of them are involved in running a Saturation Dive chamber on the barge. The crew is made up of

Americans, English, Spanish, and individuals from many other countries. Its a 24 hour a day floating construction site with the workday split between two crews who work 12 hours on, 12 Field, early 1974.



And this is why I'm here, the Saturation Diving chamber.

I'm an Electronics Technician. I work an "on call" schedule, which means if there is a problem they come and get me, even if I'm sleeping. For that I'm paid for a 13 hour day, 7 days a week. The Sat unit is in working position with the Diving Bell (on left) mated to the main living chamber. The "Dog house" is above, it houses a Gas Mixer dude who monitors the divers Air pressure, Temperature & Humidity, CO2 & O2 levels. He also talks to the divers and takes orders for chow. He also relays their need to flush the toilet! To decompress the divers is a slow process, they can only come up at a 4 feet/hour rate - Sat depth is 190'. In bad weather the entire unit is cranked back into the "Sat House", the ramp is pulled up and a huge door (to right) is slid closed. Rick Steckle (Diving Supervisor) is standing next to the Bell.

Daily life



Much revolves around the weekly "crew boat", shown here tied alongside - note that any boat must come alongside on the Port side away from the divers.

The boat has mail, food, relief crew and (most important) 16 mm first run movies! The B&W photo also means I had run out of colour film!



Personel are transfered by basket, here shown in rough seas with safety lines attached.

You hung on from the outside for a quick release. In those days you could just jump aboard from the boat also, (don't slip).



Our movies are shown in the "rec" room (the projector is behind the steward cleaning the room). Andy is testing his new camera and a bored diver is looking on.

We bought some items from Hong Kong and had them shipped direct to the barge, didn't have to pay customs duties! Card games are played here and there is also a small library.



Here we have towed into a fjord (near Flekkefjord, Norway).

On the way in I was up in the tower and the wind speed gauge was pegged at over 100 MPH for 5 minutes. During this 60 day period (December, 75-January, 76) the barge worked 66 hours with only 30 of that diving. Shot from the top of the "BigRig", our 750 ton crane, I was skered, up so high!

Towing



When the barge is at work, it uses seriously huge anchors to hold it in position.



When anchored, the barge can pay out or pull in anchor cable on each of six to eight anchor winches to position itself.

If we need to go somewhere quickly (like a big storm is coming), you don't. It takes several hours for the tug to pick up an anchor, the barge winch it in, the crane pull it onboard, and then coil up the 200'-300' of 'pennet line' on each anchor. Here the Tug "Mister Chris" has a crewman trying to catch a pennet line.



The barge has no engines, it is towed by a Tug Boat at the end of a long cable.

Here the tug has attached the cable and is starting to take a strain on the cable. As speed comes up the tug will pay out some of the cable till it is about 300-400 yards or more away.



If the weather is too rough for the Barge or Divers to work safely (very common in Winter), you tow back and forth across the sea until the seas calm down.

Here our tug is towing the barge, we're going into the waves - water is spraying over the bow at times and with big waves the whole barge shakes and rattles (note the hold-down chains on the bow crane).



Your world now revolves around a Single Sideband Radio and a Fax machine that prints out a weather report (remember, this is 1973-1976, we didn't have Satellite Communication yet). If a bad storm is approaching the Fax looks like it has a giant thumbprint on it. Here is a shot of the Radio room.



When towing (upwind and downwind) every so often the barge must do a 180 degree turn. Here we have just turned to go upwind for a while. If the wind or seas get to big we must 'run' downwind to a safe harbor. When reaching these safe harbors the barge crew has been known to party hard.

Working



The "nerve center" is the Tower where crewmen control winches, direct tugs and monitor radios.



The dials show tension on the anchor lines and the TV's show each winch.

What you are looking at is a long piece of 28" concrete coated pipe. The pipeline (laid by another barge) has been picked up by several "chain hoists" that run alongside the starboard (right) side of the barge. The chains were connected up by the Sat divers. The BigRig has lifted the "riser tube" up (it's about 180' long) and now the welders must weld the joint up between the two pieces.



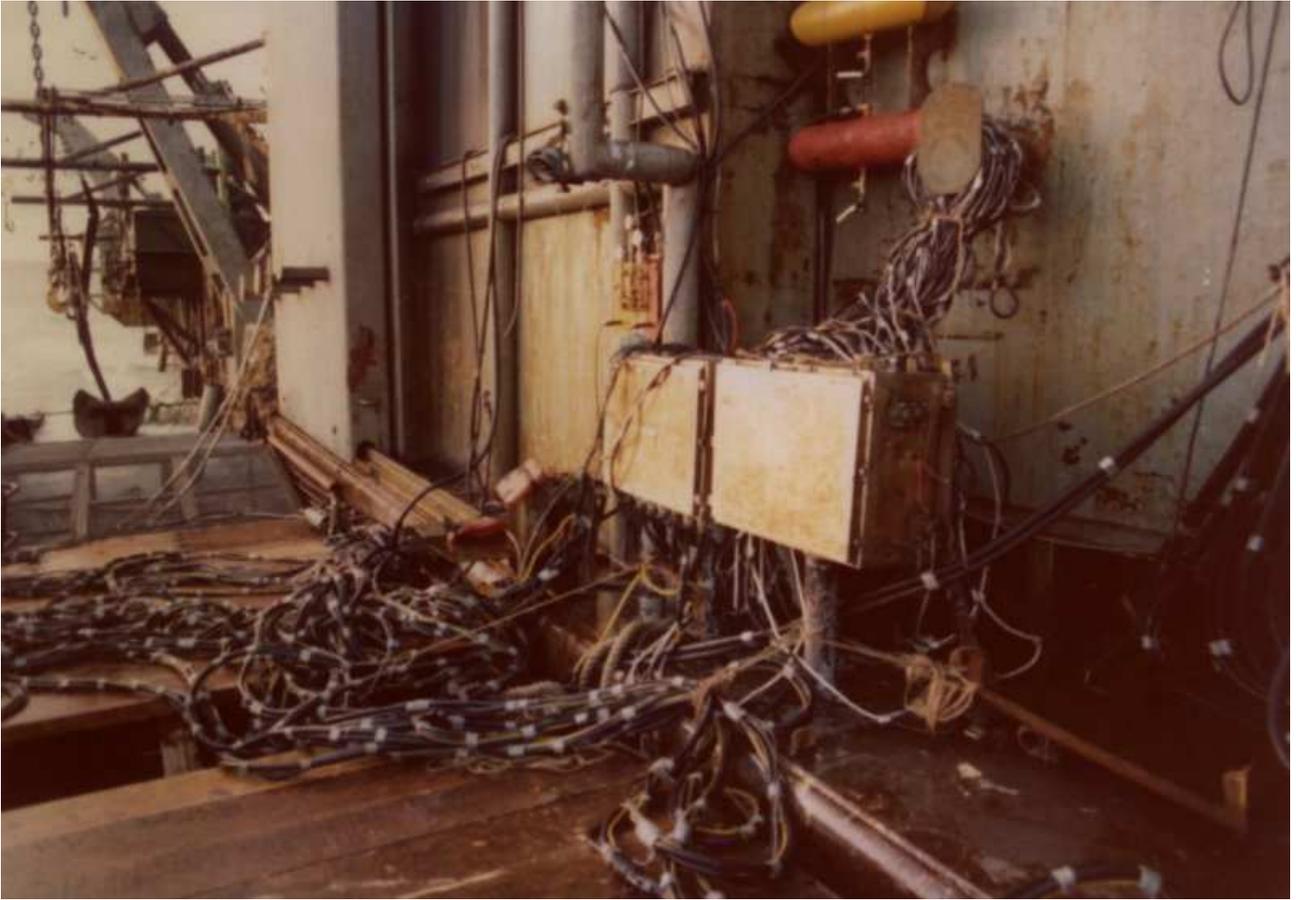
The deck crew has aligned the two pieces and the welders are now doing a full weld to the pipe. After X-raying the weld the steel pipe will receive a 3" layer of Tar to protect the steel from rusting.

After welding the riser is carefully lowered to the bottom in a ballet of chain hoists and BigRig.



I love this shot.

It was late on a summer day during dinner, about 65 F and we were surface air diving (not very deep, about 70-110 ft, too shallow for the sat divers), tightening up several clamps that hold the riser to the leg of the platform. The tender (White shirt in the middle) is tending the divers airhose, another tender is manning the Dive Radio (he is also the safety diver), three barge workers are waiting to do their part of the act (3 on right). The Sat Chamber has been retracted into the Sat House where another tender waits on them.



South of Ekofisk Field, late 1975.

And here is after a bad storm caught us rigged for 'summer' weather.



What's this thing?
(around 1982)