

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI

Harris' 35-year engineering career spans globe

BY DEBRA BAKER BECK

When distinguished alumnus Loy Harris (BS '57) received his first international engineering assignment in 1964—for Esso Standard Libya Inc.—he wasn't initially sure he wanted to accept the challenge.

But ultimately, Harris knew it was an offer he could not refuse.

"I finally decided that if I didn't go, I would always wish that I had," the Basin (Wyo.) High School graduate says. Harris' eight-year stint in Libya (1964-1972) was the first of many exciting international assignments over his 35-year career with Exxon Corporation and its affiliates worldwide. Other jobs took him to Saudi Arabia, the Yemen Arab Republic, Venezuela, and Colombia, with domestic assignments interspersed between.

Travel was only one of many aspects of his career that made it personally fulfilling.

"I enjoyed the whole thing," Harris says. "I enjoyed my time overseas; I enjoyed the scope and challenge of the operations and also just the chance to be in different cultures and be exposed to new things."

Harris' petroleum engineering career actually began seven years before accepting the Libya job. When he graduated from UW in 1957 (general engineering, with a petroleum option), he had two promising offers—one from the Carter Oil Company and one from Atlantic Refining Co. Harris accepted the Carter position, because he wanted to stay in the Rocky Mountain region.

Carter sent him to Illinois. But within six months, Harris got his wish when Carter reassigned him to Durango, Colo. He also worked at Ardmore, Okla., before accepting the Libya assignment.

Harris loved that first overseas job.

"It was a delightful place to be," he says. "We had Mediterranean beaches and Roman ruins up and down the coast. Before the revolution in Libya, we even had a fairly cosmopolitan night life."

Having a small community of expatriate engineers and their families allowed Harris and the others a chance to form strong personal and professional ties that enhanced their experiences in that country. Wherever Harris' career took him and his family, he developed similarly positive relationships with both his colleagues and the country's citizens that added to the fun and excitement of each assignment.

Over the years, his duties were varied and increasingly complex. In Libya, Harris served in a series of technical and management positions, starting as a senior petroleum engineer and working up to manager of corporate planning.

His next position was based out of New York with Esso Middle East. From 1972-76, Harris served as Aramco adviser, which required coordination between Exxon and the Arabian American Oil Company.

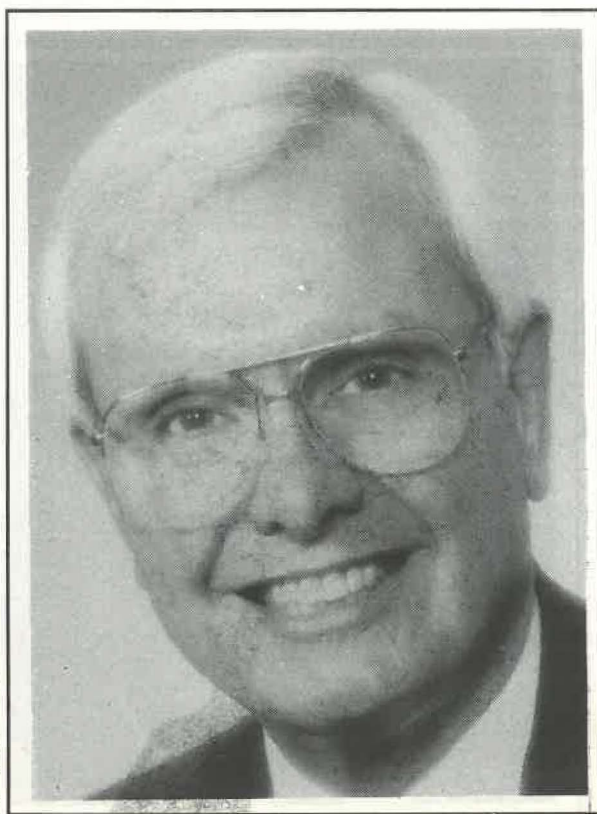
He moved to Caracas, Venezuela, to work for Exxon Services Venezuela Inc. (1976-1981) first as vice president and subsequently as president of that affiliate.

From 1981-84, he was the Houston-based operations manager of the production department of Exxon Company USA. In that capacity, he supervised operations in three of Exxon USA's producing divisions (East Texas, South Texas and Southeastern).

Harris returned to Esso Middle East for two years (1984-86) as vice president in charge of Exxon's upstream (exploration and production) activities in the Middle East.

His next assignment with international ties was with Exxon Company International, as manager of Exxon's Yemen Project. Harris supervised the company's interests in the Yemen Arab Republic.

In 1988, he took his final Exxon assignment—president and chief operating officer of Esso Colombiana Limited in



LOY HARRIS

Bogota, Colombia. Harris guided Exxon's oil, gas and coal operations in that Latin American country. He assumed responsibility for a total investment of more than \$2 billion and supervision of about 5,000 employees.

Exxon's interests in Colombia included a small oil and gas operation; but the centerpiece was the world's largest export coal mine, still in its early stages when Harris arrived in 1988. This assignment was Harris' first real experience in the coal industry.

His time in Colombia was an enjoyable one. Harris says the work was interesting and challenging, and he worked with many outstanding individuals to make significant progress on the coal project.

"Improved standards of performance were attained, we made significant strides in our environmental awareness and protection, and our safety record became competitive with those of Exxon's other international coal operations," Harris says. He adds that the operation brought substantial benefits to Colombia and its people.

Spending 35 years with one company wasn't so unusual, according to Harris, particularly when he worked for an outstanding organization that continually challenged him.

"I got with a company that I was pleased and proud to be with, and I kept being moved around and exposed to different things," he says. "I enjoyed it very much and stayed there my whole working career."

Working in the energy industry for so many years left Harris with insight into the challenges it faces in the years to come. Eventually, he says, the country must deal with the diminishing cushion between the supply of energy resources and demand for them. Environmental pressures also will require more serious consideration of alternative fuel sources.

"One of these days, we're going to have a combination of price pressures, and perhaps ecological pressures, that are going to reopen the alternate energy issue for us," Harris

says. "There's no question that increasing concern with emissions, atmospheric conditions, pollution and things like that will continue to exercise the best brains in the energy generous business."

It won't be an easy process, particularly when the transition must be made from traditional means of energy delivery to newer methods. But Harris says people are beginning to acknowledge the need for change.

"I think people are becoming more and more aware that there are finite limitations to what Spaceship Earth can provide, support and sustain," he says. "I think that it will be easier to come to grips with the issue of sensible, sustainable rates and patterns of energy consumption as part of an overall concern for the environment in which we all have to live than it was when we thought conservation was an isolated issue having to do only with energy supply, without an overall ecological awareness."

Starting a New Phase

Retirement in 1992 ended one phase of Harris' life; but he has begun a second career as an ordained United Methodist minister.

A serious illness during the Colombia assignment prompted both his retirement from Exxon and his subsequent move to divinity school. Medical personnel airlifted Harris from Bogota to Houston for treatment, where his doctor told him after the fact that he hadn't been expected to live when he was admitted.

That physician told Harris that whatever years he had left were "freebies" and that he should enjoy them. Harris took that statement to heart and pondered the two thoughts that flashed through his mind: "do what God wants me to do" and "it's time to go into the ordained ministry."

Church and his spiritual life have always been important to Harris. In fact, at one point he seriously considered entering a seminary after completing his undergraduate education. Those plans were sidetracked, though he remained active in his local church wherever he went.

Harris prayed about his future as he recovered in the hospital and came to a decision.

"By the time I was released a month or so later, it seemed that it was a call to which I needed to respond," he says. Harris retired and eventually enrolled in Duke Divinity School in Durham, N.C.

"The Divinity School is even better than I expected," he reports. "Even the 'bad' days have been good."

On June 1, Harris passed another milestone on his journey; he was ordained a deacon in the Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Miscellany

As a student, Harris participated in Sigma Nu fraternity, the UW band, intramural sports, Sigma Tau engineering honorary and ROTC.

Over the years, Harris has continued to support the University of Wyoming. He is a long-time donor to UW programs, and he is a life member of the UW Alumni Association.

Harris maintains his ties to Wyoming through his parents, Loy and Edith, who still live in Worland. Both of his siblings are UW alumni. Harris' sister, Sally McClellan, lives in Medford, N.J. His brother, David, lives in Hilton Head, S.C. Harris and his first wife, Karen, reared two children: Kelly Fanelli of North Palm Beach, Fla., and Loy Harris of Dallas. Our UW distinguished alumnus and his wife, Colleen, live in Houston.