When a British magazine named distinguished alumnus, Harry Sager (BS '51) one of the “10 most influential oil men in the world” in 1985, his immediate reaction was “you guys must be crazy.”

But those familiar with Sager’s accomplishments might beg to differ with his modest self-assessment. Over his career, Sager has been at the forefront of developments in the petroleum industry worldwide — not bad for a guy with a civil engineering degree.

Sager devoted his entire career to Conoco Oil and its affiliates worldwide. A large portion of his time was spent overseas with Conoco’s international division, which included managing exploration activities from Libya to Indonesia and from the Persian Gulf to the North Sea, including resident management assignments in Dallas and London. But it all began just 30 miles from his Luck, Wyo., home at Lance Creek.

Sager joined Continental Oil Co. in 1955, after serving with the Naval Civil Engineer Corps during the Korean War. When his four-year military commitment ended that year, Harry and his new bride, Anne (by coincidence, a Laramie native), wanted to return to Wyoming to explore opportunities, but opportunities were limited at the time. Oil was a possible entry point for that dream, so he and Anne went to Houston where the oil industry headquartered; and he worked his way up the streets of Houston interviewing for jobs with companies in that field. Harry got his chance with Continental (later Conoco) and took his first assignment at, of all places, Lance Creek.

They didn’t stay there long. Over the course of about a year, the company’s training program, designed to prepare new engineers for all aspects of the industry, took the couple to Glencoe and Linch, Wyo.; Denver; Ponca City, Okla.; and Houston, where Sager, in his first career, also took assignments at Linch and Powell, Wyo.; Denver; Cody, Wyo.; and Billings, Mont. The Sagers didn’t have much in common as a safe place to live, with a colorful, centuries-old history around every corner. The couple purchased a home built in 1827 and settled into life in the United Kingdom with John, the younger of their two children.

Conoco next moved the Sagers to the Middle East so that Harry could work on a new oil discovery at Dubai in the Persian Gulf. His title was vice president and managing operations for Dubai Petroleum Company. Thus, Sager’s time there was generally pleasant — it was basically a safe place to live, with a colorful, centuries-old history as a sea-faring trading community. Citizens were for the most part friendly, and the “benign dictatorship” placed no real restrictions on people living there.

Sager supervised an exciting operation in Dubai that involved a great deal of exciting exploration. When the company constructed a major offshore oil site there without using pipeline to shore, it was an industry first. Rather than apply traditional methods, it instead stored the oil in large underwater tanks fastened to the sea bottom, a process that Sager and his Dubai-based crew developed. With this system, ocean-going tankers could come right into the field for their loads.

In 1973, Sager transferred to Conoco’s StatoilHead, Stavanger, Norway to oversee the company’s Middle and Far East operations. The job still gave him many opportunities to go overseas, as he traveled to such destinations as Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia, Taiwan, Iran, Dubai, Saudi Arabia and Africa.

The Sagers moved again in 1976, when Conoco consolidated operations at the Houston headquarters. What moved Harry’s focus also changed, this time to Conoco’s European and Middle East operations. The job still gave them the opportunity to see “the big picture,” rather than a small part of it.

Biographical Informat

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Now retired, Sager remains active as president of the Offshore Operators Association, a prestigious organization that focused on giving their students a "managerial viewpoint of engineering" allowed them to see "the big picture," rather than one small part of it.

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