

THE RISKS OF EARLY OIL EXPLORATION IN VENEZUELA

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The Perijá Mountains of Colombia and Venezuela

The Motilón-Barí Indians have lived their lives for millennia along the Venezuelan-Colombian border, south of Perijá range. Since 1912, geologists from different companies started to explore the Lake Maracaibo Basin and Perijá Mountains, so contacts and incidents with Motilón-Barí Indians started to be more and more frequent. In the late 1940s and early '50s, the lure of gold, minerals and oil, lying hidden in their mountains, began to change the Motilonés' way of life forever.

The oil industry and governments were anxious to exploit the riches of the Motilón territory, so a running battle commenced between these aboriginal natives on one hand and big oil companies on the other. Hostilities increased due to the massive penetration of Motilón territory and because the indiscriminate use of guns against the Indians. This conflict lasted decades.

Today, little is left of their old way of life, but in the past, these small size Indians were fierce, moving in groups, with their curare-tipped arrows to hunt wild boars, monkeys, birds and any animal in the jungle. The curare root, famed throughout South America for its lethal action, is a common name for various alkaloid poisons originating from plant extracts, which are plentiful in their jungle. This root is prepared by boiling

the bark of one of the dozens of plant sources until the liquid turned into a black heavy paste that can be applied to arrow or dart heads. The Motilón soaked foot-long arrows in this toxic paste. When dried, the arrows were a deadly weapon.

From the 1920s through the '40s, geological and airborne seismic surveys of Western Venezuela had revealed the presence of large geological structures that might contain oil reserves. The particular structures along Venezuelan-Colombian border held promise of oil findings, so companies like Royal Dutch Shell and Standard Oil Company, among others, decided to brave the Motilón threat and conduct exploratory campaigns in these areas.

THE EXPLORATION

In 1948, the geologists H.W. Loser and P.S. Kiewiet de Jonge, working for the Anglo-Saxon Petroleum Company Ltd. (one of the Shell group companies) spent two months in the south Perijá mountains of Venezuela, between Machiques and the Santa Rosa de Agua Blanca River, conducting a geological field trip through the area. In their monthly progress reports, the exploration survey had mentioned very interesting results of the Cretaceous facies of Perijá, and mentioned also high expectations in the Tucuco area, where photogeology

indicated a possible major structure. Loser and Kiewiet de Jonge were about to discover that the difficulties to approach the Tucucu area proved more serious than originally anticipated.

On May 7, Loser and Kiewiet de Jonge and the rest of their exploration party suffered a Motilón attack in the vicinity of the Rio Santa Rosa. Kiewiet de Jonge wrote a report with narration and details of the attack and sent it to W.L. Foster at the office in Caracas, who in turn sent a full report to the Operations Department of Anglo-Saxon Petroleum Company Ltd. in London.

THE ATTACK

Kiewiet de Jonge's detailed report described the attack suffered by his party with the following texts:

"On Friday May 7th at 7 a.m., accompanied by ten workmen, I left the base camp situated at the Rio Santa Rosa de Agua Blanca (165 km. SW, of Maracaibo, or 54 km SSW of Machiques, at the foot of the Perijá mountains range, +/- 25 kms. E of the Colombian border) in order to clear a new campsite 3 hours walking downstream along the same river. In this party four men were armed with shotguns and I carried a revolver. Having worked for four hours at this new camp-site we returned to the base camp. Nothing unusual was observed during this return trip. At a distance of about 200 m. from the base camp four men were walking in front of me. Suddenly they started shouting and I saw arrows flying over the trail".

"Three of the men came running towards me and I began shooting in the air for fear of hurting our own men, through random firing at the invisible Indians. Immediately two armed men of the rear guard rushed into the bush and started shooting. I ordered them to stay near. The second man of the head group, Jesus Angel Paz, was badly wounded. One arrow had pierced his chest and one his arm. The first man of the head group, Severino Marquez, had an arrow in his back".

"I did not perceive this instantly, as he ran forward towards the base camp and was out of my sight. 5 to 10 minutes after the attack I heard some shooting ahead of me. This was Loser, who, after having heard our shooting, arrived from the base camp with more armed men. He found the wounded Marquez walking in the pica and brought him to the camp. One of Loser's men soon arrived at the place where I was waiting with the wounded Paz".

"I knew then that Loser had the situation well in hand ahead of me and that I could stay where was. The attack took place just before 5 o'clock in the afternoon".

"The attacking Indians must have numbered one dozen men. We deduced this from the observation that the two ambushes we found could shelter about this number. The ambushes were made roughly of palm leaves, resembling very closely palm leaves normally cut down in a pica. One ambush was situated +/- 2 m. from the trail. From this one the arrows were shot which wounded our two men. The second ambush was at a distance of about 8 m. from the trail".



Map showing the location of the Motilón attack (modified from the original map in Kiewiet de Jonge's report)

THE BASE CAMP AND THE ESCAPE

Kiewiet de Jonge continued with his report, describing the arrival to the base camp at Rio Santa Rosa, and the transportation of the wounded people:

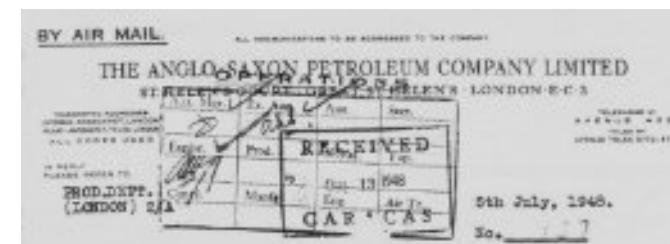
"After having made a stretcher, we arrived with Paz at the base camp at 5.45 p.m. Loser wanted to transport the wounded men to the mission the same night, but a 'baquiano' familiar with the conditions in Motilone country advised against this, as he expected more ambushes along the trail from our base camp to the mission".

"We had only three mules available, as most of them had been sent to La Cueva to fetch provisions. On Saturday morning, however, these three mules could not be found. We had in our camp 26 men available out of a total of 36. We needed 16 stretch-bearers and at least 4 armed men in the vanguard as well as 4 in the rear of the transport. Therefore, we could not leave a sufficiently strong guard behind for the protection of the equipment in the base camp".

"On Saturday May 8th we left the camp at 9 a.m., with the crew carrying only the most important personal items. The remainder of our personal belongings as well as all the camp equipment had to be left behind".

"At 2.30 p.m. we arrived at the mission. From here Loser went ahead on horseback to arrange for transport from La Cueva to Machiques and from there to Maracaibo. At 4.30 p.m. the transport moved on to La Cueva. On our way we engaged stretch-bearers from among the local farmers".

"We arrived at La Cueva at 10.30 p.m. ... where transport by car is possible. At 1 a.m. May 9th a power wagon arrived kindly put at our disposition by a gravity party of the Creole, working near the Rio Negro. At 2 a.m. this car left for Machiques with the two wounded men in care of four trusted men. At 5 a.m. this car arrived in Machiques, where the wounded got their first medical assistance from Dr. Taborda. An ambulance then brought them to Maracaibo. At 8 o'clock on Sunday morning the two men were in the C.P.C. Hospital and were attended by Dr. Vasquez".



Letterhead of one of the multiple communications between Anglo-Saxon offices in Caracas and London

THE CAPUCHIN ORDER

On May 13, in an internal correspondence between Maracaibo and Caracas' Anglo-Saxon offices, signed by a "Mr. McCurdy," some background explanations are detailed about the work done previously to ensure a safety exploration of the Tucucu area. In the memorandum, the writer explained that the attack occurred in the northern border of the Motilón territory, which appears to be under the influence of the order of the Capuchin Monks for missionary activities. The monks maintained an outpost in the northern fringe of this territory. Before entering the area in question, Anglo-Saxon personnel made contact with Padre J. Cesareo de Armellada of the Capuchin order, who had been conducting a campaign of pacification of the Motilones.

Cesareo was reluctant at the beginning, but soon he changed his attitude and gave advice about the approach to the area and gave his consent, before Loser and Kiewiet de Jonge started their fieldwork. However, after the attack, Cesareo appears to have forgotten that meeting, and during a visit to Anglo-Saxon's Maracaibo offices few days after the attack, he hinted that not only he warned the company about the great danger of entering the area in question, but also that the incident probably had destroyed the results of his work with the Motilones.

Regarding the Loser/Kiewiet de Jonge program, the memorandum stated that an attempt would be made to salvage the equipment at the base camp. Thereafter, the complete party would be pulled out of the area, because there was some "bad feeling of the crew men against the missionaries," but most importantly, because further attacks by the Motilones would be unavoidable if the geological survey continued in their territory.



Motilón shelter in the 50's

EPILOGUE

On May 28, W.L. Forster communicated to the Anglo-Saxon offices in London that Severino Marquez, who was wounded during the attack, died at the hospital in Maracaibo. Forster also confirmed again that in view of further attacks, the Loser/Kiewiet de Jonge party had been pulled out of the Motilón area, abandoning exploration in the Tucucu area for the time being.

In the same message, Forster stated that the continuation of the geological survey is inadvisable for the time being, since it is likely to result in undesirable publicity and might even induce the government

authorities to place a ban on all exploration work in Motilón country.

During the '50s and early '60s, the Capuchins had established various missionary centers within Motilón territory. The missionary advance was accompanied by yet more intrusion by oil companies and landowners. The Motilones successfully resisted for a long period of time, but were eventually outflanked and displaced.

Today, the Motilon-Barí people's main economic activity is the growing of Theobroma cacao, the plant from which chocolate is made. They trade the cacao and use the proceeds to help maintain their network of schools, community centers and health clinics. In a census performed in 2011, the population of Motilón-Barí was close to 8,700 people: 64 percent in the North Santander department of Colombia and 32 percent in the Zulia state of Venezuela.



Motilon people. Roberto Lizarralde photo (1945).
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DÉFICIT DE GAS EN MÉXICO V/S INDICADORES DE LA PRODUCCIÓN PETRÓLERA ONSHORE DE TEXAS, EE. UU.

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RESUMEN

De acuerdo con la Energy Information Administration (EIA, 2024), desde el año 1981 el estado de Texas, se mantiene en el ranking como el principal productor de petróleo y desde 1979 para la producción de gas natural de los Estados Unidos, tan solo para el año 2023 el estado de Texas promedio una producción diaria de 5.5 millones de barriles de petróleo crudo, representando 3.48 veces más de la producción de petróleo en México y 34,914 millones de pies cúbicos por día, equivalente a 7.14 veces más respecto a la producción de gas natural para el mismo año. Bajo este mismo contexto deficitario, del año 2018 al 2023, las exportaciones de gas natural del estado de Texas a México, se mantuvieron al alza con un 25% aproximadamente, indicando una demanda considerable para las actividades en el uso y aprovechamiento del gas natural en México. En este trabajo, se presenta un análisis de los indicadores de producción y exportaciones de hidrocarburos, contrastando capacidad productiva de México y el Estado de Texas, revelando un claro déficit y dependencia energética de México con Estados Unidos.

Palabras clave: Petróleo, gas, déficit, México

INTRODUCCION

En el año 2023 la producción de crudo en Estados Unidos EE.UU. alcanzó un record de 12.9 millones de barriles diarios (EIA, 2024), mientras que la producción en México alcanzó un promedio diario de 1.65 millones de barriles de crudo (CNIH, 2024). Tan solo para dimensionar la capacidad productiva de crudo en el Estado de Texas, el año 2023 alcanzó una producción promedio de 5.5 millones de barriles de crudo por día.

El deficitario mercado del gas y petróleo nacional en México, se ha visto seriamente afectado por la baja en la producción de gas y aceite en territorio nacional, ocasionado principalmente por la falta de localización, exploración, desarrollo y refinación de gas y aceite de las cuencas mexicanas, mientras que en los Estados Unidos de Norte América, el superávit, les ha permitido en la última década, posicionarse como el principal productor de gas y petrolíferos del mundo y exportar sus excedentes de combustible, principalmente gas natural, GNL y GLP a México, cubriendo con estas exportaciones nuestro déficit y aumentando gravemente nuestra dependencia de combustibles importados, que representan un alto riesgo para el país en términos de competitividad ya que estamos a merced del libre mercado de los hidrocarburos o mercado spot, donde la oferta y la demanda internacional, ponen al país en una balanza poco favorable.

La guerra en Europa, agrava aún más la situación, ya que los países en conflicto están desestabilizando la producción de gas y petróleo. Rusia, es un productor estratégico ya que suministra de gas natural a todos los países de Europa, mientras que Ucrania es otro actor importante ya que igualmente su cuenca del Donbás/ Cuenca de Donets, produce gas natural y carbón dirigido a los mercados de Asia y Europa y con la guerra las operaciones de su infraestructura de producción, vías de comunicación y gasoductos se ve afectada totalmente, al punto de no poder garantizar en el caso de la república de Ucrania, un suministro constante de combustibles a sus clientes potenciales, lo que pone a estos países consumidores en la misma situación de dependencia de