Mr. Ajeet Deshwal has had an illustrious and distinguished career, that spans across ONGC and ONGC Videsh Ltd. (OVL), encompassing significant roles both domestically and internationally. With a wealth of experience dating back to 1980, as an epitome of professionalism, Mr. Deshwal earned a well-deserved reputation for his exceptional aptitude in building cohesive teams, as well as endearing himself to colleagues and subordinates alike. His remarkable ability to foster a collaborative and supportive work environment has consistently resulted in the successful completion of projects. Throughout his tenure, he demonstrated unparalleled expertise in managing intricate assignments and delivering outstanding outcomes. Moreover, his extensive experience in assembling multicultural international teams and overseeing projects across diverse nations, time zones, and regulatory frameworks is truly remarkable. Mr. Deshwal superannuated in 2017 as Executive Director, ONGC.

Mr. Deshwal’s upbringing in a rural setting played a crucial role in his ability to effectively manage a geophysical field party that he was assigned, GP-26. The invaluable experience he gained as Party Chief of GP-26 enabled him to excel in his role as a country manager, skilfully executing his responsibilities. At OVL, as Country Manager for Qatar, he oversaw the company’s first wholly owned production sharing contract in the region, drilling and testing two offshore wells within two years. He later held notable positions, including Head of Exploration Operations at OVL, and contributing to the organization’s strategic objectives.

Mr. Deshwal graciously agreed to my request for writing his memoir for this issue of GEOHORIZONS and quite enthusiastically furnished details of his career spanning close to four decades.

- Rajeev Tandon
Prologue

On a balmy afternoon in September 1980, I was reclining in the comfort of my home in the quaint village of Basera, nestled in the serene district of Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh. As I savored the tranquil surroundings, I was distracted by the sight of our village postman standing at my gate, clutching a pink-coloured telegram. My heart leapt with anticipation, and I hastened to receive the message from him. Upon inspection, I noticed strips of paper pasted on it and scanned the words with bated breath. To my great delight, the message bore news of my appointment as a Geophysicist (S) at ONGC, with explicit instructions to report to the Director, KDMIPE (Keshava Deva Malaviya Institute of Petroleum Exploration), at ONGC headquarters (HQ), Dehradun. I could hardly contain my happiness, and a broad smile crept across my face. After re-reading the telegram several times, I placed it on the table and took a deep breath. It was a dream come true, and I felt immense gratitude for this opportunity.

Later that day, I went for a walk with my friends. Despite my attempts to clear my mind, I couldn’t shake the memory of the telegram and the life-altering news it had brought. As we strolled along, I shared with my friends the incredible opportunity that had come my way. They were overjoyed and congratulated me on my significant milestone.

After performing the vedic ritual of havan, the following day, I left for Dehradun. On September 4th, 1980, I reported at the E-I (Establishment Section-1) Section of KDMIPE and presented the telegram that confirmed my appointment. Mr. C. S. Negi then escorted me to meet Mr. A. C. Rangachari, CG (AD), who assigned me to the Computer Service Division.

After reporting to the Head of Processing, Dr. V. S. Aithal, CG(S), I was assigned to the recently formed Processing Group A. This group was spearheaded by Mr. R. G. Ratnam, who had recently been elevated to the position of Senior Geophysicist (S). I was the first person to join his team, and throughout my tenure at ONGC, I would often joke that since the day of my joining, I had held the number two position and never slipped to number three.

Finally, my joining at CSD was finalized, and I was prepared to commence my new role in the processing group.


Reflecting on the first phase of my journey at ONGC fills me with fond memories. It all began in September 1980 when I started as a seismic data processor. My group leader and controlling officer, Mr. R.G. Ratnam, played a pivotal role not just as my superior but as a true guru, embodying the guru-shishya relationship rooted in ancient Indian tradition. In those early years, I acquired seismic data processing skills from Mr. Ratnam and my colleagues. I also witnessed the evolving advancements in this field as technology progressed.

While working at CSD, I was selected to take on a special assignment at Volgogradneftgeophysica in Volgograd, USSR, where I had the opportunity to ensure the quality control of seismic data processing. Although thrilled about the chance, I was also nervous about what to expect in a foreign country.

As the junior member of the team, I embarked on my journey to the USSR in July 1984. I felt a mix of satisfaction and apprehension about the unknown. Communication was slow back then, and it took a
staggering 20 days for news of my arrival in Volgograd to reach my family in India. I still recall the anticipation of waiting to hear from my loved ones.

During my two-month stay in the city, I impressed the Russian experts with my knowledge and proficiency in reprocessing data. It was important for me to prove myself worthy of the trust placed in me by Mr. J. G. Saha, CG(S), Head of Data Processing, who had selected me for this assignment.

Despite the challenges of being a vegetarian in Volgograd, where meat was a staple of every meal, I remained true to my dietary restrictions. This was a small challenge compared to the bigger picture of my assignment, and I was determined to make the most of my stay in the Soviet town.

After returning to India, I utilized the knowledge and skills gained from the Soviet experts to enhance processing at CSD. I became proficient in operating various software systems and platforms like TIOPS, IBM 370, VAX 11-780, and IBM 3083. My responsibilities included processing land data from different regions. The most thrilling experience was when our team received our first 3D seismic data from Western Region Business Centre (WRBC). I was proud to be a part of the task force entrusted with processing this data and establishing a 3D processing sequence.

During this time, my experience with processing 3D data using crooked line techniques proved to be useful. I realized the extent to which I had learned from my guru, Mr. Ratnam, whose teachings equipped me with the skills and knowledge necessary to take on any challenge that came my way.

During my time at the centre, I witnessed significant organizational changes. Mr. K.N. Bhave became the first Head of GEOPIC (Geodata Processing and Interpretation Centre), which was newly formed as the biggest computing facility of ONGC by carving out of KDMIPE. It was an exciting period, and there was a sense of anticipation regarding the potential of this new division. The CSD (Computer Services Division) now operated from a spacious eight-story building, providing a more comfortable working environment. In the past, four processing groups were crammed into a single room, but now we had ample space.
The introduction of the new IBM 3083 hardware system, coupled with Western Geophysical software, was a notable highlight. Its impressive speed astonished us, as tasks that used to take hours on the old VAX 11-780 machine could now be completed in minutes. We gladly transitioned from using punched cards to utilizing terminals in cluster and common rooms. Running jobs no longer necessitated trips to the machine room. In fact, I humorously mentioned during a coordination meeting that we had fewer interactions (and conflicts) with the operation groups since jobs could be submitted remotely.

The subsequent experience was even more exciting. I was offered an opportunity in 1986 to go on deputation to Digicon, Singapore for quality control of seismic data from NRBC, which showed the trust my seniors had in my skills.

Between 1980 and 1990, my experience at CSD and GEOPIC was truly remarkable. The state-of-the-art building, advanced technology, and exciting foreign assignments provided me with invaluable opportunities for growth and development. It was a privilege to be a part of such an environment, and I am grateful for the experience.

However, I recognized the importance of gaining expertise in seismic data acquisition, realizing that there was much more to learn in this field. I was delighted when I received the news of my transfer to the Geoscience Division in Jodhpur. As per ONGC’s work rotation policy, I understood that this transfer was inevitable. While nervous about the new challenges that awaited me, I embraced the opportunity.

In May 1990, I packed my bags and left for Jodhpur with a sense of melancholy, as they say, all good things must come to an end, and my time at GEOPIC was no exception.

**Leading the way: Exciting Vibroseis seismic exploration in Rajasthan’s Thar desert, Jodhpur, May 1990 to May 1997.**

Oh, where do I even begin to describe my time in Jodhpur? It was an unforgettable experience that holds a special place in my heart. As I reminisce about those days, I feel transported back to that time and place, overwhelmed by a flood of memories and emotions.

Jodhpur was not a new place to me. It held a special place in my heart - it was once my home. I graduated from the University of Jodhpur between 1974 and 1977. Those were the best years of my life, and Jodhpur was the perfect setting for them.

Jodhpur brought back my memories as a student. I was eager to explore everything the city had to offer and stayed with my uncle, Dr. Alam Singh. He was the Professor and HOD of Civil Engineering at MBM Engineering College, a kind and loving man who made me feel at home in this new place.

As I arrived at the Geoscience Division in Jodhpur, I was thrilled to have been given the opportunity to lead the Vibroseis Geophysical Party, GP-26, in the Thar Desert near Jaisalmer. Although I had always been fascinated by geophysical field operations, I had never worked in a seismic field party before. Nevertheless, I was determined to take on this challenge with a positive attitude.

As the Party Chief of GP-26, I assumed responsibility for the party’s success and led a team of skilled professionals to ensure smooth operations. While some fear of the unknown lingered, I had confidence in my ability to quickly learn and adapt.
I always approached assignments with enthusiasm, believing it would bring out my best performance. With many new personnel joining GP-26, I recognized the importance of addressing their concerns and ensuring effective party operations.

Fortunately, the initial apprehensions expressed by the Field Supervisor openly and others privately did not materialize. Instead, our teamwork prevailed, enabling us to overcome challenges and successfully complete the project. Through this experience, I grew as a leader and acquired new skills.

I still remember it like it was yesterday the first day I embarked on my journey with Mr. D. Purkayastha, the then Party Chief of GP-26. It was a dark night, and I had no idea what lay ahead of me. I was a little nervous, truthfully, but also excited to see what was in store for me.

As we cruised along the desert road from Jaisalmer to Longewala, the only sounds we could hear were the hum of the car engine. I was lost in thought, gazing at the inky black sky, when suddenly a bright light caught my eye. I could not quite make out what it was, but I could see that it was a beautifully illuminated site, nestled amongst the towering sand dunes. It was breathtaking, and I could not help but gasp in wonder. "What is this?" I exclaimed, turning to Mr. Purkayastha. He smiled at me and said, "This is Camp GP-26." "You have arrived at your destination, my friend," he continued. "Welcome to your oasis in the desert.

The midnight silence in the camp, with only the sound of the generator, left me in awe. The serene desert, illuminated by warm lights, brought a sense of calm, and created a moment I would always cherish. The beauty of the desert and the welcoming nature of the people made it feel like an entirely different world.

As I reminisce about the days gone by, I remember the exhilarating feeling of embarking on numerous expeditions to Camp GP-26 with my beloved wife and two young children in tow. Just imagining venturing into the unknowable terrain with my family never failed to ignite a spark of excitement within me.

My son and daughter, full of youthful enthusiasm and energy, were always eager to immerse themselves in the wonders of the great outdoors. Their insatiable thirst for exploration and adventure knew no bounds as they eagerly traversed the unfamiliar terrain of our surroundings.
During our stay at the campsite, my family and I had the opportunity to immerse ourselves in the unique activities and experiences provided by the scenic location. As we settled into our new surroundings, with boundless energy and an adventurous spirit, my daughter would spend time chasing the playful chickens and giggling with delight as they fluttered and clucked in response. It was clear that she was completely unaware of the ultimate fate of these feathered friends, but that only added to the charm and innocence of her interactions with them.

As the Party Chief of Team GP-26, I had the privilege of being part of an incredible project involving Vibroseis seismic data acquisition in some of the most challenging terrains imaginable. During one of our field seasons while camping at Aasutar, we received a communication on March 30, 1992 from the Head of Operations in Jodhpur. The message requested that we contribute as much as possible to help WRBC achieve its financial yearly target, which had been set by the Regional Headquarters in Vadodara.

Despite the challenges of a shift change day and limited operational personnel, our team willingly took on the task, working tirelessly from 0000 hours on March 31, 1992. We remained determined and committed to achieving our objectives and putting in long hours of hard work.

The team synergized, with each member contributing their skills and talents seamlessly. In the 24-hour campaign, which concluded at 23:59 hrs. on March 31, 1992, team GP-26 successfully observed 333 Vibroseis points, leading to the fulfilment of WRBC’s financial yearly target.

I still vividly recall the wireless message that was sent to the Jodhpur headquarters. It stated that a task had been assigned to GP-26, which required them to observe as many vibro points as possible to contribute towards achieving the WRBC fiscal year target. With pride and pleasure, it was announced that GP-26 had successfully observed 333 vibro points. The wireless operator was initially skeptical and double-checked with our operator. Later, the Head of Operations from Jodhpur came online to verify the report and extend congratulations to GP-26.

The Regional Headquarters at WRBC in Vadodara recognized our efforts and awarded our team the title of “Best Party” in WRBC. The sense of pride and accomplishment we felt was indescribable.

The recognition we received from the regional headquarters was a testament to our dedication and commitment to the project. It motivated us to continue working hard and pushing ourselves to achieve even greater heights. Our team had set a high standard, and we were determined to maintain it.

During my tenure in Jodhpur, I had the privilege of serving as the Secretary of ASTO (Association of Scientific and Technical officers), ONGC, and representing Jodhpur officers for the 1990-1992 term. Although the role presented challenges, I
wholeheartedly embraced it and was determined to do my best for both my colleagues and the organization as a whole.

During my tenure, one incident remains vivid in my memory. The crew of GP-14 mistakenly entered Pakistan and was captured by Pakistani Rangers, causing great anxiety. We urgently sought help, and Mr. Amitabh Gupta, Director General of Border Security Force, Rajasthan, and Gujarat, emerged as a hero. He swiftly contacted the head of Pakistani Rangers, stressing the gravity of the situation and advocating for their immediate release emphasizing that the crew had made a genuine, yet foolish mistake. Thankfully, following a flag meeting between BSF and Pakistani Rangers, the crew was released, relieving us all. However, the incident highlighted the need for caution, especially in sensitive areas like national borders.

During my time with GP-26, the toughest challenge was the seismic data acquisition task in the Shahgarh Sub-Basin, an uncharted area infested with sand dunes in the Thar Desert. Previously, only the CGG team had conducted a Vibroseis survey for ONGC in the area during Field Season 1985-86. However, leveraging our team’s experience in challenging environments, GP-26 was confident in our ability to succeed. Equipped with seismic survey gear and extensive desert experience, we faced numerous obstacles, including navigating treacherous sand dunes and extreme weather conditions. With pride and professionalism, we tirelessly worked for two field seasons, namely 1993-94 and 1994-95.

After completing five field seasons, the fifth one ending in 1994-95, I found myself stationed at Jodhpur HQ. It was during this time that India implemented a new policy, the New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP), granting Shell Netherlands the license to explore a new block, RJ-ON-90/1. Per chance, I was selected to work with Shell, a globally renowned oil giant. This opportunity provided me with invaluable exposure to international best practices, an experience that certainly benefitted me for years to come.

Shell awarded Western Geophysical, an American company, the contract for Vibroseis seismic data acquisition and processing. Being associated with the Western Geophysical field crew was an enlightening experience for me. Their work culture and HSE (Health Safety and Environment) practices differed from what I had observed as Party Chief in GP-26. The Western Geophysical crew had superior hardware and performed initial data processing in their field camp, which was not the norm for ONGC field parties. As an experienced processor familiar with Vibroseis seismic data acquisition in GP-26, this opportunity allowed me to learn about both acquisition and processing. Collaborating with an American company enriched my knowledge base significantly. Besides, my experience with the production-sharing contract under NELP was highly beneficial in my professional life.

Jodhpur held a special place in my heart, not only for its breath-taking desert landscapes but mainly because of the remarkable people I encountered there. Despite our diverse backgrounds and languages, a strong sense of closeness and camaraderie united us. This bond extended beyond my own GP-26 team and was evident in GP-14 as well. We shared not only good times but also difficult memories, which became an integral part of our collective experiences without overshadowing our thoughts or conversations.

“All good things must come to an end,” and so did my time in Jodhpur. In May 1997, after a seven-year tenure, I was transferred to NRBC, Dehradun, marking the end of my stay in Jodhpur. It was a bittersweet moment as I prepared to leave the city and start a new assignment. Jodhpur will always hold a special place in my heart for the memories that it provided, and I cherish. As I made my way to Dehradun, I felt a mixture of emotions, both of excitement, and anticipation.
Challenges and triumphs: Frontier basins, Dehradun, May 1997 to May 2004

Joining NRBC, my role involved overseeing the quality control of seismic data acquisition, a crucial responsibility requiring precise and accurate work. Even the slightest error could have significant repercussions on the data analysis process, emphasizing the importance of meticulousness in this task.

During this time, I had the opportunity to meet Mr D.K. Pandey, who had recently joined as the Head of NRBC. I consider myself fortunate to have had him as my mentor, as he took me under his wing and guided me through my work. Mr Pandey was a natural leader with a wealth of experience in the field, and I learned a great deal from him. His guidance and mentorship have been invaluable.

Progressing in my career at NRBC, I became the Chief of the Special API (Acquisition, Processing and Interpretation) Group in the EBG (Exploration Business Group) department. In leading this team, our responsibilities included planning and supervising seismic data collection in Himachal Pradesh and Satpura. Additionally, we played a vital role in establishing NRBC’s seismic data processing facility and introducing the PROMAX seismic software for the first time.

During my posting in the Frontier Basins, I was privileged to be selected to work with the renowned Dr. Dale G. Stone on a project aimed at addressing the issue of poor seismic data quality in the hilly terrain of Himachal Pradesh. This project involved the use of GX Technology software and the design of field parameters, and it was a prestigious assignment that took us to Houston to collaborate on modelling work.

Overall, this experience was a valuable learning opportunity and an important milestone in my career as a geophysicist. It taught me the importance of attention to detail, collaboration, and dedication to achieving our objectives. Working with Dr. Stone and the rest of the team on this project was an honour, and I am grateful for the opportunity to have contributed to its success."

Throughout my time at NRBC, I was fortunate to work with some of the brightest minds in the field and Mr. Krishan Pal, CG(S), was undoubtedly the main pillar of our group. He had a keen eye for detail and was an excellent analyst whose contributions were invaluable to our team’s success. I had the opportunity to learn from him and grow as a professional. The experience and knowledge gained during my time at NRBC have been invaluable, and I shall remain grateful for the opportunity to have been a part of such a prestigious work centre.

With the introduction of CRC (Corporate Rejuvenation Campaign) in ONGC, NRBC was renamed as Frontier Basins. As the Head Specialist Group, my role was to enhance the seismic API by providing innovative solutions. Leading a diverse team of geoscientists, drilling experts, civil engineers, mechanical engineers, and electrical engineers, we collaborated closely to successfully tackle assignments and surpass expectations.

As a team, we achieved a significant milestone by setting up a dedicated site for the IIWS (Interactive Interpretation Workstations) of the Frontier Basins. This streamlined our operations and improved our efficiency in delivering high-quality work. Additionally, we implemented GIS (Geophysical Information System) software to digitize and integrate old geological maps with other G&G data, enhancing the accessibility and utilization of this information for interpreters. This initiative greatly improved the accuracy and precision of our work, proving to be a valuable asset in our daily operations.
Towards the end of April 2004, I received the news about my transfer to Assam in the northeast region of India for a mandatory three-year term. It was not the ending I had envisioned. Sitting in my office, I got to reflect on my journey till that point and was overwhelmed with emotions. The city had become my home, where I had formed relationships and created lasting memories about the laughter over lunch, the jokes exchanged, and the late nights working together to meet deadlines. Added to that was the familiar sights and sounds that had become part of my life. Now, I had to leave it all behind. The thought of the upcoming journey filled me with a mixture of sadness and anticipation, as I had to embark on a new adventure.

**Journeys through difficult terrain: Exploring the Assam Arakan basins in Jorhat, May 2004 – October 2005**

In May 2004, I embarked on an adventure to India’s oil and gas industry in the northeast. I became a seismic data acquisition manager for the Assam Arakan Basins, starting my journey in May that year in Jorhat. Despite being away from my family for a long time, I made use of ONGC’s quarterly travel facility to visit them every three months. Settling into my bachelor accommodations in Jorhat, I eagerly took on the responsibilities of overseeing a seismic campaign in Assam, Mizoram, and Tripura. It was a challenging yet thrilling task.

As Seismic Acquisition Operations Manager (SOAM), my main responsibility was supervising the challenging seismic campaign in Assam, Mizoram, and Tripura. This experience taught me valuable lessons in teamwork, communication, and perseverance. It also gave me a deeper appreciation for the resilience of the people in these regions. Overall, it was a rewarding and transformative experience that I will always cherish.

While in Jorhat, I received thrilling news that I had been nominated by Mr. Y. B. Sinha, our company’s Director of Exploration, to attend the prestigious Society of Exploration Geophysicists (SEG) conference in Denver, USA.
It was an honour that humbled me. The SEG conference was a renowned event where experts showcased cutting-edge technologies and discussed the latest research in geophysics.

Despite the limited time, I managed to obtain my visa just before my flight departure and arrived in Denver just in time for the conference. The venue was awe-inspiring, filled with posters and displays presenting advanced geophysical techniques and technologies. I eagerly absorbed all the information, mingling with experts in the field.

Attending the SEG conference proved invaluable in expanding my knowledge and skills in geophysics. It reinvigorated my role as a data acquisition manager, equipping me with a deeper understanding of the latest techniques and technologies. I was grateful for the opportunity, knowing it would greatly benefit our company's exploration projects in the years to come.

As I reminisce about my career, a blend of emotions fills me including wistfulness, satisfaction, and joy, especially when I recall a crucial moment that took place while I was in Jorhat.

One day, I received a life-changing invitation for an interview with ONGC Videsh in Delhi. Thrilled, I immediately accepted and attended the interview with a mix of excitement and nervousness. The interview went exceptionally well, leaving me positive about my chances. In October 2005, I received a transfer order to ONGC Videsh in Delhi as the Country Manager for the OVL project in Qatar. Sharing the news with my loved ones, I prepared to relocate and embrace this exciting new role. As I bid farewell to Jorhat, I embarked on a journey filled with pride, gratitude, and cherished memories.
Exploring opportunities and overcoming challenges: OVL’s Qatar operations in the global energy landscape, October 2005 to September 2008

Entering the impressive office of ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL) in Delhi, I felt a surge of adrenaline. This marked the beginning of an exciting new chapter, where I aimed to prove my worth as a valuable team member. The sleek and polished surroundings reflected the company's status and influence.

With enthusiasm, I presented my joining report, ready to make a positive impression. Assigned to work under the Qatar Project Manager, I eagerly entered the meeting, listening attentively to the project’s objectives and challenges. I was determined to contribute to the team's success.

Immersing myself in the project, I actively participated in discussions and meetings, drawing on my previous experience with Shell and Western Geophysical. My in-depth understanding of production-sharing contracts, acquired during my time in Jodhpur, proved to be a valuable asset in my role as the Country Manager in Qatar.

Earning the trust and reliance of my new team members filled me with pride, knowing that I was contributing to our collective success. Working seamlessly with the MM, Finance, and Project Coordinator, we began pursuing our goals with ease and fulfilment.

Establishing a presence in Doha, Qatar, was essential for the project's triumph. Setting up an office and organizing the inaugural Management Committee (MC) meeting became priorities, and I was resolute in achieving them. Overcoming the hurdle of obtaining visas, we secured tourist visas through our hotel bookings for our travel to Doha.

Meeting with the Manager of Qatar Petroleum, responsible for all exploration projects and Chairman of MC for the OVL Project, Najwat-Najem (NN)-Production Sharing Contract (PSC), was pivotal and was fixed.

I approached the meeting with a sense of trepidation, but I need not have worried. The Manager, Mr. Ismail Abdullah, was welcoming and eager to hear about our plans for the future. As I presented a detailed overview of our objectives for the OVL project, I felt a surge of confidence with each word. To my delight, he was impressed by our proposal and readily agreed to convene the first MC meeting. It was a significant accomplishment for us, and having a powerful ally in Qatar Petroleum would be instrumental in navigating the complex oil and gas industry landscape.

To comply with the PSC terms and conditions, it was essential to establish an OVL branch office in accordance with regulations. After thorough research, I discovered the El-Emadi Business Center—an impressive building with modern amenities and a prime location. The centre offered elegant, well-suited offices for our requirements. Renting one of these offices, I swiftly proceeded with establishing our business.

After weeks of anticipation, I finally moved from my home office to our new workspace. While initially working alone, I knew my Delhi team would eventually join me for MC and Technical Committee (TC) meetings. During our first MC meeting, we established the groundwork for our work. In the PSC, OVL committed to drilling and testing two wells for the NN block, Qatar Offshore, aiming to complete MWP (Minimum Work Program) within two years. With my team's dedication, I was confident in achieving our objectives and elevating our business to new heights. The inaugural MC meeting was a pivotal moment that set the tone for our work at OVL, and I, as the project lead, had full confidence in our team’s unwavering dedication and hard work to succeed.
To meet the agreed timeframe for MWP completion, we conducted a thorough analysis of local markets to identify suitable rigs and long-lead items. Careful planning and execution were crucial for meeting the deadline. We also recognized the importance of conducting pre-drill environmental impact assessment surveys and engaging relevant services to comply with local regulations.

In accordance with the PSC, a Tender Committee was established to ensure smooth project execution. The committee comprised a chairman appointed by Qatar Petroleum and OVL Country Manager as Secretary.

As the secretary of the Tender Committee, I distinctly remember the significant inauguration of the committee in January 2006. This marked the beginning of a series of crucial deliberations and decisions that would shape the project’s trajectory. During the meeting, the committee established procedures and guidelines aligned with the requirements of the PSC, ensuring adherence to prescribed standards throughout the project.

To facilitate the tendering process, a specialized team was formed comprising Mr. Anoop Hansda (CE), Mr. Sandip Chaturvedi (Manager-MM), and Mr. Kamal Chopra (Manager-F&A). They were tasked with carrying out tender-related work in Doha and remained there until project completion, after which they would return to Delhi.

In addition to this, Qatar Petroleum seconded a very senior officer, Mr. Abduljabar, as DGM to OVL, as per the terms stipulated in the PSC. Mr. Abduljabar was a reputed driller who had held many prestigious assignments in Qatar Petroleum and was the founding MD of Gulf Drilling International. He was a fine gentleman and a very cooperative colleague who proved to be an excellent asset to our team. I am fortunate to maintain a friendship with him to this day.
To facilitate effective communication with Qatar authorities, I collaborated closely with the Indian Embassy, arranging meetings, and building relationships with government officials. I maintained regular contact, providing updates on our progress and seeking guidance on regulatory matters.

As part of my responsibilities, I ensured smooth visa and resident permit processes for OVL officers. I meticulously handled paperwork and documentation to prevent any operational delays or disruptions.

As the project lead, I was responsible for meticulously planning and provisioning all materials and services for the two-well drilling campaign. This included acquiring mandatory certificates and clearances, such as environmental and explosive licenses, by closely collaborating with regulatory bodies for timely approvals.

I also facilitated the utilization of shared services with Qatar Petroleum, such as oil spill management and core analysis, to optimize resource allocation and minimize costs for OVL.

The proposed drilling locations were found suitable and approved by the MC, marking a significant achievement for Team OVL. The Tender Committee met regularly to process received tenders and provide recommendations for approval.

We undertook preparatory tasks to meet regulatory requirements and contractual obligations, securing authorizations for offshore drilling operations. The team worked with urgency to finalize contracts, obtain approvals, and ensure equipment and personnel readiness.

The team’s exhaustive efforts included assembling approximately 35 contracts, both large and small, to achieve the necessary endorsements and complete all preparatory operations before commencing drilling activities.
Despite challenges, the team’s dedication and hard work paid off. With pre-drilling activities completed and necessary approvals and contracts in place, drilling operations commenced. Excitement filled the air as the team awaited D-day, one step closer to their goal.

As the final piece fell into place, relief and excitement surged as Aban was awarded the drilling rig contract. With the rig ready for mobilization, D-day approached swiftly.

In the end, our hard work paid off as we received the green light to begin drilling. Reflecting on the journey, pride and accomplishment overwhelmed us, knowing we overcame obstacles and emerged victorious.

A skilled team was assembled, including well site drillers, geologists, and chemists from ONGC Videsh and ONGC, along with additional experts in geology, HSE, and logistics stationed in Doha. Mr. Anoop Hansda, CE(D), was already posted there.

After thorough preparation, the long-awaited D-Day arrived on July 7, 2007, as the NN-3 well was spudded. The Doha office became a bustling centre of activity, closely monitoring all aspects of the drilling process.

During the initial stages of drilling well NN-3, progress was smooth. However, as we reached the Arab D formation, we faced a significant challenge: heavy mud losses leading to an internal blowout. Conventional methods failed to contain it.

In response, the Crisis Management Team, led by Mr. V. P. Mahavar, mobilized quickly. Through their expertise and specialized equipment, they worked tirelessly to mitigate mud losses and halt the internal blowout. This experience highlights the importance of a skilled team in handling unexpected drilling challenges. The Crisis Management Team’s prompt and effective response saved time and resources, ensuring the successful completion of the well.
In the annals of oil exploration, there exist tales of both triumph and tribulation, and the story of Well NN-3 and NN-4 is no exception. However, with significant risk comes great responsibility, and no effort was spared to ensure the drilling process was safe and secure.

In December 2007, the rig mobilized to Well NN-4, and drilling began with enthusiasm. The team worked diligently to meet the project’s deadline. By February, the drilling was efficiently completed, but the logging results were disappointing, leading to no testing of the well. However, the team remained determined, confident in their ability to overcome obstacles and continue forward.

After careful analysis, OVL Delhi determined that the NN block was not found to be economically viable. The decision to relinquish the area was made and communicated to Qatar Petroleum through the MC. As we prepared for closure, I found myself handling tasks alone, similar to when I started in Doha. I was responsible for disposing of scrap and leftover drilling materials, as well as clearing any outstanding payments to service providers.

In addition to these responsibilities, our team also had to move forward with the insurance claim process. This resulted in several meetings with the insurance company, where I was assisted by Mr. Anoop Hansda, DGM (D), and Mr. V. Sridhar, DM (F&A). Through these discussions, we worked tirelessly to ensure that our team was fully supported, and our interests were well-protected.

Now was the time to say goodbye to Doha, roaming through the now-empty rooms of the OVL office in Doha, I was struck by a mixture of sentimentality and accomplishment. It was an unusual feeling, as if I was both reflecting on the past and bracing for the future.

Upon arriving in Doha, we started with a clean slate and transformed an empty office into a thriving workspace for over 18 months, drilling two offshore wells. Despite challenges, we achieved our goals and felt pride as we closed the office to move forward. The end of this era brought bittersweet emotions, as we cherished memories and connections made. Grateful for the experience, we carried these memories with us as we continued our journey.

Global adventures: Managing overseas projects across continents- OVL, Delhi. September 2008 to August 2017

As I returned to Delhi in September 2008, I felt like I had never left. The sights, sounds, and smells of the bustling city were like an old friend welcoming me home.

But there was little time for reminiscing. As soon as I arrived at OVL Delhi, I was informed of my nomination for the Executive Development Program. It was a prestigious program that promised to hone my leadership skills and equip me with the tools to take on more responsibility in the company. I was thrilled at the prospect of participating and immediately set off to complete the training.

After completing the program, I returned to OVL Delhi to learn the insurance claim had reached its final stage. We presented our case to the insurance company’s surveyor, who was satisfied with our evidence. OVL was awarded INR 37.11 crores in compensation, bringing relief and pride to the team after months of hard work and uncertainty.

I now had an assignment with the challenge of designing and optimizing seismic data acquisition and quality control for exploratory projects.
Later on, as some changes took place in OVL, I was thrilled to be designated as the Project Manager for OVL’s operations in Kazakhstan, where OVL partnered with KMG for an exploration project. As the head of the project, I was tasked with the crucial responsibility of ensuring the swift completion of the agreement that would enable OVL to officially enter into project management and control.

In my detail-oriented role, I managed critical areas such as regulatory compliance, work programs, budgets, and project progress appraisals. My assignment in Astana, Kazakhstan involved attending MC meetings and liaising with stakeholders to ensure compliance. Coordinating collective decision-making required considering inputs from all parties to reach mutually beneficial outcomes.

My role required skill, expertise, diplomacy, and managing complex relationships. I focused on achieving objectives within time and budget constraints while maintaining quality, proactively addressing obstacles, and keeping stakeholders informed. As Project Manager, this challenging and fulfilling experience refined my leadership skills and contributed to a high-profile project’s success.

In 2012, OVL underwent a leadership change, and I was appointed as Head of Exploration Operations, overseeing operations in eight countries. With experience as a Project Manager in Kazakhstan, this was an exciting opportunity to take on higher responsibilities. However, the shift was a significant leap as I was now responsible for 17 exploratory projects across multiple countries.

In my new role, I embraced an exploratory mindset and used analytical skills to assess project feasibility and risks. This enabled me to create tailored strategies to achieve project objectives while mitigating challenges. Although the expanded responsibilities posed difficulties, I was confident in my ability to adapt and leverage past experiences for success, making it a significant career advancement.
The management team had great confidence in my abilities and expressed enthusiasm about my appointment. As the Head of Exploration Operations, I had a pivotal role in overseeing all exploration blocks worldwide, including on land, shallow seas, and deep-water areas, both operated and non-operated. Implementing ONGC Videsh’s exploration strategy efficiently and effectively was my primary responsibility. It was a demanding task that required dedicated efforts from my team and me to achieve our objectives.

To achieve our goals, I led a diverse team of geoscientists responsible for planning exploratory activities across various blocks. We closely monitored the implementation of our work program, prioritizing activities to meet exploration objectives. As a team, we made collective decisions on significant matters concerning exploration projects, always prioritizing the best interests of the company and stakeholders.

In addition, I supported country managers in managing partners and service providers, including dispute resolution, where professionalism and technical expertise were crucial. This task was challenging but approached with diligence to ensure fair and just decision-making.

As Head of Exploration Operations, I travelled to various countries for meetings, interacting with diverse cultures and environments. This experience enriched my understanding of stakeholders' needs. Overall, being appointed to this role was an exciting and cherished opportunity. It involved challenges, hard work, and dedication, but it was fulfilling as it allowed me to contribute to the company’s success while learning from different cultures and environments.

In 2015, significant changes took place at OVL, altering the course of my professional life. I was appointed as the Regional President for the Asia Pacific region, responsible for overseeing exploratory and production projects in four countries: New Zealand, Vietnam, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. During my tenure, we successfully executed a large-scale seismic data acquisition and processing campaign in New Zealand's offshore region, covering one block. The project involved implementing 3D broadband source and receiver surveys, and our team’s hard work and dedication resulted in impressive outcomes, meeting our goals within the specified timeframe. In Bangladesh's offshore region, we conducted seismic surveys, including 2D steamer and OBC surveys, which greatly expanded our knowledge base. These
surveys provided valuable insights that helped refine our exploration strategies. Additionally, we successfully completed the necessary formalities for seismic campaigns in two onland blocks in Myanmar. We diligently planned and awarded contracts to reliable contractors for these projects.

In conclusion, my appointment as Regional President Asia Pacific in 2015 marked a significant milestone in my career. From starting as a geophysicist, I progressed to overseeing exploratory and production projects in four countries. Utilizing the skills and knowledge acquired throughout my career, I successfully led various initiatives, including seismic campaigns and surveys. The experience gained from these projects enabled me to address multifaceted challenges and greatly influenced my professional trajectory for years to come.

As the 31st of August 2017 drew closer, the day of my superannuation, I found myself lost in a sea of contemplation, looking back at the winding road that had been my professional career. My heart was brimming with gratitude and appreciation for the journey that had led me to where I was today.

(A fond farewell: Marking the day of superannuation with team and Director(E), OVL)

I reminisced about the times when I had been tasked with assignments that seemed daunting and insurmountable. But I was blessed to have knowledgeable seniors who not only guided me with their expertise but also nurtured my potential. They believed in me, and their trust and support gave me the confidence to push my limits and reach new heights.

It was not just my seniors who played a significant role in my journey; my team members and peers were equally important. The constructive collaboration of our collective efforts and the support we provided for each other were the driving force that made the successful completion of those assignments possible. I was grateful for the excellent team and working environment that had nurtured and honed my skills.

As I looked back, I realized that my career had taken me to some of the most challenging places on earth. From the air-conditioned offices of GEOPIC to the scorching heat of the Thar desert, the hilly terrain of
Himachal Pradesh, the parched land of Satpura, and the dense forests of Mizoram, I had seen and experienced it all. Yet, even in dusty and challenging environments, I found myself enjoying every moment of it.

My journey had also taken me beyond the borders of my motherland. My first foreign trip to the Soviet Union in 1984 had been a life-changing experience that opened new vistas for me. Later, I had the honour of being the Country Manager, Qatar, and my professional life at OVL had exposed me to a world that was vastly different from my own. All these experiences enriched my life and added a new dimension to my persona.

I am filled with gratitude towards the esteemed GEOHORIZONS team for presenting me with the opportunity to pen down my memoirs. It is with great pleasure that I extend my heartfelt thanks to Mr. Vishal Shastri, ED, Head GEOPIC, and President SPG, India.

My memoirs would not have taken shape in their current form without the invaluable contributions and insights of Mr. R. S. Pandey, Ex-ED (GP), and Mr. Krishan Pal, Ex-DGM (GP). Their guidance and suggestions were instrumental in shaping my narrative and providing depth and perspective to my experiences. I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. Rajeev Tandon, Ex. Executive Director, and member of the editorial board at GEOHORIZONS for first contacting me and his persistent insistence on my writing this memoir. Despite my initial reluctance, his unwavering faith in me and the significance of my story served as a source of motivation and inspiration.

I am filled with boundless gratitude as I reflect on the incredible review by my grand-niece, Pragya and daughter Shivangi. Pragya’s literary analysis of the memoir was a masterpiece, delving deep into the themes, obstacles, emotions, honesty, and personal style. Her dedication and expertise left me in awe.

As for my daughter, Shivangi, she examined the memoir with a critical eye that only a daughter could possess for her father’s deeds. Her unflinching honesty and attention to detail pushed me to be better and to strive for excellence in every word and every sentence. I cannot express enough how grateful I am to both.

Their suggestions were immeasurable, and I will always cherish their willingness to lend their talents to this project. Pragya and Shivangi, you have my eternal thanks and admiration.