

When Myron M. Kinley answers a fire call he goes places...

He never knows, when the telephone tinkles in his Navigation Blvd. office in Houston, just where he will be going--whether on a hurry call to South America, Europe, or into the desert lands of Persia.

Once it was the Barco Concession in the jungles of Columbia, once the Balkans, and thrice the Latin countries of the South.

Tomorrow, in his role of fire fighter to the world-at-large, this Texan may be on his way to any one of these places--or to East Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, or any other place where men punch holes in the ground to find oil.

For Myron Kinley and his brother Floyd have a romantic and dangerous part in the story of the petroleum industry--a job that begins only when trouble stands in the way of the conquest for black gold, and when that greatest of all perils lifts its red and flaming head among the derricks to take a tragic toll in life and property.

Fire! Nothing could be worse in the derrick-studded fields. It is Death laughing behind a red veil, and reaching out with an invisible hand to grip the human heart with fingers of terror. It is, among the oil men, Industry Enemy No.1.

But since oil fields must have fires there must be men to snuff them out; and that's the job of the brothers Kinley, to snuff them out even as you and I would blow the flame from a lighted match...except, instead of breath, they use the rocking explosion of a charge of gelatin, nitroglycerine's younger but more lusty brother.

A well is on fire in the great East Texas field. It threatens millions of dollars worth of production; perhaps a nearby town...and more often than not it has taken several lives. The Gulf or Sinclair or Tidal exhausts all its skill in meeting the menace and then, as a last resort, sends for Myron Kinley. They know he can do the job if anybody can.

A big truck, symbolically red, and equipped with winches and draw lines, swings out of the Kinley Building in Houston. The world's No.1 oil well fire fighter is answering a call.

A few hours later he is on the scene, sizing up the enemy and preparing for action. If things appear particularly bad he sends a wire to Tulsa; asks his brother Floyd to come down. Otherwise he goes to work along with a crew of oil company helpers.

The well, a big gasser with a flow of oil, is a roaring inferno. A column of fire, thicker than a man's body, stabs 200 feet into the sky, at the

same time spreading out into a lake of flames at the casing head. The steel derrick, softened in the terrific heat, has collapsed over the hole... a jumbled mass of metal which must be removed.

Then, too, there may be bodies of men. Once there were nine.

Hose lines are laid from boilers; moveable shields of metal and asbestos are made ready; and the truck is backed as near the flames as possible. Then, with hose nozzles pushed through holes in the protecting shield, Kinley and a helper advance toward the fire, playing on streams of water.

They edge closer and closer and then, after one section of metal has been reasonably cooled, Kinley leaves the shield and walks into the edge of the inferno. The helper plays a stream of water on him as he goes, and for further protection he wears heavy work clothes. Once he wore an asbestos suit for this work but he has learned, he says, that such suits become water-soaked and hamper his movements.

Once in the edge of the flame he hooks winch lines to twisted hunks of metal; the truck groans under the strain and the work of clearance starts... a job which may last three days or possibly a week. That's why Myron Kinley's face wears a constant "sunburn" now...

The first objective is to concentrate the blaze in one shaft, and so, when all the debris has been removed, the well connections are pulled away with winch lines, or blown away with a charge of gelatin placed near the casing head. Then Kinley prepares the "breath of the giant" for the final move in conquering the fire.

He takes from his truck a box containing a 34-pound block of yellowish-brown jelly. He lifts the lid and, using a knife, cuts out big gobs of the stuff. He pushes it into tin shells, bumps the shells against the ground to pack in the content, and then crams in more.

This is a job that you and I would not care to try, for each quart of that yellowish-brown substance--gelatinized nitroglycerine--contains enough power to blow a man to minute shreds. But Mr. Kinley, accustomed to the business, doesn't seem to mind.

"It's not likely to explode unless it comes ~~xxx~~ in contact with an electric spark," says he, as calmly as a man stuffing innocent sausages. "Once I took a box up in a plane and threw it out, and it didn't explode. It's not dangerous... if you know how to handle it."

And then when the giant's breath is ready... perhaps 15 to 50 quarts... Kinley places it in an iron drum, connects his detonating wires, and with water playing on him, moves it up to the well and places it beside the roaring shaft of flame.

All hands seek shelter, in a ditch or behind a distant boiler,

and the detonator handle is pushed home.

The blast is terrific, ear-splitting. The "breath of the giant" cuts through the flame, separating it momentarily from the flow of gas at the hole, but long enough that the flame is blown upward to die. And, just as a man would blow out a match, another oil field fire ~~was~~ has been conquered.

Myron Kinley, at 37 years of age the recognized world champion in his line, was born to the business. His father, K.T. Kinley, still living in California, was a veteran nitro shooter in the Bakersfield and Taft areas; and in 1913 Myron watched his dad put out a well at Taft...the first on record to be extinguished with nitro.

He watched his father's work with a kid's interest, not even guessing that through this new method in fighting oil fires he himself would someday hold one of the most adventuresome jobs in all the petroleum industry.

Later K.T. Kinley moved to Oklahoma and went into the shooting business at Tulsa, and he found that his fame had preceded him...for he soon was called upon to handle several fires in Texas.

The Tidewell No. 1 near Desdemona was ignited by lightning. Kinley shot it out after five attempts with 20 quarts of nitro.

Gordon and Green's gasser in the Cisco field came in for 10 million feet. Then, during a meeting at the nearby Four Corners school, a lamp was overturned, and the building was burned. The well caught from the school. K.T. Kinley arrived on the scene, put up derricks, tied eight quarts of gelatin on a cable between them, ~~and~~ swung the charge over the hole and touched it off with an electric spark. The concussion put out the flames.

Then, in 1923, the J.K. Hughes Development Co. brought in a wildcat in the Powell field near Corsicana. It was called the No. 1 McKie, and 13 men were on the derrick floor attempting to cap its 5200-barrel flow when, from some undetermined cause, it caught fire. Those 13 men--including S.P. Allen, the drilling superintendent--had no chance for escape. Caught in the boiling flames, they died.

The Hughes Co. sent for the elder Kinley. He cleared the wreckage, removed the ~~max~~ charred skeletons, shot out the flames after two weeks of work--while Myron and his brother Floyd (seven years younger) watched. It was then that Myron decided to try his own hand at the business, and early in the following year he opened an office in Tulsa...to await a call.

On Monday May 12, 1924 the Bruner No. 2 of the H.P. Wilcox Co. was drilling at 3408 feet in the Cromwell field of Oklahoma when the bit touched the gas sand. The bit cut through three more feet and a 32 million foot gasser roared up through the casing. Then a flint rock, hurled ~~upward~~ upward by the pressure, struck a pulley. There was a spark--and Bruner No. 2 ~~was~~

became a fiery furnace which threatened half a dozen other wells.

On Tuesday morning Myron Kinley, in Tulsa 75 miles away, received his first call. He chartered a plane, loaded a supply of gelatin and an asbestos suit into the cockpit, and took off in a rainstorm at the noon hour. At 4 p.m. he was at Bruner No. 2.

He found difficulties. The derrick was down and the gate on the well, being almost closed, was sending the fire downward and spreading it over the debris. Besides, the pit under the casing head had filled with water from a pipe which had been playing a stream on the fittings.

But luck was with Kinley on his first fire. With a pipe hastily constructed to meet the emergency, he succeeded in throwing the gate open and allowing the flame to shoot upward.

Then, with water playing on him and soaking the asbestos suit, he carried four quarts of gelatin as near as he dared and swung it up to the flame. The charge was fired with a spark but it was too light.

Kinley then wrapped 17 quarts of gelatin in asbestos and wired it--but without the assistance of the field workers, who were "leary" of the nitro. This done, he rigged a line between two trees so that the line would pass directly over the mouth of the hole. Then he placed the gelatin on a pulley, started it down the line, and set it off as it reached the flame. That did the job--and Bruner No. 2, Kinley's first well, was out exactle 18 hours after it had caught.

When Myron Kinley took off his salamander-like asbestos suit that day at Cromwell the oil industry had a new expert. Young Kinley was at the start of a career which would make him the world's most famous fire fighter--a career which would be packed with drama, and which would take him into far and strange places.

(Next: A Hurry Call--3000 miles away)