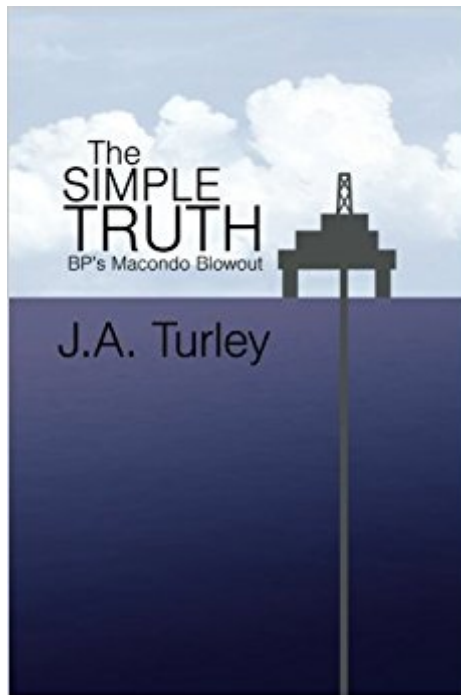




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The Simple Truth: BP's Macondo Blowout



Synopsis

On a quiet Tuesday evening in April 2010, experienced leaders aboard Transocean's DEEPWATER HORIZON drilling rig ran pressure tests and declared BP's deep oil-and-gas well to be secure. They were wrong. Hours later the well blew out, followed by explosions and fire that killed 11, sank the rig in the mile-deep Gulf of Mexico, and left behind mourning families, a disastrous environmental oil spill, and questions without answers. Questions like: Who, how, what caused BP's blowout? THE SIMPLE TRUTH is narrative nonfiction, often called a nonfiction novel (fact-based fiction). The story dramatizes the drilling and demise of BP's 3-1/2-mile-deep Macondo exploration well, albeit at the hands of fictional characters, surrogates for survivors and the eleven perfect witnesses who died that terrible night. Readers are invited to join the crew aboard the rig and share their lives as they drill ever deeper and make the costly decisions that define the business. And when just one of several such decisions goes wrong and the clock ticks down, readers, too, will better understand the simple rule: Zero tolerance for failure, because offshore there's nowhere to run. J.A. Turley leans on his decades-long industry career as an offshore-drilling expert to unravel investigative findings about the catastrophe. As a degreed petroleum engineer, ocean engineer, and professor of petroleum engineering, he narrates the story as if he and the reader are on the rig, immersed in the character-rich world of offshore drilling. His detailed and extensively referenced Epilogue documents the simple truth about the CAUSE of BP's Macondo blowout. Readers who are also interested in the EFFECTS of BP's blowout (the oil spill, company culture, energy independence) are encouraged to read published nonfiction titles on the topic by renowned authors and journalists, including: Joel Achenbach; Bob Cavnar; John Conrad & Tom Shroder; William R. Freudenburg & Robert Gramling; Peter Lehner & Bob Deans; Stanley Reed & Alison Fitzgerald; Carl Safina; Loren C. Steffy; and others.

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Customer Reviews

J. A. (John) Turley grew up in San Diego, California. Advanced degrees in petroleum engineering and ocean engineering from the Colorado School of Mines and the University of Miami and a three-year petroleum-engineering professorship at Marietta College preceded his oil-and-gas-industry career. His two decades of offshore drilling- and project-management responsibilities with a major U.S. energy company began with the Gulf of Mexico, evolved to the North Sea, were bolstered by executive education at Harvard Business School, and led him to be named manager of worldwide drilling. After a number of years as the company's senior technical officer, he elected to retire early to focus on writing. *THE SIMPLE TRUTH*, narrative nonfiction, is Turley's debut publication. Others will follow.

Disclosure- I worked at BP as a contractor from 1999-2006. I know and worked with many of the persons, including the two BP WSL's Vidrine and Kaluza. I also lost a friend and colleague in the explosion. This gives me some insights that other readers won't have, but it probably also colors my interpretations. Here are my thoughts on Turley's efforts. This could have been a much better book, but achieves its objective of revealing the true causes of the Macondo blowout. I was initially enthused by the idea of a fictionalized account of this tragedy. With the license to create a scenario that fiction grants I expected a behind-the-scenes look at the key development phases of this well. That didn't happen, to my disappointment. First the good stuff. As an engineer Turley knows the drilling business. The nuts and bolts of deep water rigs, the mechanical aspects of well construction, the geology of the reservoir that is the target of the drill-bit, are all realistically portrayed here. Perhaps too pedantically. Turley is an ex-Professor of Petroleum Engineering and there is perhaps a little too much 'nuts and bolts' in this work. As an example he has Barry the WSL for BP teach the engineering basics of working as a Well Site Leader-WSL (BP's term for a Company Man) to a young geologist who wants to return to school, and obtain an engineering degree- with the ultimate goal of becoming a WSL. A little weird but could happen I guess. This is a very unlikely scenario as it paints a false picture of how a super-major WSL spends his/her day. This sort of technical dialogue is going to be wasted on the average reader and doesn't really contribute a lot to the

story. One thing Turley nails is the failure to realize that the NPT test on the drill pipe was way more valid than the NPT test on the kill line. This is a critical responsibility of the WSL and Rig's OIM-Offshore Installation Manager, and was the last link in the chain of bad decisions that led to the blowout. This failure confuses and astounds me as it is the most basic aspect of well control and the two BP WSL's in real life were masters of this concept and understood it on an elemental level. To have made the decisions they made in the face of their education and experience is mystifying. I cannot come up with a single explanation for this error except perhaps they were under so much pressure to move the rig that they succumbed to pressure from their bosses to 'believe' the second result on the kill line. If that is the case, then although they have been absolved of criminal liability, they have to live with the deaths of eleven men on their consciences. Turley also does a reasonable job of capturing the cost mania that drives deep water projects. And, the pressure put on WSL's to stay on AFE, and economize rig time. The proper term for this exercise is "CRITICAL PATH", and I'm a little surprised Turley didn't use it even once. None-the-less the reader should come away with the impression that the administration of a million-dollar a day enterprise draws attention from the highest levels of the operating company. Also good is how in the epilogue/wrap up section he enumerates and explains the specific mechanical and procedural failures that led to this catastrophe. And, does it a way that the average person should be able to grasp. Now for the not so good stuff- Turley lays too much responsibility (as does the movie currently out) on Barry- the WSL. (And what the heck????? There were two WSL's out there. Where was Barry's tour (pronounced-tower) relief in the book?) WSL's are not decision makers (certainly not the big decisions like-running a long string of casing vs a tie-back), they implement decisions that have been made by the onshore managers. To be sure they "influence" these decisions, and if they have profound disagreement can cause these decisions to be reviewed and changed. But for the most part the job of the WSL is to keep the rig tracking down the critical path following a recipe called a 'prog', short for prognosis. A prog is a detailed, step by step (or series of procedures) procedure that the rig must follow and is crafted by the engineers in charge of the well and generally must be signed off by at least two layers of onshore management before it is sent to rig. The WSL's are easy targets because their names are all over the rigs paperwork. This can be a little misleading to those not familiar with the BP company culture. BP WSL's spend most of their days on conference calls with various onshore managers who have an interest in upcoming aspects of the rig's timeline, or Critical Path. I wish this had been developed in the book as it would give the reader a more realistic view of this job. There is also a goofy sub-plot of Jessica's- the young geologist character. This annoyed me as I found it distracting from the story I wanted to read. No one cares about this and if Turley ever

revises this book, I would axe the stuff about her family. Finally, missed opportunities. I wish Turley had gone into the conversations that were being had along the way with the onshore managers. I will guarantee you that discussions with 'town' took place before the displacement to seawater began. I worked on dozens of projects during my time at BP and I cannot recall a single instance where a WSL (including Vidrine and Kaluza on other projects) took a step like this without calling town- (slang for the onshore bosses) to have a last look at the situation before taking a step like this. Now Vidrine and Kaluza ain't talkin, and who can blame them, but Turley should have been able to construct these 'chats' as I am sure he had them with his WSL's when he was an onshore manager. I think perhaps he got lost in the technical weeds of the story and lost track of what would make this a really compelling book. It happens. Particularly with a story as complex as this. I have waxed on and on here and I could go on. But, I am going to wrap up. This book is a worthy effort overall. It could have been better, but, as I said it achieves it's objective. Turley is passionate about never repeating these mistakes- as we all should be, and I think the average reader will take this away from this book.

Turley uses a narrative to walk us through the technology and the decisions that led to the disaster. The characters are cliché, but they keep the story moving, and keep the read from getting too dry - it's an interesting way to present a lot of technical material. Having just gotten interested in deep water drilling, I found the technical descriptions and diagrams very educational - it's a good introduction to deep water drilling. Lastly, the indictment of BP decision making is damning. The drilling supervisor (company man) in particular is portrayed as highly competent yet still willing to follow every cost-cutting decision that comes down from management. And there were a lot of them.

This is an excellent and outstanding technically written book about the Macondo Incident, unfortunate disaster that took eleven hard working colleagues innocent lives with a major environmental impact that will effect Gulf of Mexico for many decayed to come and the Upstream Oil & Gas Industry activities. The book has been written technically very well. It has been written with the supporting documents and technical information. If you are Petroleum or Chemical Engineer who works in Upstream Oil & Gas Industry (Drilling & Completion), this is a must book to read. In addition, if you have experiences in Process Safety no matter in any of the Oil & Gas streams (Downstream, Midstream or Upstream), it will add a lot to your understanding about the cases of this disaster. John has explained the incident so well that really will open your eyes. I highly encourage everyone who is in Oil & Gas industry to read this book.

Having spent the majority of my career, almost 25 years now, in various aspects of the pipeline industry, I found this book fascinating. The author's point that numerous high-alert persons could have stepped in at a number of points and prevented this disaster is an excellent illustration of how high profile events often occur. This point reinforces the importance of an effective "safety culture" within an organization. If you, like me, are unfamiliar with the process of offshore drilling, be prepared to read the book numerous times. As you read it again and again, things that were confusing the first time become very clear. I highly recommend this book for anyone involved in an industry where low probability, high consequence events can happen as a result of things like normalization of deviation from standard procedures, lack of adequate procedures, or financial/productivity pressure can have tragic results. People who work in these industries need to be reminded of the potential consequence of not working safely. This is especially important in cases where "we've done this a hundred times and nothing bad ever happened". While I read this as a Kindle book, due to the numerous diagrams and drawings, I would encourage others to consider buying the printed version to make it easier to reference the illustrations and quickly return to the text. The Kindle formatting for this particular book made it difficult to accomplish this. Thanks to Mr. Turley for making this disaster understandable and offering us all the opportunity to learn from it and prevent something with similar root causes, whether offshore or not, from recurring.

Overall a good story telling what happened, in a fairly comprehensible format with Jessie being the one always asking the basic questions. There is a bit more credence given to some issues such as casing centralizers being part of the "cause". This was one of the recommendations from the incident, but I believe that with even with 100% of the recommended centralizers this incident would have still occurred. The long string and the poor cementing practices employed were major problems, but if the float collar worked and/or, had the company man heeded the negative pressure results (the first one), we'd not be speaking of Macondo.

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