

AFRICAN QUEEN
PICKARD AT A GAS PLANT
NEAR THE NIGER DELTA



The Bravest Woman in Oil

Ann Pickard, Shell's chief in Nigeria, knows the true meaning of oil crisis. BY JON BIRGER

ANN PICKARD'S TITLE sounds normal enough—she's regional executive VP in Africa for Royal Dutch Shell's exploration and production division. But as Shell's top official in Nigeria, Pickard may hold the most dangerous executive post in the oil industry.

Shell is the largest multinational in this oil-rich country; it produces 300,000 barrels a day there, 10% of its worldwide production. The top job is a world away from running spreadsheets at headquarters in Houston. Employees venturing onto the wrong roads have been robbed and murdered. Last year, the 5-year-old child of a local Shell employee was kidnapped (though later returned unharmed). In September, rebels launched attacks on a Shell pipeline, gas plant, and flow station, killing two workers.

The mother of two young children, Pickard says she would not remain in Nigeria if she believed her children and husband, a retired naval

officer, were in danger. (She typically travels with bodyguards and police escorts.) Why does she stay? "I like these types of environments because you make a difference," she says. She ticks off a list of Shell's contributions to local communities, from health programs to college scholarships. Still, Shell's 70-year presence in Nigeria remains controversial, both among environmentalists and among ethnic minorities who want a bigger share of the nation's oil wealth.

SECURITY ISSUES HELPED LEAD TO A \$716 MILLION CHARGE IN ONE QUARTER.

The economic payoff for Shell can seem as tenuous as its employees' safety. In last year's fourth quarter, security problems in Nigeria helped lead to a \$716 million earnings charge. But the company persists—and so does Pickard. "My job in the past was always in headquarters," says the 53-year-old Wyoming native, who helped organize battered women's shelters before entering the energy business in the late 1980s. "My view is you can't really run these regions from HQ. You've got to be there in the middle of it to really understand it." ■