



# Operation RIO Update

1 Aug 2003

This issue is dedicated to the memory of Tom Baksa.  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineer Photo.

*An update for all SWD employees and Operation RIO volunteers supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom.*

**Tom Baksa :** It is with sincere regret that we announce the death of one of our RIO team members. We have suffered the loss of Mr. Tom Baksa from Huntsville Center. Mr. Baksa, just returned from Iraq on 28 July, suffered a massive heart attack while having dinner with his wife and son. He was going through out-processing at CRC at Ft. Benning. While providing ordnance disposal support to the RIO operation, Mr. Baksa made many friends on Team RIO, with contractors from Kellogg Brown and Root as well as the Iraqi Oil workers. Our deepest sympathy goes to his family, his co-workers and the many friends he made around the world. Condolences may be sent to Mrs. Susan Baksa, 110 Mill Stone Cove, Crestview, FL 32539.

Mr. Baksa's family has requested that in lieu of flowers, a contribution be made to a charity of choice. Huntsville Center has established a memorial fund for ex-EOD employees. This will allow Mr. Baksa's son to apply for a scholarship from that fund. All contributions made in Tom Baksa's memory will be acknowledged to the family.

**Mission Update Postcard from Iraq:** We had an awards ceremony last evening (28 Jul) to recognize some Task Force RIO members. These are always preceded with a hail and farewell ceremony. These events are emotional because a number of great Americans with whom we lived and worked are departing, but some are also arriving to join our team. One of the fun things during the Hail portion of the ceremony is the initiation into Team RIO. Very simply, each new member gives their 30-second commercial, shows their Just Do It card, and learns the meaning of HOOAH.

We are doing well at Task Force RIO. Production exceeded a million barrels a day for 3 consecutive days, and Iraqis continue exporting oil out of Mina al Bakr. In fact, two ships are loading simultaneously as this is being written. On 27 July, daily production exceeded 1.5 million barrels, and production in the south alone exceeded 1 million barrels. From 15 May thru 26 Jul, the Iraqis produced 39,346,000 barrels of oil, 450,183,000 liters of benzene (gasoline), and exported 16,370,000 barrels of oil. In this same time period, Team RIO imported 464,412,000 liters of benzene and 58,629 tons of LPG. This is incredible when one realizes that on May 14, no oil was being produced or exported, and the infrastructure had suffered almost \$1.5 billion in damage from the war, looting, and sabotage. Despite any criticism the Corps of Engineers may receive in the media, its people are dedicated, know their business, and work hard. And the business processes are excellent. At Task Force RIO, we use our **Just Do It** cards everyday, and "just do" what is needed to execute the mission. To assemble 70 people who have never worked in the oil business, and for the most part never worked together, and "manage" the oil restoration mission is nothing short of a miracle.

The great support we receive from our extended team members at RIO Rear in Dallas enables us to focus on executing this mission. We thank all of you for your unsung services. On Team RIO, we all are very proud to be Americans, members of this team, and the **US ARMY Corps of Engineers. HOOAH!**

DONALD M. DUNN, P.E., Deputy for Program Management, Task Force RIO

**Pay claims being reviewed:** DFAS (Denver Payroll Office) has agreed they may have made an error in calculating the maximum amount of pay an employee deployed may be paid each pay period. The current maximum pay period cap is \$6,589.00 and the maximum Aggregate Annual pay cap, which includes foreign entitlements, awards, overtime, hazardous duty pay, etc., is \$171,900.00. DFAS is reviewing all of the pay cap rules to verify the original decisions are correct. The error is not in the annual pay cap amount, only the pay period cap. DFAS has requested copies of time sheets and tours of duty designations for the initial records to be reviewed. If it is determined an error was made, corrective pay actions will be taken and all records will be reviewed. We will keep you updated on this development. Points of contact about premium pay and how it relates to employees volunteering for the FEST-RIO mission are Jerry Sosebee at (817) 886-1170 or Brent Little at (817) 886-1182.

**Postcard from Iraq: Jim Fields, FEST-Main Admin Support**



My job in SWD originated because of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Little did I know that I would be deployed to support Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom 30 years after I was sent to Southeast Asia for the final operations of Vietnam. Amazing how short time really is and how small the world can be. Not so amazing are the humanitarian efforts I have witnessed in both operations.

If you were here, what you would see reminds you of war movie scenes...mud and brick buildings half crumbled or just a pile where a building once was...windows all knocked out...charred remains of carts, vehicles and such. The list goes on and on. But the most devastating effects were not of the recent war, but rather from a vicious ruler who used money made from oil to terrorize his own people. The reality of it all makes you feel sad for those who were made to live in this environment and builds hatred in your soul toward any evil empire allowed to so reign.

Initially during our visits in Iraq, it seemed the people did not know what to do. They may have felt uncertainty from the invasion of their country or from fear of the unknown. However, as time went on it became a common sight to see the children running from their adobe huts to the side of the road just to wave at us and give us the "Thumbs Up". You would also hear them say in their broken English, "Go USA" or "Go Mr. Bush".

There are still some Iraqis who are skeptical and some that are still afraid that the terror of Saddam Hussein and his henchmen will return again.

We were attending a meeting up in Northern Iraq outside of Kirkuk. The meeting was conducted at a former resort that was frequently visited by Saddam and his senior staff. A resort that was once a very beautiful place, but one where awful memories still hang around. I talked with a former tour guide who had obtained his education in Baghdad for the Ministry of Tourism. He took me on a tour that included the abandoned playground, the Olympic size pool, the outside theater, and shaded social grounds. It was a large complex that could accommodate a lot of people and families. But I soon found out that it had some awful history.

We talked and walked. Even with his broken English, we were still able to communicate and understand each other in our own way. We talked about how busy it had been in the past and of course how beautiful the grounds used to be. Even while we were walking around, it was evident the place had been recently manicured. It was very peaceful and quiet. The pool water had turned a dark green and colored tiles were coming apart around the edges and walkways, but it was still peaceful. As we walked to the outside theater area, he became very quiet. I could tell that he was uneasy. I too started to feel uneasy. I asked him if he thought it would get better. He stood there for a short period then looked into my eyes. His facial expression was not reflective of happy moments, but very sad. He quietly stated, "28-people died here."

I was lost for words and asked him to tell me about it. He shook his head and stated again, "I saw 28-people die here. I am not sure if it will get better." We walked off together, but in silence. This was but a snapshot in time for me, but another moment I will never forget.

## **A view from down range: Mike Farinech**

Article by Nola Conway

Trying to keep ahead of the looting is what Mike Farinech has found most challenging about his assignment to Team-RIO (Restore Iraqi Oil).

Farinech arrived in Kuwait mid-April and spent the first month working in the southern oil fields. Then he moved to the Northern Area Office in Kirkuk, Iraq.

In the south his work included doing environmental assessments and cleaning up oil spilled from lines damaged during the war.

In the north he has done pipeline assessments, security fencing and the restoration of the Northern Oil Company (NOC) buildings so the Iraqi oil workers will have a place to work.

Looters took everything from desks, chairs, copiers, air conditioners, windows and all the office supplies. They destroyed filing cabinets, took tools and burned documents.

"The offices were emptied, the doors were gone from their hinges or broken. Getting the offices fixed so the staff could go back to work was just as important as getting the oil facilities back on line," said Farinech.

Farinech works with the Corps' contractor, Kellogg, Brown and Root (KBR) and the Iraqi Northern Oil Company to get the facilities up and running again. Recent projects included the startup of a liquefied petroleum gas bottling plant near Kirkuk.

"I much prefer to oversee large construction projects, but this has been very rewarding. The most gratifying has been the little kids waving and giving you the thumbs up," Farinech said. Back at home with the Fort Worth District, Farinech is a quality control specialist.

"I really feel like I am doing something worthwhile to help the Iraqi people out. I have had them come up and thank me personally several times," Farinech said.

Originally volunteering to go to Afghanistan, he ended up in Spain for three months before being notified to report to Kuwait. "I will retire in January 2004 and wanted to end my career with a last hoorah. It has been all that I could imagine and more," Farinech said.

Assigned to the White Sands Missile Range Project Office where work was slowing down, Farinech thought it was an opportune time to volunteer. He will return home in August.

A geological engineer with a background in oil, Farinech worked in the oil fields with the Department of Energy at the Elks Hill Naval Petroleum Preserves near Bakersfield, Calif.

He has 28 years of service in the Air Force, spending 7 ½ years in active service and more than 20 in the reserves as a C-141 crewmember.

"I've been on every continent, including Antarctica," said Farinech, who went on his first deployment with the Corps this year. The most interesting site he has seen in Iraq has been an underground refinery, constructed in the side of a hill near Tikrit.

"I've been told it was built during the Iran-Iraq war. It is a small refinery with the capability of producing only 30,000 barrels. It must have cost a lot to construct. It doesn't make sense, but it is interesting," said Farinech.

"This experience will be hard to top," he said.

**"HOOAH!!"**

*MICHAEL L. SCHULTZ, COLONEL, EN  
Acting Commander,  
Southwestern Division*