



Operation RIO Update

15 Aug 2003

Baghdad

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

Team RIO Helps Restore Gas Facility

Event marks another milestone for northern Iraq

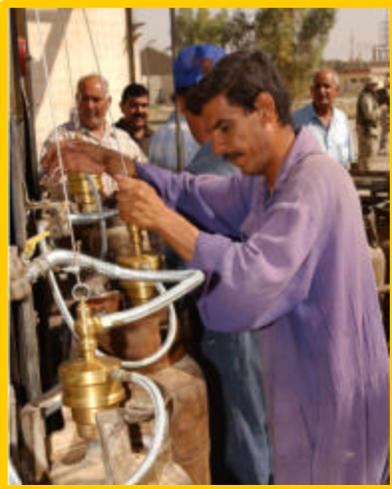
By Tech. Sgt. Mark Getsy

506th Air Expeditionary Group, Kirkuk Airbase
USAF Public Affairs

Another milestone was reached in northern Iraq when coalition forces and Kirkuk City officials teamed up to restore the first liquid propane gas bottling facility since the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

During a ceremony July 26, military and civilian officials flipped the power switch on the first of three bottling lines at the Bajwan LPG Bottling Plant.

The facility, located just outside the city's limits, produces propane for use throughout Kirkuk and other outlying areas. The Iraqi people primarily use the propane gas for home and restaurant cooking fuel. This bottled product was in low supply because the facility, completely looted after the war, was not operational.



Since then, the Iraqi people have relied on coalition forces to meet propane shortfalls by importing from other countries.

Helping get the plant up and running again was the 404th Civil Affairs Battalion, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Kellogg, Brown and Root contractors, and the Iraqi Oil Ministry. Their mission is to do what is necessary to provide for repair and continuity of operations of the Iraqi oil infrastructure.

During the ceremony, Brig. Gen. Robert Crear, commander and division engineer, U.S. Army Engineer Division, Southwestern and Team RIO commander, said in his remarks that he was delighted to be part of the ceremony.

"What is happening this morning is a very significant event. There's a lot of people who need to be thanked for this, and I think the most important people of all are the Iraqi

people," Crear said. "Their dedication and hard work is second to none. We're very proud to be part of their team."

According to Nola Conway, Team RIO public affairs specialist, the bottling line activated during the ceremony was the oldest of the three lines. It was restored first because it's a mechanical system and was the easiest to repair.

She said the team felt it was very important to get at least one line operational so propane can start being produced and distributed to the local residents. Team RIO is currently working on making the other two lines operational.

The Bajwan facility, built in 1975 by a Danish company, was the largest bottling facility in the county prior to the war. It was able to process approximately 25,000 cylinders daily. The

newly finished line can now produce 23 cylinders simultaneously. The other operating facility in Kirkuk could only produce 9,000.

A view from down range: Eileen Grant

Article by Alan Dooley, photo by Steve Wright

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Little Rock, Arkansas, District Chief of Logistics, Eileen Grant came to Kuwait and Iraq to listen. What she heard and saw has changed her for life.



Grant completed nearly four months as chief of logistics when she flew out of Kuwait City, Kuwait on August 9, 2003, marking the end of her assignment with the Corps's Task Force RIO (Restore Iraqi Oil).

Grant wanted to experience firsthand what serving in the military was like. Service to country was already been a family tradition. One of her sons served in the first Gulf War. Her brother-in-law is a Vietnam veteran.

"I wasn't in favor of America going to war this time," she said. "But once we did, I fell in immediately to support our troops. It couldn't be any other way."

Ironically, military service, which in the past has taken many of the men of her family away from home, has this time taken its women. Serving this time in Iraq and Kuwait with Eileen are her daughter-in-law, who drove refueling trucks to keep the rapidly advancing 101st Airborne Division supplied with fuel in Iraq, and a sister-in-law who is commanding the Army's 53rd Transportation Battalion.

In Iraq and Kuwait, she has seen the small group ramp up from trying to survive and become functional to an organization that directs a \$1 billion-plus mission. The assigned task is to reestablish Iraq's all-essential petroleum system that both supplies the nation of 25 million and is almost their sole source of export income.

During her last few days at Camp Doha, Kuwait, Eileen took several newer TF RIO replacements to visit the group's first work place in a warehouse that initially had no air conditioning – or doors.

"They had A/C when I arrived, but when the dust blew, it came in through cracks so badly that you could write notes on your desk each morning – without paper," Eileen observed.

The experience has been satisfying. "We've accomplished extraordinary things here. And more are coming," she said.

While Grant speaks with pride and warmth of her colleagues, she is especially glowing over the young soldiers she has shared living quarters and meals with. "They are so young. But they are so good too," she said. "I heard some people complain about latrines being dirty. These kids hadn't had latrines, showers or even cots to sleep on for weeks before they came to Camp Doha to rest and recover."

Grant reported that she tried to serve them by being a good listener as they relived experiences, expressed concerns or fears about home, or just talked about nothing in particular.

"Just being with them made me proud to be an American," she said. "I wanted to do whatever I could for them."

Eileen said that the image that will live with her forever is that of the Iraqi children standing alongside the road to Basra. "I wish I could take all of them back to America with me," she said with more than a little sadness. "I've got to find ways to help them when I get home. Maybe I can persuade companies to contribute clothes, or some of the other things they so desperately need," she said.

She went on to note how Iraqis have been mentally imprisoned for decades. "And it is such a rich nation for the people to be so poor," she added.



TF RIO Logistics Chief Eileen Grant pays a final visit to her first work space at Camp Doha. Teaming with Contracting personnel, she has driven a continuous improvement in tools to do the job, places to work and live, and consequently, productivity and satisfaction.

Grant also showed concern for her teammates in Kuwait. For the 4th of July, she spearheaded a successful program to collect money from senior members of the group to sponsor a catered meal for everyone. "I felt it was even more important to celebrate our nation's liberty over here," she noted.

She also pushed to create an especially well-received Camp Doha observance of Engineer Day.

As Grant sat at her desk in a large office complex in a former warehouse, she answered the question of whether she would recommend her experience to others.

"If they are coming for the money, or think they will live somewhere luxurious, they shouldn't come. If they come to learn and serve, it will change their lives forever," she said.

"I thought that after 26 years as a military spouse I was different," she said. "But I still didn't understand what this was about until I did it myself. And my experience was so much gentler than those troops experienced."

What is she taking home with her? "It's not the souvenirs," she said. "It's satisfaction. I know I can look myself in the mirror – and again – be proud to be an American."

Grant reported that her perspective on life has changed. "Different things are important now. I like my job at home, but past concerns kind of pale into insignificance," she said.

"I will never again be able to get too upset over the square footage of someone's office space. I guess it's all relative, but after you have managed more than \$1 billion with 70 people, hearing ten times as many people obsess over one-tenth as much money won't have the same impact.

This experience has also set the die for a future change in career direction for Grant.

“I’ve got a dream of a combined care center for children and the elderly,” she said. “I think they’d be so good for each other,” she said. “But this is all in the future – sometime after 2008.”

Eileen Grant is looking forward now to returning home. “I know my friends and family are eager for me to get back. So is my district commander, Colonel Ben Butler. He’s been great. He was at the airport for each of our departures. He has sent us pictures of our families while we’ve been gone and he’ll be there at the plane when we return.”

Grant has three children, two sons and a daughter. One son, Charles, served in the Army and is now employed as an aircraft mechanic by Cessna in Wichita, Kansas. A second son, Raymond, works in the insurance industry in Oklahoma City. Her daughter, Stacey, is a schoolteacher in Jacksonville, Arkansas. She also has eight grandchildren.

Eileen is a native of Batesville, Arkansas. She grew up there with her mom and dad, Christeen and Stephen Neely, now both deceased. She still has a sister, Helen Neely and brother, Cledice Neely there, as well as numerous other members of her extended family.

Grant’s performance during her assignment to Kuwait and Iraq has been recognized by award of the prestigious Army Civilian Meritorious Service Medal.



Brig. Gen. Robert Crear promotes John Conner to Major at a 25 July ceremony at Kirkuk Air Force Base. Conner also received the bronze star.

A view from down range: Maj. John Connor, Team-RIO-NAO

By Nola Conway

Serving as a project engineer at Tulsa District for six months prepared Maj. John Connor for his deployment with Team-RIO (Restore Iraqi Oil).

“The six months that I was with the Corps at Tulsa provided me a lot of insight into the nonmilitary aspect of this operation. I am very impressed with the abundance of knowledge and the links to the resources in the Corps staff serving on Team-RIO. No matter where you look, they have the experience and technical capability at their finger tips and it really has helped in this mission,” Connor said.

Connor came in February on the advance team and helped to set up and operate the FEST-Main at Camp Doha, Kuwait. Serving as the operations officer, he moved on to the Southern Project Office and volunteered to come on the advance team that set up the Northern Project Office.

It has been an experience in his military career that has left quite an impression. "My first impression was "How did I get back here to this place?" he said. He had deployed to Kuwait with the 3rd Division from Fort Stewart, Ga., in 1998. When the call went out for volunteers for Operation Enduring Freedom for a Southwestern Division Forward Engineer Support Team, Connor was one of the first to go.

After the Southern Project Office opened, he moved up from Doha to Camp Commando, Kuwait.

"In the beginning, our main focus was in the south. We had info on the north – knew that there were a couple of fires there – but since we didn't have access to the north, we concentrated on fires in south," he said. While the battle to control the north was still going on, Team-RIO was working to put out the oil fires and get the south up and running.

Answering the call for an advance team to the north, he was assigned as the North Project Office operations officer and was put in charge of the convoy that would move the staff from Kuwait deep into northeastern Iraq.

"The convoy was a challenge. There were still battles being fought and along the way we could see tanks firing off in the distance," he said.

After arriving in the north at Kirkuk, Iraq, in April, they had to find a secure location to set up the NPO.

"The first thing we had to determine was where we were going to set up. We had some office space on Kirkuk Air Base, but there wasn't much to support the staff. The hotel was a good location. The threat level was not towards Americans at that time. We opted for the hotel, with a contingency plan to work out of base if something happened," Connor said.

From their arrival at hotel, the staff hit the ground running. "The Northern Oil Company, with a staff of some 9,000, was out of work. The oil production needed to be started back up, but the biggest problem was looting. We had to get security on the sites, quickly," he said.

One of Connor's tasks was to get a security force in place. "The area had been secured by the 173rd Airborne Division, but they did not have the resources to devote to all the sites. We met with the commander and he made us aware of an available contractor," he said.

Unlike the south, secured by the British and American troops until an Iraqi oil police force could be stood up, CINU security force – Coalition of Iraqi National Unity – was already available to stop the looting.

"It did not stop completely, but it has made a huge impact," he said.

Affectionately known as "Capt. John" by the CINU staff, he went to work in earnest, putting security at every Northern Oil Company site and with the NPO staff. "It stopped most of the looting and allowed the team to work," he said.

"I found working with the CINUs quite an experience. It was my first time working with Iraqis. I had worked before with the Kuwaiti Army, but this was different. It's a custom for the men to kiss the men and hold hands. I never kissed back, but I was kissed a lot," Connor said.

"It changed my perception about Iraqis in general – always thought Iraqis were all Arabs – but they also include Kurdish, Assyrians, and Turks. Also, I wasn't sure if everyone was pro-Saddam. But since I've been up here, it is very apparent that there are many groups that struggled day-in-and-day out to get a voice in society. Capitalism is alive and well in Iraq," he said, citing the street side vendors and contractors he worked with. And Connor would know. He has a BA in business and an MS in building and construction.

A native of Tupper Lake, NY, he is an ROTC graduate of Monmouth University, NJ. He returns to Tulsa District in August to take a position in Programs and Project Management.

He and his wife Valerie live in Broken Arrow, Okla., with their two sons, Ryan, 9 and Jacob, 7. In his spare time he is restoring an upright piano. It was waiting for him when he returned from Kuwait in 1998.

"I have no idea what will be waiting for me this time," he said. But he will take home with him some pretty powerful impressions of the people he worked with over here. "It is all about team work and that is what I will remember the most about my time here," Connor said.

Postcard from Dallas: I was part of the ADVON team that arrived in Kuwait on 19 February 2003. We spent the first few weeks struggling to find our way around the base and adjusting to our working space. As we adjusted to our new surroundings, we also dealt with the regular night-time "scud alerts" and frantic movements to put on our gas mask and chemical protection gear. I can remember several nights where we just gave up and slept in our gear and gas mask. Sometimes we hastened to a bunker, but often just stayed in our warehouse/quarters. After several weeks in Camp Doha, I was part of the advanced group that went with John Forslund to set up the South Project Office. Our office was located in a tent city named Camp Commando. Initially our tent had no power or phone, but after a week or so, we managed to get "Haji Power" and "Marine phones". There are some good stories about running electrical extension cords to a near by tent before we got the "Haji Power". We had some great people. We struggled to figure out our mission and how to inter-relate with the contractor. The first few weeks at Commando were spent in "culture shock" adjusting to the "Marine way" and experiencing nightly "scud alerts". Even the "scud alert" announcer got tired because one night he announced "All Clear" before he had even announced an attack. Interesting memories. We proceeded into Iraq the day after hostilities commenced. The Iraqi "tank trap" stands out visibly in my memory.....about 15 feet wide, 20 feet deep, and extended in either direction toward the horizons. The Brits had filled in part of the trap, allowing us to cross. At the beginning, there were very few impediments to our border crossing. Later, border crossing became a bit more of a challenge. We all worked together and tried to make the best of it. As our mission progressed, we learned how to close wells, shut down GOSPs, work communications equipment, clean up oil spills, interrelate with the locals, and navigate the country-side. I hope in some way I helped in the mission. I know the entire experience will be part of my memories for a long, long time.

Frank McStay, Jr.

Frank McStay returned to his job at SWD in late April. He continues to be a Pacesetter as the Formerly Used Defense Site Program Manager.

"HOOAH!!"

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