



Operation RIO Update

22 Aug 2003

You have to smile to keep from crying. Doug Cox shows media the scene of another fire that has been started by saboteurs on an Iraqi pipeline -- one of the keys to Iraq's economic future. Army Corps of Engineers Photo.

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

Mission Update: Prime Power to the People... of Iraq

Story and photos by Alan Dooley

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 249th Engineer Battalion (Prime Power) – the people who turned the lights on Wall Street back on in the wake of 9-11 – have worked their magic again by restoring dependable electrical power to the Basrah refinery complex in southern Iraq.

This mission became critical when looters systematically damaged southern Iraq's national power grid, cutting down electrical towers to bring down the copper cables, which they then cut up and stole for salvage. A pair of aging back-up electrical generators, one of which had been cannibalized for parts for the other, was unable to assure power to the Basrah refinery.

Electricity is the key to Iraq's oil system. Since refineries must operate around the clock and every day to be efficient, a steady supply of electricity for pumps, sensors and even lighting, was essential. Refineries cannot easily be restarted when they must halt operations.

It took more than a flip of a switch to ensure the critical power supply though. A combined team led by Bravo Company of the 249th, including Army reservists providing point security, contractor personnel from IAP Worldwide Services, technical representatives from Aggreco, the manufacturer of the 21, 20-megawatt generators installed, and British Army engineers pulled together to accomplish the critical mission.



Captain Geoff Van Epps, Officer-in-charge of the Prime Power group, led the convoy of 27 trucks, hauling giant generators, transformers, fuel tanks, connecting cables and other equipment into Iraq from Kuwait less than a week before the team announced success Wednesday evening, August 20th.

The 249th Engineer Battalion, which calls Fort Bragg, North Carolina home, is the only military unit assigned to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. They have been tasked with disaster response nationwide for years, including their well-known response to the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York. But the mission has grown to a global scale, as the mission has expanded to include contingency operations worldwide. Before coming to Iraq, the 249th's Prime Power Team served in the region in Afghanistan, where they remain today. Indeed, like the British Empire of old, it may be said that the sun never sets of the 249th Engineer Battalion (Prime Power).

"We've really received amazing support from the British Engineers here," Captain Van Epps reported. "They've taken care of us and fed us. They've done everything we have asked

for. They brought in a machine designed to lift containers and literally snatched the generators off the trailers spotted them precisely and quickly where they needed to go. And they've helped with the heavy lifting too. They've given us everything but time. They want it done as badly as we do."

The heavy lifting referred to by Van Epps included manually lifting and pulling the main power cables – thicker than a human leg and weighing about 25 pounds a foot – that brings all the power together and carries it into the Iraqi switches from which it is being fed into the refinery's back-up power network.



"We had four runs of those big red cables," Staff Sergeant Barry Newnam, a Canton, North Carolina native, said, pointing to the thick cables runs lying on the sandy ground. "There were two of about 78 feet; one of about 175 feet and finally, one of 255 feet." The cables had to be lifted and manhandled into position.

John Williams, head of the IAP Worldwide Services contractor team that will operate the generators in the longer term, lauded the cooperation of all personnel on site. "It was amazing. It was the very best example of a seamless team that I've ever seen," Williams said. "Everyone dropped what they were doing when the heavy work started. Nobody shrugged and said it was someone else's job."

When asked what he thought was most amazing about the accomplishment, Sergeant Brent Rafferty, of Minneapolis, Minnesota said, "I've never been involved with anything this size. The speed it went together is just astounding."

Captain Van Epps echoed this observation. "This is normally a two or three week task. Today is the sixth day we have been here. We will," he emphasized, "produce power this evening." And at 2000, Prime Power turned on the juice.

With a stable, reliable source of electrical power available, southern Iraq's oil industry is poised to resume production of benzene (gasoline) and diesel fuels for vehicles and generators, and to resume production of Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG), the lifeblood necessary for cooking and heating throughout the country. Finally, it will be possible to move growing quantities on crude oil to export facilities to generate foreign earnings for the entire nation.

The 249th Engineer Battalion (Prime Power) has added yet another "win" to its growing scorecard of successes. As the evening sun set in southeastern Iraq, the small cadre of U.S. Army engineers, their British counterparts and civilian contractors were able to take comfort – even in the sweltering 110-plus degree heat – in another job well done. They had indeed, brought Power to the People of Iraq.

Scheduled for Deployment: Going to CRC 24 Aug: James Holder, Tulsa District; Jose Pinon, Japan District; Jimmie Reep, Little Rock District; Wayne Stroupe, Engineering Research and Development Center-Vicksburg.

Team RIO continues to need good Corps employees to fill important jobs. It is an excellent time to gain project manager or PDT experience in a historic mission environment. Contact Linda Ranallo (214) 767-2385 or Jim Barton (214) 767-2370 to discuss deployment opportunities currently available or to add your name to the list of volunteers. Supervisory approval is required.

Automobile Insurance Tip: Don't forget to call your insurance carrier **before** you deploy and change your driving status to "non-operator." Some insurance companies offer policy holders a reduced rate, **especially if the car is put into storage** while you are deployed. Some insurance companies offer a pre-deployment guide to help military member policy holders prepare for deployment. USAA, for example, offers this service to both military and civilian members. Each insurance company is different so check with your insurance company.

After You Are Back Home: The U.S. Army has learned that sometimes when soldiers return home after being deployed for a long time, they have troubles adjusting to being home. So do their families. While the soldier is gone, the spouse has learned to do things the soldier used to do, sometimes better. The children have adjusted to the spouse who stayed home being in charge. Occasionally disagreements flare up upon return. To help soldiers and families, the Army has instituted programs on military installations that are designed to help the readjustment process. Obviously, the Corps isn't on a military installation, but we have a program that can help.

An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a service available to all employees at no cost. It is staffed by professional counselors who will help you address problems that can adversely affect job performance, reliability, and personal health. A counselor will discuss the problem with you and after helping you assess the problem, provide short-term counseling. If needed, the counselor will also refer you to other professional services and resources within your community for further information and assistance. EAP counselors will work with you to help resolve a wide variety of problems including alcohol and drug abuse, work and family pressures, legal and financial problems, job stress, and other concerns which can affect your work performance and personal health. A telephone call is normally all it takes to make an appointment with an EAP counselor. EAP operating hours usually are flexible so the employees can make appointments before, during, and after the workday. For specific information on hours of operation and procedures for making appointments, you should check your agency's bulletin board, telephone directory, or call your agency's EAP office.

Your privacy is protected by strict confidentiality laws and regulations and by professional ethical standards for counselors. The details of your discussions with the counselor may not be released to anyone without your written consent. There is no cost to employees who receive counseling and other services provided by the agency's EAP. Costs for outside treatment and professional services, which can result in personal expense, may be covered by your Federal Employee Health Benefits plan or private insurance. The EAP counselor will work with you to identify the best available outside treatment program and services in line with your individual finances.

The Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Program is also available. CISM peer supporters help employees recover more quickly from abnormally stressful job-related incidents and trauma, collectively known as "critical incidents." CISM peer supporters are not therapists or counselors. They are empathetic Corps employees who are trained in recognized protocols and standards of care established by the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation

CISM does not replace professional counseling and other services provided by EAP. The two programs complement each other in support of our team.

A more detailed description of the CISM program will be provided in the next RIO Update.

A View From Down Range: Doug Cox

Article and photo by Alan Dooley

Longtime Lewisville resident, Doug Cox is on his way home from an arduous tour with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the oil fields of Northern Iraq.

"We did it," Doug Cox, of the Fort Worth District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, recently exclaimed as he read an AP (Associated Press) wire report. It reported that oil from the Iraq's northern oil field had finally flowed through the Iraq-to-Turkey oil pipeline from Kirkuk, across the

Turkish border. From there it had gone on to storage tanks at Ceyhan, Turkey, for export.

"We did it," he said again. The team in the northern office of the Corps' Task Force RIO (Restore Iraqi Oil) had triumphed.

Cox, who manages three Corps lakes -- Lewisville, Grapevine and Ray Roberts Lakes -- in the Dallas and Fort Worth metroplex, got the good news only a day before he was scheduled to fly home from Camp Doha, Kuwait.

It was long awaited news.

Cox had come to the region April 16, 2003 while the war still raged in Iraq. He was detailed to go from there as soon as possible, to the oil fields of northern Iraq to help stand up the TF RIO mission



there – to help the people of Iraq restore their oil production to prewar levels. Iraq's known oil reserves are the second largest in the world. In addition to supplying the domestic needs of the nation of 25 million, oil exports are the dominant part of its foreign exchange and economic future.

Cox told of his long and arduous land journey from the Camp Doha Army staging area in northern Kuwait to the hills and mountains of northern Iraq.

Compared to what was to come, the two-day drive to Baghdad was relatively benign. "They diverted us away from the fighting east of Baghdad, and we drove right through the city," Cox said.

Cox traveled in a five-vehicle convoy consisting of two Humvees and three new Dodge trucks, one hauling a flat bed trailer burdened with a twenty-foot conex box – or shipping container with the team's equipment and luggage. Fifteen people were scattered among the vehicles. A Humvee led the entourage. Another brought up the rear.

"When we got near Tikrit we could not cross the Tigris River for a direct approach to Kirkuk – our final destination. We had followed the 4th Infantry Division there, and on their advice, we skirted Tikrit and drove toward Mosul, north and west of our destination," Cox told.

As they journeyed north the land got greener. "It looked like Kansas or Oklahoma," he said.

But the bucolic journey abruptly came to a halt when they first saw U.S. Bradley fighting vehicles in the distance and then a number of Abrams Tanks. "Then I saw flashes and smoke from their guns," Cox reported.

Soon an armored column swiveled in our direction and Cox's experience as a U.S. Army Ranger told him that they were witnessing a classic pincer maneuver in the making. "We increased our speed and got out of the area as quickly as we could," he said.

As the five-vehicle element progressed north, it got colder, with temperatures dropping into the 40s and rain pelting down. "The guys in the trucks had it OK, but in the windowless Humvees it was miserable," Cox remembered with a shiver in Kuwait's 115 degree heat.

Driving into Mosul, Cox reported that they stumbled into a bazaar and dense traffic. "We crawled along at 2 miles per hour. It was tense. Our team was waving and smiling, but there were no friendly gestures in return. There was thankfully, no evidence of hostility either. "I think they were just shocked to see the three new Dodge pickups and Americans driving through their bazaar so soon after the fighting had ended," Cox said.

Moving next toward Irbil to the southeast, they encountered a downed bridge. The local people had filled the gap with earth. "We watched awhile, and seeing some pretty big vehicles cross safely, elected to press on. The alternative was to lose the mission, and we refused to accept that alternative," Cox said.

"When we reached Irbil the whole mood changed. People were thrilled to see us. In the town we encountered some low hanging electric lines – too low to drive under. Townspeople came out of their shops, climbed on the conex containers and held up the lines with brooms so we could pass safely," Cox said.

Near Irbil they arrived at a then still-to-be named air base. There they enjoyed their first meal other than MREs--meals ready to eat, the field meal of the U.S. military.

"It was a t-bone steak. We stood more than two hours in the rain in three-inch-deep mud just to get it. With apologies to Texas steaks, that t-bone was one of the most delicious I have ever had.

"We were clothed for the desert and heat but it was hardly either. It was 40 degrees, raining and windy. They put us up for the night in a tent. It didn't have any heat, but it had a floor and we were up out of the mud," Cox reported. Life was tolerable, if not good.

The next morning they were able to proceed on into Kirkuk.

On arrival there it quickly became obvious that rival clans were already staking out oil fields and facilities for their own exploitation.

They had taken over the guard posts and checkpoints of the Iraq's Northern Oil Company (NOC). Captain John Connor, our convoy leader, got direction and told us to drive through the checkpoints. We did not recognize their authority. They respected our military, and in uniforms and Humvees, we benefited from that respect.

In Kirkuk the team met Major Joe Hanus, Team RIO military leader and Deputy Project Manager. He had deployed a week earlier with Special Forces to shut down oil wells if necessary to prevent fires.

Cox, Hanus and KBR Project Manager Wes Jordon agreed with a handshake, moved into a hotel across from the Kirkuk Government Building and the North Project Office of Task Force RIO was officially stood up.

They remained there until July, living relatively comfortably until the hotel was attacked with rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and small arms fire in July. Then they moved aboard the nearby Air Force Base.

The team has since moved onto Northern Oil Company property where they are awaiting construction of a base camp.

Since leaving Kuwait en route to Kirkuk, Cox, who would be a project manager and later the Northern Area Engineer – although he observed wryly that he's not an engineer – continuously emphasized teamwork.

I was determined that we would be one team. It would not be the Corps and KBR (Kellog, Brown and Root). We would be Task Force RIO. When we got on scene and started to work with the people of the Northern Oil Company we spared no effort to ensure that they were not another entity either. Rather, we saw them as a third team member.

The result of this team concept, in addition to creating more pleasant working conditions, was arrival of NOC oil in Turkey for export in recent days.

Of the Americans in the team in northern Iraq, Cox said, "I was privileged to be with a great group of people. We came from different places, brought different skills and went into a wartime setting together. We didn't bother with individual job descriptions. Rather, we simply pitched in and got the work done.

When asked what kinds of people do well in such an environment, Cox replied, "They need to have a sense of mission and purpose. When you have a goal in your heart and mind, terrain, weather and long hours just become challenges to overcome to achieve the final objective.

"They need to be willing to think way outside the box. We've all had time in the past when we said to ourselves, 'Boy, if I could, I'd just do it this way...' Well, over here we did that a lot," he observed with a grin.

Cox couldn't say enough good about the Iraqi people with whom he worked.

"It was thrilling to watch Iraqis being 'released' spiritually and intellectually to be the engineers they have always wanted to be. Most had spent their entire adult lives under centralized dictates from Baghdad. They knew that shipping wet crude oil would damage their pipelines. But they weren't given options – only orders.

"They are smart. They are well educated. They had kept up with and knew about all of the latest technologies and techniques. Now they are going to get a chance to implement and practice them. Given even a fraction of a chance, these people will just take off.

"They are a delightful people as well as being talented," Cox continued. "They are part of an ethnically integrated region. Arabs, Turkmen and Kurdish people have lived together there for ages and are very tolerant of each other. It's a model for the whole region.

"They do an incredible barbecue too," Cox laughed. "There's a great deal of Texas in northern Iraq. We appreciate a lot of the same things and all work like the dickens too."

As the hours tick down on his last day in Kuwait, Cox is eagerly anticipating his return home, just in time to celebrate his 27th anniversary with his wife, Laura on August 21. Laura and Doug were high school sweethearts who married after his Army hitch.

They have two daughters, Erin, 19, and Sara, "almost 15." Erin just graduated from Lewisville High School last spring and Sara will be a Freshman there this fall. The family resides in the Dallas-Fort Worth suburb of Lewisville.

A 25-year Corps veteran, Cox joined the Fort Worth District in 1978 after receiving a BS in Agriculture – Range Science from Texas A&M.

The prestigious Army Civilian Meritorious Service Award has been presented to Cox in recognition of his outstanding contribution to TF RIO and the future of Iraq. And indeed, he returns home with the pride that he stated so well upon learning of the start of the flow of oil from northern Iraq: "We Did It!"

Visit the USACE Iraqi Web Site: For additional vignettes, mission updates on oil and other infrastructure in Iraq, use the following URL: <http://www.hq.usace.army.mil/cepa/iraq/iraq.htm> USACE has redesigned the vignette section to make it more user friendly. It really looks good, check it out.

A View From Down Range: Bruce Johnson

Story by Steve Wright

He was looking for some adventure and change. Bruce Johnson found both in Iraq 6000 miles from home.

"I was looking at the adventure of it and a chance to do something different from what I do at home. I've had some fun and had some disappointment here, but it was interesting and challenging for me," Johnson said.



A heavy equipment operator for the Little Rock District Johnson volunteered to work for the Task Force Restore Iraqi Oil (RIO) as a quality assurance inspector. In this job he worked on a major oil export pipeline in southern Iraq and on assessments of Gas Oil Separation Plants (GOSPs).

"The projects I worked on were important to producing the first oil in Iraq after the war. I first worked with our contractor KBR (Kellogg, Brown and Root) when they assessed two key GOSPs," Johnson said.

A Gas Oil Separation Plant (GOSP) is the collection point for a number of oil wells. Iraqi oil below the earth's surface in reservoirs is under very high pressure. This pressure pushes oil from the wellhead without being pumped and flows into a gathering system of pipes toward the GOSP. Here pressure is reduced in a series of tanks and as this occurs natural gas separates from the crude oil. Two products, crude oil and natural gas, then leave the GOSP through pipelines. The first crude oil produced in postwar Iraq came from a GOSP Johnson worked on.

"I also worked on the 48-inch pipeline at Ham Dan Junction," Johnson said. "All the crude oil now being produced in the southern oil fields flows through this pipeline."

The Ham Dan Junction is where pipelines meet and enter one pipeline that goes to Mina Al-Bakr an offshore terminal in the Persian Gulf. Supertankers with two million barrel capacities receive oil the pipeline at this terminal.

Saboteurs firing rocket-propelled grenades attacked Ham Dam Junction. No damage was done to the pipeline and following the attack security was increased to prevent future attacks. In spite of attacks Johnson said he didn't feel any danger.

"I was in Iraq everyday and didn't feel any danger. I do think we've been lucky so far that we haven't had to go back and rebuild facilities we've fixed," Johnson said.

"I think the Iraqi people are just like everyone else. They want to get better pay, telephones, and television and send their kids to school. Some would like to come visit America. In five years they should be on a par with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and be able to do many of the things they now only dream about," Johnson said.

Johnson and wife Connie have two children—Jessica (20), a college student and student aid with the Corps and son Joshua (16). For his service to Task Force RIO, Johnson was awarded the Army's Superior Civilian Service Award.

"HOOAH!!"

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