



Operation RIO Update

26 Sep 2003

Iraqi workers weld pipe at the NGL plant in North Rumaila.

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

Mission Update: It's been an exceptionally busy week for Team RIO. BG Crear had the opportunity to brief Acting Secretary of the Army Mr. R. L. Brownlee about the RIO mission on Tuesday. On Thursday, the Southwestern Division staff hosted the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works), Mr. John Paul Woodley, Jr. Mr. Woodley was accompanied by MG Carl Strock, USACE's newly named Director of Civil Works. MG Strock moves into the Civil Works position following his service as Director of Military Programs and also as a member of Ambassador Bremer's staff. Both visits went extremely well with positive comments from all parties concerning RIO's mission.

Oil production this week remained steady at about 1.8 million barrels per day. The team continues to work steadily toward our production goals. With winter just around the corner in Iraq, RIO, along with the Coalition Provisional Authority, continues to work various options for ensuring the steady supply of refined products for the Iraqi people.

Help Wanted: Several key jobs are opening soon for Task Force RIO. Skills needed include: GS-12/13 Project Managers and GS-12/13 Project Engineers to work in Iraq, and a GS-12 Accountant to work in Dallas starting in early November. If you are interested and have your supervisor's concurrence, call Jim Barton at 214-767-2370 for more information and possible deployment dates. This is an excellent time to be part of a history making project that is benefiting the people of Iraq.

A view from down range: Patrick "Mac" McLaughlan

by Wayne Stroupe

"I can handle the heat!"

Those words from an Oklahoma resident might not raise eyebrows, but when Patrick "Mac" McLaughlan says them, you'd better take notice. He spent the summer working in the oil field areas of southern Iraq as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom, and he means heat!

"I saw 138 degrees on the thermometer one day," said McLaughlan. "And I felt every bit of it, too!"

McLaughlan, an employee of the Corps of Engineers' Tulsa District for 17 years, was a member of the Corps' Task Force Restore Iraqi Oil (RIO). He helped with oil field reconstruction projects around Basrah, Iraq, from May 4 to Sep. 9.

An electronics technician at his home office at Keystone Lake, in Iraq McLaughlan worked in quality assurance.

"We made sure that the contractors were living up to the contract, doing the work, using the equipment they were billing for, and following safety guidelines. I talked with a lot of folks during the day," laughed McLaughlan. "Some hated to see me write in my notebook!"

Task Force RIO's mission is to help Iraq restore its oil production capabilities to prewar levels. Approximately 70 Corps personnel are working with the people of Iraq to rebuild the country's oil production facilities and infrastructure.



McLaughlan worked for the RIO Southern Area Office, responsible for the Rumaila oil fields just west of Basrah. "Rumaila is Arabic for 'little sand.' The Rumaila oil fields, northern and southern, cover roughly 30 by 20 kilometers each. Rumaila was pumping 800,000 barrels a day the week I left. That was up from zero the week I got there."

Each day started with McLaughlan making the 1-1/2 hour drive from Camp Commando, near Jahara, Kuwait, where he was based, up to the oil fields in Iraq. Camp Commando was a U.S. Marine Corps tent city. "They got air conditioning the day before I got there," said a relieved McLaughlan.

According to McLaughlan, it was a learning experience at first for everyone involved. "I had to get over my inherent distrust of the Iraqis. You heard all these things about them, just like they've heard about you. It's a two-way street. They are just people trying to make a living, just like us."

"The highlight for me was seeing these people grow to trust us. Once they saw that we weren't here to take over their jobs and oil; that we were just getting their facilities repaired and then turning them over to them to run, it came along pretty well.

"We quickly went from no information or bad or misinformation at first to good working cooperation as we bridged that first river – trust."

Another major milestone that McLaughlan noticed was in the news. "After Saddam's sons were killed, the Iraqis really got on board. They were afraid the old regime would somehow return and retaliate. After that incident, they all started coming to work."

"Until we get Saddam, there will still be some fear in the Iraqis. They will always wonder if he is coming back. That will be the last major milestone."

Even though the area McLaughlan worked was largely controlled by British troops, he wore the American uniform. "I wore DCUs (desert camouflage uniform). I was a representative of the United States and the U.S. Army to the Iraqis in the area."

While he sometimes took "shooters" (American soldiers for security duty) in areas, McLaughlan was not really concerned for his safety. "The poverty of these people was such that they were too busy trying to eek out a living. They didn't have time to cause trouble."

McLaughlan said he originally deployed for several reasons: the money, the adventure of seeing a new part of the world, and the satisfaction of accomplishing a tough mission. But looking back on his time in Iraq, he said something more important came out of his experience.

"It was pretty gratifying to see the Iraqis start to realize freedom. Basically, they are a good people. It's just going to be hard for them to shake 30 years of oppression. We had a backhoe operator who wouldn't dig close to the oil pipeline. Turns out he was afraid. In the old days, if he broke them, he would have been shot."

McLaughlan also saw some of the early stages of freedom and democracy in action and how it could affect the Iraqis. "The oil workers voted on their supervisory structure and supervisors. Before the war the Baath Party members directed everything. Once the Iraqis selected their own direction, production took off. Before the vote, we only had one GOSP (gas-oil separation plant) going. Within two days, they had two more up and going. It was great."

A newfound appreciation of home was also apparent in McLaughlan's words. "You can never imagine how good we have it in America. We have the greatest country in the world – we have more of everything in the world. You just can't appreciate it until you've been in a third world area like Iraq.

"It was a good experience, and I'd do it again," said McLaughlan. "But I missed rain, trees, grass, home, and my family. The phone and e-mail made it easier to deal with, but it was still hard on my family. It was probably harder on my wife, Toni, with two teenagers at home, than on me."

"My oldest daughter, Cecilia, is in the Army. We thought she might be coming over here, but she didn't make it. It would have been funny to see her here."

More vignettes: Check out the USACE web page for more vignettes and additional information about the Iraqi mission. Go to www.usace.army.mil and click the Iraqi mission icon.

A view from down range:

by Steve Wright

If prizes were given for positive attitudes, Margie Higginbotham would be standing in the first place line. Higginbotham volunteered to serve with Task Force Restore Iraqi Oil (RIO) for several reasons.

"I wanted to do something for my country. I wanted to do something different. I wanted change for just a little while and was mobile and able to do it," Higginbotham said. I really thought about it. I knew it would be hot and dusty with lots of sand.



"Some people don't really think about what they are volunteering for and might not be ready for the conditions. For me, it wasn't much different than Texas, except for the sandstorms and the heat. It was a little hotter, and the sandstorms put sand in places you wouldn't imagine," Higginbotham said. "But even things that are bad can be good. Take the sandstorms for instance -- they make it cooler in the desert."

"As for the job, since I was the first admin officer, I had free rein and I got to start from scratch. It was a great job for me. I like to take responsibility and make sure everything is running right. I think everyone wants the responsibility to do a good job," she said.

"As for being here, it has been a blast. I wouldn't change a minute of it. It might have been a struggle at first, but now things are getting a lot easier," she said. "It's been a good experience for me. It's made me grow, and I'll go home a better employee for the Corps. We can all learn from our experience. I hope everyone has had a good experience here. It would be bad if they didn't."

"It is a sad situation to see how poor many of the Iraqis are. What we take for granted, they don't even know about. They are ingenious and are able to get things running without money. How creative and resourceful they are. They can create something from nothing. They've been forced to be creative. They are family-oriented, and they love to have their picture taken," Higginbotham said.

Higginbotham is from the Forth Worth District and works as the admin officer for the Mid Brazos Area Office. She has a son Brad, daughter-in-law JoBeth and three granddaughters. For her support to Task Force RIO, she was awarded the Army's Superior Service Medal.

Back Issues of RIO Update: Have you missed an issue of RIO Update? Go to <http://www.hq.usace.army.mil/cepa/iraq/RIOupdates/RIOupdates.htm> and view copies of all back issues. Ms. Angela Williams in SWD IM, has been very faithful in maintaining this web page.

"HOOAH!!"

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