



Operation RIO Update

28 November 2003

It is hard to tell the players without a program; even harder when both sides wear the same uniform .
Army Corps of Engineers Photo.

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

Mission Update: Oil production remains around 2 million barrels per day. The military and civilian employees deployed with TF-RIO celebrated Thanksgiving in Iraq in similar ways as those of us here in the states did. They had football, a good meal, and shared time with great friends. Here are some photographs taken by Carolyn Vadino from Camp Pioneer, Southern Area Office.



View From Down Range: Maj. Tom Langlois

by Wayne Stroupe

As one of a handful of petroleum subject matter experts in the military, it was fortunate that the Corps could borrow Maj. Tom Langlois from the Corps for duty with Task Force Restore Iraqi Oil (RIO).

Wait a minute....Corps borrowing from the Corps? Yep, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers kindly got to borrow the good major from an equally proud organization, the U.S. Marine Corps. Langlois served as the deputy area engineer for RIO's Southern Area Office in Basrah, Iraq, from June to the end of October.



Langlois has a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from the University of Texas and a master's in electrical engineering from the Naval Post Graduate School.

"Chemical and petroleum engineering speak the same language and are very closely associated," Langlois said. "The oil industry is something I have a tacit familiarity with. I'm from southeast Texas and my mother's family was very involved with the oil industry."

A 16-year-veteran of the Marine Corps, Langlois arrived in Kuwait on Oct. 10, 2002, as the operations officer with the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, Headquarters Group from Camp Pendleton, Calif. He helped set up Camp

Commando, a Marine Corps base camp in Kuwait, and then followed the 1st Marines into Iraq when the war started in March.

Following the war's conclusion, Task Force RIO's mission of restoring Iraq's oil infrastructure was a perfect fit for Langlois. "I found out about RIO and went to talk with them at Camp Doha in Kuwait. They asked if I would join them, and it worked out that I did.

"It was déjà vu when I hooked up with RIO. I drove through the middle of burning oilfields in the first war (Desert Storm 1991) as a platoon commander for the Marines' 1st Light Armor Infantry Battalion. From my background, I understood what was going on in 91' with the oil wells, but was more concerned about my men and the mission at the time."

As the deputy area engineer, Langlois supervised most field operations and had technical oversight over repair projects for a wide variety of oil facilities over a large geographic area.

"One of the biggest challenges was the sheer number of oil facilities and the distances involved between the facilities. In southern Iraq we had four major oil fields: North Rumaila, South Rumaila, Az Zubayr, and Burzagan. We had three refineries, 40 GOSPs (gas-oil separation plants), six major pump stations, three major gas handling facilities, two water systems (water injection into wells to replace oil and process water for production use), two offshore loading terminals, about 500 oil wells and no telling how many miles of pipelines. It is all in a region roughly the size of the state of Georgia," Langlois said.

"I have probably driven more miles in the last five months than any time in my life. Three-hundred-and-fifty mile days were not uncommon. And I have never driven as fast as I have here in my life."

According to Langlois, there were other problems that acted as roadblocks in Task Force RIO's missions.

"Another big challenge was the lack of documentation, as built drawings, and engineering support documents for facilities, all the way from oil wells to refineries. In refineries, Iraqis have been making do and making it work. Pipes have been rerouted, tapped into, whatever. We'd get a diagram, and there would be significant pieces missing because it wasn't maintained. This is one of the reasons it takes an enormous amount of time to do repairs.

"The Iraqi oil infrastructure was also in very poor condition; much worse than we expected. This was due to multiple things. The equipment in a lot of the facilities was obsolete, so it was very difficult to repair or get parts. Routine maintenance was very bad. A great deal of this was due to the embargo. Iraq has basically been on an island for the last 15 years. The hard currency coming in for the 'Oil for Food' and other UN programs didn't get down to the simple

upkeep and maintenance of oil facilities. A lot of repairs the Iraqis did were jury rigged or selective interchange or cannibalization of parts to keep things running.”

Langlois said there was some war damage to oil facilities, but that a majority of the damage was done by the Iraqis themselves.

“During the war, we did not target oil facilities. Our aim was the take as much intact as possible. There was some war damage from fighting around oil facilities. We also saw facilities that were damaged in the 1991 war. However, the level of looting, especially near populated areas, was tremendous.

“We are still having problems with criminal activity. Ninety percent of our current problems are criminal acts. People are knocking down power towers to steal the wire; they are stealing parts and supplies off the work sites. This also resonates itself; the Iraqi site workers are afraid. We are trying to modernize and train police and security. It is helping, but it is a slow fix.”

Cultural differences, Saddam’s dictatorial regime, and change itself are also stumbling blocks for Iraqi progress according to Langlois. But he sees signs that a new Iraq is taking hold.



“Iraq was an autocratic, Marxist economy. Everything was decided by Baghdad. The Iraqis got paid to show up for work; not necessarily for doing work. We come with our different, results-oriented culture. It’s a 180-degree shift from the work standpoint. A lot of Iraqis have caught on real quick. But there are still some stubborn people who don’t want to make the transition. Kind of like getting my father-in-law to use a PC!

“We’re seeing more and more Iraqis willing to stand up and take charge. Over time, more will take responsibility to get things done. It’s going to be generational. It will take years for the full process of a market based, results-oriented economy to take hold.

“I have seen what I call positive signs of recovery develop before my eyes. At Safwan (an Iraqi town near the Kuwaiti border), there is now a free market at the highway cloverleaf. There is a restaurant, vendors selling things, and all of it has developed in the last two months. People are trying to improve their lives, and they are doing it themselves instead of waiting for it to be given to them.”

How did the Marine Corps major take to his new found Corps friends? “I never worked with the Corps before. They are a diverse group, good people, and with certain skills in abundance. In construction management, contracting, and civil engineering, the Corps is very, very good,” Langlois said. “If you’re going to drive over it, land on it, or need it to hold back a lot of water, the Army Corps of Engineers is the very best.”

After over a year’s separation from his wife and four kids, Langlois is ready for some time at home. But he said he would come back to Iraqi to help finish this important mission.

“I really enjoyed it. My five months with RIO were very satisfying, very interesting, and very educational.

“Iraq as a stable democracy will benefit us greatly. It took 15 years or so to get Germany on their feet after World War II; the same with Japan. Americans want to help people. Our fight was not with the Iraqi people; it was with Saddam Hussein. Unfortunately Iraqi people suffered.

“We need to help the Iraqis prosper. By getting them on their feet, another rogue state that supported international terrorists is eliminated. There are a few less rocks for terrorists to hide under.

“In the end, it will be worth it. We have to be patient, just like we tell the Iraqis. Changes won’t happen overnight. Things will get better. We’re seeing it.”



"HOOAH!!"

*ROBERT CREAR, BRIGADIER GENERAL
Commander,
Southwestern Division*