



Operation RIO Update

7 November 2003

“A trailer on blocks, a large cooler and friendly migratory birds in the front yard. It just doesn't get any better.” Wayne Stroupe, Vicksburg
Army Corps of Engineers Photo.

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

Mission Update: Post-war crude production remains strong with production over 2 million barrels per day for two consecutive weeks. In further good news, Iraqi Oil Company employees successfully thwarted an attempted sabotage of an important pipeline by discovering and successfully removing explosive charges. Significant efforts continue with regard to refined products to ensure no shortages during the upcoming winter months.

There continues to be much discussion concerning the stand up on the new USACE Iraq Division. Details are sketchy but include a new, provisional Division Headquarters lead by MG Ron Johnson who is currently the Director of Military Programs at HQUSACE. The Division will include three Districts in Iraq. At some point, all USACE elements currently in Iraq will "morph" into the new Division. One of the key elements of the new Division will be a change in personnel policy with a transition to one year tours for both military personnel and civilian employees. No one who is currently on a 120 day tour (or future 120 day tours) will be involuntarily extended to a year. In other words, you'll know "up front" if you're on a one year tour. The intent is to continue to staff the new Division with volunteers. Again, many of the details regarding this new Division are currently unknown; and those that are known often change. We'll keep everyone up to date as information becomes available.

Veterans Day 2003

by Alan Dooley



Veterans Day this year will be day of great meaning for more than 100,000 brave young men and women of our armed forces. For they are serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, becoming what the day is intended to recognize, veterans of our nation's wars.

Veterans Day is semi unique among American national holidays. It was originally established in 1926 to observe Armistice Day, and mark the end of the First World War – on the 11th hour, of the 11th day, of the 11th month. In 1954 it's meaning was broadened by President Dwight D. Eisenhower to become a day to remember all Americans who have served in our nation's conflicts.

Every year hundreds of speeches and messages were written, intoning such words as... “Americans should pause to remember...”

But by 1968 – half a century after World War I, and most

of those veterans were dead – the date was changed.

Veterans Day was moved to the fourth Monday in October, converting it to become part of a convenient three-day weekend, strategically positioned between Labor Day and Thanksgiving.

But only 10 years later, in 1978, enough Americans were troubled that we had stopped observing a day of great significance in our nation's history, and our Congress restored Veterans Day to the 11th day of the 11th month.

Veterans Day should be a day on par with the 4th of July. On that single day in 1776, our great experiment in democracy that would become the United States of America, was born.

Veterans Day, on the other hand commemorates not a single event and a small number of brave patriots. Rather it recognizes all of the men and women who have fought our nation's enemies, down through more than two centuries, to ensure that that noble endeavor would survive.

There will be no picnics, fireworks and band concerts to make the day festive. It will be just another day to so many Americans. But it is a day designated for our nation to recognize those who have served her when she has called – who have endured hardships, who have struggled and sacrificed – who have born terrible burdens in distant lands, far from loved ones and home.

If you know a veteran, thank him or her this Veterans Day, November 11th. Thank that person for making all that you have accomplished and managed to accumulate, possible. Tell them that you appreciate them for what they have done. If you don't know one, stop, pause, and reflect. Then thank them all. We owe them no less.

And oh, let's not forget again. Another generation of veterans is being created right now.

Farewell: Dan Zinanti's last day at the RIO Rear will be 14 November. Everyone in Dallas, Iraq and Kuwait appreciates his service to TF-RIO.

A view from down range: Kris Graves

Story and photos by Alan Dooley

Tulsa District Information Technology Specialist Kris Graves had never been overseas before – but when she went the first time, she did it in grand style, going to Kuwait and Iraq for four months.

Graves was assigned to duties at Camp Doha, Kuwait and then in Baghdad, Iraq, in support of Task Force RIO (Restore Iraqi Oil). That Corps of Engineers group is charged with helping the Iraqi people and oil industry restore their petroleum production capability to the prewar benchmark of 2.5 million barrels per day.



The oil industry is especially critical to Iraq, providing more than 95 percent of its foreign exchange earnings which in turn, underlie virtually all of the Iraqi economy. Iraq possesses the second largest known reserves of oil in the world – second only to Saudi Arabia.

“I thought I could help,” Graves answered when she was asked why she volunteered to take on the long hours in a potentially hostile environment. I wanted to show support for the United States and to help this mission. I saw it as an opportunity to do

something for my country.”

Graves work, supporting the computing and communications needs of the Task Force RIO organization, spread more than 500 mile across the length of Iraq, has taken her to all of the major Corps work sites there; Kirkuk in the North, Basra in the South and Baghdad, as well as in Kuwait.

Her lasting impressions from her travels are of a land of extremes – desolate deserts in the south, lush fields in the higher lands of the north, crushing poverty in many places and obscene opulence in Baghdad for a favored few of Saddam's regime.

"It came as a real cultural shock the first time I saw a donkey and cart on a street, and saw people carrying heavy loads balanced on their heads," she said. "The faces of the kids, barefooted and begging for anything – even clean water – are always going to stay with me," she added.

"I have seen people living in mud huts with no grass and only a couple of goats. It makes one realize just how fortunate we are in America.

"We normally feel safe in America. But here you get used to hearing explosions and gunfire all hours of the day. We are relatively safe behind military protection, but they live in that environment. I only hope that somehow, we can help get them on a path to a better, safer and more prosperous future. This is potentially a very rich nation," she affirmed.

How would she advise a prospective volunteer for duty with the Corps of Engineers?

"Let me tell you how I felt and feel now," she replied. "I would tell them they could do this. Back when I started to get ready, the prospect of four months here seemed so long. But it has gone so quickly. I have been busy every day. I have been challenged every day. It has not been boring, although the long hours and seven-day-a-week schedule makes the days run together.



"I had no military background before coming here, and I have learned a lot about their jobs and methods – and I am amazed. I also have discovered that even though I have worked nearly 30 years for the government – 19 for the Corps, I didn't know much about what other people did. Here, I have worked, taken my meals, traveled and spent what little off-duty time we have with these people. I have come to know them as individuals and how their contributions fit into the big Corps picture.

"One more thing I have learned about has been the oil industry. I've lived my life near the oil fields in Oklahoma. But here I have learned more about the entire industry – getting it out of the ground, refining and distributing it. And I have learned that it is done differently here than back home. I will look at oil in Oklahoma with a different perspective now."

Graves noted how unpredictable the future can be, as she neared the end of her tour in Iraq. "A year ago I would never have dreamed that today I would be sitting on a veranda overlooking the Tigris River, in the middle of Iraq. So we can never know what the future holds."

In one respect she has been a little closer to home than many Americans in Iraq. "I think we have had 48 people from the Tulsa District over here – we're leading the way in the Southwest District and RIO." In fact, as she spoke, Colonel Leo Flor, former Tulsa District Engineer, leaned out of a nearby door and shouted, "Make sure you tell them how great Tulsa is."

Kris thanked her husband and family for letting her come here. "They got the tough end of this bargain. They have all of the same work to do and I am not there," she said.

But soon she will be with them again. And she is anticipating something else besides the reunion with him and their three children. "Larry is a great cook. I am really looking forward to that first steak and baked potato. We don't need to go to a restaurant for a great meal."

In addition to her husband, Larry, who operates their own car wash and mini-storage company, Kris is eager to see their sons Mike, who works in sales, Mark, who helps manage the family business and Laura, who manages an apartment complex, and her brother Darrell. All reside in Tulsa. And you can bet that all of them are eagerly waiting to see her.

"I'm also looking forward to the new Active Directory and Windows Server 2003 software we will be installing in Tulsa and throughout the Corps of Engineers. I have worked with it here since Baghdad is a test site. It will be new, exciting and challenging," she said with anticipation.

Six thousand mile is a long way to travel on one's first trip overseas. And it will be a long trip home. But Kris Graves will return with a new appreciation for what it means to be an American and live in that nation. "It's not something we should ever take for granted," she concluded.

For her service to the Corps of Engineers and the nation, Kris Graves has been recognized by award of the Department of the Army Superior Civilian Service Award.

"HOOAH!!"

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