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STARS AND STRIPES.

Tuesday, May 20, 2003

Engineers work to get Iraq's oil back on line

By [Rick Scavetta](#), Stars and Stripes

European edition, Monday, May 19, 2003

RUMEILA, Iraq — When Spc. Garrett Michaels' engineer unit deployed to Southwest Asia, the West Virginia National Guardsman expected a combat mission.

Instead, Michaels, 20, is pulling security for Army engineers and civilian contractors attempting to bring Iraq's oil production online.

"I'm learning a lot about the oil industry," said Michaels, who studies forensics at West Virginia University.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is working to restore Iraqi gas and oil separation plants above the Rumeila oil fields, said spokeswoman Alicia Embrey. Team RIO — short for restore Iraqi oil — works with civilian engineers from Kellogg Brown & Root to return such plants to working order, she said.

"We're getting the oil production back to pre-war standards," Embrey said.

The teams arrived in Kuwait in



Rick Scavetta / S&S

Spc. Joseph Feagin, 25, of Charleston, S.C., strolls past burning gas fires at an oil processing plant near Rumallah, Iraq.



Rick Scavetta / S&S

Military intelligence analysts who

February and followed U.S.-led coalition troops into Iraq.

Hanging around the engineers all day is becoming a learning experience, Michaels said. Already, he understands why naturally occurring pressure forces small lakes of oil to churn and spurt up like black geysers. And he can name the several gases burned off in 40-foot flames near the plant.

The West Virginia troops, part of the 1092nd Combat Engineer Battalion, stay at Camp Commando, a small base north of Kuwait City, said Pfc. John Forester, 19, of Moundsville, W.Va.

Each day brings a new mission, he said, often to major towns in southern Iraq. Over the past month, the Guardsmen have had shots fired at their convoy and rocks thrown through their windows.

But they are undeterred.

“It’s a good mission,” Forester said. “We’re seeing and learning a lot.”

spent the war within the confines of Camp Doha, Kuwait got a chance to escape this week for a day’s adventure through the Rumallah oil fields.



Rick Scavetta / S&S

Lakes of bubbling crude surround an oil processing plant near Rumallah, Iraq, as necessary gas fires burn in the distance. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is overseeing a vast project to restore Iraqi oil and fuel production to help the local people.



Rick Scavetta / S&S

Spc. Joseph Feagin, left, and Spc. Damon Mehl stand beside a lake of oil outside Rumallah, Iraq.

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