

Engineers Battle Sulfur Fire

By Mr. Thomas O'Hara



This was not in their battle plan. They had no training for this. But American soldiers and Army engineers answered the call to fight a toxic sulfur fire creating a boiling lava-like melt that crept toward the Tigris River and threatened the water supply in southern Mosul, Iraq.

Wearing chemical masks to protect their lungs from nauseous sulfur fumes, members of the composite task force "Camp Sulfur" quickly stemmed the advance of the fire while working four-hour stints in the hot desert terrain. Choking off the caches of sulfur that constantly refueled the inferno, Army engineers turned the tide of flames and gradually smothered the threat to nearby citizens of Mosul. Members of the 326th Engineer Battalion, 52d Engineer Battalion, 926th Engineer Group, and 887th Engineer Company cooperated in the effort.

While American forces accomplished this effort without injury or loss of life, the fire took its toll on an Iraqi fireman who was killed during the effort. Apparently thrown from a fire



Aerial view of sulfur fires north of Mosul



The 326th Engineer Battalion officer in charge of fire fighting (left) discusses sulfur fires with soldiers.

truck in the haste to quell the flames, the man landed in the lava-like pool and quickly burned to death. A countryman, trying to save his friend, was severely burned and evacuated for medical assistance.

Investigations were underway to determine if the fire was deliberately set as an act of vandalism or sabotage. Nonetheless, the response of Army engineers, in partnership with local Iraqis, prevented this environmental hazard from becoming a catastrophe. 

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Photos by Jonas Jordan