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## Kuwait Firefighters Blow Off Steam as Mission Ends

November 02, 1991 | From Reuters

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AHMADI, Kuwait — The international firefighters who tamed Kuwait's blazing oil wells are packing up to return home--after a huge party thrown by the emirate.

The Kuwait Oil Co. organized the celebration late Thursday to thank the firefighters for bringing the world's worst oil field disaster under control.

At a later party, they were even able to toast their success with alcohol, officially banned in the emirate.

"To be able to see again a clear sky above Kuwait rather than drive in a black cloud makes me realize that it's over," **said American firefighter Jerry Winchester from Halliburton Co.**

**The 27 teams, rushed to the emirate after Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's defeated troops set fire to its oil fields in February, have capped all but seven of 732 burning wells.**

Kuwait has earmarked Nov. 6 for the ceremonial capping of the last of the wells that belched acrid black smoke into the skies of the emirate, turning day into night.

"After eight months, now we can say that everything is over. The last traces of war have been erased," said Kuwait fire officer Ali Assad.

He described the whole operation as traumatic for his team.

"We were witnessing the wealth of our country in flames in front of our own eyes as (if) it was our child burning in front of us," he said. "I would have wished to have used Saddam Hussein as a stinger (plug) to cap the blazing wells."

Teams from Kuwait, the United States, the Soviet Union, France, Britain, Canada, China, Iran, Romania, France and Hungary drove a procession of 200 firetrucks, Jeeps, cars and ambulances to the stadium of Al Ahmadi, south of Kuwait city.

Despite the danger to life and limb, the job of capping the emirate's wells paid well. A firefighter's salary ranged from \$1,000 to \$2,000 a day. Support team members made between \$300 and \$700 a day. Fire officers got up to \$4,000 a day.

"I am happy that it's over. I can't wait to go home," said American Dave Elkins, 31. "It was such an adventure."

Joe Negial, 47, from the Hungarian team, said: "I am sad that I am leaving because I wanted to work more. I need the job."

With their flashlights on and sirens wailing, the firefighters paraded from the Ahmadi oilfields at the end of what was for most of them their last day's work here.

American, Russian, French, Spanish and Arabic music blared from loudspeakers as the team members, clad in their field suits, savored a barbecue dinner of hamburgers, shrimp, fish, steak and chicken.

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