

Postcard from Iraq

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412th Engineer Command



The 18 months before I arrived here in March, I was deployed to New Orleans for Katrina duty; coordinating debris management, demolition, and minor infrastructure reconstruction. Before that, I was in Korea for a 21-day exercise with my Reserve unit—the 412th Engineer Command—when Hurricane Katrina hit.

Katrina duty gave me insight for what a Provincial Reconstruction Team engineer should be able to do. My interactions there were with town mayors, governors, FEMA and other federal channels. My work here with village elders, the provincial council, the Kirkuk PRT and the US Army Corps of Engineers parallels the ins and outs of different government entities in order to function and be productive.

My wife and I bought a house in Florence, Miss., four years ago and moved in the day I left for Korea. I've only lived there nine months since we bought it. Cheryl has completely remodeled that house during my deployments, but I did find the bedroom the last time I was home on R&R ... and our dog, Maggie, recognized me again! Our spouses are truly great to handle all that they do so we can serve.

We've been in Iraq five years, and have had PRTs for three years. We're still cleaning up from Katrina after three years. Our efforts in Iraq will not be an overnight success. It will take the Iraqi people maintaining and pursuing from this generation to their grandchildren's generation...but the rewards will be so much better than if we had just walked away.

I split my time equally between the Kirkuk Government Building downtown and out in remote villages. Downtown, I work with the Deputy Governor of the Kirkuk Province, as well as the Deputy Generals for water, sewer, roads and bridges, and electricity; while other Kirkuk PRT members work with the DGs for Rule of Law, education and others.

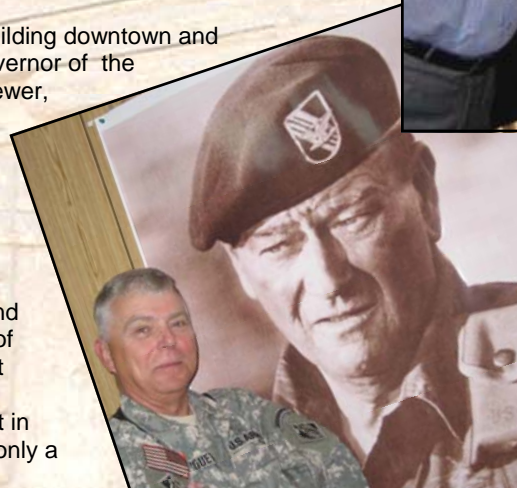
The deputy generals are appreciative, well-educated people who are experts in their field of work—they have a great ability to visualize and conceptualize projects...and I have the greatest confidence in the world in them.

My biggest enjoyment here is out in the remote villages and talking to the village elders. We try to assess realistic needs of the village and put together realistic project proposals; submit them to the Provincial Reconstruction Development Council; and follow through to funding by the Iraq Central Government in Baghdad. We're here such a short time...we may get to see only a few projects to the end.

At the end of the movie, *The Green Berets*, the little boy asks John Wayne's character, "what am I going to do now?", and John Wayne replies, "You let me worry about that. After all, all of you [children] are the reason we're fighting this war."

I guess the tag line to us being in Iraq is that we're to bring a better infrastructure, stability and unified peace to Iraq's children and grandchildren.

The Soldiers of the 412th Engineer Command redeploy to the U.S. in early January..."ansha-allah," [God willing].



Jack