

# Postcards from Iraq

## Providing Iraqis hope for a better tomorrow

By Brian Souter

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Contract Specialist, Gulf Region Division Central District

I'm concluding my second deployment to Iraq this month, this time as a civilian. Last year I was a soldier with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Cavalry Regiment out of Ft. Carson, CO, and participated in the major battle at Tal Afar known as Operation Restore Rights that cleared that city of insurgents.

For this tour, I worked as a Contract Specialist with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers whose mission is helping rebuild this country, giving the Iraq people tangible signs that their government is working and things are getting better. Whether it's renovating a hospital, installing new water and sewer lines, building courthouses, putting in new electrical distribution networks, constructing neighborhood primary healthcare centers, these are civil works projects that not only improve the day-to-day life of local families here but gives the younger generation hope for a better tomorrow. Our effort will pay dividends for decades to come.

The very first contract I worked on was the construction of a school in southern Baghdad Province. That \$729,000 project calls for the demolition of the existing 576-square-meter building, replacing it with a new two-story 921-square-meter masonry structure in Yousifiya. I'm confident students there and their parents will appreciate that investment.

I was also involved with the overhead protection structures safeguarding our dining facilities from incoming mortar attacks. Now our soldiers can eat in relative peace knowing they're protected from indirect fire, a real threat especially at some of our Forward Operating Bases.

There's no question, this is a demanding assignment. You're separated from family, no weekends off, and you are in a war zone. You have to be flexible because change is constant – that's the nature of our business. I plan to encourage people stateside to consider volunteering for a tour here. We're making a difference and you walk away with a real sense of accomplishment.

GRC's Contracting Section was tight knit, everyone looked out for each other, they became my extended family, morale was great, and I made some lifelong friends.

In 2005 I was among the last units to deploy with their own stateside equipment. We drove from Iraq's southern border through the entire country to its northern border with Turkey. I met and talked with Iraqis all along the way. I've seen how they lived and how they work. I'm grateful for the opportunity to help and wish them my best.

**Brian Souter**

**Contract Specialist, St. Paul District**



**Contract Specialist Brian Souter**



**Heather McDonnell, Maria Otero, and Brian Souter are accompanied by an Iraqi guard on a tour of Iraq's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in the Baghdad International Zone.**