

Postcards from Iraq

Helping Iraqis take the next step

By Navy Commander Terry Hart, Adder Area Office OIC, Tallil, Iraq
Gulf Region Division South District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

I have 33 years service with the military, most of that time as a Seabee with the Naval Reserve. This is my 2nd deployment in the past five years and I wasn't thrilled to be on the list again. But as my wife Vickie said, "You would have retired long ago if you were not ready to go again." She was right and this has proved to be the best assignment of my career.

I'm concluding a six-month tour with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, overseeing 55 projects helping provide essential services for Iraqi families — basic necessities like clean water, schools, electrical substation upgrades, and a new 80-bed surgical hospital.

As the Officer in Charge of the Adder Area Office, we're working long hours to ensure these projects are done in a timely and safe manner with quality construction. We have a staff of 10 U.S. civilians, but what's truly remarkable is our 35 Iraqi engineers. They live in these communities and are our eyes and ears visiting the projects daily. They email us written reports with photos documenting the ongoing progress. They have impressed me with their professionalism and the courage they continue to demonstrate to get the job done. They've become good friends and are passionate in their work to help make this area a better place for their children and grandchildren.

Safety at the work site has been a challenge and something we continue to focus on. We provide guidance to the contractor from the first day we meet of what is expected. At one time it was not unusual to see workers not even wearing shoes. But now we find them with all sorts of personal protective gear including hard hats, safety harnesses, glasses, gloves, etc.

Reflecting on my time here, it's the relationships that will stay with me forever — the USACE team, soldiers with the Army maneuver units, our Security detail who keeps us safe (personally I've been outside the wire 47 times), Iraqi community leaders we deal with on a weekly basis, and most important our Iraqi engineers. It's those trips seeing the families we're helping that really touched my heart

I want to thank my beautiful wife and our two incredible children, Leland (19), and Cameray (17) for your unwavering love. I also want to recognize my employer, Agrium Advanced Technologies, Reese (MI) Operations, for your understanding and ongoing support. It's been an incredible six-month tour. This

job, especially on those occasions we were able to talk to Iraqi families about improvements to their neighborhoods, such as providing clean water for the first time ever — those are the moments that really touched my heart.

I know we're making a difference.



Iraqi youngster says hello.



Iraqi laborers proud to be doing their part.



Navy CDR Terry Hart at a job site.

