

Postcards from Iraq

A Different Deployment for a Navy Seabee

Lt Cdr Paul Chan, OIC, Taji Resident Office, Iraq
Central District, Gulf Region Division,
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (USACE)



Unlike the rest of my deployments with the Seabees; this has been a bit different. As Individual Augmentees, we deploy individually in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom as part of Central District, Gulf Region Division, US Army Corps of Engineers. GRC took us in immediately as one of their own, and we were trusted and empowered to make this good organization better! Furthermore, I had a chance to work with some of the best and brightest the military and civilian sectors had to offer on some of the most impactful projects I have ever worked, including the Taji Theater Internment Facility and Reconciliation Center, the Kharkh Water Treatment Plant, a high voltage distribution network and various schools, just to name a few.

Lt. Cdr. Paul Chan (right) briefs GRC Commander, Col. Ron Light, Left on Kharkh Water Treatment Plant construction



I truly hope that these projects will serve the people of Iraq well and give them a better future in our dynamic global environment. Serving the people and their children.

The GRC mission is clear – reconstruction of Iraq. This task, despite its stated simplicity in words, is anything but simple. Reconstruction of Iraq involves more than just concrete and steel. GRC plays a significant role in restoring the country's cultural values, changing construction attitudes about safety and most of all – giving the Iraqi people a sense of self and pride! I gained new appreciation for critical infrastructure (electricity, water, sewage, schools, police stations, etc.) as a non-lethal weapon system to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people.

Within the last six months of my deployment, I saw the change in Iraqis attitude towards our projects. They are now a lot more involved and took pride in the end products. A definitive parallel to this attitude change is that the security situation has drastically improved. I hope our sacrifice will be appreciated for generations – all of us are separated from our families for six consecutive months or longer working in a combat environment - not being able to fully appreciate a daughter's first step, first smile, first words and her first birthday. For that, I'll be glad to return home.



Lt. Cdr. Paul Chan (L) discusses the Taji TIFRC with MG Michael Eyre, incoming GRD Commander.

For more information on challenging GRC jobs in Iraq visit: <http://cpolwapp.belvoir.army.mil/coe-gwot/>