

Postcards from Iraq

Iraq duty ... an historic opportunity

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I'm concluding nearly a one year tour in Fallujah — my second deployment to Iraq. (I served here for four months in 2004 working as the Chief of Engineering and Construction at GRD Headquarters. While that first tour was a rewarding experience, GRD was still in its infancy and I didn't get the chance to see all of the good work that was to follow.)

The completion of my current assignment marks a remarkable period in my personal and professional life that I'll never forget. When I considered returning to Iraq, I wanted to go somewhere that would better fit my skills and personality and Fallujah seemed like the perfect fit. Fallujah was my choice because I would be following in the footsteps of many of my Jacksonville District colleagues. So with the great support of my family, friends, and coworkers I accepted an historic opportunity to work in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Fallujah Resident Office.

When I arrived at Camp Fallujah in May 2006 I really didn't know what to expect. I was greeted and welcomed just as one would welcome a new member into their family. I joined a great team. Mr. William "Bill" Kiddy gave me an overview of all of the projects that the office was charged with completing along with the analogy of "drinking from a fire hose" and he couldn't have been more correct. I quickly learned that this assignment

would be fast paced, very intense, challenging and very rewarding.

During my tour, I had the privilege and honor of working with Iraqi Government Officials as well as a great number of Iraqi Contractors completing essential service projects within the war torn city of Fallujah. Not only are we helping to rebuild the city, we are also bringing a sense of ownership and pride to the residents there. Through our reconstruction efforts, we work hard to engage contractors from the area who in turn hire local citizens to work on their crews. This gives them a sense of ownership and also gives them meaningful employment. So not only are we rebuilding the city's infrastructure, we are also rebuilding the capability of the people who live there, allowing them to develop the skills to continue this effort long after our time to assist them has passed.

My assignment lasted just short of one year and it seems like only yesterday that it was just beginning. It has always been my feeling that an assignment of this nature is much harder on those you leave behind. Without the love and support I received from my wife Tracey, and my three children, Jordyn, Trey, and Annah, I would not have been successful here. To anyone who is considering volunteering, I would encourage you to get the support of your family and accept the challenge. There is still much work to be done and I feel our efforts are truly appreciated by the Iraqi people. If I didn't believe in this mission, I wouldn't have volunteered.

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Chip Nieman confers with two of Fallujah's city engineers

