

# Postcards from Iraq

## No shortcuts to greatness

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What to expect in Iraq? . . . the experience of a lifetime!

My greatest joy has been serving with such talented people from all over the world, especially the Iraqis. With an average personnel turnover of 15% each month, our district is the most diverse organization I've ever served with. We include military (Active, NG, RC, retirees), U.S. Government civilians from a variety of organizations, worldwide contractors, Iraqi Associates, and, of course, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers personnel. Together, we manage a daily program of \$1.2 billion in active essential service projects (potable water, sewage systems, electricity, roads and buildings, health clinics, schools, fire stations, etc.) to benefit the people of Baghdad and Al Anbar provinces. The magnitude and complexity of issues facing us each day are astounding, and moving from one point to the next never follows a straight line. With so much to do, a 7-day work week is the norm with one morning a week off. Unfortunately, I have been unable to discover more than 24 hours in a day.

Negative forces often abound in a world viewed in extremes, but stories of courageous Iraqis and our many partners, especially the maneuver brigades and combat teams working diligently to keep us safe, inspire us and keep us motivated. Most of all, seeing the faces of and being around the Iraqi children is enough to light up our smiles and open our hearts.

Many reports on Iraq omit the sacrifices made and commitment shown by so many. A key Iraqi, actively leading Government of Iraq efforts in support of reconstruction, learned his son was murdered just this week. One of our Iraqi employees, a gentle and generous man with a young family, was kidnapped and brutally murdered this past month as he was traveling to check on a health clinic under construction. Yet, in the face of this violence, average citizens of Iraq are increasingly banding together to stop the killing of others, such as in the Al Anbar province. In Kurdistan, a group of terrorists assumed the local population would do nothing to stop their activities. They drove there and began planting bombs. Immediately, however, the local people emerged from their homes, beat up the culprits, and detained them for the local security forces.

Enemies of peace (terrorists, religious extremists, neighboring countries, common criminals, and others who tell the Iraqis it is futile to fight for their freedom) continue to deliberately impede Iraq's enormous potential to be the most prosperous country in the Middle East. We should remember that, to guarantee the freedoms Americans often take for granted today, our own founding fathers overcame incredible odds, even as they and their families suffered many sacrifices. No shortcuts to greatness existed then, as they don't exist now. It has been an honor to serve with these ordinary citizens who are making extraordinary sacrifices so that others may also experience the unalienable freedom to pursue life, liberty and happiness.



Col. Debra Lewis visits the newly-completed Assriya Women's Center and Taji Girls High School.

