

# Postcards from Iraq

## Differences in Iraq — 2003 to today

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This is the middle of my fourth tour in Iraq and I am sitting back and looking at all the changes that have occurred over that time. My first tour here was in the early days of 2003 with the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. I was with a USACE FEST-A (team) working for the Division Engineer. We traveled to many locations in Diyala, At Tamin and Salah ad Din Provinces doing assessments of medical clinics, schools, bridges, government buildings, police stations, water treatment plants, wastewater treatment plants, and prisons. Seeing the various villages and towns without either electricity or potable water was very discouraging to know that the former government could not even provide the basic needs for their people, or felt that these people should not have those basic necessities.

When I returned for my second tour I wanted to help provide the Iraqi people some of those little things which in America we take for granted. I was placed as a Resident Engineer at the Baiji Power Plant. That facility is one of the largest power plants in Iraq with 1,640 derated MW, producing 10% of the power used in Iraq. For me, it was a personal project, one which I felt offered the Iraqi people literally a step toward a brighter future. The task of getting the power plant up and running was daunting, but also very satisfying, since the past 25 years of neglect needed to be fixed and repaired to current standards. This task was not done alone by me — it was a team effort with Task Force RIE, the Washington Group, and the hundreds of Iraqi workers who labored day and night to complete the task.

On my third tour to Iraq, as I flew over the country it was great to see the towns and villages below having lights. It made me feel good inside to view the progress Iraq was making. They may not have electricity 24/7, but that had more than before. You may ask why they cannot have it all the time — there are many causes. First, the new Iraqi government is trying to distribute it equally throughout Iraq, which means the limited production they have is not able to keep up with the demand. Today, if you visit an Iraqi home, you might see an air conditioner, refrigerator, television, microwave or other electrical appliances which they could not purchase under the previous government. Only a select few had them — now it very common. Do I see progress ... yes, not only in electricity, but potable water, wastewater treatment, hospitals, medical clinics, and most of all, the schools. Have these been shown in the main stream media ... no, but to the coalition forces, government civilians, contractors and the Iraqi people — they see these difference and know we're making progress.

I'm proud I was part of a mission that helped the Iraqi people and their children secure their freedom. I feel we will reap rewards on our investment here. The Iraqi children are seeing that Americans are kind, caring and generous — we're building a partnership for a better future. Have things changed ... yes. Iraqis are now living without repression, they have the freedom to make choices. I know in my heart they will make the best of it. I am very thankful for the opportunity to serve here in Iraq and grateful for the tremendous support of my wife and District workmates.

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