

# Postcards from Iraq

## An Oasis in a Combat Zone

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One might ask what the Navy is doing in the desert. Working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has been a challenge as well as very rewarding. Integrating with the civilian side of the organization from a military orientation took a large amount of mental adjustment. As a career Sailor from the marine engineering field with very little formal construction experience, the learning curve was steep.

Upon arriving in theater, the theater reception and movement (RSOI) personnel were fabulous and professional. Their curbside service and welcoming was the beginning of a strong foundation. My assignment at Ramadi's Camp Blue Diamond found me in an oasis amid the desert. Unfortunately, we would be required to move across the Euphrates River to Camp Ramadi a few months into my tour. Camp Ramadi knew little about USACE and we knew little about the intricate workings of our new base. The ground floor set up would take five months to complete from pack up on Blue Diamond to compound completion on Camp Ramadi.

Our reconstruction efforts never stopped regardless of our displacement. Our sites needed visitation and our contractors required guidance. Due to staffing shortages I had my own projects to manage along with the requirements of being the Resident Office NCOIC. Few military personnel get to see the beginning of a project and actually complete that project on time and on budget. The Al-Mujarrah Bridge project (Bridge 27) taught me a great deal about construction, concrete, schedules and timelines. I faced the challenge head on and expected nothing less than executing the plan from myself and my contractors. Constant communication with the contractors voicing these expectations made them stay on track to completion.

*The Aegis security team assists Chief Donald Miller (left center in cap) to visit critical rebuilding projects in Ramadi, Iraq.*



During my time in Iraq I was able to spend a great deal of time outside the wire both visiting reconstruction sites and trying to win the hearts and minds of the local citizens. One of the shining moments was when I passed out candy and soccer balls to Ramadi children. Traveling through the city and witnessing the war-torn parts of the country reminded me of how good we have life in America.

Standing in the gap and running the show during vacant positions has been one of the most challenging times during my deployment. I have endured through three Resident Engineers and three OICs. The one constant has been our Aegis Security Escort Team. I understand that my continuity made their job easier. Their schedule flexibility, professionalism and camaraderie made my job enjoyable.

My time in Iraq and in the Oasis that has been built in Ramadi has been extremely rewarding. If my career path returns me to this part of the world I would not hesitate to request to work again with the Corps of Engineers. The organization makes life much more comfortable when you must be away from home.

Thank you all for the support and the experience!



*Navy Chief Donald Miller celebrates the new toys given to Ramadi children.*