

Postcards from Iraq

'Go ahead for both of us'

By Steve Farkus, Project Manager

Gulf Region Division South District, Tallil Air Base, Iraq

(Deployed from the Louisville District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)



When I was first approached by the Louisville District leadership about volunteering, I said I had to confer with my wife. Marcella's response was, "go ahead over for both of us." Little did she realize she would have her own trip and special mission. I'm blessed to have a wife who not only was positive about my deployment but willing to make the sacrifice herself.

A few weeks ago I received a care package from my brother Joe — a carefully assembled collection of photos, art and candy that help to make me feel connected to those I love. Now it's my turn to mail a care package! My connection back home in Louisville recently took an interesting twist. Marcella [Denton] is now deployed in support of the recovery effort for Hurricane Ike in Austin, Texas. She's leading the debris mission and coordinating the Corps' efforts with the state of Texas. This is a repeat of 2005 when I was in Afghanistan and Marcella was called to mobilize for Hurricane Katrina. (Large storms hitting the US coastline during my deployments are only coincidence!)

You may wonder why I came over. I think we have to wrap up our efforts in Iraq in the most efficient way. Tax payers (like myself) expect prudent use of our funds. My years in the Army as an Engineer officer and my years with the Corps managing military construction have placed me in a position where I'm the right man for the job.

I'm one of two project managers for the Military Construction Program in southern Iraq. Our projects help to make sure our soldiers, sailors and airmen are supported well. There is much to coordinate and the responsibility is immense. I don't let the scale of the tasks at hand bother me. As PM, I'm the advocate for our customers. I stay with a project from cradle to grave and the leadership looks to me to head the Project Delivery Team and get it built.

The work consists of a lot of reports, spreadsheets, meetings and conference calls. We live by schedule, scope and budget. If you don't like people or have a problem telling someone things they don't like to hear, this is not the job for you.

My friends here rib me about my energy level and positive attitude. That's easy to explain — five years ago we beat my wife's cancer. Now, I'm lifted by the thoughts and prayers of my friends and family at home and in my home district. I feel like each day with life is icing on the cake. Your funny stories of events back home and the day-to-day incidentals are what interest me the most. I got a kick out of our friend, Brenda Sullivan, asking me what were the funniest

stories I had about her husband and my Louisville co-worker, Terry, to be told at his 50th birthday party. I do get sad when I learn of a retirement at the office. I pray for the health of my uncle George, Aunt Dolores and Aunt Nan who are all in their 80's. I want to see them as soon as I'm home.

It does get tough being deployed — it can't be good when I'm standing in heat above an oven setting and putting my hands in my pockets is the only way to stop the pain of the 128° heat of Kuwait. Now it has cooled off and barely cracks 105°. It's funny how the term "hot" is all relative.

We're making a difference here. I'm grateful for the opportunity to be part of this historic effort.



Project Managers Craig Bush (left) and Steve Farkus from the Louisville District along with Construction Rep Mac Drake from Pt. Gibson, MS, check soil borings for a new Dining Facility Overhead Coverage System that is being built to protect the troops.



Wife Marcella in Austin supporting Hurricane Ike recovery effort.