

Postcards from Iraq

Why?

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Sacramento District

When I made the announcement that I was deploying to Iraq, the common question I got from friends, family and co-workers was “why?” I have always enjoyed meeting new people and learning about new cultures. I am an adventurous person who loves to travel and explore new places. What a better opportunity than experiencing all that and at the same time participate on a reconstruction mission that would make a difference in people’s life. This was an excellent opportunity that I couldn’t pass on.

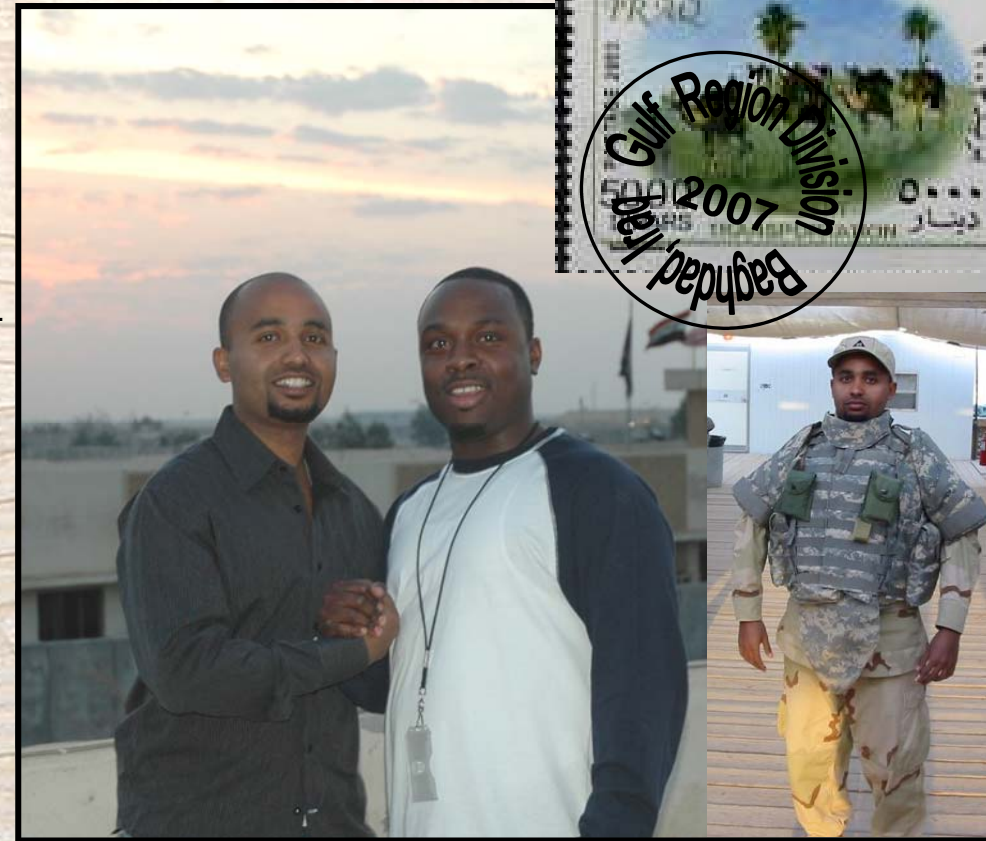
I was assigned with Gulf Region South (GRS) and served from July 2007 – December 2007. I was stationed at small base called Forward Operating Base Kalsu located about 30 miles south of Baghdad. One thing FOB Kalsu is famous for is its dust. It has more dust than I have ever seen at any other place and it doesn’t take long to recognize that.

At FOB Kalsu, we (Corps of Engineers) had a small compound that consisted of 8 – 10 Corps employees and about 30 Aegis employees who provide security when we go on a mission to project sites and meetings. The six month time I spent at FOB Kalsu will be remembered as one of the fastest six month of my life. Work kept me busy each day to a point where I would lose track of the day. There is no such thing called “weekend.” The people around here like to say “every day is Monday.” That’s true because everyday was a working day. I enjoyed my work and staying busy made the time go by a lot faster which was a good thing. You might wonder what we do outside work. Sure, we do have life! We played volleyball on holydays and we occasionally had gatherings for a BBQ, which I will definitely miss. I will also miss the free food, the Thursday night movie, and the very short commute to work. I only had a 2 minute walk to get to my office.

As Project and Resident Engineer, I managed over 25 projects for two provinces in Southern Iraq: Najaf and North Babil. I worked on projects that involved pretty much everything; water, electricity, roads, buildings, schools, airports, substations, hospitals, clinics, police stations, and water treatment plans. I worked closely with Iraqi contractors, local government officials, and our local national engineers. Iraqi people are one of the most courteous, respectful, and hospitable people and I was honored and privileged to have the opportunity to work with them.

At times we faced some challenges due to language barriers, cultural differences, and security concerns. However, despite the challenges, we completed construction of two Public Health Clinics (PHC’s) and turned it over to the Ministry of Health. I was actually hoping to see the PHC open to residents before my redeployment. We also completed and turned over an electrical Sub station to the Ministry of Electricity. The substation will be able to provide power to approximately 30,000 local residents in Southern Iraq. This is significant for lots of people who are forced to live w/out power in their mud huts. One of my other projects was Rehabilitation of Iskandariyah Vocational Technology Center which was just completed. The completion of this facility will allow 1,000 new students to enroll at the school and live full time at the Center.

These are the type of projects that motivate me to keep going each day. I have seen that the reconstruction missions we are providing to the Iraqi people are essential and we are making a difference in their life. I am proud to represent Sacramento District and participate in supporting our country during Operation Iraqi Freedom. I would like to extend a sincere THANK YOU to all coworkers at the Sacramento District that participated in preparing the Care Packages. Your support, prayers, and well-wishes have been tremendous. Essays!



Fitsum Kebede, left, USACE, Resident Engineer, with Sam Curry (USACE PHOTOS)