

# Postcards from Iraq

## From Vietnam to Iraq — the journey continues

By Jim Mills, Basra Area Engineer  
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My 30-year journey with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has taken me to many places and given me many fond memories of the people I have worked with and the projects I have had an opportunity to be a part of.

It started at Vandenberg Air Force Base in 1978 and took me through tours in Japan, South Korea, Afghanistan and my current deployment here in southern Iraq. I have been blessed to have the support of my wife Suni and our children Devin and Erin. My friends in Nipomo and Santa Maria, although they thought I was crazy, have been and continue to be a source of strength for me.

Iraq has been the most challenging but also the most personally rewarding of my career — our projects here impact families directly, you see the results and it touches your heart. I have overseen work rebuilding facilities in neighborhoods where families are in desperate need of help — schools, clinics, a children's hospital, drinking water systems, courthouses, police stations, roads and every other type of project you can imagine. Some of these projects were in dangerous areas but that has not stopped us in our effort to help the people of Basra. We have brought clean fresh drinking water to communities for the first time in their history. We are building a school in a small village whose people are generally uneducated because Saddam's regime shunned them, refusing to invest in anything there whatsoever.

This has been a once in a lifetime opportunity and I am proud to be part of this effort. As the Area Engineer in Basra, I've had the privilege of working with 60 other dedicated professionals — Iraqi Engineers who heroically go to the project sites each day alone and unaccompanied. Yes, they do it for a paycheck, but every one of them is proud to be part of this historic mission, motivated to make a difference, and thankful to those of us who are here to assist. The Iraqi people continue to amaze me!

The years have gone by quickly, from a young man in the jungles of Vietnam to the deserts of Iraq — the journey has been interesting and at times quite exciting. I have been blessed regarding this adventure and it's still not over. Who knows what's next . . .



**We're connecting permanent power to a pumping station providing Basra its main source of water.**



**Basra Area Engineer Jim Mills in Iraq**



**New primary healthcare center opens**