

Postcards from Iraq

Bringing Good Things to Life



I never thought I'd be involved in construction in my Naval service. That's what my Seabee brethren do for a living. And, furthermore, managing an Army Corps of Engineers office never entered my mind. That was until now.

Now, I'm the officer-in-charge of an Army Corps of Engineers operation at Al Asad Air Base, Iraq, with on and off-base construction projects ranging from roads, bridges, buildings, living spaces, schools, health clinics, power lines, water treatment plants, lighting, etc. In my first six weeks on the job, I have traveled all over Al Anbar Province visiting towns along the Euphrates River such as Hit, Baghdadi, Haditha, Rawah, Ubaidi and Al Qaim for my projects and always looking to say hello to someone in Arabic, making that personal connection. I didn't take that Arabic class at the Naval Academy for nothing! It's also a privilege to work side-by-side with Iraqi staff in the office as well as with Iraqi contractors. They are just like me, trying to provide for our families, perhaps seeking to be a part of something much larger than ourselves and just trying to do a good job. This country is changing in a positive direction, and I'm proud not only to help develop part of the economic infrastructure but to be able to train and handover these valuable assets to the Iraqi people.



Navy Lt. Cmdr. James Lee inspects a bridge.

One of my projects is the renovation of the hospital in Haditha. During a pre-construction visit, I walked throughout the hospital including the Intensive Care Unit, Surgery, Outpatient Services and Pediatrics. Small children were crying while getting their immunization shots, and my mind immediately took me home thinking of my 3-year-old daughter getting her shots, tears streaming down her face for a minute until the fears evaporated away, sniffing as she looks for reassurance from her father and mother that everything is OK. The childhood innocence is the same. The town of Haditha has certainly shed tears and I hope the restored hospital and future expansion plans brings back those smiles. This hospital project is a special one in my heart.

The young men and women serving in the Multi-National Forces and working as contractors here deserve a handshake and a pat on the back. I've met Azerbaijanis, Georgians, Turks, Lebanese, Filipinos, Australians, Tongans, Koreans, Japanese, English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh and Americans from all over the States to name a few. Relationships begin at the person-to-person level, and I feel at ease shaking hands with a Soldier, Marine or Sailor asking where is his or her hometown or asking an Iraqi boy or girl in Arabic what is their name and how old they are. The smiles are all the same.

The Lee family at home in Maryland.



I hope to come back with my family one day and visit places along the winding banks of the Euphrates River. Then they'll see eye-to-eye the deep pride, culture and beauty of the Iraqi people, and their country I have come to know.

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Iraqi child and Navy Lt. Cmdr. James Lee.

