

# Postcards from Iraq

## Growing, Learning, and Living in Iraq

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After graduating with a BS in Business Administration from a Canadian University, I started working for the USACE Deployment Center (UDC) at the Transatlantic Programs Center (TAC) in Winchester, VA, in October of 2006. It only took six months of supporting our civilians who choose to deploy to a combat zone, to decide that I wanted to deploy too. I grew up in a military family, and after retiring from 20 years with the US Navy, my mother began working for USACE. She deployed to Iraq in early 2005 and fully supported my decision to aid in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT).

After many months of searching for a replacement for my position with the UDC, I was finally able to deploy in August of 2007. I've been working as an administrative assistant for both Programs and Projects Management Division (PPMD) and Engineering and Construction Division (ECD) for about one year. Working for these departments I prepare the three bi-monthly Projects Review Boards (PRBs), ensure the maintenance of RMS data in the field offices, prepare the Monthly SITREP, detailing every project that GRS is responsible for, prepare Talking Points for the Programs Review Board (PgRB) and track submittals for Electrical Reachback support.

Working in an administrative position doesn't provide me with many chances to meet with the Iraqi population; however, working in ECD and PPMD, I've been fortunate to work directly with 13 Iraqi Engineers and many others throughout GRS operations. In March of 2008 I was happy to assist in facilitating GRS Contractor's Conference, held for 2-days at Camp Ur, where the GRS staff aimed to help contractor's learn more about solicitations and the structuring of proposals. At this conference I learned how to read and write Arabic numbers 0-10.

After living here for a year, this place is my home. My GRS family is constantly changing, but we take care of each other and support each other. This position is versatile and has given me the privilege of working with and meeting people from all over the world. Working for USACE, we are provided many comforts that others are not so fortunate to receive. Being in a warzone doesn't sound like fun, and sometimes it isn't, but the majority of the time, life is what you make of it. We go shopping at the PX and the DFAC for "groceries", we watch movies, throw holiday and birthday parties, have game nights, play softball, shoot pool, and go dancing. In Iraq I've learned to play Spades, and dance Salsa, Meringue and Bachata; next I'm hoping to learn some line dancing. The memories I have created here will be kept forever.

I am now hoping to put my degree to use by gaining admission into a Contracting Internship. To help in getting some direct Contracting experience, I will be moving into a Contracting Administrative Assistant position on exactly the one year anniversary of my deployment, in 10 days. My current tour ends in March 2009, but I am considering extending until the 2009 Internships begin. I truly feel that what we are accomplishing here matters, and fully encourage everyone that can, to come support their country and the country of Iraq. *Essayons!*



By nomination from a co-worker Michael Dragoo, Lauren Kelly receives recognition, for her hard work with PRBs, from COL Drolet.



GRS Game Photo: USACE vs. Army Engineers (USACE Photo)