

Postcards from Iraq

Freedom is not free!

By Hunter Logan, Andrews AFB, MD

I recently met an Iraqi gentleman while attending a conference. He asked that I please convey to the American people how grateful he is for our support. He told me that the palace we were standing in (Al Faw Palace, Victory Base Complex, Baghdad) was built with the sweat and death of the Iraqi people. He had never dreamed that he would one day be standing inside one of Saddam's palaces.

Under the Saddam regime his people were not allowed to fly outside Iraq. They were not allowed to use the internet or telephones. They didn't have the freedom to read books from other countries or higher institutes of learning. He said they were prisoners inside their own country. He was sad that so many lives had been lost and that it was taking so long to realize their dream of freedom – their freedom of choice. But he knew the end result would be worth the sacrifice and turmoil his people and country are facing.

The conversation reminded me of just how fortunate we are. We are free to travel when we want, to use the internet, to make a phone call, participate in sports, see a movie of our choice or just about anything else that we may want to do. We're free to voice our opinion, to choose our government officials, protest, support a cause or choose not to have an opinion at all.

Yet, as technology savvy as we are, we are vastly ignorant to the sadness, cruelty and inhuman horror that exist outside the boundaries of the United States. In some countries women are persecuted just for being women, in others, an entire group of people are being eliminated because they're not of the same ethnic background as their persecutors. In some countries there are no freedoms at all.

We are doing good things here. We're building schools, hospitals, roads, water treatment facilities and helping businesses get back on their feet. We're active in charity drives to obtain donations for orphanages, schools and hospital maternity wards. Military and civilians; Americans as well as those from a variety of other countries work side by side with Iraqis to help a nation build an infrastructure and secure freedom. It's not an easy undertaking but it's definitely rewarding and satisfying to know that we're making a difference.

It goes without saying that we would prefer we weren't in a war and that our young men and women were safely tucked away at home. I can tell you that the majority of the men and women I've talked to would do it again. They are willing to make the sacrifice not only to help Iraq find its voice but to ensure that America keeps hers.

Yes, I believe that what we're doing here is good. I'm grateful that I've had this opportunity. The hours are long, the weather is hot and the living conditions aren't to the standard that we're accustomed – but none of that is worth trading, even if it's just for one soul to realize the freedom that we have long taken for granted. I doubt seriously that our forefathers could envision the freedom that we now have and I suspect the Iraqi people don't fully understand the democracy that awaits them. Like our forefathers, they are willing to take the chance and fight for their own voice. And like our fellow Americans that have gone before us and will come after – we hear the cries of others and we reach out. No — freedom is definitely not free!

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