

# Postcards from Iraq

Greetings from Paradise  
by Gene Dowell  
Louisville District

**H**ello Everyone! I've been in Iraq for two and a half weeks now and starting to get a handle on things. There is a lot of work to do – that's a good thing because there isn't much else to do. We are typically putting in fourteen hour days, seven days a week. There are a great bunch of people over here trying to get the job done. If anyone is considering coming over here, this is a great time. It is much safer than what you see on the news and the Corps goes out of their way to keep us safe. We're even looking for people who don't work for the government to fill positions. If you want to see what's available log on to [www.usajobs.com](http://www.usajobs.com).

We have contractors working on three power plants and one power transmission line that need to get done ASAP to beat the hot weather. I've been busy the last three weeks and have not taken the time to send any updates so I will try to hit the high points. As of 5-16-04 I will have been in country for three weeks. The time flies when you work 14 hour days! I have received a promotion to Supervisory Civil Engineer GS-13 spot so I have that going for me. My return date is around the end of October. The first week involved getting oriented to my new home, food and sleep times. We are eight hours ahead of Louisville here so your Friday night is my Saturday morning. I'm having the typical side effects of so many changes all at once – things like sleeping habits and other bodily functions that I won't go into. After three weeks though I'm getting my routines down and settling in for the long haul. I have been fortunate to get to travel and see our job sites as well as some local attractions.

Since power plants need cooling water to operate they are located near rivers. I have seen the Tigris and Euphrates rivers as well as the ancient ruins of the city of Ur. One thing that I didn't realize is all the different armies that are here. I've seen Romania, Dutch, Netherlands, Italy, Britain, Korea, Japan, Guatemala and Guana (I think). These countries aren't in the major battles because they aren't really equipped for it but they are here in support of what we are doing. It will be a plus for their country in future relations with the US and others. One thing that occurred to me was all the armies of the world coming together for the battle of Armageddon – well, most of them are here! (Don't worry mom, I don't think it is time for that yet.) Our contractors are employing hundreds of Iraqi's for security as well as Iraqi contractors to do the work. Most of them are friendly and smile and wave when you wave to them. When we make a site visit we have quite a presence with the security guards and military uniforms. We get a lot of stares so I try to acknowledge the people and not ignore them. Many of them say "hello" and give you a thumbs up – which we were told was not a positive hand signal in their culture so sometimes I don't know what they trying to say.

The Iraqi people want to work and need the money so they do try. It is such a different culture – they have lived in fear and poverty for so long. When Major General Johnson was here this past week we toured the naval base at Umm Qsar. I heard a story of an Iraqi who accidentally ran into a contractor's vehicle. The Iraqi guy freaked out because he thought he was going to be shot. It took an interpreter the better part of a day to calm him down and convince him he wouldn't be shot. While the General was here he gave some army "coins" to some people in appreciation for the job they are doing. I received my first coin from the General – undeserved since I really haven't done anything yet – but he told me if I didn't do a good job he would come and take it back.



Gene Dowell and Sam Watson In Iraq (Photo provided by Gene Dowell)