

Postcards from Iraq

Iraq service a front row seat to history
by Roger Gerber, Commander, Gulf Region Southern District



I had the privilege of attending the change of command for the Multi-National Division - Central South (MND-CS) on July 18, 2004, at its headquarters in Hillah/Babylon. What an historic event - the change in leadership of this multi-national division, in an amphitheater located on the ruins of Babylon. In the shadow of one of Saddam's palaces, surrounded by soldiers from Poland, Ukraine, Romania, Thailand, and several other nations from around the world, I heard outgoing commander MG Bieniek speak of creating a free and democratic Iraq. He described how a stable Iraq is good for Poland, making the world a more stable and peaceful place.

As U.S. General Casey, commander of the Multinational Forces - Iraq, passed the division colors from the outgoing Polish Major General to the new Polish commander, I couldn't help but wonder where CNN, CBS, and the other news media were. They were probably reporting on yet another car bombing and the 'failure' of the coalition effort. Yes, the bombings and shootings continue, but they are not the real story. The real story is that nations who less than 15 years ago were enslaved to communism are now fighting to help the Iraqi people achieve their own freedom.

For me, a Soldier who devoted his first 12 years of service to winning the Cold War, sitting that day beside former Eastern Block soldiers gave me reason for hope that someday freedom and democracy will prevail in Iraq and the Arab world as well. Every day I see the progress of our work to rebuild the Iraqi infrastructure, much of it accomplished by brave Iraqi construction company owners and workers despite threats from terrorist thugs. They all know that what they are building is a future that they could never have had under Saddam. We are making a positive difference - electricity generation is up, oil production and refined products have increased, water is being treated and distributed, waste water is being collected and treated before entering the rivers, and more schools and hospitals are available. Iraqis now have hope for a better Iraq.

I wish MG Bieniek's speech would have been broadcast back in the U.S. for those who question why we are here. President Bush's words on September 20, 2001, ring true today with even more clarity and vision, "We will not waver; we will not tire; we will not falter; and we will not fail. Peace and freedom will prevail." We must stay the course.

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Former Cold War foes stand shoulder-to-shoulder in an effort to rebuild a free Iraq during MNFI-Central South Change of Command ceremonies in southern Iraq.
(Photos provided by Col. Roger Gerber)

