

Postcards from Iraq

Just Do it!

by Darralyn Williams
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This has undoubtedly been the most rewarding, challenging, exciting, and yes at times frustrating experience of my life. The importance of the work that we are doing over here cannot be over-emphasized. The work of a Contract Specialist/Contracting Officer, even at the Division level is unprecedented and so darn interesting. I realize that it is unlikely I will ever have the opportunity to experience this type of work again.

As Program Executioner for the Reconstruction Effort, the Gulf Region Division (GRD) is pivotal in ensuring that Iraq is and continues to move forward in its quest for democracy. Standing up the Army and the Police Forces along with the necessary supporting infrastructure is critical to Iraq being able to provide a safe, secure environment for its people. GRD also plays a major role in this effort by providing support to the Command that is standing up the Iraqi Security Forces.

You've heard it before, the Corps is considered to be the Public Sector's Premier Engineering and Construction organization. This is due in large part to the fact that as an organization we are always more than willing to take on the most difficult and challenging missions. To that end, Huntsville has long been considered as the go to USACE activity that willingly takes on the tough challenges, goes the extra mile, does it skillfully, and accomplishes the mission successfully!

Let me tell you about living in Iraq. The living accommodations are more than adequate; better than I ever expected. We have individual rooms and private baths. Living arrangements vary by location, for example at Gulf Region Central; they live in a dormitory style building and share a common bathroom. Some might say, Yuck! Well I can tell you living in the "dorm" is pretty fun. After a long day, folks often get together, head up to the roof, kick back and enjoy the night or they go over to the entertainment center to watch a movie, pop popcorn, and generally just wind down after a long day. It's like being in college again. J

Many of the friends you make here you will have for life. I worked in Saudi Arabia nearly 30 years ago and still have close friends from that era. Serving in Iraq during what may arguably be considered one of the most important periods in history, cannot easily be put into words. To have been here for the January 30th elections and now during the drafting of the Iraqi Constitution is something that no one can take away from me. I was here!

In addition, as a member of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, I and my fellow USACE employees have the ability to shape history by imparting our exemplary, unique construction and contract management expertise. We do this in a collaborative effort with our many Team members. When I worked in Arabia, I was so young that I did not fully appreciate USACE's contributions and the tremendous impact we were making. I am thankful that I have the opportunity to gain that appreciation here in Iraq.

Bottom Line: Choosing to volunteer for Iraq is a very personal decision; no one can make it for you. I can honestly say that I have never regretted the choice I made nearly seven months ago. Thanks to the support of my family, my supervisor, and the HNC Commander and his Leadership Team, I have chosen and been given the Go Ahead to extend my original deployment from four months to one year.

Why don't YOU consider a deployment in Iraq? It's an Opportunity You DO NOT want to look back upon and realize Geeze, I missed It! Rather than saying I Coulda, Shoulda, and Woulda - JUST DO IT!!



The famous crossed-swords in Baghdad is just one of the rare sites Corps employees serving in Iraq get to see as part of their deployment (Courtesy D. Williams)

