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Team Basrah "Living the Dream" Celebrates Christmas Eve

By A Al. Bahrani
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Christmas preparations, the dining facility at Camp Balckadder- Basrah, Iraq
"Living the Dream" . (USACE photo by A. AlBahrani)

BASRAH, Iraq- "What better gift to give than of one's self in helping a great nation rebuild itself," said Army Lt. Col. Kenneth W. McDonald, Basrah Area Deputy Commander for Gulf Region Division South District.

"This is my second Christmas at Basrah," he said. "Christmas in Iraq has allowed me to re-evaluate what is important and the true meaning of Christmas.

"I'm very proud of Team Basrah," McDonald said. "There is a certain team feeling here that I have never felt before in any job that I have had. I believe it is because everyone is pulling together and sacrificing their time away from home to make Iraq a better



LCDR Gary Underwood, resident engineer, Basrah Children's Hospital Project Office (left). LTC Kenneth McDonald, Basrah Area Deputy Commander for Gulf Region Division South District (next). SFC Harold Stewart, Basrah Area Office (center). LTC. Richard E. Painter, Basrah PRT Engineer (left). Adel Aayad, project engineer with Basrah Area Office (far left). (USACE photo by A. AlBahrani).

place for the Iraqis.

McDonald said the motivation must be contagious because he has seen several British T-shirt that have "Living the Dream" on them. That's the motto of GRS' Team Basrah.

"Being here in Iraq, at this time, is very special to me," said the Area Engineer Cecil McClenan, whose jobs include overseeing and administrating construction contracts for the Basra Area Office. "I feel very fortunate that I'm able to provide a service in rebuilding a nation that is trying to come together as once.

"This is my first Christmas away from my family and home," he continued. "I miss home dearly; however, I realize all here are away from home also. Everyone has been so friendly and pleasant. It has been a joy to share this Christmas with our Iraqi family.

"Christmas over here is special in its own way," said Randy Mendenhall, information management specialist for Basrah Area Office.

"This is my third Christmas in Iraq," said Mendenhall. "Although we would all rather be with our families at this time, it isn't possible when being deployed. We do what we can over here to feel the Christmas spirit, but it will never be the same as being with our families. So that part will always be missing. But we become like a family here as we are all going through the same thing and we make do creating unique memories that will someday be looked upon fondly.

"This is a very important mission that has the ability to affect the world in positive way," he went on. "We aren't always in a position to make difference, but over here it is



The dining facility at Camp Blackadder- Basrah, Iraq "Living the Dream"

possible .In that way it is rewarding.

"My hope is that someday the people of Iraq can live in peace and not have to face the daily bloodshed that takes place across the country," Mendenhall added.

"The most positive sign I see is that we have moved from restoring infrastructure as our primary mission to providing new facilities to help the Iraqi people," said Dan Foltz, resident engineer with Basrah Area Office, who celebrated his second Christmas in Iraq. The first was in 2003.

"It is a wonderful reminder that Iraqi society has many traditions that I can learn from as Christmas has a different meaning in Iraq than in the US," Foltz said.

"I think the big difference is obviously my family. I don't have them here and it is difficult not to be home during this time of year," McDonald said, who added that it's easier to connect with the true meaning of Christmas when not hit with the materialistic overkill that is quite prevalent in the US.

McDonald said attended a midnight Mass service at Brandy Line, in a gym that was crowded and not well lit. He said candles were used to help see the readings and music, which gave the event a very intimate setting. "The Fijian choir sang a number of songs which were fantastic," he said. "I have never heard such wonderful music from the heart. They had no instruments and carried the music with their voices.

"It was one of the most memorable Christmas Eve Masses I have attended," McDonald continued. "I was also struck by the fact that I am in the region where Christianity originated and this gave the event a more spiritual meaning to me."

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