

Postcards from Iraq

Why should we stay the course?

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For five and a half months I have been the Officer-in-Charge of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Fallujah Resident Office. The job has been more frustrating than I could have ever imagined, and I would not trade the experience for anything.

We try to fit our Western culture mold on a people whose every conversation ends in “inshalla” (literally translated as God’s Will), and then don’t understand why the mold keeps breaking. Very slowly, through painstaking communication, demonstration and sometimes the necessary tough standards, they begin to understand that they can work safer and not go against their beliefs.



Fallujah area children greet Navy Cmdr. Larry Wooster as he visits USACE project sites.

As we go out and talk to these workers, we begin to see a change, from distrust to understanding that we are here to try and help re-build there city, not to conquer and control. In some cases, new friendships are formed that will most likely follow us through a lifetime.

There are still bad people in Iraq that want to kill anyone that tries to bring new ideas or stability to the area. But more and more, the people of Fallujah bring them to the attention of the security forces, and those bad people are brought to justice.

Each week I’ve traveled into the town of Fallujah with the Marines’ Civil Affairs Teams, and met with local Sheiks, Muktar and government officials. Each meeting moves all of us forward in understanding each other’s cultures. To think that some day I may be able to travel back to this city and sit and have tea with some of these men is a very real possibility, and I will know that I helped to rebuild their city.

And then there are the children. Always smiling, always happy when we give them attention, a toy, a piece of candy, or as we found in Karmah, their favorite thing... a pen.

These children are the future of Iraq. They need to know who we are, and that we care about what happens to them. And so we work, for them, and their future.



Cmdr. Larry Wooster discusses a bridge rebuilding with the Majarrah Sheikh and officials near Fallujah.

