

# Postcards from Iraq



*Navy Chief James Davis oversees construction of overhead protection project.*

## **A defining moment . . .**

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With over 17 years with the U.S. Navy, this six-month tour in Baghdad is definitely a highlight of my career.

I arrived at Forward Operating Base Loyalty, located in east Baghdad, on April 1 assigned to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) as their Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge. Ten days later I was having dinner at the dining facility when a 60mm mortar tore through the roof and blasted shrapnel in all directions. Four soldiers eight feet away were all seriously injured and my combat life saving training was immediately put to the test. To this day, I have no idea how I escaped being wounded.

That moment shaped my whole tour and became a driving force as I spearheaded efforts to get an overhead protection system installed on that facility. Today that \$4.1 million project is 98 percent finished. I'm proud to say I served as USACE's Project Engineer overseeing its construction. As I leave Iraq, I know I've made a tangible difference to force protection and the morale of troops serving here. They can now eat in relative peace without having to race out of the structure to nearby bunkers when mortars and rockets are hitting the base.

Those blasts were a common occurrence during most of my time here.

USACE's Loyalty Resident Office is currently overseeing over 90 active projects valued at \$400 million including new water and sewer lines, school renovations, primary healthcare centers, upgrading gas stations, and installing new electric distribution networks in east Baghdad. With only eight Americans on our staff, we couldn't have handled that kind of workload if it wasn't for the 37 Iraqi associates who courageously join our team every day. They visit each of those projects to ensure we're getting quality construction in a safe manner. They're in constant danger and yet are steadfast in their commitment to make Iraq a better place for their children and grandchildren. They are some of the bravest individuals I know.

I'm looking forward to returning home and seeing my lovely wife Severine, and two children, Sarah 6, and Lea 4. They've been tremendous in their ongoing support while I've been deployed.

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