

# Postcards from Iraq

## An aircraft mechanic serving with the Corps of Engineers?

By AMC(AW/NAC) Philip J. Wright, NCOIC  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Fallujah

I really didn't know what to expect when I was selected as an individual augmentee to work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) in Fallujah, Iraq. I started to think "what is an aircraft mechanic going to do there?" I soon found out.

USACE gave me the job of NCOIC for the Fallujah Resident Office and I was asked to oversee the construction of some local projects around the camp. I didn't have a clue what a Project Engineer did, but our USACE Resident Engineer there, Bill Kiddy, soon introduced me to what I needed to know. Soon I would be going into Fallujah with the 1 MEF Marines, RCT5 and AEGIS Risk Management security team to check on the progress of USACE projects such as a new waste water treatment plant (currently that city of 200,000 uses septic tanks that spews raw sewage into the streets), new electrical substations and medical clinics, fire and police stations. We would talk to the Iraqi contractors and see first hand the status of the projects to ensure they were on track, safety precautions were being met, and they were being built to the contract's specifications.

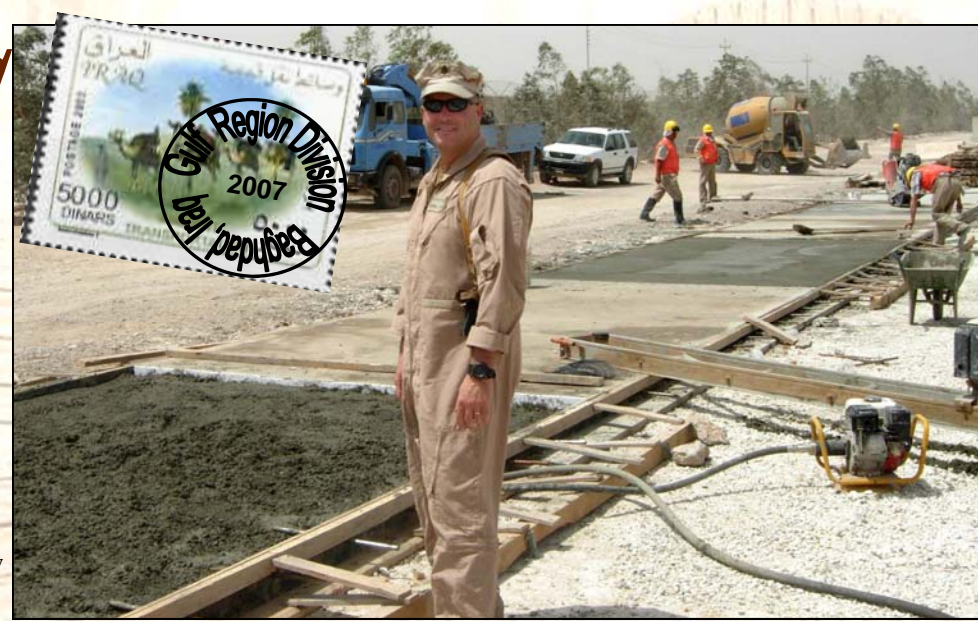
This was very different for me. I have been working in Naval Aviation for 19 years but for this assignment I wore armor, carried both a loaded M-16 and M-9, and traveled frequently through a city where we could be hit by an IED or RPG at anytime.

I consider myself lucky to have had a chance to be part of Operation Iraqi Freedom and work with our USACE engineers in Fallujah. They have a challenging job, trying to communicate with contractors who only have 4 hours of electricity a day, scheduling a variety of meetings and conferences. It sometimes seems a never ending battle, but they do it every day with the utmost professionalism. One part of the experience I will never forget is working with our Iraqi engineers and interpreters; I have learned so much from them that I cannot begin to describe it. They are very resilient and caring people. I will miss their kindness, sense of humor and laughter they brought to our office everyday.

Behind every Chief Petty Officer is a strong, loving wife. I would not have lasted one month here without the support and understanding of my wife Gisele. Whenever I would have doubts of why I was here, she would always put me back on the right track by telling me "it won't happen overnight, do your job to the best of your ability, always be safe, remember I love you and come back home to me when you're finished." That was all I needed.

You hear on the news about the heroes in battle and how they are recognized by awards and medals. What you don't hear are the battles that our spouses go through every day and night without recognition; I would like to thank, my best friend, my hero, my wife, and say — "You did an outstanding job sweetie, I love you and I am proud of You!!!!!"

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Navy Chief Wright oversees work at a construction site on Camp Fallujah.



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Chief Wright and a member of the Aegis security detail prepare for a trip into Fallujah.