

Postcards from Iraq

Iraq Memories

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It's easy to remember the kids pictured on this postcard. Living in the boondocks of a country that has been through a lot, they couldn't have been more cheerful. And their village, which is getting a water unit built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, couldn't have been friendlier or more receptive. The village elders were as warm in their more restrained adult way as the kids. The Village of Takadoom, out in the wide open spaces of Wassit Province, was a nice, hospitable place.

The vibes were much different at another water project site just down the road a few miles. The young men hanging around there had no use for the visiting Americans and British and didn't try to hide their feelings. A memory of two faces of Iraq seen on the same day.

You remember what you remember. It will be easy to remember our next door office neighbor Ken Brown singing from time to time. Great voice. And our office mate, Mohammed Aliwi, patiently helping us with the basics of camera-computer interplay and listening with rapt attention to Patsy Cline singing "Crazy" on a disc supplied by our friend and down-the-hall neighbor Amy Matthews.

We attended many awards ceremonies in Iraq but the one that comes to mind first was a ceremony in the commander's office for a departing security contractor supervisor. He said he'd come to Iraq for the money, of course. But he then spoke movingly and at some length about how he had warmed to and embraced the Corps' reconstruction mission and his part in it.

There will be no forgetting the sound of bagpipe music cutting through the Corps' compound at Tallil in the late afternoon of a day when a memorial service was held for Stephen Dixon of Aegis. He lost his life protecting USACE reconstruction personnel, two of whom, Natalie Sudman and Jarrod Bonnick, were seriously wounded by the same roadside bomb that killed Dixon and injured one of his Aegis mates..



Col. Steve Hill, GRS Commander, and John Connor, GRS Public Affairs Officer, surrounded by Iraqi children on a visit to Wassit Province. (USACE PHOTO)

Nor will there be any forgetting the Erinys security man who reached out with one big hand and grabbed a person who wandered out of the chow hall at Camp Echo oblivious to the fact that a mortar attack was in progress, yanking him into a bunker with the gentle admonition, "In you go, old man."

We'll remember day the Maysan officials came to Tallil, promising safe passage in their province for USACE and Provincial Reconstruction Team personnel. That issue is still being worked. We'll remember project manager Bill Simpson saying "there's 20 years worth of good work" in Iraq for construction firms--"if things get settled down." And we'll also remember Clayton Waller, now a mainstay of the GRS engineering and construction staff, helping us drag our bags through Dulles Airport at the start of this odyssey.