

Postcards from Iraq

Honor, courage,
commitment

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Honor, courage, commitment — you would think these values only apply to the U.S. military. I have been in Iraq going on a year now and I can tell you first hand I have seen the values applied by both the Iraqi Army and the local nationals that are employed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

My split tour in Iraq began with Multi-National Security Corps – Iraq as a Liaison between the Iraqi Army and their Life Support Contractors. Most of my time was spent with Iraqi Army Brigade Commanders and Senior Enlisted. They were truly committed to the well being of their troops by enforcing the contractor to provide the minimum requirements of their contract. There were some challenges to overcome with alleged corruption but this was minuscule in the grand scheme of things.

Six months later I was assigned to the Army Corps of Engineers as the Officer in Charge of the Taji Resident Office in north Baghdad responsible for construction contracts for the people of Iraq. I have seven local nationals that work outside the wire. They have the courage to travel on a daily basis in and around Baghdad with no protection. If they were linked with the US Army in any way it would potentially have fatal consequences.

One of my Iraqi Engineers was kidnapped and the only way out was to lie and tell them he worked for the Ministry of Construction (doesn't exist). A couple of them have been threatened by insurgents for having ties to Coalition Forces. For this, it takes a great deal of courage to travel to hostile areas not knowing what to expect on a daily basis.

While working with the Iraqi Engineers, I became very interested in their culture and history. They take great pride and honor in their efforts in rebuilding Iraq. They are very eager to learn from the classes that are offered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. This results in projects that are inspected at every level of detail which produces quality workmanship, something rarely seen in Iraq in the past. They love their country and can see the direct impacts we are having while rebuilding their nation.

As you can see, these values are very much a part of the Iraqis as much as they are for the U.S. military. They each have the fortitude that makes for a nation that will be back on its feet soon. These are just two examples of what I have seen in the short 11 months that I have been in Iraq. I am due to return to the states very soon and I look forward to passing on my experiences to those who have doubts about our efforts. It humbles me to see the courage the Iraqis show every day when they report to work not knowing whether or not they will return home.

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LTJg Robert McCharen helps construct a new Baghdad Girls High School.

