

Postcards from Iraq

Once in a lifetime experience to leave a positive contribution

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Site visit conferences were a frequent part of the routine for Sgt. 1st Class Hector Cruz at Baghdad's International Zone projects.

It all started on the 15th of July 2007, arriving at Baghdad International Airport and later to the Central District, Gulf Region Division (GRC), HQ compound. I honestly didn't expect to be in a place with the luxurious accommodations we have here! Honestly, being a Soldier of 19 years of service, I consider our accommodations here as a four-star experience!

After two months, the real journey began with my transfer to the International Zone (IZ) Resident Office (RO) as Noncommissioned Officer in Charge (NCOIC). Everything after 18 September 2007 until 26 August 2008 at the IZ RO has been an unbelievable experience, one that I will never forget for as long as I live.

During the time I spent as NCOIC, my duties multiplied each day. First it started with the assistance as a sponsor for contractors with projects inside the IZ with badges. In addition, came the most critical and sought after mission I was looking forward to, making quality assurance site

visits for projects outside the wire. I shared the visit load with the RO officers in charge — three Navy officers, Lt Cmdr. Shaulis, Lt. Cmdr Smith and Cmdr. Graddock. All are very professional officers with one commitment and that is mission accomplishment.

There were times when we had to share a small place of safety, while the compound received Indirect Fire (IDF) and we waited for the ALL CLEAR to sound off. Fortunately, we were able to talk and not grieve about it in our office. Site visits by far were the most rewarding accomplishments of my tour.

The ability to talk to contractors, share experiences and see that my input can make a difference is such an important mission. It has no equivalent value in my book. And to top that, having the opportunity to take donated toys and school supplies to kids that live in the areas where the projects were built gave the visits an entirely new meaning. I felt like I was working towards a better future in Iraq!

Looking back at this past 13 months, there is nothing I would have done differently. If someone asks if I would do it again, I would say without a doubt . . . count me in!

Toy distribution was a big hit for both the children of Baghdad and Sgt. 1st Class Cruz.

