

Postcards from Iraq

Helping Iraq move forward

By Staff Sgt. Katrail Smith
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I'm entering my 5th month in Baghdad and there's no question in my mind I've got one of the best jobs in the military being part of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as we help rebuild Iraq.

And this isn't just talk. I've already extended my deployment an extra six months and this month I participated in my final formal re-enlistment ceremony signing up for an "indefinite period" as I'm at the 10-year mark and am now a career soldier.

So what's so special about our mission? We're building schools and primary healthcare centers, installing water and sewer lines, repaving roads, renovating hospitals, putting in whole new electric distribution networks, constructing fire stations and courthouses. We're helping Iraq take its first steps toward democracy – we're working directly with Iraqi leaders and because of our projects, Baghdad families are seeing their government is working and things are getting better.

One of my favorite teachers at Purnell Swett High School, Maxton, NC, was Mr. John Hodges. He instilled in me a true passion for history. When I look at Iraq, a cornerstone of our civilization, I see such tremendous potential here. There's significant archeological sites in every direction. And their natural resources are unbelievable – it's the land of two rivers (Tigris and Euphrates), rich farm ground, abundant oil, a society that deeply believes in the values of education. I'm proud to be a part of this undertaking.

I interact with Iraqis on a daily basis. They want the same things we all do – and they put their lives on the line every day working hard to provide a better future for their children and grandchildren.

When I finish my Army career, I'd like to return to my hometown. Who knows – maybe teach in those same classrooms motivating, encouraging students like Mr. Hodges did for me.

My wife, Ebony, and I married seven years ago immediately after she graduated from boot camp. We're both now stationed at Ft. Wainwright, AK, and have two children – Mahogany, 3, and Kalea, 2. The Army has been very good to us and I sincerely appreciate my family's total support during this deployment.

I have a compassion in my heart for what we're doing here and I have no doubt Iraq will once again be a magnificent place. When they recently won the soccer championship game in the Asian Cup, it was a special moment – Iraqis throughout this country were all celebrating that victory. We're working hard to help them move forward to a brighter tomorrow.

