

Postcards from Iraq

Seeing positive signs in Iraq

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As I am writing this, I am in the process of re-deploying to my home District in Walla-Walla. For the last 20 months, I have been tasked with, for lack of better wording, the management of the second largest hydro-electric facility in Iraq. The original job description, written by my predecessor (Chester Lowery from Nashville District) read similar to this: facilitate and manage the operation and maintenance program, act as a liaison and consultant to the Coalition Forces and their partners, work with the Iraqi plant staff to assess the needs of the station, and help facilitate the repair and procurement of parts through the Ministry of Electricity, PCO, State Department, USACE, and the USMC Civil Affairs Group.

Upon reflection on my tour there, I would have to say there were some facets left out. If I were to rewrite the job description it would include: manager, facilitator, electrician, pipe fitter, mechanic, physician, liaison, playground monitor, counselor and priest.

As many of you know, the situation in Al Anbar Province, until recently, had been less than desirable. This applies to the lives of both the Coalition Forces and the Iraqis. Due to this, my tour here has been one of the most rewarding and heartbreaking challenges that I have ever faced. The losses have been high, and in my position I have experienced first hand the aftermath of both.

Yet, during that same time, I have seen the opinion of local townspeople change from "the Americans must leave NOW and we will deal with the Bad Guy's" to "No, you can't leave yet, things are just starting to get better." Those of you who have experienced the Iraqi culture know what a monumental shift this truly is. When I left Al Anbar, there were young Marines playing soccer with Iraqi children in the streets. The threat is still there, but the situation is improving daily. It is a shame that the American public does not get a chance to see the positive impact we are having on the whole situation.

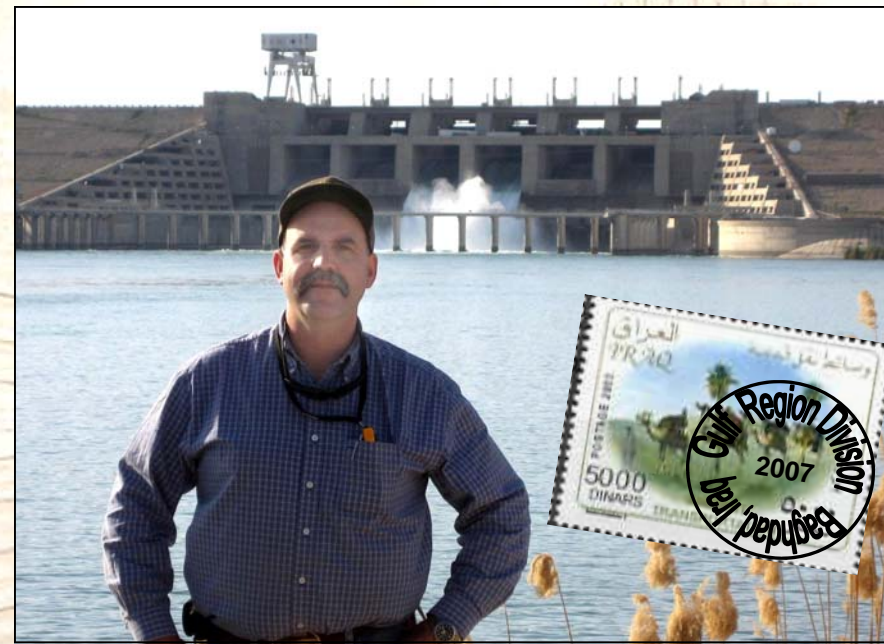
Recently, at an awards ceremony, I had the opportunity to thank the folks from the Gulf Region Central district for their support, not only for myself, but everyone involved with keeping the water and electricity flowing at Haditha Dam.

As I am not as articulate as I would like to be in this type of situation, I would like to reiterate my heartfelt gratitude, not only for the support, but for dedicating their time to try and make a difference in the lives of their fellow man. Everything that happens in Iraq is a team effort. Even in the remote location of Haditha Dam, I never felt the absence of this.

It is my hope that every man and woman who serves here leaves with the same sense of accomplishment and pride in their work, knowing what our organization is accomplishing. Also, I would especially like to recognize the men and women of the Coalition Forces. These are the true heroes -- without them nothing in this country would be possible.

"The Soldier above all others prays for peace, for it is the Soldier who must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war." --Douglas MacArthur

Scott Gates
Haditha Dam Power Manager, Iraq



Scott Gates, Haditha Dam Power Manager



Scott Gates visits the Ministry of Electricity office in South Dam Village, Haditha Dam