

Postcards from Iraq

Iraq duty — it's the people connection

By Suetta Jackson, Resource Management
Gulf Region Division South District, Tallil Air Base
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

For those of you who are familiar with the deployment process, you know that we spend almost two months before deployment ensuring that our physical and mental health is suitable for the expected lifestyle while deployed. Preparation is similar to the holiday hustle and bustle — juggling family, work, home, and completing deployment responsibilities simultaneously. However, there is one thing that was unexpected and a pleasant surprise — it's the wonderful people you meet during the deployment process and while in theatre.

The staff at TAC is amazing. Everything is well organized. Despite the rush and numerous tasks, the staff took their time with the utmost patience and understanding of dealing with each person's apprehensions and providing valuable information about the road ahead. I was amazed how much we got accomplished in such a little time.

Once arriving in Iraq, I was absolutely overwhelmed with the diverse nationalities of people I encountered each day. I've met Iraqis, Ugandans, Brits, Romanians, Indians, Filipinos, Europeans, Americans from different states and some veterans who had already deployed numerous times. Of all the new people I met, I admire those who have not only made a big decision of initially deploying to a foreign country, but then to see them volunteer for another assignment — it's amazing and unselfish. Mostly as I look into each person's eyes, I see the common thread that makes us all the same. We are all a long way from home, our loved ones, and those things that are most familiar to us that make us comfortable.

Though our work day is full, we take the time to have FUN. The commander and his staff have organized various events to break the tension and monotony of the seven-day-a-week work grind. For example, our commander, Colonel Jack Drolet, makes sure that as staff arrive and depart GRS, they are hailed and farewelled properly. This happens with one of the highest forms of recognition — public recognition. It is intimidating to some (having to talk about themselves and what they like to do for fun in front of strangers), but in the end it is a very enduring experience that brings us closer together as a family and a unit. We've also had a Veteran's Day celebration with various activities. There was also the wonderful Combined Federal Campaign Dinner which consisted of a Filipino meal. I've also participated in several

BBQs. Most of the time we are playing games, listening to music, or just hanging out under our new patio.

The purpose of my postcard is to let all of you know that this is a phenomenal experience and the relationships you form here are priceless. You realize it the most when people you have bonded with re-deploy or go on R&R. I know that some of the relationships that I have formed here in Iraq will last for a very long time. I am thankful for this historic opportunity to help the Iraqi people..



Iraqis warmly greet us whenever we get a chance to go out in the community.



Sue Jackson visits the 4000-year-old Ziggurat of Ur.



Enjoying some time off singing karaoke.