

Postcards from Iraq

**Dusty Notes from a USACE Engineer -
Liaison to the Baghdad Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT)**

Lt. William Simpson, U.S. Navy

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Liaison Officer (USACE), Baghdad, Iraq

Iraq is a land of dichotomies. Wow, how time has flown by and dragged on at the same time; one moment the way forward is crystal clear and the next it's enveloped in a cloud of dust; one moment things are calm and the next the "Easter Offensive" has started; the land of the garden of Eden and the latest in infrastructure technology; a land with enormous oil reserves and a shortage of power; the land of the two rivers and a shortage of clean drinking water.

As the USACE PRT engineer, I've been in a unique position to work with people from various levels of the Iraqi government on requirements development and Coalition Forces on the execution of those requirements. Each side of the coin has unique challenges that pose the opportunity for the "thrill of victory" and the "agony of defeat". Persistence overcomes brilliance!

My time here has been a valuable experience that I'll carry with me for the rest of my life. To work with the Iraqi people trying to recover from so many years of dictatorial rule and the subsequent voids left in the society is rewarding and frustrating at the same time. The oft quoted "brain drain" of Iraq implies an intellectual void but the reality is only a lack of experience; experience that will come with time.

I believe the American people only get half of the story and we're an impatient lot. The picture the world receives from the media is one of Iraqi dysfunctionality, and while there is some, remember that Rome wasn't built in a day, nor was it built without tribulations. All politics aside, we are here and should remain here until the job is finished. The people of Iraq will triumph over evil and rebuild their country; Iraq will once again become the jewel of the Middle East. And I take a little pride in knowing that I have contributed.



Photos: above, Navy Lt. William Simpson at Al Faw Palace in Baghdad; below, contrasting sandstorm and clear photos of Baghdad from the same location illustrate Simpson's perspective on Iraq.

