

Postcards from Iraq

A struggle worth seeing through

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I had previously deployed to Kuwait in 1991 so there were few surprises when I arrived in Iraq as far as weather and living conditions. The one difference that has been hard to get used to is the confinement to the base. I have gone outside the wire with security teams on numerous occasions and what I found was much worse than the conditions in Kuwait. Although Kuwait was bombed out, the structures were more like 20th century buildings compared to 19th century Iraq. It really feels like we stepped back in time. Iraq was under an embargo for many years and is a really poor country. Ninety percent of the Iraqis want nothing more than a job and a safe place to live and raise their families. The people are very industrious with what they have, able to repair most of their essential items with little or nothing. Being raised on a farm in Arkansas, I call it the hay wire fix.

Being in Iraq during this war on terrorism has been a history lesson in itself. I believe I have seen the beginnings of the birth of a new country. I have met some of Iraq's greatest countrymen and they really love their homeland. These brave individuals, in my opinion, are Iraq's equivalent to our Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. They risk their lives daily in the struggle to achieve a freedom that is taken for granted in America. Being here has given me a sense of what our forefathers went through for independence and I am proud to have given the Iraqis a hand toward their goal.

I started out in Iraq as a Project Engineer at the Victory Resident Office designing and managing projects on the base in support of our troops. After four months, I moved to the Victory South Resident Office as the Resident Engineer and starting managing projects outside the base in the south Baghdad areas of Mahmoudiyah, Latifiya, and Yousefiyah; referred to as the "Triangle of Death." It was common to have a project almost complete only to be blown up by insurgents. Due to the dangers of this area, we hired local Iraqi Engineers to inspect the work on a daily basis. We constructed police stations, schools, water and sewer systems, electrical lines, roads, health care clinics, and government council buildings. Most of that work was an effort to piece the infrastructure back together so the Iraqi people could start rebuilding their nation -- all this while the insurgents continued to kill, terrorize and disrupt their everyday lives. Slowly the Iraqis are beginning to replace their mistrust of the Americans and are starting to believe in a better future with freedom.

After five months with the Victory South Resident Office, I moved to the Victory Area Office as Area Engineer to serve my last 14 months. This is when I finally realized that 34 years of experience with the Government was starting to pay off. We had a lot of volunteers on staff who did not possess a construction background. I was able to mentor my employees and as the year went by I was able to see significant changes in the administration of contracts and construction quality. Our office, with 31 personnel, is currently overseeing 57 projects valued at \$106 million.

I will leave Iraq knowing that I took on one of the most challenging and personally satisfying jobs in my career for a struggle that is worth seeing through. Although I won't be here for the end, I believe we will see a free Iraq sometime in the near future. Who knows, I may come back someday on vacation and see some of what I missed.

One thing I have learned in my 22 months in Iraq is that I can live without many of the items we seem to place a priority on in the U.S. The most important thing in life is one's family and I am starting to miss mine too much. It's time to go home, rejoin my lovely wife Carolyn, and watch our children, grandkids and great-grandkids grow up and establish some good memories that they can take through life when we're gone.



Terry Steuart on one of his many construction site visits in the Mahmoudiyah area, south Baghdad Province.



Terry and Carolyn Steuart deployed to be part of the team helping rebuild Iraq.