

Postcards from Iraq

It's an experience you'll never forget

**By YNC (AW) Michelle M. Guiliano, USN
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My experience working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), as a part of the Navy's Individual Augmentee (IA) program, has been challenging and rewarding. I've had the unique opportunity to work closely with Coalition Forces, Army, civilians and the Iraqis all at the same time and see first hand the progress we're making to help rebuild this war-torn country.

I enjoyed working with the Army because it gave me an opportunity to learn more about another branch of the military. I have a much better appreciation and understanding what the Army does and I've even learned a new language (hoo-ah!). But on a serious note, what impressed me the most was the way they take on a challenge and get the job done.

What surprised me the most was the number of civilians who are here filling many different roles. Not only are they helping rebuild Iraq but they are also protecting us while in the process. Many civilians have been here for extended periods of time away from the comforts of home and their families but they are here because they want to make a difference in people's lives. It's something to remember when their sacrifices are not always recognized.

While working here, I also had the opportunity to interact and work with Iraqis. When I first arrived, I asked one of them how after all this time of violence, does he find the strength to go on? He told me, "I always have hope. There is always hope." It surprised me to hear him say that and whether he realized it or not, those words inspired and motivated me during my entire tour.

Before I arrived, I didn't fully appreciate just how much progress has been made in helping the Iraqis rebuild their country. Working with USACE, I now know first hand the hundreds of essential service projects we're currently overseeing and how that work is directly benefiting Iraqi families. There's still a lot of construction remaining.

As I said, this experience has been challenging and rewarding but well worth it. I encourage people who want to make a difference and be part of history to come over here and work with USACE. It's an experience they'll never forget!

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