

# Postcards from Iraq

## In the land of giants, prima donnas need not apply

by Thomas O'Hara  
Omaha District

**W**hen I began my second trip to Baghdad to serve the Corps in Iraq, I assumed nothing would match the experience from last fall. I thought there was no way the Corps service members could measure up to those I had the pleasure to work with last year. I was wrong.

While Baghdad and the rest of Iraq is certainly much different than last year (for the better, despite what the media says), and while the Corps mission has evolved, one thing has remained constant and that is the caliber of those serving here. As titans go, Iraq is certainly the land of giants in the Corps. No matter whatever else I do in the Corps, I will forever be thankful of this opportunity.

There is no way to encapsulate the magnitude and breadth of our mission here. Corps volunteers throughout country are working around the clock to add capacity to the national power grid and to constantly improve the oil exportation and refinery systems to strengthen the Iraqi economy. Thousands of projects in water and wastewater infrastructure improvements, new municipality facilities (schools, hospitals, etc) for the Iraqis and military projects that serve our brave service members in theater add a level of significance to the mission that can not compare to anything we've ever done anywhere else. About one percent of the Corps, roughly 350 members, are managing a construction program of \$12.6 billion in Iraq. It's incredible.

In the faces of the Iraqis you meet, their appreciation and mutual dedication is evident. Iraqis are wonderful people and in no way resemble the fanatics you see on TV. I am humbled every day by their courage and am forever reminded, and thankful, of the freedoms we enjoy back home.

In my duties I am incredibly fortunate to get the chance to see much more of this country than most and witness the amazing impact of our work. I only wish there was a way to package that experience and share it with those at home who only see what is being filtered by the media.

If you're considering volunteering for Iraq I encourage you to do so. But make no mistake – Iraq is tough. The hours will be long, the environment austere, but the payback is ten-fold. I say if you're a prima donna, you need not apply. If you're looking to make a name for yourself, or expect to have your individual needs catered to, then stay home. But if you're willing to roll up your sleeves, suck it up for the good of the fight, and be part of perhaps the most important mission of your career, then I encourage you to come and walk with giants. —T3

In the public affairs capacity, I have had the fortune of seeing the magnitude of the Corps work here in Iraq. Flying from project to project, you can see the progress from the last year and the appreciation from Iraqis in Marsh Arab villages, simple farms, and towns throughout Iraq.



Thomas O'Hara poses with a group of children from the Green Zone school, a local school adopted by Corps personnel. (Photo by Greg Wilson)

