

Postcards from Iraq

Fantastic memories...

My nearly three and a half year tour here in Baghdad, Iraq has been immensely rewarding. I compare this saga to the theme song from "Gilligan's Island." This adventure started out as...a six month tour...a six month tour... more than three years later, it is time to begin a new adventure.

Coming from the Transatlantic Program Center (TAC) was a natural transition because there I was a part of the Reach Back team. But actually being here allows you to understand the urgency with which resolutions to challenges need to be provided. One of my favorite 30-second commercials when trying to recruit colleagues to come over was... "Do you want a fun-filled paid vacation in the sun? Come to beautiful Baghdad!" The commercial did work in fact because several of the TAC-team have been here not just for one tour, but for an additional tour!

There have been several fantastic memories that I will take away. The first is having the privilege of working and dining in a palatial palace. Not many people you encounter can say that. The second and truly most important memory is being an ambassador for the United States of America here in Iraq. For most Iraqis as well as with some of our coalition partners, we may be the only "in the flesh" Americans that they see. It is important to let them know that America is a caring, courteous country with men and women of integrity!

I am also known as the "pin lady." It started out as having a few various type pins on my ID holder that morphed into providing pins to our coalition partners located within the IZ. I have provided friendship pins not only to the Iraqis, but to coalition partners working in the IZ from Pakistan, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Fiji, Peru and Kurdistan. It is a most rewarding experience to hand someone a friendship pin and just say....Have a Great Day! Being part of the humanitarian mission handing out bags of clothing, school supplies and food to Iraqis in local communities within the IZ was also a great experience. We take what families and organizations from the States have sent and share with less fortunate families here. The hope is to have the children of the future generation and the adults see that God loves everyone regardless of what race, religious belief or country you come from.

The mission here is challenging and constantly changing to adapt to the ever changing environment as the Government of Iraq transforms to a democratic society. With all of the work and the long hours, there is still time to have fun. I have enjoyed being a part of the International Zone (IZ) Gospel Choir every Sunday. I am part of the choir back home. Being here is merely an extension of God's family here. I have even had the opportunity to have private violin lessons from one of the GRD family members here. This experience is what you make of it.

The key to success here as in any organization is focusing on people, keeping the team informed, incorporating lessons learned and celebrating successes. I have been given the opportunity to accept various challenges and give the freedom to use my previous experiences to not only excel, but achieve successes.

Coming to Iraq is an experience that I highly recommend to everyone if your family circumstances allow for it. I am extremely grateful to my family and church family for their continuous prayers of protection for not just the civilians, but the military personnel as well. I would also like to send a special Shout It Out to my son Damien for holding down the fort while I have been away. My parting words especially to our Corps of Engineer family are....Come to Iraq and become a part of establishing the course of history for the betterment of the world. It is an experience of a lifetime!



Margret Jones

Gulf Region Division

Baghdad, Iraq