

Postcards from Iraq



Serving in Iraq's "Wild, Wild West"

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Riding back from a construction site the other day, I started thinking back to my 5th grade History class, when we were given an assignment to complete a book report on an American from the 18th or 19th century who'd made a significant contribution towards our nation's development. I was the only person in our class who hadn't checked out a book yet. My teacher angrily sent me back to the library to find someone to do a report on, or else! Noting that I

was discouraged at the prospect of having to write this report, the African-American librarian, Mrs. Burke, said to me; "Oh honey, I have a book I think you'd be interested in." She gave me a book called "Nat Love, Negro Cowboy." After I got home and started reading the book, I couldn't put it down. I was amazed to find out that there had actually been black cowboys in the old American west. And I couldn't figure out why I had never seen any portrayed in the movies?

Today, I'm charged with running an office that manages over \$200M in construction contracts for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the Al Anbar Province of western Iraq – throughout an area of operations the size of South Carolina! My staff and I are primarily responsible for a myriad of vast and complex infrastructure rebuilding and upgrade projects at Al Asad Air Base – which has an airfield alone that's about 3-times the size of LAX's. Al Asad is where Abraham stopped to rest with his family on their journey from Ur to Haran (Genesis 11:31), and it's the location of an oasis where he stopped to drink water from and washed his feet at – hopefully, in that order. :-)

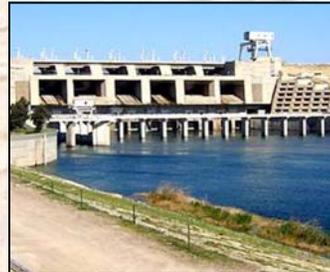
Haditha Dam Ops brief with BG Walsh



"Abraham's Oasis" on Al Asad Air Base



Rawah Health Clinic



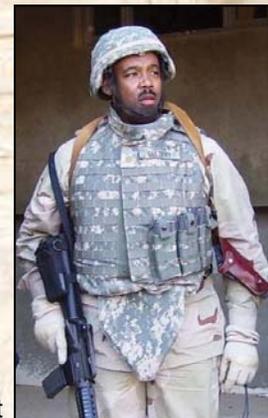
Haditha Dam



Trebil Water Pipe



400kV Transmission Line & Support Towers



Our office also provides oversight on a series of water wells that are being drilled in Trebil on the Jordanian border; we've just finished a Hospital rehabilitation project in Ar Rutbah not too far from Saudi Arabia; we're directing the installation of several electrical substations in Al Qa'im next to Syria; we're supervising the construction of Health Clinics and Primary Schools in the towns of Rawah and Anah along the banks of the Biblically historic Euphrates River; we'll soon be administering a contract for the repairs, widening and repaving of a 90km supply route between Hit and Baghdadi that will offer military convoys a safe and secure alternative to potentially IED laced Iraqi public roads; and we also provide facilities maintenance liaison support to the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity and Ministry of Water Resources at the Haditha Dam Hydro-Electric Power Plant Facility on the southern bank of ancient Lake Qadidiyah. Our office is charged with transforming these two Iraqi Ministries to replicate the Tennessee Valley Authority; in the same way that the U.S. Marine Corps and U.S. Army are trying to develop the Iraqi Army into an 82nd Airborne or Force Recon company, and the Iraqi Police to mirror the LAPD or NYPD.

With all of this globally historic work going on to improve the standard of living, availability of healthcare and education, and the impact this reconstruction will undoubtedly have on the capacity for economic development for this country, I'm often intrigued as to why I've never heard anything from the U.S. national news media about this enormously important work the U.S. military and federal government is doing here in Iraq? To hear nothing positive about our revolutionary efforts in the middle-Eastern news media, you'd surely have to expect. To see nothing but the stories of murder, kidnappings, and bodies being maimed and mutilated as a tool of fear and intimidation by Islamic extremists and Al Qaeda in Iraq – well, what else should you figure? But I'm really disappointed that our own country's press corps could let us down in this way.

LCDR Theron C. Colbert, who grew up in Daytona Beach, now resides with his family in Jacksonville, FL.