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Husband & Wife Team Arrives At Tallil To Share New Adventure In Iraq

By John Connor
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John and Patricia Bilttoft, a married couple just arrived at Tallil for a one year tour with the Gulf Region South district. (USACE photo)

Tallil, Iraq – Adding to the sense of family at the headquarters of the Gulf Region South district of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is a newly-arrived couple, Patricia and John Bilttoft.

Definitely not stay-at-home-and-watch-TV married folks, the Bilttofts are looking forward eagerly to their one year tour in Iraq. Pat will be the personnel officer in GRS and John will work in engineering and construction. Before coming to Iraq, both worked in Germany, where Pat was in the U.S. Army Europe personnel shop and John was with the Criminal Investigation Division.

Pat said some people seem to think the environment in Iraq is too harsh, that it is too hot, that the work is too difficult. But she said they talked to people who have worked in Iraq for the Corps of Engineers and that "we don't know anyone who has come who wouldn't come back."

Pat said a German neighbor asked them why they were going to Iraq and that John responded with a question of his own: "Why don't the Iraqi people deserve the same opportunities to enjoy a good life as the German people?" John, a veteran of 26-and-one-half years of Army service, recalled building projects in Germany as an Army engineer in 1967.

"When I found out my mother was a civilian, I ran away from home," joked John, who said he gets culture shock not by coming to a country such as Iraq but when he goes back to the U.S. and finds things moving in slow motion.

The Bilttofts have been married for 27 years and have five children and five grandchildren. Pat said they both like to fish, and indeed, that they met while fishing in Kansas. They have family in Riley, Kan., but don't currently have a home in the States. After their tour in Iraq, they plan to settle in Guntersville, Ala., where the fishing is good. They also plan on doing some fishing in Iraq. "I brought my

rod," Pat said.

John paraphrased General and later President Dwight Eisenhower as saying during World War II that while he wasn't airborne, he liked being around airborne Soldiers. And John added that after his many years of service, he wanted to stay around Army people. Pat said she was inspired several years ago by a young colleague who left her family, her husband and children, to serve in Iraq, sacrificing to help the Iraqi people. She said that stuck in her mind until she decided that the time had come to do the same thing.

"That just made an impression on me," Pat added.

Neither Pat nor John has worked for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers before. They have tried any number of things over the years, including raising horses and running a hog farm. "We got to do a lot of fun things all over the world," said John.

Why did they sign up for a joint tour in Iraq? "We're together because we're married," said John, who quipped that "the kids wouldn't leave home, so we did." Pat, more seriously, said a joint tour enables them to share a great adventure, to support each other, to avoid separation anxiety, and to try to help the Iraqi people.

Plus, as Pat told John in advocating

their Iraq deployment, "You won't have to cut the grass for a year." John, who related this wifely sales pitch with a smile, said he is very grateful for the opportunity to serve.

Pat, 60, said the chow in Tallil is "not bad," while John, 59, said he needs the exercise and enjoys the walk to the dining facility.



John and Patricia Biltoft, a married couple just arrived for a one year tour with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Iraq, stand outside the headquarters of the Gulf Region South district in Tallil. (USACE photo)

Note: John Connor is the Public Affairs Officer with the Gulf Region South district, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Iraq. For more information, contact Grant Sattler, public affairs officer at 540-665-1233 or email requests to CEGRD.PAO@tac01.usace.army.mil. For more information on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Iraq, visit www.grd.usace.army.mil