



For Immediate Release
December 3, 2007
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Proudest seeing smiling faces of children waving, giving us thumbs up

By A. Al Bahrani
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BASRAH, Iraq – “Relationships are key in my position,” said Army Maj. Rick Smith, whose jobs include coordinating and building relationships between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the British Army.

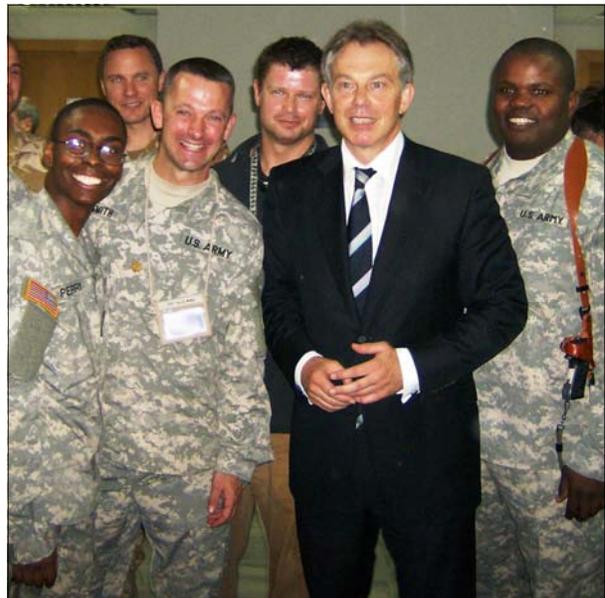
“Each day is always busy,” said the major, who serves as executive officer and operations officer of the Basrah Area Office of the USACE Gulf Region South district as well as the Liaison Officer for Multi-National Division-South East.

Smith said his daily activities typically consist of coordinating and dealing with the J-9 section of the British military, the section involved with reconstruction.

Elaborating on how relationships are central to his job, he said, “I am lucky that one of my best assets is having people to our camp for a meal. We have our own chef and eat with real plates and forks, unlike other camps that use plastic plates and utensils.”

Smith, a North Dakota National Guardsman now into the eighth month of a one-year tour in Iraq, said with regard to performing his multiple duties that “it’s a matter of getting things done now or having to wait a few days.”

He said life is very different in Basrah than at home, where so many things are taken for granted. “Going through the day wondering when the sirens are going to go off, signaling a rocket attack,” he ruminated. “Just seeing something green, like trees or grass.”



Maj. Rick Smith, whose jobs include serving as liaison officer with the British, and others pose with then-British Prime Minister Tony Blair in this May 19, 2007 photo. (Courtesy photo)

“My experience in Iraq is an experience I will never have again in my life,” he said. “Each day a person wakes up, they choose their attitude for that day. I try to wake up each day and make a difference in people’s lives, even if it is just a smile.

“It is difficult being 9,000 miles from my kids, but it is only for one year and the difference we make here each year will last a lifetime,” said Smith, who has two children, Sidney, 7, and Jordan, 11, and who works at home as a district sales

manager with Coca-Cola.

"Our slogan for our unit is 'making a difference,'" he added.

He said the Iraqi people are good natured and deserve a better way of life, and expressed hope that he and other Coalition military and civilian personnel are making things better.

"The thing I feel the proudest of is seeing the smiling faces of the kids, the waving, giving us the thumbs up as we drive by, waving at the helicopter as it flies overhead," Smith said. "The people I have met, the smiles, the kind words."



Maj. Rick Smith, left, poses at Basrah Area Office with coworker Tia Chandler and visiting Brig. Gen. Jeffrey Dorko, commander, Gulf Region Division. (USACE photo by A. Al Bharani)

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