



<Back | 

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## Married Couple Dedicated to Serving in Iraq

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*TIKRIT, Iraq*-What makes a married couple decide to pack their personal belongings and close up the homestead to work in Iraq? Bill and Cathy Hood can answer that question. Married for 14 years and coming from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Kansas City District, the Hoods dedicated this past year to working with the Corps of Engineers in the reconstruction of Iraq.

The beginning of their relationship was an omen of things to come in their married future. Working together in the same office, Bill and Cathy met in Denver, Colo.; Bill active duty Air Force and Cathy working as a civil servant.

Fourteen years later, Bill is now retired from the Air Force and a civil servant himself, though not much has changed from the original scenario. Bill works as a Senior Construction Manager and Cathy works as an Administrative Assistant in the same office; both devoted to the reconstruction effort.



Three years ago, while working the hurricane relief in Florida, Bill heard there was a desperate need for engineers in Iraq and Afghanistan. Feeling the need to go, he discussed with his wife the prospect of working together overseas in a war zone.

"Most of my children are grown and have families of their own," said Bill. "So I wanted to volunteer in hopes that my kids and with small children would not have to go."

"I wanted to help with the mission," said Cathy, "and after hearing of my husband's previous deployment, I knew I wanted to be this time to share this wondrous experience together."

Working side-by-side in country, there are no distractions from the outside world and both dedicate 100 percent of themselves work. While providing guidance and engineering support as needed, Bill hires contractors to construct the schools and drill the small villages in the northern region.

Small villages range from 100 to 500 people - most with one room mud huts for schools and no access to water. Due to the s

wood in the country, most of the new schools are made of block and consist of six classrooms and a playground, very similar to built in the United States. Once complete, Bill has the opportunity to meet the students and teachers.

"In every single case, the people are ecstatic to have something so nice to call their own," said Bill.

Improving the water conditions in these small villages also falls under Bill's purview. Most people haul water to their homes from nearby rivers or hire delivery trucks if available. The water is then stored on their roofs in 500-liter tanks.

Installing a well that will support the entire village will ease the stress of water shortages and the difficulty in transporting it. A daily storage tank built next to the well with a chlorination unit to sanitize the water dramatically improves the quality. In some cases, if funds are available, a water pipe network is installed to hook the homes directly to the well or to at least bring the water closer to the village.

"There are too many good things happening here that are not being promoted," Cathy explains when asked why this mission is important. "There are more good people in Iraq than bad and they are grateful to the U.S."

Watching Iraqi families live without the daily essentials of water, electricity and sewage gives the Hoods a new perspective on life. Experiencing this as a couple has strengthened their marriage and gives them a new appreciation for each other, their families and their way of life.

"This was an eye-opening experience for me," said Cathy. "I've always known there were people in other countries without these necessities. I now realize how well we live in the U.S and will no longer take for granted the water running in my sink and the electricity in my house."

"This country and its people desperately need our help," said Bill. "This is a worthwhile cause. If we (the U.S.) pull out now, it will devastate the country. The basic infrastructure is not in place yet. We owe it to them to finish the job."

Leaving children and grandchildren behind was hard, but the rewards outweigh the temporary sacrifices of serving in Iraq. The people, Bill, a graduate from the University of Missouri and a native of Annuitt, Mo.; Cathy a graduate of South High School in Dallas, will leave this country knowing they made a difference and a contribution to the reconstruction effort.

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