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# Media Release

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## **Lexington man returns home after spending nearly 4 months in Iraq with the Army Corps of Engineers**

**By Eric Cramer**

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Americans have conflicting images of Iraq. Many envision a sprawling desert with picturesque scenes of oases and camels. Others see the country as an urban zone of terrorism and violence.

Neither is accurate, said Dereck Wansing, 31, of Lexington, Mo., an engineering technician with the Hydrology and Hydraulics section of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Kansas City District.

“I never saw a one camel, not one, in Iraq,” Wansing said after completing a 120-day assignment in Iraq where he served as a quality assurance specialist on construction projects.

Although he works in hydrology in his Kansas City office, Wansing owns rental real estate in and around Lexington and has construction experience that led him to his quality assurance role in Iraq. He worked with contractors and their employees on the completion of several projects.

Wansing is one of the more than 330 military and civilian employees who have deployed to Iraq to work closely with the Coalition Provisional Authority to rebuild the country’s infrastructure in the wake of war and more than three decades of dictatorship.

“I think within the next six months, you will see a large difference in the quality of life for the Iraqi people, and within a year there will be a huge difference and it will keep getting better,” said Lt. Gen. Robert Flowers, chief of engineers.

Despite the global importance of these missions, Wansing said he volunteered to go to Iraq out of curiosity.

“I didn’t think I’d ever have a chance to go to that side of the world. It was an opportunity to and see what it was like over there,” he said. “I started calling to see how quickly I could get on. It was a pretty fast turn around once I started talking to the right people.”

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After taking initial training in Fort Bliss, Texas, Wansing traveled from the sands of Texas to the sands of Kuwait Sept. 11, 2003.

Wansing then spent a couple of days in Kuwait before flying to Balad, a city north of Baghdad to begin his quality assurance mission and take up his new residence in Camp Anaconda, a tent city he describes as “deserty.”

“I had access to a PX (post exchange), telephones and the Internet the whole time I was there,” he said. “A lot of people don’t get to have that.”

It was while on a trip to get fuel and visit the PX that Wansing had a pleasant surprise. A veteran of the Lexington, Mo.-based Company C, 110<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion, Missouri Army National Guard, Wansing recognized a member of his former unit beside the road.

“He was with a group of five guys from my old unit who were attached there,” Wansing said. “It was just a shock to be on the other side of the world, and be in this tent city near Baghdad International Airport where there are 5,000 people, and see someone I knew from Harden.

“I just couldn’t believe it,” Wansing said.

As a quality assurance specialist, he worked with many contract employees who were assisting in the country’s rebuilding.

He said in the course of working with Iraqis, Jordanians and Egyptians he came to know quite a bit about their culture.

“Their Thursday night is like our Saturday night,” Wansing said. “People get married on Thursday – I had one guy tell me they always get married on Thursday. You could hear explosions and gunfire every night, but you’d really hear and see fireworks on Thursday night,” Wansing said.

Wansing also made it a point to sample the local food, eating frequently with his Middle Eastern coworkers.

“There was a lot of lamb and chicken. Lamb is their main meat. I enjoyed it,” he said.

He said the people he worked with were enthusiastic about their jobs.

“They told us the typical salary in Baghdad was about \$2.50 a day, and the contractors are paying them between \$7 and \$10 a day, so maybe that was the incentive,” he said.

Wansing returned to his Lexington home Dec. 20.