

Argus Leader

Internet helps soldier see son's graduation

Project possible through Freedom Calls

By Jon Walker

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Sharon Frisbie will have her heart in two places Sunday, but an Internet innovation will ease the pain.

Her husband, Gerald, is at war in Iraq, where he's a forward observer for a U.S. infantry convoy.

Her son, Jordan, will graduate from Lincoln High School during a 7 p.m. ceremony at the Sioux Falls Arena.

A two-way video hookup will connect them and be a test case in the school district's ongoing efforts to help families enjoy educational milestones.

From Iraq, Staff Sgt. Frisbie will watch Jordan and his classmates in their Arena procession. A camera will follow Jordan to his seat and follow him up the ramp to receive his diploma. Jordan then will leave the stage and speak with his father at a laptop computer with the ceremony continuing on the platform behind him.

"We're excited about it," said Sharon Frisbie, 46, who works for Midland National Life. "We can't be together physically. We can be together through technology."

She's been down this road before. Two years ago, Sgt. Frisbie missed their older son David's graduation. "He was on a plane coming back from Afghanistan," she said.

Two weeks ago, daughter Janice graduated from the University of South Dakota, and this time he was watching by two-way video as the ceremony proceeded in Vermillion.

The hookup is possible through Freedom Calls, an agency that connects families to servicemen and women. Such connections occur 2,000 times a month for graduations, births and weddings, said spokesman John Harlow from New Jersey. Freedom Calls pays for this and sent the district the \$80 baseball-sized camera for Sunday's event.

The school district's only burden is to make it work. Mike Koepke, a technician at Lincoln High, has been leading that effort. Nicholas Peterson, a South Dakota State University intern from Beresford, will handle the camera.

Jordan Frisbie, who turns 18 today, is a slender, curly-haired student who works at Walgreen's and plans to study biology this fall at USD. Peterson will track Jordan but also show the rest of the 75-minute program for Jordan's father.

A brief announcement will inform the audience without other fanfare, assistant principal Mike Klinedinst said.

"From the start, Sharon was always interested in the integrity and respect of the other students graduating. It's their day, too," Klinedinst said.

Sgt. Frisbie, who works at StarMark, is on his third war tour, this one with the 133rd Infantry with the Iowa National Guard in Waterloo. He went to Iraq in April 2006 and thought he'd be home by April this year.

In January, he learned that was being extended 125 days.

That should bring him home in August, in time to help send Jordan off to USD.

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