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Marine corporal in Iraq drops in on sister's nuptials

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Gary Fore figured out the surprise just minutes before he was to officiate at his daughter's wedding Saturday afternoon.

At first he could not understand why a video camera, laptop computer and a giant, pull-down screen were set up in the room where the wedding was to be held in the Emily Morgan Hotel.

Then it dawned on him, but he kept mum.

As his wife, Linda, walked their daughter Amy down the short aisle, she didn't notice the big screen behind her, now filled with the face of her son, Cpl. Ronald Fore, stationed in Iraq.

Gary Fore welcomed the wedding's special guest, but still Linda didn't get it.

Finally, bridegroom Steve Stanfield pointed behind her.

Linda Fore turned, sucked in her breath, and began to cry.

The Fore family has not seen their son, husband and brother since his Marine reserve unit, based at Fort Sam Houston, was deployed in January.

But thanks to the Freedom Calls Foundation, he was able to virtually attend his sister's wedding.

"When I realized what was happening I just couldn't believe it," said Gary Fore, tears still in his eyes.

When Ron's face filled the screen just moments before the ceremony began, "I gave him the thumbs up and a hoorah!"



(Photos by Shauna Bittle/Express-News)

Above: Ron Fore speaks with wife Tiffany and sons Caleb and Joshua during the reception of his sister Amy's wedding. Tiffany cried during the ceremony when she discovered that Ron was there via teleconference.

Below: Amy Stanfield, Tiffany Fore and her sons Caleb (standing) and Joshua speak with Tiffany's husband, Cpl. Ronald Fore, via teleconference.



After the service, family members, including Fore's wife Tiffany and their sons, Caleb, 4, and Joshua, 2, were able to stand in front of a video camera and talk to him. They were also able to transmit a slide show of family photos.

While one person spoke to Ron, the rest of the wedding party could see him on the big screen, as well as what he was seeing, in the bottom left corner of the screen.

The bride discovered freedomcalls.org while doing research online on what she could send to her brother in a care package.

At first she feared she would not be able to afford the service. But Freedom Calls, a non-profit organization run on donations, offers video hookups to families of American servicemen and women overseas.

Fore had to travel about an hour from where he's stationed to the Iraqi city Al Asad, to hook in.

Amy originally thought her family would have to troop down to the nearest Kinko's after the wedding to see her brother.

But the folks at Freedom Calls had another idea.

They worked with William Brendel, the Emily Morgan's general manager, to bring Fore right into the hotel.

They shipped the laptop and Web cam to the hotel, then tested it on Thursday and Friday.

Even with multiple tests, both to the Freedom Calls offices in New York and to a tech sergeant in Al Asad, Brendel admits he was nervous.

But the hookup went without a hitch.

"And it added so much emotion to the wedding," Brendel said. "I'm so happy we could do it."

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