



# Technology connects loved ones

## Families see those in Iraq

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January 29, 2007

Cellular phones, online instant messaging programs and Web cameras help Royce Wainright stay in touch with his son, Donovan Wainright, a private first class serving in the Army at Camp Taji in Iraq.

Although they communicate on a regular basis, those technologies have limits, Royce Wainright said.

Royce Wainright and other family members recently talked to Donovan Wainright for more than an hour in a video conference arranged by volunteers with AT&T Pioneers and the Freedom Calls Foundation.

"It's just like you're talking to him on the phone, and you can see him," Royce Wainright said.

When a family member requests the service, volunteers with AT&T make sure the serviceman or woman is at one of the camps with the video-conference technology, said Tara Beekman, a volunteer with AT&T Pioneers. Military servicemen and women are allowed about one hour of video phone calls per month.

"It's on an ongoing basis," she said.

The service is free to the families, although just a few families have used the service in Amarillo, Beekman said.

Talking to Donovan Wainright through the video phone service was priceless, Royce Wainright said.

"They're wonderful folks who are trying to help out parents who have kids in Iraq," Royce Wainright said.

Donovan Wainwright graduated from Caprock High School in 2002. In high school, he competed in football and wrestling. He was in the Army for 17 months before going to Iraq, his dad said.

Being so far away from their big brother is hard for younger sister Jackie Wainright, a freshman at Caprock High School, and younger brother Jeffery Wainright, 11 and a sixth-grader at Bowie Middle School.

"It's scary," Jackie said. "That's my best friend."

Today is Jackie's 15th birthday, and she will not be able to celebrate with her big brother. Donovan Wainright often takes his younger sister shopping for her birthday and usually is the one who shoves cake in her mouth, Jackie said. She misses her brother, she said.

"I can't go talk to him every time I'm having something wrong," she said.

Donovan Wainright's mother, Serena Wainright, teared up when she talked about her son.

"I'm proud of him," Serena Wainright said. "I'm very scared for him. I pray to God that he comes home safe."

With the daily news reports of bombs and violence in Iraq, Serena Wainright is eager for the war to end so that her son and the children of other mothers can return home.

Regular communication lets Serena Wainright know that her son is OK, she said. Talking to him through the video phone service was an emotional experience, she said.

"I just started bawling," Serena Wainright said. "I got him crying."

### **Long-distance connection**

AT&T Pioneers, a volunteer organization of phone service employees and retirees, and the Freedom Calls Foundation help to connect military families through video phone calls.

Military personnel are allowed one hour of video calls per month. The service is free to families.

To arrange a video phone call, contact Tara Beekman at 806-378-1634 or [tb1763@att.com](mailto:tb1763@att.com)

For more information: Visit [Freedomcalls.org](http://Freedomcalls.org)