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Troops in Iraq, Afghanistan to get free Web-based calls, e-mail, videoconferencing

By [Karen Jowers](#)

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Free Web-based phone calls, e-mail and video conferencing are coming to about 40,000 troops in Iraq and Afghanistan in the next two to three months.

The first facility with donated technology providing free phone calls over the Internet is due to open by June 14 at Camp Cooke, Iraq. Another eight facilities are expected to be up and running in Iraq within the next 60 to 90 days, along with two more in Afghanistan.

The 11 facilities will serve a total of about 40,000 troops, said John Harlow, executive director of Freedom Calls Foundation, a public charity based in Brooklyn Heights, N.Y.

“Hopefully, we can get enough donations to provide access for every single service member in Iraq and Afghanistan by the end of the year,” Harlow said.

The Foundation’s first facility at Camp Cooke will serve 10,000 to 12,000 troops 24 hours a day free. The facility has 50 computers, six of them dedicated video conferencing stations and 30 with Voice Over Internet Protocol telephone capability. VOIP allows phone calls to travel over the Internet to telephones in the United States.

The public charity plans to begin installing facilities at military bases in the United States within the next month for families without broadband access at home to conduct video conferences, starting with bases that have large populations of deployed troops, Harlow said.

People who already have broadband access at home can be connected for free to the Freedom Calls network to do video conferencing anytime they want to talk with their troops. To connect their families, troops should notify the point of contact at their local Freedom Calls facility.

The request must be initiated by the service member “so that we’ll know he has the capability to communicate” with family members at home, Harlow said.

Troops interested in having a Freedom Calls facility at their camp should pass a request up through their chain of command, or send an e-mail to [Harlow](#).

