



Family reunites with Marine by videoconference

By Eric Russell

Friday, August 03, 2007 - Bangor Daily News

HOLDEN - The young man's face appeared on the 42-inch widescreen television, prompting smiles from a room full of family members.

Autumn Marie Lewis, all of 19 months old and wearing a brand-new pink dress for the occasion, kissed her father's face on the screen and giggled.

The family of Marine Cpl. Barry Lewis of Holden didn't get to see the 22-year-old dad in person because he is in Iraq, but they got the next closest thing.

Thanks to a nonprofit organization known as the Freedom Calls Foundation,

Lewis' mother, stepfather, brother and sister, along with his wife and daughter, spent more than an hour Thursday talking to the Marine by satellite videoconference.



Nineteen-month-old Autumn Lewis gets a lift from her grandmother, Marie Cormier, so she can "kiss" her father, Corporal Barry Lewis, during a video conferencing call on Thursday, August 2, 2007. Lewis extended family gathered in Cormier's Holden home for the event, which was made possible by the Freedom Calls Foundation. Lewis, a Marine, is currently serving in Iraq. (Bangor Daily News/Kate Collins)

"You look so good, Barry," Marie Cormier told her son, who is stationed in Fallujah, Iraq.

"We can't wait to see you back here," added his stepdad, Tommy Cormier.

Cpl. Lewis spent several minutes describing how he has been spending his days, without giving away too many details.

"It's hot," he said, describing a recent night when at 10 the temperature was still 119 degrees.

"Quit whining," his wife, Priscilla Lewis, joked. Her T-shirt had a picture of a heart with the words "half my heart is deployed."



Priscilla Lewis smiles as she sees and talks with her husband, Marine Corporal Barry Lewis, during a video conferencing call on Thursday, August 2, 2007. Lewis's family gathered in his mother's Holden home for the event. Lewis is currently deployed to Iraq. (Bangor Daily News/Kate Collins)

Barry Lewis, a graduate of Brewer High School, met his wife in North Carolina when he spent a year there living with his father.

Priscilla Lewis said they each had a crush on the other but didn't act on it until after Barry graduated and returned to North Carolina.

"Apparently, he wanted to find me," she said. "We started dating on April 1, were married on April 29 and found out we were pregnant in mid-May."

Priscilla and Autumn now are staying with Lewis' family in Holden.

The corporal is on his second tour of duty in Iraq. He previously spent seven months overseas and then several months home before being redeployed.

During the first tour, Lewis missed the birth of his daughter.

He's scheduled to return home next month, but for now, his family is ecstatic just to see Lewis on the big screen.

"I'm so high on life right now," Marie Cormier said Thursday afternoon.

The only problem Thursday was the satellite delay, which took some getting used to on both sides.

Freedom Calls, a New Jersey-based charity unaffiliated with the military, provides a satellite network to connect families in the U.S. with their loved ones serving overseas. Executive Director John Harlow said the organization has been active for about three years.

"We are performing what we believe is a vital function for military families," Harlow said Wednesday by telephone.

Harlow said the foundation started after someone heard news of a soldier's \$7,000 cell phone bill.

Unfortunately, Freedom Calls operates on donated money and the well is running pretty dry.

"We could be shut off at any moment," he said. "Our satellite provider is threatening to shut us down. We need the public's support."

The Freedom Calls Foundation is based in Morristown, N.J. For more information, visit the Web site at www.freedomcalls.org.