



Foundation helps keep soldiers connected

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The Freedom Calls Foundation is a non-profit that provides free communication services for forces in Iraq and their families at home.

John Harlow, executive director of the New York-based foundation, said it was started because a need for more Internet communication in Iraq was evident.

"We started this because we heard soldiers had \$5,000 cell phone bills," he said. "For the first time in history we can do this. Our vision is that a war fighter can come off the battlefield and spend virtual time with family every day. Soldiers may now keep their commitments to their families while keeping their commitments to their country thousands of miles away."

For more information, log onto www.freedomcalls.org.



Hamm works in one of four Freedom Calls call centers in Iraq.

What follows are excerpts from an instant-message chat between Caller-Times reporter Nancy Martinez and SSG Lisa Hamm from Fort Hood who works in one of four Freedom Calls Foundations call centers in Iraq.

Hamm, 30, is with the Headquarters Substainment Support Brigade, 4th Infantry Division. This is her first time at war.

Martinez: Hello.

Hamm: Hi there

Martinez: My name is Nancy Martinez, I'm a projects & investigative reporter at the Corpus Christi Caller-Times. Thanks for chatting with me.

Hamm: no problem

Hamm: We run 26 computers and 14 phones for the soldiers. We give them a 30-minute time limit to use each facility.

Hamm: The phones can dial anywhere for free, no calling cards necessary. They can even make international calls. As for the computers we allow web chat so they can chat back and forth with their families. Each soldier can submit a request to VTC (Video Teleconferences) with their family members.

Martinez: How easy is it for military to get access?

Hamm: It's so easy all they have to do is come to the building show an id card and Badda Bing Badda Boom they are connected.

Martinez: How important is Internet communication to military forces?

Hamm: We had one VTC (video teleconference) that the soldier was actually able to see his newborn baby after she was born. Then another soldier wanted to be there for his daughter's first birthday. FCF (Freedom Calls Foundation) is so important to the soldiers because it gives you a relaxed place to hang out and watch some TV while you're waiting in line for the phones and computers.

Hamm: It saves the soldiers money and it shows them that there's a group out there willing to dedicate their time and efforts to connect them to their families. You should see the smiles on the soldiers' faces when we connect them on the VTC.

Martinez: So what if soldiers and Marines didn't have an Internet connection?

Hamm: Then it would be even hard to keep in contact with your families, it takes the mail about 8 days to get here but even longer for our letters to get out. So you couldn't stay in touch on what's going on with the families back at home. I think a lot of soldiers would drift even further apart from their families or they wouldn't get the morale support they need to make it through this deployment.

Hamm: Our families are what keeps us going and to know there are people everywhere that support us defending our country. We would worry even more if we didn't know what was going on at home.