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Marine has chat with family via teleconference from Iraq

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The family of Antonio Goes, who is serving in Iraq, talked with him via teleconference at Londonderry High School's library on Thursday morning. Front to back are Mark Dingman and Dawne Goes, Anthony Goes and Nancy Goes, along with Jacob Dingman, seven weeks old.

LONDONDERRY — Thanks to the wonders of technology, Lance Cpl. Tony Goes met his 7-week-old nephew, Jacob Dingman, for the first time yesterday.

Goes, who is stationed at the Al Asad U.S. Marine Corps Base in Iraq, got to talk to his family via a teleconference at Londonderry High School yesterday.

With tears rolling down her cheeks, Dawne Goes, 23, proudly held up her new son to the video monitor so her brother could see him.

"Say 'hi' to uncle Tony," she said.

"What's with the hair?" Goes teased. "He looks like a little gremlin."

Goes' parents, Anthony and Nancy Goes of Londonderry, his sister Dawne, and Dawne's significant other, Mark Dingman, were seated around the distance education equipment compliments of Londonderry High School and Freedom Calls. The organization, headquartered in Brooklyn, N.Y., is a nonprofit foundation that makes it possible for families to reunite from 8,000 miles away.

The foundation has launched Operation Hometown Link, hooking up soldiers with their families via long-distance video equipment. The foundation uses schools, universities and corporations that have offered to allow military families to access their video conferencing facilities, such as the one at Londonderry High School.

Yesterday, after a little awkwardness knowing that they had an audience of media personnel and students in the school's library — the family loosened up.

Goes began making faces and telling the family that he thought the bags under his eyes were permanent.

"It's 19:12 over here," Goes said. "In English, that's 7:12, Dawne."

"Those two are thousands of miles apart, and they still tease each other," chided Nancy Goes.

Nancy Goes asked her son if he had any idea how much 47 Beanie Babies weigh. Tony Goes had sent them to baby Jacob, and Nancy Goes picked them up at the post office.

"I had a flag dedicated to Jake," Tony Goes told his sister and Dingman. "We can have the flag that is flown each day dedicated to someone, and they make up a certificate. I'll send it soon."

Goes' father, a former Marine, stood up and showed his son the back of the leather jacket he was wearing with the U.S. Marine logo on it.

Nancy Goes asked her son about his ankle. "I was running down a road and twisted my ankle," he said. His mom offered to send him ice packs but he said he'd probably be home before they got there.

"There's a Burger King on the base," Goes said. "It's kind of sketchy though. I think we're eating camel burgers."

Goes asked Dingman to describe the place where he and Dawne are living in South Berwick, Maine.

"I hope there's a big kitchen for Dawne to burn everything," he said.

Goes and his sister stopped teasing each other long enough for Goes to ask about mutual friends. He noticed that Jacob fell asleep. "He's a champ," he said.

Goes left for Iraq in September 2005 and is due home to Londonderry mid-May for a visit before heading back to San Diego where he will be stationed for two and a half more years.

"He turned 21 in Iraq," his mom said.

Goes grew up in Dracut, Mass., and graduated from Dracut High School in 2002. He attended the University of Massachusetts Lowell for one year and then joined the Marine Corps. He works the night shift from 4 p.m. to 4 a.m. as a logistics analyst.

Goes told his family that the water in Iraq is so dirty he feels worse after taking a shower. He also said there are camel spiders that jump 4 feet high.

He told his family that being in Iraq was an enlightening experience, but he still wants to leave.

"I need to see the beach," he said "Then I'll be fine."

Goes is scheduled to leave Iraq on April 15. He will go to San Diego and then come home to Londonderry for 10 days.

Toward the end of the almost 90-minute conference, Goes looked at his mother and said, "I'm so far away, Mom. It's so sandy and dirty here. But how are you?"

Nancy Goes said after the conference that her son had been his usual jocular self.

"He told us that he'll be fine, I believe him," she said. "It seems like the only thing he'll have flashbacks about are those camel spiders."

The family found out about the teleconference a month ago but didn't know exactly when it would take place. Lynne Jackson, a media specialist at Londonderry High, tested the school's distance education equipment with Freedom Calls and the base camp last week. When it was successful, John Harlow, who co-founded the program and is its executive director, let the family know of the date and time.

"We e-mail all the time, but to see Tony and talk to him at the same time was wonderful," his mom said.