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Iraq war soldiers talk to Spring Grove students

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Sophomores at Spring Grove Area High School say they don't have a real grasp of what life is like for soldiers serving in Iraq.

They wonder about everything from what the soldiers eat to what they think of the war.

"We hear about it, but it's mostly hearing about bombings," said sophomore Brittany McClung. "I want to hear about their experience."

The students got answers to their questions Wednesday during a video conference between classes at Spring Grove and Fairfield high schools and four soldiers serving in the U.S. Army and Air Force at Camp Taji in Iraq.



Pfc. Lesley Dees and Sgt. Angela Younger-Embree, both stationed at Camp Taji in Iraq, talk to students from Spring Grove and Fairfield high schools Wednesday morning in Spring Grove via video conference. (Evening Sun Photo by James Robinson)

Thanks to a satellite link set up by the Freedom Calls Foundation, a nonprofit organization that provides telephone and video-conference services to military personnel, the students were able to spend about an hour talking with the soldiers and learning about their lives.

Some of the information the soldiers provided surprised the students.

The students asked Sgt. Angela Younger-Embree, an information-systems analyst, if she would have joined the Army if she knew the war was going to happen. To their surprise, Younger-Embree said she enlisted for five years after Sept. 11, 2001 - during October 2002 - and has since re-enlisted for another six years.

"It's tough at first, then you kind of get used to it," she said. "It's heart-wrenching still when my 4-year-old son says, 'Mom, I want you here to sing me to sleep.'"



Kaydee Muntz left and Amanda Parker listen. (Evening Sun Photo by James Robinson)

But when asked, Younger-Embree and the other soldiers said they have no regrets about enlisting or re-enlisting.

"What you see on television is not always what's going on here," said Master Sgt. Craig Colton. "There's some good things happening. We are making a difference here and I think we're doing the right thing."

The students were also surprised to hear the living conditions on the military base aren't as bad as people assume, according to the soldiers.

Younger-Embree said she lives in an air-conditioned building, which she feels lucky to have since other soldiers are living in trailers that do not contain restrooms.

Aside from one incident of rockets striking several shops nearby, she said the camp is "fairly safe."

Colton said the food compares to what you would find on a cruise.

"It's difficult to control your appetite. That's one thing the Army does well," he said with a laugh.

Sophomore Jen Peterson said after the video conference that the soldiers' living conditions surprised her.

"They're not as bad as I thought," she said.

She added that the video conference helped the students understand what goes into a soldier's day-to-day life.

"I think we all know more now," Peterson said.

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