

KILLEEN DAILY HERALD

The day of his daughter's wedding

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**By Robert Nathan
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The 8,000-mile separation between Army Spc. Lance Rollason and his daughter was not enough for him to miss out on her wedding Saturday.

By videoconference, Rollason's daughter Stanlisha Topper exchanged vows with Pvt. Dwayne Baldrige, 20, in the KNCT-TV studios at Central Texas College.



Herald/STACEY CRAWFORD

Spc. Lance Rollason watches via satellite as his daughter, Stanlisha Topper, kisses her new husband, Pvt. Dwayne Baldrige, at a small wedding ceremony in the KNCT-TV studio at Central Texas College on Saturday. Rollason is serving with the 4th Infantry Division in Iraq, and Baldrige will be deployed with the 1st Cavalry Division when it heads to Iraq later this year.

Rollason's participation in the wedding was made possible through the Freedom Calls Foundation, a public charity communications network dedicated to providing videoconferencing, telephone and Internet services to enable troops in Iraq and Afghanistan to keep in touch with their families and loved ones at no cost.

"Thanks a lot for doing this," Rollason told the Freedom Calls Foundation in the videoconference. "I'll defend your freedom for the next couple months to pay you back."

Stanlisha, 18, said the two decided to get married only a few weeks ago.

Baldrige said, "We could have held out longer, but we didn't want to because we love each other."

Before the bride approached the altar, and before "The Wedding March" was played over a loudspeaker, Baldrige and Rollason had their last conversations before officially becoming family.

"I'm ready when you are," Rollason said. "You didn't forget the ring, did you?"

His soon-to-be son-in-law smiled and then grabbed his best man to show that he brought the wedding ring.

After the rings were exchanged and Justice of the Peace John Guinn pronounced the couple man and wife, Rollason congratulated them and asked the newlyweds and the audience of about 20, about the post-wedding celebrations.

"Isn't this a Texas wedding?" Rollason asked. "Where is the beer?"

Although there was no beer in the KNCT-TV studios, Stanlisha was quick to fulfill her father's request. One of the wedding guests picked up a rose and handed it to Stanlisha.

"This bud is for you, Dad," she told her father.

KNCT-TV has opened its doors every Thursday this summer to enable many local military families to see and interact with their loved ones serving in Iraq over the Freedom Calls satellite network.

"The foundation is transforming a long-standing family communication paradigm in the time of war by enabling soldiers in the war zone to attend and participate in milestone family events like weddings. Soldiers are now in the position to keep their commitments to their families at the same time they keep their commitment to their country thousands of miles away," said John Harlow, executive director of the Freedom Calls Foundation.

Stanlisha's mother, Jera Ryan, said, "It was very important to Stanlisha that her dad be able to attend her wedding; I called the foundation, and they made all the arrangements. This is a dream come true."

Baldrige will be leaving for his first tour of duty in November, when Rollason will be returning from Camp Cooke in Taji, Iraq.

The foundation's Web site is www.freedomcalls.org.

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