



## Company will provide video calls to Iraq

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Family members of military personnel in Iraq will soon have to go no further than Triangle Telephone Cooperative in Havre to see a loved one, thanks to Freedom Calls Foundation.

The national organization in April began to give soldiers in Iraq the opportunity to video conference with family members throughout the country. With the help of Vision Net, a company owned in part by Triangle Telephone Cooperative, Montana is next.

Vision Net has volunteered to do all the administrative work to coordinate the calls, spokesman Bill Baillie said. There are between 150 to 200 video conference sites in the state, including several in Havre, that can serve as a call site with Iraq.

"It doesn't make a lot of difference where you live," Baillie said. "There's probably a facility in your town or no more than a half hour drive" away.

Vision Net regularly coordinates video conference calls on behalf of hospitals or schools. The service allows doctors to consult with patients living in remote areas. It allows schools with limited course offerings to take advantage of another school's classes.

In addition to sites served by Vision Net, there are several video conference networks set up by hospitals, as well as a state network, Baillie said. Those sites will all potentially be available for calls.

The calls will be free, he said.

"The Montana side is the easy side. We can make it happen over here," Baillie said. "It's getting the servicemen to a site in Iraq that is the limiting factor."

"It'd be great if we can get hooked up to do it," Clint Dumas said. Dumas, a member of the Montana Army National Guard, is home on leave, but will be stationed in northern Iraq when he returns at the end of the month. He said he's not sure if he could get to Baghdad for a call.

The only call facilities in Iraq are in Baghdad and Fallujah. The Freedom Calls Foundation is planning to make eight more sites available in Iraq, as well as two in Afghanistan.

Dumas said he will happily take advantage of the service if he can.

In order to arrange a call, the service person in Iraq needs to schedule a time that he or she can be present at either Camp Cooke or Camp Fallujah, Baillie said. The Army will then contact Freedom Calls. It, in turn, will contact Vision Net to find a Montana location for the family to use.

Baillie said several school superintendents have given out their home and cell phone numbers, telling Baillie to get them out of bed if there is a phone call that can be placed into their schools, no matter the time.

Nicole Johnson's husband is serving with the 163rd infantry in Iraq.

"Any way to see his face would be pretty neat," she said. "Especially for the kids more than anything."

Johnson's three children are 7, 3 and 2. She said her 3-year-old son was a wreck the first time her husband returned to Iraq, but was more comfortable the second time he left.

"For my son to be able to see him - that Daddy's still here," she said. "And the same for me. It'll reinforce that I have a live husband, not just a phone friend."

Johnson's husband is also far from Fallujah and Baghdad and probably would not be able to take advantage of the video conference service until there is a closer site, but Johnson said she's glad some people will be able to begin using the service soon.

"There's always somebody that needs it more than I do," she said. "If somebody gets to see their spouse, if somebody can see them, that's important."