

## **Marines stationed in Iraq visit Lehigh University via video Teleconference bridges gap between troops and students.**

By Stephanie Fails Of The Morning Call  
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Lehigh University students saw a side of the war in Iraq Tuesday that they won't see on TV.

Video conferencing technology allowed the students to talk directly with 11 troops stationed more than 6,000 miles away in northern Iraq.

The videoconference was the third installment of a series called "Inside Iraq," which was arranged by Lehigh's Global Union to give students a better understanding of life in the war-torn country.

The Freedom Calls Foundation, a public charity that helps troops stationed overseas connect with family and friends, coordinated the conference using its satellite network.

About 50 students gathered in a large lecture hall for an hourlong question and answer session with 11 troops, whose images were projected on a movie screen.

Sophomore Evan Spark-Depass said that the conference didn't change his opinion about the war, but, "it definitely put more of a human perspective on things."

Junior Joseph D'Elia, a cadet in Lehigh's ROTC program, said he attended to get an idea of what he will be going through after graduation.

"I just wanted to see their experience through their mouths and their eyes instead of through the media," he said.

The troops, Marines stationed at Al Asad Airfield, said that the media only report negative aspects of the war. They were only identified by rank and last name in the conference.

"I would like the entire world to see exactly what is going on here," said Lance Cpl. Howard. "It's not like 'Oh no, everyone's dying out here!' There's more good being done than bad."

The troops could not discuss their day-to-day activities for security reasons, but referred to rebuilding the country's schools and training its security forces as some of the most beneficial work they've done.

Howard said he would like to see the media compare the condition of Iraq's cities from before and after the invasion to show how much the country has improved.

Lance Cpl. Martinez said that the Iraqi people have become more trusting of American troops

because of the humanitarian work they've done.

"More and more of the Iraqi people are turning in insurgents," he said.

Lance Cpl. Hughes said that American forces have maintained security at crowded public events since the invasion, but this will be the first year that security for all events related to Ramadan, the Muslim holy month, will be run by Iraqi security forces.

"That's really a big step for them," Hughes said.

The Marines unanimously answered yes when an audience member asked them if they believe in what they are doing in Iraq. However, they all agreed that they would come home if they could, even though they know that won't be soon.

"You'll probably be collecting social security by the time that we leave," Hughes said.

Howard said that American troops will not leave until Iraqi forces are able to maintain security in the country.

"We're going to be here for as long as it takes," he said.

The Marines, who volunteered to speak in the conference, encouraged the crowd of students who gathered in Lehigh's Whitaker Laboratory to show their support by sending care packages and letters to troops stationed overseas. They said they appreciated that students cared enough to attend the conference.

One student, sophomore Hilary Chadwick, says she has already sent encouraging e-mails to troops and would definitely be interested in sending care packages.

"I think it's encouraging to see them smiling and laughing and wanting to talk to us," she said.

[stephanie.fails@mcall.com](mailto:stephanie.fails@mcall.com)

610-861-8626