

Video connects Marine to home in Guam

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Although separated from his family by thousands of miles of ocean and war-ravaged terrain, U.S. Marine Pfc. Victor Mario Lagaña Borja was with them in their Talofoto home yesterday.

Borja, who is fighting the War on Terror in Taqaddum, Iraq, spoke to and was able to see his father, Vic; mother, Beverly; sister, Melody; and brother, Matt, for about an hour via Web conference.

A few minutes after Beverly Borja secured a live feed, her son walked into an empty room at his camp and unstrapped himself from combat gear -- all seen through her laptop.

The cyberspace gathering was made possible through the efforts of the U.S.-based nonprofit Freedom Calls Foundation. It was the first video conference between a Guam family and a front-line U.S. service member conducted by the organization, according to the foundation.

"We're very, very happy," Beverly Borja said. "It's different than talking on the phone. With this camera he came home for a visit."

Before yesterday, the Talofoto family had not been able to see and speak simultaneously with their son and brother through any platform, Beverly Borja said. The family first had to upgrade their computer system and Internet service.

And they prepared and planned it as best they could, she said.



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U.S. Marine PFC Victor Mario Lagaña Borja, 21, appears on his family's laptop computer during a live Web conference from Taqaddum, Iraq on April 5.



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Melody Borja, left, Beverly Borja, middle, and Matt Borja smile while speaking to U.S. Marine PFC Victor Mario Lagaña Borja, 21, during a live Web conference from Taqaddum, Iraq on April 5.

"We all prepared the house like he was actually coming home. We panned the computer across the entire area, and took the laptop and camera outside to show him the cars and the dogs," Beverly Borja said. "We wanted to fill every moment with an experience and try to give him as much of the house and of us as possible."

Good times

After some camera adjustments, the close-knit family quickly hit it off and almost instantly, all of them were laughing.

Victor Borja spoke about his experiences, and told of how he's been able to make many new friends since being deployed.

The family also told of their activities, including 16-year-old Melody's education and learning to play the drums.

"My kids told me before the call, 'Mom, don't cry.' And they were here with me to

make sure that our spirits were always up and there would be no reason for crying," Beverly Borja said.

The 21-year-old Victor Borja was deployed in January and, before yesterday, communicated with his parents and siblings via telephone and through e-mail. But thanks to Freedom Calls Foundation, he and his family can now get together via the foundation's satellite network three times a month.

Hardest part

Beverly Borja said last night that she was very thankful to the organization for the work it does and service it provides. And she encourages other families to enlist Freedom Call Foundation's assistance.

"They feel it is a privilege to do this for families, but they truly are angels. The hardest part of everything was saying goodbye to my boy, and seeing him put on his battle gear, pick up his weapon and then walking out of the room.

"But I know that he's safe and I'm really proud of him."