

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Webcam as Wedcam

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There was a delay between the all-important question and the "I do," but don't blame cold feet - the words had to travel across the country and around the world.

That was just one downside of getting married over the Internet for Senior Airman Katie Fields, stationed at Scott Air Force Base, and Staff Sgt. Fred Matney, at an Air Force base in South Korea.



Kathryn Fields waves to her husband to-be minutes before she is wed to Fred Matney via special video conference.

(Laurie Skrivan/P-D)

A real live kiss will have to wait a few months. The bride had to settle for smashing cake into a big-screen TV version of the groom's face instead of the real thing. And the wedding night can be only so memorable with thousands of miles and 14 hours separating the bride and groom.

But for Fields, who got married in downtown St. Louis while the groom tuned in by webcam from his dorm in South Korea and a justice of the peace officiated from Montana, it was just as satisfying as a more traditional ceremony.

"I'm still shaking," Fields said shortly after the ceremony, held Thursday evening here but early this morning in South Korea. "It's done and I'm so happy. It was actually a lot of fun."

Fields, 24, and Matney, 28, met at a barbecue in May when both were stationed at Scott. They each describe their role in the military as "computer geek." They say they fell for each other, but by July, Matney was headed for a year in South Korea.

They've kept in touch by phone, webcam and e-mail since, and they recently decided it

was time to get married. Fields set about finding out how to do that, investigating which states allow proxy weddings and finding that Montana will marry two people when neither is actually present.

So with the help of the Freedom Calls Foundation, a group that sets up video conferencing between men and women in the military and their families, everybody gathered together through phone and data lines to get Fields and Matney hitched. Fields was with family and friends in a room in St. Louis provided by AT&T. Earlier, she'd called to wake Fields for what was to him an early morning ceremony. And the justice of the peace and two proxies standing in for the bride and groom were linked in from Bozeman, Mont.

"Can you see Fred?" asked the justice of the peace, Gordon Smith. "Is this the Fred you want to marry?"

The right people were indeed involved. Then, everyone had to get used to the sometimes-stuttering video, the echo - everything said in one location was heard in the other two - and the time delay between questions and answers. Other than all that, the ceremony ran like most others.

After Fields and Matney each said "I do," the proxies in Montana signed on their behalf, and Smith declared it official.

"Congratulations to both of you," he said. "I hope you have a wonderful, long and happy marriage."

Then it was time for a toast, cake and photos, with Fields posing next to the big-screen version of Matney and an attempt to line themselves up correctly for a virtual kiss.

The real thing can come in December, when Matney will be back in the states for leave. They plan a more traditional ceremony in front of family and friends in Matney's home state of Ohio. Sometime later, they hope to actually visit Montana, the state where, officially at least, they got married.

"What do you think?" Matney asked his new wife after the ceremony.

"I'm happily married," Fields said. "I'm excited."