

## Technology brings father's face home

By Jessica Farrish/Register-Herald Reporter

**The family conversation sounded like dinner table chatter in any American home.**

"How do you like your laptop?"  
Otie McVey asked Joseph.

"It's OK," replied the teenager.

"Joseph might build me a computer," Sean piped into the conversation.

"Well, that would be a lot more economical," commented Dad.  
"Are you going to camp this summer?"

But the domestic exchange soon took a less prosaic turn.

"Do the Iraqi kids still stand outside the perimeter of the gate and watch you all the time?" Teresa McVey asked her husband.

"What is the weather like there?"

"I'm just glad to be able to talk to you ... I miss you."

"I miss you, too."

Since January, SFC McVey has been stationed with the West Virginia National Guard 185th CSB Alpha Co. at a military base north of Baghdad.



Sgt. 1st Class Otie McVey, seen on the computer screen, talks from Iraq with his wife Teresa, left, and sons Joseph, 14, seated, and Sean, 10, in Oak Hill Friday. Joseph set up the call with the Freedom Calls Foundation, which is building a communications network helping troops in Iraq and Afghanistan communicate with loved ones. (Rick Barbero/The Register-Herald)

Friday was the first day his family had seen him - thanks to modern technology and the Freedom Calls Foundation - since he returned home in March to attend his mother's funeral.

The family gathered around a computer in Joseph's room and saw SFC McVey's face on the screen as they talked to him.

In Iraq, McVey's family was visible to him - even Maggie, the family dog.

Joseph - a computer whiz - set up the call with the New York-based foundation, which is building a communications network dedicated to providing VOIP - video, Internet and teleconferencing - for American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan to be able to communicate with family and loved ones.

"It wasn't really complicated," Joseph said. "I got the software from Edward Bukstel, Freedom Calls' Director of Operations, and I set it up from it, and it just kind of connected."

The group has so far installed 50 computers and 20 telephones at the army base north of Baghdad, located in the Sunni triangle area of Iraq which serves about 12,000 soldiers.

The system is in operation 24 hours a day and is totally free.

The teen-ager said he contacted Freedom Calls after his dad learned of it in Iraq.

"It was more Dad's idea because he just saw that one guy's son had graduated in California in May," he said.

The video teleconferencing for the McVey family is the first freedom call in West Virginia and came within days of the McVeys' wedding anniversary.

Joseph said he didn't plan for the conference to happen in such a timely manner.

"It kind of ended up that way," he said.

SFC McVey said the sun sets in Iraq about 9 p.m. and that dust storms are a problem in the 130-degree heat.

Terrorist threats are a problem, but the younger generation of Iraqis are looking forward to running their own country and are enjoying

the new existence that freedom from toppled Iraqi President Saddam Hussein has given them.

"Partially, they're glad we're here, and they're glad that they have jobs (on the military bases) and their lives are better," he said. "But at the same time, they'd like their country to be stabilized to the point that we don't have to be here."

After news had been shared from two continents, the McVey family cut the connection.

These shared minutes of family togetherness is a far cry from the separation Otie and Teresa McVey suffered shortly before they were married, when SFC McVey was stationed in Okinawa, Japan, during the Vietnam War operations, McVey's mother, Susie Richmond, observed.

"I think it's amazing," she said. "All these electronic things; and Joseph can do all this and hook his daddy up for this."

For more information, visit [www.freedomcalls.org](http://www.freedomcalls.org).

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