

# Rockford Register Star

## When freedom calls, a son's a little closer

By Jeff Kolkey

ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR

July 14, 2007

ROCKFORD — Filling up at the gas station. Eating at restaurants. Summertime barbecues with family. Those are some of the things Pfc. Matthew Quast misses while stationed in Iraq. But at least Quast got an hour Thursday to talk with his Rockford family face to face. Or perhaps more accurately, face to screen.

Quast's family gathered around a television monitor inside the University of Illinois Extension office in Rockford to talk with him. It was the first time the family had seen Quast since a leave in March.

"I can't get over this," his mom, Kathy Quast, said. "It's fantastic. It's like he's here."

It was the third See Your Soldier event hosted by the University of Illinois Extension that, with equipment provided in Iraq by the nonprofit Freedom Calls Foundation, makes it possible for U.S. families to videoconference with soldiers on the other side of the world.

The Quasts are among 16 families in Illinois that got the chance to speak to loved ones stationed at Camp Al Asad and Camp Taji in Iraq.

Parents Bruce and Kathy Quast, grandparents Herman and Ruth Legel, and brother Sam chatted with the soldier via an Internet video camera signal sent by satellite to the base in Iraq. Bruce is an editorial cartoonist for the Rockford Register Star.

Matthew Quast, 20, graduated in 2004 from East High School and joined the Army in 2006. He drives a truck, delivering bottled water as part of the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade. He recently re-enlisted for five years.

It was easy for him to sign up to talk to his family, he said, which required him only to reply to an e-mail from the Army. Such chances are offered free of charge twice a year to families with soldiers stationed at the two camps where the Freedom Calls Foundation has installed equipment.



AMY J. VAN HORN | ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR

"This is pretty cool," Army Pfc. Matthew Quast said Thursday about the video hookup that allowed him to speak from Iraq with his family in Rockford.



AMY J. VAN HORN | ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR

Kathy and Bruce Quast listen to their son, Pfc. Matthew Quast, during an Iraq-Rockford video conference Thursday. It's the first time they've seen him since he was home in March

Five families from Rockford had initially expressed interest in a July videoconference, but missions and troop movements forced all but Quast to cancel.

The distance between Quast and his family created an echo effect when they spoke to each other, but they said it was much less of a delay than the one they get over the phone. And aside from a short period when Quast's image was momentarily frozen, the family was impressed with the technology.

"This is pretty cool, honestly," Quast said. "It's a whole different setup. It's not choppy or anything."

"It's hard," Quast said. "It's hard being away from everything you are used to, family and things. But I can't complain because I joined the Army in a time of war."

U of I Extension video equipment is typically used for educational purposes, network administrator Bill Woessner said. But equipment in Iraq provided by the Freedom Calls Foundation is expensive and relies on donations to maintain.

"As time and the war has gone on, I understand they are in need of cash," Woessner said. "If they don't get that funding, there is a danger they might not be able to continue in the future."