

The Times

Bank uses Internet to give soldier a moment with her family Relatives connect for a moment via Internet video conference call.

June 19, 2005
Shreveport, Louisiana

"I cried tears of joy. I just hope she gets to come home."
Willie Mae Clinton, mother of soldier serving in Iraq
By James Ramage

jramage@gannett.com

Willie Mae Clinton said there would be tears Saturday. And there were, thanks to her daughter's presence and her son's voice.

Clinton and her family drove to Shreveport from Monroe to see and speak with her daughter, 34-year-old Staff Sgt. 1st Class Verna "Lisa" Bellamy Clinton, who is serving in Iraq. It was made possible by an Internet video conferencing connection at Ouachita Independent Bank, partnered with public charity Freedom Calls Foundation.

The family packed into a small conference room at the bank in the 400 block of Market Street in Shreveport to be reunited for a short time with Lisa Clinton, who is thousands of miles away.

Shortly into the connection, Lisa Clinton asked her brother, Stanley Reed, to sing for her.

He responded with a soft and touching rendition of Boyz II Men's "It's so Hard to say Goodbye to Yesterday," spurring many tears among the daughters, brothers, mother, aunt, nieces and nephew present.

"I was very, very happy to talk to her (today)," Willie Mae Clinton said. "I cried tears of joy. I just hope she gets to come home."

Lisa Clinton's family know she's been in Iraq for seven months but were unsure where exactly, what her job is or when she will return.

Many remarked that her hair looks different, to which she responded that she'd pulled it back tightly into a ponytail. They also asked why she wasn't wearing the proper hat for her position and cheered when she donned her cap.

"I don't want to see you in no ponytail when you get back," Willie Mae Clinton told her daughter.

"I'm still the same; I haven't changed at all," she responded, smiling.

"Are you missing me, Big Bird?" 11-year-old Alexis Clinton asked her mother.

"I miss you all, every day," Lisa Clinton responded. "It's getting old. It's time to go home."

Lisa Clinton's head disappeared from the screen each time she lowered it as she laughed.

She was reunited with her family through over a satellite connection with her base in Iraq, said Ronald Lawson, Ouachita Independent's information technology manager. "Basically, it's a video conferencing call. It's just a really long way away."

The Clintons' call lasted about an hour and is one of three scheduled between Saturday morning and

Tuesday afternoon, said Walter Lamb, president of the bank's northwest division. "We think it was the right thing to do.

"This was an opportunity presented to us to link up soldiers with their families. And we jumped at the chance," he said. "At very few times do we really have the opportunity to support our troops and their families."

Lisa Clinton's family supports and respects her role unconditionally, but they are unhappy she is in harm's way in Iraq.

"That's my baby sister over there," Clarence Reed, 45, said before the call. "But I don't like that she's there with people shooting over her head and by her."

Willie Mae Clinton agrees. "They're in a war they didn't start and a war they don't belong in," she said after the call.

"I just want her to come home safe."