



A quick Father's Day salute

Home front links to Iraq battle zones make saying "I love you" easier

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Today is Father's Day. And, for soldiers in Iraq, staying in touch has become fairly simple since the days of censors and V-mail.

Soldiers will log on to their e-mail or instant messaging accounts. They'll talk to relatives face-to-face through video conferencing. Or they'll listen to favorite songs on an iPod or watch home movies on their laptops.

Cyber cafes as well as free call centers set up by the Army and nonprofit organizations have helped. And many troops say they try to e-mail at least every other day and, depending on the availability of telephones, call at least once a week. Letter writing also remains popular.

"My youngest daughter was just an infant when I left home," Maj. Richard Goldenberg of Schuylerville, who is stationed near Tikrit with the 42nd Infantry Division, said in an e-mail interview. "Thankfully with digital cameras everywhere, my concern over her forgetting about my presence was unrealized. She regularly points to the pictures on the wall and proudly tells my wife, 'That's my daddy.'"

Communications between the home front and the battle front have evolved tremendously over the past century.

Albany resident Richard Marowitz, who spent two years in the Army during World War II, didn't speak to his family once while he was in Europe. His letters home had to be inspected by officers, who made sure he wasn't giving away his unit's position. The correspondence then had to be shrunk down on film and transferred to little cards, known as V-mail, to save shipping space.

"You never knew how long it might take," said the 79-year-old veteran. "You would try

to write a month before the holiday or the event, to make sure it got there in time."

During World War II, radio-telephone service was available between the United States and Europe, but \$40 for a 10-minute conversation was out of reach for GIs like Marowitz, who made about \$75 a month.

Family members who had an emergency, such as a death, could call the American Red Cross, which would try to track down the soldier (a service it still provides).

Other than that, troops usually had to wait weeks, if not months, for any news from home.

By the Vietnam era, the military was providing free telephone service at some bases, but complications remained.

"You had to call to Hawaii, and they'd patch it through to somewhere in the U.S.," said Bethlehem resident David Duff, who served in Vietnam from 1967 to 1969. "You had to go through three or four operators. It might take 15 minutes or a half-hour to get patched through."

E-mail appeared during the first Gulf War in 1991, and many troops today have easy access to laptops.

Video conferencing is provided by the Freedom Calls Foundation, a Brooklyn Heights-based nonprofit organization that has set up three facilities in Iraq.

The organization has gotten more than 1,000 schools, hospitals and corporations in the United States to donate the use of their video conferencing capabilities for families wanting to talk to their loved ones overseas.

They can see their new babies hours after their birth," co-founder John Harlow said. "We actually had a guy talk his wife through a 12-hour birth at home. We've had soldiers get married over the network. We've had parent-teacher conferences, saying good-bye to dying relatives, you name it."

Soldiers also can call home through a Morale, Welfare and Recreation line that patches them through to the United States, but the type of service varies from base to base.

"The only issue with the MWR line is that the call ends right at 10 minutes," said Maj. Vincent Memole Jr. of East Greenbush, who is also stationed near Tikrit with the 42nd

Division. "The line just goes dead, usually with no warning, so you feel bad that you didn't get the opportunity to say goodbye or that you love them."

The time difference, about eight hours, presents some difficulties, said Salem resident Sgt. 1st Class John F. Holmes, who is stationed near Tikrit and has two kids, ages 5 and 7.

"That makes it hard to talk to my older one, due to him not usually getting home until about 11 p.m. my time," he said.

Most fathers say they try to keep their families from worrying.

"My 3-year-old always asks me if I have any boo-boos," said Greenfield Center resident Capt. Michael D. Tagliafierro, who is also near Tikrit. "I assure them that I am fine, and tell them how much I love them and miss them."

He and his wife, Maureen, said their sons -- John Paul, 5, and Michael, 3 -- have been coping well, though they often hear the phrase, "when things are like they used to be." They also have a 7-month-old daughter named Sophia.

"We always talk about daddy," Maureen said. "There are some days when they really miss him. They just want to take a ride in the truck with their daddy and go do boy things."