

Arizona Daily Star

Dad in Iraq sees grad

Navy petty officer sent to Mideast watches daughter by videoconference as she picks up Cienega diploma

By Jamar Younger

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Roy Lamb is thousands of miles away, but that did not stop him from being a part of his daughter's graduation.

Lamb, a U.S. Navy petty officer, watched his daughter's graduation from Cienega High School live from Iraq through a video teleconference on a laptop and camera that broadcast the graduation ceremony at the school's football field.

Afterwards, Lamb congratulated his daughter, Jessica Lamb, while talking with his wife, Diane, and their other two daughters.

He gave a thumbs up as she walked across the stage and received her diploma Wednesday night.

The video broadcast was coordinated through the Freedom Calls Foundation, a non-profit group that provides free phone, e-mail and video communications to service members in Iraq.

Lamb contacted the foundation after he heard it conducted videoconferences, he said.

"I asked if they could get a high school graduation," he said via the video conference.

Lamb knew how much it would mean to his daughter, he said.

"My daughter is the one who really wanted me to be there," he said. "It has hurt me that I couldn't be there, so I did this for her."

The foundation has five call centers in Iraq, each supported by satellite links. Lamb watched the graduation and talked with his family from one of the call centers.

Jessica did not know he was watching and expressed shock when the Vail School District's director of technology carried the laptop toward her while she waited in line to receive her diploma.



U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Roy Lamb looks on from the laptop held by Matt Federoff as Lamb's daughter Jessica graduates.

JAMES GREGG / arizona daily star

Her surprise turned into tears once she walked on stage to receive her diploma.

Lamb was sent to Iraq in October and won't return home until September, he said.

He usually talks to his family every day, but he has not been with them in person to celebrate Jessica's 18th birthday and her graduation.

"I know I sent him a graduation announcement and he said he started crying," she said. "He was saying he wanted to be here really bad."

Jessica said she was emotional when her father left for Iraq.

"The two events he missed, it was really hard on me. I'm really close to my father," she said.

Jessica's mother said this was the best graduation present Jessica could've received.



Jessica Lamb, second from right, heads to a graduation practice run arm in arm with friends, from left, Tia Ramsey, Samantha Head and Breanna Walls. Lamb had no idea her father, in the Navy and stationed in Iraq, would be watching her graduate via videoconference.

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"I'm a lucky man," he said. "A lot of people over here are missing graduations. I'm one of the few that got to watch. I'm happy I made this one."

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"This means more than I could possibly say," Diane Lamb said.

About 2,000 videoconferences are held each month between service members and their families, said Kathryn Hudacek, director of development for the foundation.

The high school had to figure out how to get wireless networking out to the football field and configure the computer's hardware and software, said Matt Federoff, director of technology for the Vail School District.

The high winds also posed a threat to the videoconference call.

"This was going halfway around the world. We had to nail it tonight," he said.

Lamb felt fortunate to be able to see his daughter graduate, he said.