

A grad's dad in Baghdad

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DURHAM – GRADUATION JUST didn't seem as sweet for Leslie MacEwan after she found out her dad couldn't attend.

Army Sgt. 1st Class David MacEwan was deployed to Iraq last month and was on the other side of the world as his daughter ended her high school career last night.

But an ocean, several continents and seven time zones weren't enough to keep him away. His body may have been in Baghdad, but his heart was clearly in Dover. MacEwan showed up last night via video conference from Iraq on a projector screen set up in front of the graduates at the University of New Hampshire's Lundholm Gymnasium in Durham.



Army Sgt. 1st Class David MacEwan, Leslie's father, leads the Pledge of Allegiance via video conference from Baghdad during his daughter, Leslie's graduation from Dover High School last night

Dressed in fatigues, he thanked everyone who made his appearance possible, put his hand over his heart and then led the packed gymnasium in the pledge of allegiance.

"It's awesome that we can present him so that everyone can see him," Leslie MacEwan said. "For the whole audience to see him is pretty amazing."



Leslie MacEwan sits in the center of a row of fellow Dover High School seniors. (CLYNTON NAMUO)

► [Freedom Calls Web site](#)

Last night's video conference was made possible by the nonprofit Freedom Calls, which helps soldiers abroad link up with family back home, and from UNH's audio video services department, which allowed the school to use its equipment free of charge. Staff from the department also volunteered their time to set the video conference up and maintain it throughout the graduation.

MacEwan said her father's support and ability to be there in his own way on such a special occasion meant the world to her. Her father had been stationed in upstate New York. She

sees him only every couple months, she said, so having him there last night was especially special.

Freedom Calls has also set up a connection at the home of MacEwan's mom, Julie Trask, so she can talk with her father three times a month.

Leslie MacEwan, 18, of Dover, has been a standout in Dover High's Junior ROTC program and served as the group's commanding officer, its highest cadet ranking, this year.

"After being very heavily screened, she was the number-one choice of everyone, bar none," said retired Marine Master Sgt. Gerry Harrison, an instructor with the school's Junior ROTC program. "She's been one of the best I've seen in my 11 years of teaching."



From left, Junior ROTC Cadet Lt. Cmdr. Leslie MacEwan poses with her father, Army fire support Sgt. 1st Class David MacEwan, her brother, Sean, and her mother, Julie Trask. (COURTESY)

Inspired by her father's service and her time in Junior ROTC, MacEwan said she is considering joining the military after graduation, but so far has no firm plans.

"I really like the unity and closeness we share," she said of her time in Junior ROTC, adding that she hopes to do "something filled with action" after graduation. "I think sitting behind a desk is boring."

Dover High School sophomore Sean MacEwan, Leslie's 15-year-old brother, is also a member of Junior ROTC and served in the color guard at last night's graduation.

He said his father's appearance, while great, was bittersweet because he knows it will be some time before he gets to see him in person. He said he had a simple message for his dad.

"Come back, that's what I'm gonna say," he said. "Come back."