



Linkup lets dad in Iraq watch son graduate

By Mark Haney - The Daily Citizen via AP
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SEARCY, Ark. — The day of graduation is often seen as a day to remember because of how truly special the event is. For Chance George, the day was even more significant.

In November 2007, Army Spc. Jerome George, Chance's father, was deployed to Iraq for the third time. He's not due back in Searcy until January.

Family members feared that he would not get to witness his son's graduation from Searcy High School on May 10. It appeared that watching the event eight months later on videotape would be the only way the elder George would get to see his son's march across the stage.

That is where the Freedom Calls Foundation stepped in.

The graduating senior's mother, Bambi George, saw a news broadcast about a Freedom Calls-related event, and called the foundation, who then contacted John Brown at Searcy High School.

Through both Searcy High School and Freedom Calls Foundation, Jerome George was able not only to watch his son graduate but also to talk to him after the ceremony.

Bambi George tried to keep the arrangements a secret, but when the company confirmed that it could make the satellite-fed reunion possible, a call to the George household reached the wrong family member.

"When they called, I was the only one at home," Chance George said. "When I got off the phone with them, I knew I was alone so I jumped up and down and started screaming. After that, I cried tears of joy."

Chance said that, after composing himself, he called his mother to, in his words, "chew her out for keeping it a secret."

According to his mother, he didn't chew her out but was still emotional about the impending reunion on camera.

"I told him the reason I was keeping it a secret because of the chance that it might not happen," Bambi George said. "Immediately he wanted to see if his classmate Tim Dorton's brother, who is serving with my husband in Iraq could talk to Tim too. Chance is always thinking about someone else. I got goosebumps."

As it would turn out, Dorton's brother and Chance's father are roommates in Iraq.

"That made it even more special," Bambi said. "We knew there was only going to be a small window of opportunity, but we still had a chance for all of us to say hello and I love you to all of our family over there."

But weather almost spoiled the reunion.

"It had been set up at the football stadium and when [rain began and they] moved it to the Benson Auditorium, nobody knew if it would work," Chance said.

Following the graduation ceremony, which started at 7:30 p.m., Chance was taken to an office on the Benson Auditorium's second floor so he could talk to his father directly. He said it was a true thrill to be able to talk to his father. Weeping happy tears, George said his father told him something that he longed to hear.

"He told me he was very proud of me," George said. "Those are big words to come from a man like him. He won't be back until January of 2009 so what Mr. Brown did was amazing. He truly went above and beyond in setting this up technically. I will always be very grateful to him."

Chance said that in the fall, he will be attending Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, majoring in midlevel education.

"I want to teach math or science to fourth- through sixth-graders," George said. "I know teaching doesn't pay that well, but I will get a chance this way to change the world through the students I teach."

According to Bambi George, the reunion between her son and husband was something that no one in her family will ever forget.

"My husband ... said that with him being in Iraq, this was the best thing that could have ever happened," said Bambi George. "I could hear my husband crying."

Bambi said she asked her husband if his seeing his son and Dorton seeing his brother graduate made it worse on them and what they were being asked to do in Iraq. Her husband told her that it was the opposite of what she feared.

"He told me that it made it better for them," George said. "They feel better knowing that their families are over here safe and doing well, so he said seeing us in this way makes them more determined to do a good job while over there and even fight harder while they are there."