

VTC brings V Corps Soldiers deployed in Afghanistan face-to-face with families in Germany for holidays

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International Security Assistance Force Joint Command Public Affairs Office

KABUL, Afghanistan -- Being away from loved ones during the holidays can be tough for Soldiers deployed to a combat zone, but the senior enlisted leadership of V Corps, working with their Family Readiness Group in Heidelberg, Germany, found a way to make that time apart a little easier to handle.



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V Corps' Sgt. 1st Class James Irwin, currently deployed in Afghanistan, talks with his 4-year-old son, Jacob, and his wife, Penny, in Heidelberg, Germany, via a Christmas video teleconference arranged by corps leadership and the corps Special Troops Battalion Family Readiness Group.

discuss command operations and activities. From those weekly meetings sprang an idea for putting together a Christmas VTC to let deployed corps troops see and hear their families in Germany during the holidays.

The staff coordinated with the FRG to arrange a schedule that allowed family members to sit in front of a huge screen in the unit's facilities in Heidelberg and talk live, one on one, with their Soldiers deployed to the International Security Assistance Force Joint Command here. Twenty V Corps Soldiers and their families participated in the Christmas VTC. One family even brought their dog along.

“The (commander and executive officer of the corps Special Troops Battalion) put a lot of emphasis on taking care of our troops,” said Sgt. Maj. Wardell Jefferson. “Sometimes when you’re in a deployed environment the phones don’t always work well and Internet access may be very limited, so you can go a while without talking to your family.”

Jefferson and the STB command team -- commander Lt. Col. Matthew Rasmussen,

executive officer Lt. Col. Brian Seay and Command Sgt. Maj. Terry Abel -- get together weekly via video teleconference, or VTC, to

One of those 20 was Sgt. 1st Class James Irwin, who said he was very happy to have an opportunity to see and talk to his wife, Penny, and their 4-year-old son, Jacob.

“This was awesome,” said Irwin. “I haven’t been able to actually see my wife and son and talk to them face-to-face since October.”

For Jefferson, who has two children, getting kids involved was one of the best parts about conducting the VTC. “I think it’s especially important that the families with younger children are able to have the face to face conversations -- actually seeing mom or dad -- that you get with a VTC,” he said.

The Irwin family has been stationed in Germany since March, and although this isn’t the first time they have been away from each other for a deployment, it is the first time they haven’t been together for Christmas. “The holidays are a hard time to be away from family, but I want to make sure our senior leadership knows how much we appreciate their efforts to take care of us and our families; and I know the families appreciate it as well,” Irwin said.

The sergeant said he was also grateful for the work the FRG put in to make the event happen. “They worked a lot of the coordination issues back home, helping us find a time that would fit in with my wife’s work schedule and my son’s preschool time,” Irwin said.

Rasmussen was quick to point out the important role the FRG played in making this program work as well. “I couldn’t be happier with the support from V Corps, (U.S. Army Europe), and the FRG team -- especially Marcia Rasmussen and Sandra Hernandez -- for their support and leadership in making this program available to our Soldiers during the holidays.”

“Our FRG just continues to get stronger and stronger,” Jefferson said. “It’s important that spouses who have been around the military for a while take the time to help support the newer military families,” he said. “Their experience in dealing with the time apart, coping with changing schedules, and finding hobbies or things to do to stay busy, can be invaluable to a spouse who never had to handle those issues before.”

Lt. Col. Rasmussen said the V Corps leadership is continually working to help corps Soldiers and improve conditions for them.

“In working with Sgt. Maj. Jefferson and 1st Sgt. Stephanie Smith, we are daily focusing on quality of life for the Soldiers here,” the colonel said. “They have worked extremely hard, standing this (the ISAF Joint Command) headquarters up from nothing, and building and maintaining the support for their families is vital to their ability to be so productive. Having the FRG back there gives our families the confidence that there is a support system in place and ready to assist if needed, and that helps our Soldiers out as well.”

V Corps officials said they are looking for more VTC opportunities in the future to keep corps Soldiers connected with their families.



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