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STARS AND STRIPES

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Servicemembers staying in touch with loved ones through e-mail

By [Greg Tyler](#), Sasebo bureau chief

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Thanks to electronic communications, servicemembers and their loved ones can stay in touch this holiday season, despite mail restrictions because of anthrax scares.

After the discovery of the deadly powder in the U.S. mail, the Department of Defense requested that Americans refrain from sending mass quantities of Christmas cards and letters to servicemembers in Afghanistan and other overseas posts.

Sasebo Naval Base's United Service Organizations offers servicemembers, DOD civilians and their dependents a service to record a free holiday greeting video via Web cam, said Gil Azam, USO director.

"They can record up to 15 minutes free, and then the compressed video message is sent through e-mail or posted to an Internet site," Azam said. "It's a good way to let folks back home know they're being thought about by sailors serving overseas."

USO volunteer Tim Bailey, husband of USS Germantown's Chief Petty Officer Tammy Bailey, recently made a video at the USO's



Greg Tyler / S&S

Tim Bailey, seated, the husband of Chief Petty Officer Tammy Bailey from the USS Germantown and a USO volunteer at Sasebo Naval Base, records a holiday Webcam video to share with family and friends stateside. Helping Bailey operate the equipment at Sasebo's USO facility in Nimitz Park is Ernest Perez, manager of the USO's Internet service.



Greg Tyler / S&S

Tim Bailey prepares his holiday greeting video.

Nimitz Park facility for family and friends stateside.

"This is a really cool service, and the best thing is it's free," Bailey said. "It's a good way for my family back home to actually 'see' me this year."

In addition, three U.S. companies are providing equipment and services to allow families to send video e-mail.

Compaq Computer, Sorenson Media of Salt Lake City and Digital Island teamed to provide the service. Families can record digital messages of up to three minutes.

On the site, messages to servicemembers are divided by branch, and by various categories of senders, such as government officials, business leaders and the public.

Shortly following the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States, a small group formed the Yahoo! user group Operation Enduring Freedom Support. Now OEFS has a roster of 320.

The group corresponds with military members worldwide, including sailors on the USS Essex, USS Carl Vinson, USS Abraham Lincoln and others.

"The people who want to send e-mail letters outnumber the military members we write to," said the group's owner, BiBi Melguizo.

H. Devon Craig, a health care professional from Cranston, R.I., and a group member, said he thinks the e-mails have a positive effect on troops.

"It is so much more important now than ever to have a safe way to get messages of support to the troops," Craig said.

"Maybe we can't send food and other gifts, but we can send the most valuable gift of all: the gift of caring."

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