

When you or a loved one is stationed far away from home, keeping in touch isn't always as easy as simply picking up the phone. Access to telecommunication services and the high cost of communicating to/from the United States are common concerns of servicemembers, Department of Defense civilians, their families and friends. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has compiled information and tips to help you communicate with a loved one when you're far away.

Before You Go: What You Should Know

SAVING MONEY AND STAYING IN TOUCH

Your long distance calling plan is probably the most important factor in keeping calling costs reasonable. Whether you're stationed overseas or stateside, rates can vary dramatically, depending on your calling plan. Check with your carrier and with other carriers and compare plans and rates before you go.



SERVICE OPTIONS TO CONSIDER

Wireline and wireless providers offer many different plans that are sufficiently flexible and available in most areas of the world. Some long distance carriers offer reduced military rates, lower fees for prepaid calling cards, or bonus hours through their calling plans. Take the time to discuss the service options that a selected carrier provides and ask if these options will be compatible with your destination.

Here is a sampling of options and services that you may want to consider when picking a plan.

 **Dial Around** – This is an option that allows you to dial a long distance provider's access code, usually an "800" number, (or "10-10" number) before making a call. Dial around often allows you to bypass or "dial around" a phone's presubscribed long distance carrier and to get a better rate.

 **International Callback** – This service allows you to make voice telephone calls to anywhere in the world and pay U.S. rates. You call your U.S. service provider and they will connect you or "callback" with an American dial tone. This service should be researched and discussed with the service provider before leaving the United States.

 **Toll-Free Numbers** – Toll-free numbers are good options for people in the United States who make calls to a single long distance number also in the United States. Toll-free numbers often provide the lowest rate alternative for calls made to one number.



Prepaid Calling Cards – One way to avoid telephone bill "sticker shock" is to use prepaid calling cards. Most Exchanges offer prepaid cards in varying amounts. As with other products, compare costs. Just because it is sold in the Exchange does not mean that it provides the best rate.

Some service providers give discount minutes to Defense personnel on their prepaid cards. You can use the card for international calls from most phones with toll-free access, regardless of the long distance carrier. You pay in advance and budget long distance use. There is no record of long distance calls placed and no bill to review. These cards can also be purchased and sent online. Read the card carefully for costs associated with international calls.



Calling Cards – A calling card is simply an alternative method for billing and collecting fees for telephone services. The cards are issued by your long distance carrier. Don't confuse calling cards with prepaid calling cards. Using a calling card does not necessarily guarantee a low rate and rarely carries the lower rate that applies to a domestic calling plan.



Wireless – Cell phones are often convenient, but they don't work everywhere. Currently, there are only a few models available in the United States that can be used to make calls back to the U.S. from international locations. Most models can make calls internationally from the United States, but it may be expensive. If you are in a foreign country and on a military base or close to a shopping district, investigate buying or leasing a cell phone locally.



Once You're There: What You Should Know

COMMUNICATING WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY WHILE OVERSEAS

Very often your location or communications equipment prevents telephone contact. It can be difficult to contact Defense personnel when you want or need to. For example, military personnel have very limited access to telecommunications services while they are on board a ship. Service availability varies by the type of ship or unit to which the servicemember is assigned.

Here are a few options Defense personnel stationed overseas have available to communicate with family and friends back home.



Military Base Phone Banks – Military bases traditionally have telephones with privacy dividers, referred to as phone banks. Unfortunately, the demand is so great that it can be difficult to get access when you want to use a telephone.





Internet – This is by far the least expensive way to stay in touch. However, Internet access can be difficult in many locations. Deployed Defense personnel should consider alternatives to telephone calls such as the Internet, when such use is authorized by the unit's commanding officers.



Public Telephone Service – Public phone services are usually available around most established military bases. Services from local and long distance carriers are available to Defense users at competitive rates, just as they are available to civilian users in the vicinity of the military base.



Military Affiliate Radio Systems (MARS) –

MARS is a program conducted by the Departments of the Army, Navy and Air Force in which amateur radio stations and operators participate in and contribute to the mission of providing auxiliary and emergency communications on a local, national, or international basis. Telegram messages, known as "MARS Grams," are also sent over MARS for either hand delivery or delivery by mail. This service is available to all Defense personnel and their families.



Defense Switched Network (DSN) – DSN is a component of the Defense Communications System that handles Department of Defense voice, data and video communications. On rare occasions, commanding officers may authorize the use of DSN for personal calls to and from overseas locations.

Calling Tips: What You Should Know

POINTS TO CONSIDER

- ★ *Call carriers' toll-free numbers and request information regarding special calling plans for Defense personnel and their families.*
- ★ *Check out different carriers' Web sites. If they have search buttons, look for "military plans."*
- ★ *Read the fine print and investigate advertisements and solicitations for calling plans and calling cards.*
- ★ *As a general rule, it is easier for Defense personnel overseas to call back to the United States than for someone in the United States to contact the servicemember in a foreign country. This is particularly true if the person is deployed on a ship or at a forward location. Also, keep in mind that differences in time zones may force communication at inconvenient times.*
- ★ *Consider using e-mail. Internet access is available at most major bases, libraries, and inexpensive "Internet cafes" while traveling overseas. "Internet cafes" or "cyber cafes" are public outlets where Internet usage can be purchased.*
- ★ *When making a call from a payphone, consider cost-saving options such as using a calling card, a prepaid card or dial around.*
- ★ *Emergency communications are provided through the Red Cross. The Red Cross sends messages quickly, almost anywhere in the world, including ships and isolated military units. These communication services can be requested through local Red Cross chapters listed in phone directories.*

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CALLING HOME:

What You Should Know

A Guide for the U.S. Military



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