

Abilene Reporter-News

TUESDAY

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HIGH: 84 | LOW: 52

today's outlook: Partly cloudy, thunderstorm possible. Forecast on 6AA



SPORTS

GATOR BAIT

Gators put bite on Buckeyes for NCAA basketball title repeat. **1C**

LIFE

BURNOUT

Job fatigue can be avoided. **1B**



Live from Fallujah, Iraq

Marines, Lee students connect in teleconference

By Jerry Daniel Reed / reedj@reporternews.com
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Two Marines had little trouble Monday connecting with Lee Elementary School fourth-graders over a distance of 7,500 miles.

Their teleconference hook-up between Abilene and Fallujah Military Base, Iraq, went smoothly, too.

First Sgt. Jason Joiner, a married father of four, and newlywed Capt. Rodrigo Cantu bantered easily with the students parked before a monitor on the Lee library. They started by reading them two enchanting kids' tales - Derek Munson's "Enemy Pie" and Mia Hamm's "Winners Never Quit!"



Amanda Jungquist, center, holds a copy of Derek Munson's "Enemy Pie" as her fourth-grade class listens to U.S. Marine First Sgt. Jason Joiner and Capt. Rodrigo Cantu read it to them during a live teleconference Monday at Lee Elementary. The two Marines are stationed in Iraq.

All it took to get the conversation rolling was an observation that "you're a quiet group," prompting the kids to prove otherwise.

Alexis Parrish wanted to know what the Iraqi kids are like.

Much like you, Joiner responded.

"They love to get out in the yard and play," he said. But the Iraqi culture does not emphasize education as much as pitching in to help the family survive economically, Cantu said.

"Not every kid gets to go to school," he said - and girls in particular are often left out, he said.

The marines voiced hope that Iraqi industry will be persuaded to value education and provide the resources for expanding the country's school system.



Left, Skyler Richardson, 10, Flor Hernandez, 10, Tyra Brown, 9, and Lyssette Lozano, 9, laugh as they banter with the two soldiers.

Several questions were put to the marines about the language of the country where they're stationed.

"They speak Arabic" the common language of the Middle East, Cantu said. Just as in the United States, different dialects and different speech patterns mark different locales, he said.

Another difference Joiner pointed out: "You guys read from left to right. They read from right to left."

Joiner said it was not the soldiers' purpose to denigrate the media - though most of the war coverage he considers negative - but to tell kids directly what is really happening there.

Each was asked what he'll enjoy most about returning home.

After his reunion with his family, Joiner said, "I'm going to pull that motorcycle out of the garage, and go."

And Cantu added, "Simply driving on the road without looking for something that is going to blow me up!"

The call was sponsored by the AT&T Pioneers, a volunteer group of AT&T employees and retirees, and the Freedom Calls Foundation, created to fund phone calls between the war zones and the home front.