



# The Athens Messenger

## Taken by surprise

*Lieutenant issued oath of office by husband serving in Iraq*

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Wartime has separated families during life's many milestones, but technology can bridge that divide and did so Thursday at Ohio University.

1st Lt. Christian Cullen is on the front lines more than 8,000 miles away in Iraq. Thursday afternoon, he was brought to OU's campus via video conference to participate in a ceremony with his wife.

Through Freedom Calls - a satellite network system - Cullen administered the oath of office to Elise Cullen, now a 2nd lieutenant in the Army.

Severed by war, the newlyweds have been estranged for three out of the five months of their marriage. But the element of surprise remains strong in their relationship.

"You made my day," Elise Cullen told her husband with a broad smile. "Christian, you always find a way to make it better."



1st LT. Christian Cullen surprises his wife Elise by showing up from the front lines in Iraq via video conference to administer her oath of office upon her graduation from Army ROTC at Ohio University.

Elise Cullen, from Sandusky, stood before a larger-than-life projection of her husband in a conference room at OU's Baker Center. With their right hands raised, she swore to the oath administered by her American sweetheart.

"He made it special," Cullen said. "He really did it this time."

Family and friends were also in attendance. One by one they approached the microphone to ask Christian Cullen, "What's up?"

"Just taking it easy," he replied.

He joked that the brunt of his schedule was that of waking up around 8 a.m. and playing video games.

"Everyone's fighting over the controllers," he laughed, although he mentioned briefly that his unit is assigned to night missions.

But his sister, Rachel Cullen, was wise to his modest tone - which was to keep the mood light in honor of his wife's achievements.

"I know there are a lot of things they can't talk about. Everything they do or say is monitored," Rachel Cullen said.

She went on to explain that her brother is her dear buddy. And although seeing him for the first time in nearly six months was extraordinarily emotional, it also evoked relief.

"Just knowing he's alive and OK. It gives you reassurance," she said, teary eyed.

But Rachel Cullen's tears were put aside once she had her chance at the microphone.

"My cat's pregnant," she told him.

He replied with a quintessential older brother solution.