

# Telegraph Herald

## Dad in Iraq 'attends' daughter's birthday party

5-year-old Holly Schroeder sees and talks to her dad Paul, who's stationed in Iraq

by CRAIG REBER

Ken and Kay Schroeder say their son Paul has smiled from the day he was born in May 1969. On Friday afternoon, Paul was all smiles. So was his daughter Holly, who was celebrating her fifth birthday.

Paul Schroeder is in Iraq. He was one of about 600 soldiers who were mobilized in October 2005 from the 1st Battalion, 133rd Infantry and other Iowa Army National Guard units. Part of the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry comprised of about 4,500 soldiers, the soldiers arrived in Iraq in May.

Paul missed Holly's fourth birthday and her second due to a prior deployment to the Middle East. On Friday, Schroeder celebrated Holly's party via a video conference from Iraq, thanks to the Freedom Calls Foundation.

In Ken and Kay's family room stood a big table. There were presents, balloons and birthday cake with five candles. Paul saw it all.

Kay contacted the foundation, which made all the arrangements for the connection. Paul appeared, from thousands of miles away, on the Schroeders' computer screen.

"All right, we've got you," Kay hollered excitedly while Holly waited anxiously to see and talk to her dad.

"Who's that?" Kay said.

"That's daddy!" Holly said.

"Hey Holly," Paul said, smiling.

Family members, including Paul's wife, Linda, and her mother Darlene Thomas, gathered near a monitor where he could see them all.

"Tell him about your presents," Kay told Holly. "Tell him about everything."

Holly lacked words momentarily.

"I think she's too happy," Kay said.



TH Photo by Jeremy Portje

Holly Schroeder, 5, gets a birthday visit from her father, Spc. Paul Schroeder, who is stationed in Iraq, via satellite during her birthday party in Dubuque on Friday. Schroeder has missed two of Holly's previous four birthdays while serving overseas, but got to take part this year, thanks to the Freedom Calls Foundation.

After the realization set in her dad was on the screen, Holly unwrapped her presents, one by one, holding them so Paul could see.

"Cool," he said.

Kay, Ken, Linda and Darlene engaged in a family conversation, thrilled to see Paul.

"How are you doing?" Darlene said. "You're looking good."

"I wish we could get you some cake," Kay added.

Paul was thrilled, exhilarated he could be a part in the party.

"It's pretty cool," he said. "Just to see my family face to face is very special."

The unit's mission is providing convoy security in the western region of Iraq. Paul expects to be on a mission for both Thanksgiving and Christmas. On Friday he savored the moment.

"I love you very much," Paul told Holly, "and I wish I was there."

Paul and the family serenaded Holly with a spirited and exuberant "Happy Birthday to You," all clapping their hands.

Moments later, one by one, Kay, Ken, Linda, Darlene and Holly said their good-byes.

"I love you," Ken said. "Take it easy and be safe."

Paul said he expected to be home in March. That was good to hear.

"Oh man, how neat," Kay said. "I think it was great. I was so glad to be a part of this."

"We were really looking forward to this," said Linda, who is the assistant director of nursing at Dubuque Nursing & Rehabilitation.

Linda said Holly misses her dad's hugs. She misses the everyday activities, the interaction with her husband.

"I'm just happy this all worked out," Linda said.

On Friday afternoon, everybody was smiling.