

## Dad visits classroom from Iraq

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Christopher Lockert's teacher had just finished reading his class a book about a little boy whose father was stationed in Iraq, when Christopher stood up and looked around his classroom, his hands cupped to his ear.

"I hear my dad," he said.

"Look Christopher, look," his teacher, Suzette Haywood, said.

And there, on a laptop screen was U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Daniel Lockert with fellow soldiers and co-workers, ready to talk with the Colin Powell Elementary School kindergarten class about life in Iraq.



Christopher Lockert (right), a kindergartener at Colin Powell Elementary in Centreville, video conferences with his father Lt. Col. Daniel Lockert who is currently serving in the Air Force in Iraq

Christopher, 5, his eyes wide, walked to the computer.

"Hi buddy," Daniel Lockert said.

The Centreville students questioned the soldiers, shyly asking about their diet, holidays and job in Iraq as Christopher's mother, Beth Ann Lockert, and his two little sisters looked on.

"That's my dad," Christopher told the class in a soft voice.

The soldiers said they get to eat big cookies and ice cream, that it snowed in the desert a few weeks ago and they are in Iraq to help the people there.

Technicians got the computer image projected onto a SmartBoard so the whole classroom could see the soldiers.

Lockert said they recently took school supplies to a school about five miles from their base. The schools there are "very, very poor," Lockert said.

Katherine Oradorff asked the soldiers how often they talk to their families.

Daniel Lockert – who is stationed west of Baghdad and was shipped to Iraq in September 2007 on his second deployment there – said he talks with his family every week.

Beth Ann Lockert asked teachers at Colin Powell if they could host a live video conference. Her family frequently talks to her husband through the Freedom Calls Foundation and she wanted to give Christopher's classmates the same opportunity. The nonprofit provides video conferencing services for families of people serving overseas free of charge.

The classroom conference was a surprise for Christopher. Beth Ann Lockert and teachers Haywood and Catherine Fonte helped the students prepare questions the day before and they kept the secret.

"I loved being a part of this," Haywood said. "We are a part of his personal life and it means a lot to help him through this difficult time."

"Dad, this is my friend ... " Christopher proudly introduced each student.

The students and soldiers exchanged a few jokes. "What are two banana peels?" Jacob Jung asked the soldiers.

They couldn't figure it out.

"Banana slippers!" Jung said. The classroom laughed with the soldiers.

After the students performed "Three Cheers for the Red, White, and Blue" and held up signs thanking the soldiers for serving in Iraq, the soldiers dutifully sang "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" on request.

"When are you coming home?" asked Joseph Burton, 6, a classmate whom Christopher announced as his best friend who is sitting next to him at lunch.

Lockert is due back home at the end of March or the beginning of April.

Beth Ann Lockert said she continually reminds her children of him because it's important they know how their daddy lives, and "that it's not all bad," she said.

"To get the kids to better understand what they're doing over there is amazing to me," Beth Ann Lockert said.