

An Ocean apart, a birthday together

By Cpl. Josh Cox

**MARINE CORPS AIR STATION
CHERRY POINT, N.C.(Aug. 16,
2006)** -- During a deployment, Marines often miss out on memorable moments, priceless memories and occasions, such as holidays, weddings and birthdays, that many people take for granted. One aviation operations specialist serving with Marine Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron 3 was able to attend her son's first birthday party in North Carolina, all the way from Al Asad, Iraq.

Cpl. Tristeza Castellanoz was able to say "happy birthday" to her son in Jacksonville, N.C., Aug. 10, via video conference.



Juan Castellanoz and son Sergio, interact with mother Tristeza Castellanoz, who's in Iraq, via a video conference, Aug. 10. The family was able to celebrate Sergio's first birthday. Photo by: Lance Cpl. Samuel White

The Freedom Calls Foundation made the video conference possible for Tristeza, her husband Juan, and 1-year-old son, Sergio.

According to the Freedom Calls Foundation Internet site, www.freedomcalls.org, "We are deploying state-of-the art technology to transform the experience of soldiers on extended deployments to war zones. U.S. service members may now attend and participate in milestone family events such as graduations, births, birthdays and weddings etcetera via video conference over the Freedom Calls Network."

The video conference made a huge impact on the Castellanoz's, enabling them to communicate in a completely new way. "It was so great to be able to see my Sonny," Tristeza said, referring to her son. I loved being able to see my husband when I told him that I loved him, she said.

"It's difficult to have left them but that's the life of a Marine," she added. "It was a bit emotional for a moment, but we were ok; I guess it's only natural. This being my first deployment has been a bit hard, but I've done pretty good being apart from my boys."

Juan agreed with his wife, and said the video conference was an emotional experience,

but also a great moment for the family. "It felt pretty good," Juan said. "She pretty much got to be a part of his birthday."

The Castellanoz family spent 45 minutes celebrating Sergio's first birthday, complete with birthday cake and streamers. Tristeza said her son touched the screen, and smiled at her during the conference. Juan said later in the evening, his son slept better than he has since his mother departed for Iraq.