

A Grand Surprise

Great-grandson appears at celebration from Iraq base

By James Tinley, Register Staff

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MILFORD — On a day of birthday surprises for 95-year-old Dorothy Paul, her family saved the biggest one for last.

Paul, an 86-year Milford resident, received a surprise visit at her birthday celebration Friday from her great-grandson, who is serving in Iraq with the Marine Corps.

With the help of the nonprofit organization Freedom Calls, Carriage Green at Milford and the tireless work of Paul's granddaughter, Sgt. Chris Davis was able to join the party by way of a video conference from Al Asad Air Base in Anbar province.



Paul's face lit up with shock when she saw her great-grandson pop up on the computer screen in front of her.

"I have to punch myself to make sure it's real," Paul said of seeing Davis for the first time in more than a year.

Quick with a joke to break the ice, Paul asked the 26-year-old Marine, "Do you like all the sand?"

Davis laughed and replied, "No, there's too much of it. But I'll probably come home with plenty. It gets everywhere."

Paul could hardly believe it was possible to be able to see and talk with her great-grandson while he was serving in Iraq.

"I remember when it was a big deal to make a telephone call," she said after speaking with Davis. "To me, this is almost unbelievable."

Davis assured his great-grandmother and family, all eager to talk with him during the one-hour video conference, that “so far it hasn’t been that bad.” He exchanged some friendly ribbing with his older brother, Matthew Eckman, before receiving words of love and luck.

“You don’t know what a treat this is to see you,” said Davis’ mother, Kyle Eckman. She said her son left for Iraq two months ago.

Freedom Calls is a nonprofit organization that provides free video conferences via satellite hookups so servicemen and -women can connect to their families back home.

The video conference capped a day of surprises for Paul, who had thought she was only going out to lunch with a friend.

When she returned to Carriage Green, she was treated to a poem by Kyle Eckman titled “My Grandmother’s Garden.” At its conclusion she was presented with flowers from her five granddaughters, who drove up from Virginia and Georgia for a surprise visit.

The surprises kept coming with a proclamation from Mayor James L. Richetelli Jr. declaring Friday to be Dorothy W. Paul Day.

Paul graduated from Milford High School in 1931 and still manages to make it to most of the reunions, her family said.

But Friday, it was a family reunion of sorts with Paul’s five granddaughters and most of her 15 great-grandchildren joining her for her birthday.

“To have all my family here, it’s such a special treat,” Paul said. “It’s the biggest, nicest birthday surprise of my life.”

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