

Live from Iraq, dad attends son's 1st birthday

Technology reunites Marine, family

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In the first few minutes, Carol Mims, 52, searched for clues in her only son's face for the things the proud Marine would never tell her about living in Al Asad Airbase in Iraq.

So far, so good.

No sunken eyes -- that's a sign that Staff Sgt. Charles Mims was getting enough sleep. Cheeks a good color - - he must be eating right. Jokes about his muscles being "weapons of mass destruction" -- yup, he's doing just fine.

Family and friends of Charles Mims, 26, were able to see and talk to him during a video conference Monday night set up by the Freedom Calls Foundation. The nonprofit organization helps troops in Iraq and Afghanistan stay in touch with their families through technology.

For family and friends, it was their first chance to see how Charles Mims was doing after four months in Iraq. He is due to return by September.

And Monday wasn't just any other day. It was Rogan's first birthday, the youngest of Charles Mims' three sons.

The multimedia room at Catholic High School was turned into a party room. Balloons were tied to chairs, and a "Happy Birthday" sign was hanging on the wall. Children were sitting on the floor and tearing open the presents for the birthday boy who was too young to even understand what was going on.



Tarah Mims holds her son Rogan on Monday while her other son Braxton tries to blow out a candle on the cake during Rogan's first birthday party. Rogan's dad, Staff Sgt. Charles Mims, who is stationed in Iraq, was present via video conference.

Ben Twingley



Charles Mims spent some time Monday looking at the birthday boy, who was crawling around the room and making noises. Charles is due to return by September.

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Mims' co-workers from CTS America, a Pensacola-based company that offers technology-based public safety solutions, were there. They often check on his wife of six years, Tarah Mims, 24.

Tarah, who met Charles at Brownsville Assembly of God, took extra care to look good on Monday for her husband.

"I don't usually wear this much make-up," said Tarah, who often sends her husband home movies of the children. Tarah said the video conferencing is great when younger children are involved. The couple have another son, Braxton, 2. Charles' son from a previous relationship, Bradley McGuire, 10, also was there.

"(The children) change so much, and they don't really talk on the phone," she said about Braxton and Rogan. "When we talk for a longer length of time like this, the children get more comfortable."

The Marine stayed at Rogan's birthday party for an hour and 20 minutes.

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"When I left, he was only four months old," Mims said about Rogan. "He didn't crawl yet. He didn't even talk."

Before everyone said goodbye to Mims, Tarah carried Rogan right to the camera. She pulled his gums back so she could show her husband their son's first tooth.