

# Register-Mail

## Long-distance birthday party

### Naval Reservist in Iraq celebrates with family at home

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**BY DAVID MARTINEZ**

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Balloons, decorations and little pointed hats. It was like any other birthday party, except the guest of honor was thousands of miles away.

Chief Petty Officer Laurie Cline, a 17-year veteran of the Navy Reserves, has been on active duty in western Iraq for four months. She shipped off in February, leaving behind her husband, Michael, to look after their home. Thursday, May 25, was her 35th birthday, and Laurie received a special gift - she got to visit with her family.



**KENT KRIEGSHAUSER/The Register-Mail**

Laurie Cline can be seen smiling from the monitor in the back of a classroom at Carl Sandburg College Thursday as her husband, Michael, top left, her parents and grandparents wish her a happy birthday via a video conference. It was quarter after two in the morning in Iraq where Cline is serving in the Navy Reserves.

The Freedom Calls Foundation, in conjunction with Carl Sandburg College, arranged a video conference, via the Internet, that enabled Laurie to talk "virtually" face to face with her husband, her parents, Joe and Sue, and her grandparents, Joe and Laura. It was a birthday party made possible by modern technology.

A boisterous "Happy Birthday!" followed by beaming smiles and laughter, greeted a uniformed Cline when the video link was established and her image appeared on the television screen in a room at CSC Thursday afternoon.

Conversation ensued, but it was not a dramatic scene. It wasn't even a particularly enthralling dialogue, just ordinary talk about ordinary, everyday things.

"I just got off duty two hours ago, then I went and ate mid-rats, and now I'm here," replied a calm, demure and pleased Laurie.

In turn, her family told her about what was happening in their lives. They talked about the weather, retirement and golf.

"You been getting some practice on all those sand traps over there?" joked her father.

"Nope, no golf, Dad. But there's plenty of sand," quipped Laurie.

"It's not too hot over there, is it?" asked her mother.

"Not too bad lately, just around a hundred degrees."

They talked about the upcoming family reunion. Mike previously thought he couldn't go, but is now able to, he told his wife. "I had to figure out how to carry deviled eggs on a motorcycle."

"I sure wish I could be there," Laurie replied.

They talked about the future. "There'll be seven new ones in the family this year," Laurie's grandmother informed her. "We're going to be busy."

And round and round they went, finding connection in the details of life, finding solace in each other.

There was no cake. There were no candles. There were no gifts to unwrap. But it was undoubtedly a birthday party Laurie Cline will not soon forget. Nor will she forget the unanimous message from her family: "Come home soon."

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**On the Net:** [www.freedomcalls.org](http://www.freedomcalls.org)