

A soldier beams home

By ROB MARTINDALE World Senior Writer
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And family members in Tulsa beam back at the Army Sergeant in Iraq -- with some high-tech assistance.

Mary Mills received an early birthday present Friday from her son-in-law in Iraq.

Second-grader Cynthia Tatum got the promise from her stepfather of a new bicycle for Christmas.

And Cleta Boyles felt like she was with her husband again.

Although Army Sgt. William Ray Boyles Jr. of Tulsa was in Iraq, thousands of miles away from these family members, he got to chat with them Friday just as though they were next door.



Boyles, 35, an activated member of the Army Reserve, is in Camp Taji in the "Sunni Triangle" in Iraq, serving with the 223rd Maintenance Company out of Fort Sill.

A video conference with Army Sgt. William Ray Boyles Jr. in Iraq brings smiles Friday to the faces of his wife, Clela Boyles, and their daughter, Cynthia Tatum.

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The early birthday present for Mary Mills was in the form of a video-audio conference with her son-in-law. The conference was sponsored by the Freedom Calls Foundation network.

Participating from a conference room at the University of Tulsa were the soldier's wife, Clela; his stepdaughter, Cynthia, and father- and mother-in-law, Kevin and Mary Mills, all of Tulsa.

"It feels like he is here. I could just reach through the screen and grab him," his wife said.

The relatives talked with the sergeant from TU's College of Law, a contributor to the Freedom Calls Foundation.

The foundation has integrated systems in military hospitals and bases worldwide.



Army Sgt. William Ray Boyles Jr. talks with his family, seen in the inset photo, during a video conference Friday at the University of Tulsa.

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In addition to allowing soldiers in war zones to see and talk with their families, the program allows them to remotely attend such events as graduations, participate in weddings and to view newborn babies.

"This is an early birthday present for me," Mary Mills said of the conversation with the Army Reservist the family calls "Little Buck."

Her birthday is Oct. 1, the family said.

"It was like he was back home. I just want him here, but he is off somewhere where I can't take care of him," she noted.

Stepdaughter Cynthia told him she had lost her bicycle, and he promptly lit up her eyes by telling the Sequoyah Elementary School student he would get a new one for her for Christmas.

"It just feels good to see him. I wish he was back home," said father-in-law Kevin Mills.

Boyles is expected to return from Iraq in January following a one-year tour, his wife said.

She noted that Boyles was last home during a two-week leave in April.

"It has been very difficult to be separated from my husband for so long. I just called the foundation, and they set this up for my family. God bless them," she said.

The Freedom Calls Foundation, a public charity, is supported by corporate and individual donations.

It provides services free of charge 24 hours a day to enable service personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan to stay in touch with their families.

Boyles chatted with members of his family for one hour and 45 minutes.

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