

Veteran talks to school from thousands of miles away

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Observer-Dispatch

Nov 11, 2008

With 500 students and staff looking on, Hugh R. Jones Elementary School music teacher Beth Boudreau said hello to her little brother, Lt. Col Mark Walter, in Iraq via videophone Monday.

Walter, 42, talked to Boudreau and the students about life in Iraq, including the 120-degree temperatures and 50- to 80-pound gear he wears.

"I joined for four years and really enjoyed the time working in the field of logistics," he said.

Of course the biggest reaction came when he showed the students the guns he uses – a pistol and a rifle.

"I liked the big gun because it was huge," said fourth-grader Morgan Sipp, who asked Walter about his role in the war.

The call was sponsored by the Freedom Calls Foundation and was part of the school's Veterans Day celebrations – held a day early because there is no school today.

As part of the event, students brought their veteran relatives to school and learned how to properly fold a flag thanks to the help of the Thomas R. Proctor High School NJROTC.

"This was a way for all of the students to celebrate veterans and put faces to veterans," said Alaine Hartnett-Barnello, school principal. "They're people, neighbors and relatives."

Army veteran Jose Schwarz, who served in Iraq and Kosovo, said the day was special for him and the other veterans.

"It's neat to have the school do something like this and thank us for our service," said Schwarz, whose son Joey is a first-grader at the school.