



# Albert Lea Tribune

## Soldier based in Iraq sees his newborn baby girl for the first time

*By Sarah Light, staff writer*  
Saturday, May 19, 2007

There were tears of joy and tears of sadness Saturday morning at the Albert Lea Medical Center as Minnesota National Guard Sgt. Michael Bakken saw his wife, Jessica, and their newborn baby girl via satellite from Iraq.

Michael — with the C Company, 2nd Battalion, 135th Infantry Regiment of the Minnesota National Guard based out of Owatonna — has been deployed to Iraq for 15 months with a brief leave in September.

The couple said they had planned to get pregnant in September because they thought Michael would be home for the birth, but then in January his duty got extended an additional 125 days.

“We didn’t want or plan for me to be by myself these last nine months,” Jessica, 34, said. “It’s been hard.”

However, because of the efforts of the ALMC and the Freedom Calls Foundation, which built a satellite network to Iraq, Michael, 29, was able to see his wife and new baby just hours after the birth. Also surrounding Jessica and the new baby in the hospital room were Michael’s parents, Linda and Greg, and other family members.

During the first 20 minutes of the video conference, the proud new mother and father talked about names for the baby — which included the options of Brianna, Eva and Emma — how the baby looked, how the delivery went and how his time in Iraq has been going.



Brie Cohen/Albert Lea Tribune

Jessica Bakken shows her husband, Sgt. Michael Bakken, right, their newborn baby girl for the first time. Michael was viewing them from a Web camera in Iraq while Jessica and her family were on a Web camera at the Albert Lea Medical Center on Saturday.

Clad in a U.S. Army uniform, Michael grinned ear to ear as he saw his new baby, who was dressed in a pink outfit, for the first time.

“It’s pretty neat — I wish I could be there,” Michael said to his wife. But because he couldn’t, he noted, this was the “next best thing.”

Jessica said there were not words to describe how she felt seeing her husband again.

“It’s shocking,” she said. “But it could be worse. He could be gone for the first two years of her life.”

The couple hoped to have a name picked out for their new infant by the end of the video conference, which lasted for 90 minutes.

The Bakkens said they don’t know for sure when Michael will be home but that he should be back sometime before Christmas.

Until then, Jessica said, she will be taking her maternity leave, and the two will communicate by phone and through a new Web camera.

“I’m pretty much just waiting for him,” she said.

Michael said there are good things happening in Iraq and that the situation is “getting better.” But he could not give any more specifics.

Patty Hareid, ALMC director of community, said the medical center was thrilled to be able to participate in the event.

“This is just one little thing we could do,” Hareid said. “We appreciate the opportunity to participate, and we understand just how uniquely special and significant the birth of a baby is in the lives of parents, so we are delighted to make these arrangements,” Hareid said.

The Freedom Calls Foundation built the satellite network in cooperation with the U.S. Army and Marines to enable troops in Iraq and Afghanistan to keep in touch with their loved ones at home, free of charge.