

In Iraq, man meets son for first time

By Sara McDonald

The Daily News

Published March 27, 2008

LEAGUE CITY — He wasn't there to watch his wife's belly grow, feel his son kick or hear that first cry.

But a little technology helped U.S. Navy Reserve Lt. Cmdr. Eric Flagg meet his newborn son Wednesday morning from 7,300 miles away.

It was his first glance at the bundled-up sleeping baby and the tiny face that looks more like his wife, Carrmen, than him.

The half-hour video conference linked a camera and computer screen at Clear Lake Regional Medical Center with one a world away in Iraq.



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That glimpse at the hours-old baby is worth more than a dozen phone calls, Carrmen Flagg said.

"We're such a close family," she said.

"We share everything. For him not to be here, in such a momentous event, it's really hard. We're missing out on major family memories."

Her husband will also miss out on Travis Austin Flagg's first four or five months, Carrmen Flagg said.

He isn't due back from his third deployment in Iraq until late July at the earliest, she said.

Until then, she'll rely on her in-laws and friends to help change diapers and a nonprofit group to arrange more video conversations so he can watch Travis and the couple's 2-year-old son, Austin, grow.

Before Eric Flagg left for Iraq this time, he signed up with the group "Freedom Calls," a nonprofit that provides free video conferencing for military families.

The couple e-mails daily and talks once a week. Seeing each other face to face is what they look forward to.

"This has been especially good for our 2-year-old, who just needs to see his dad, to know he's still out there," Carrmen Flagg said. "It keeps him connected." She needs that, too.

"Nobody understands like your spouse," she said. "Other people are excited about the baby, but no one is as excited as the other parent."

When she had their first child, Eric Flagg was by her side, even when they had to evacuate League City during Hurricane Rita just before the baby was born.

This time, she was alone.

Carrmen Flagg learned she was pregnant two weeks after her husband's deployment.

Still, she's not complaining. The deployment came as a surprise but is part of the job, she said.

"This baby is such a gift to us," she said.

"We hoped for another child. We thought our hopes were dashed. I couldn't be more excited."

ON THE WEB

www.freedomcalls.org