

Midland Reporter-Telegram

Call from Iraq... Wife of Marine gets birthday video conference from husband overseas.

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by Ruth Campbell
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Staff Writer

Jami Todd got a 30th birthday present she'll never forget Tuesday when her husband, U.S. Marine Master Sgt. Mike Todd, placed a video conference call to her from Iraq.

Todd arranged the call through the Morristown, N.J.-based Freedom Calls Foundation, which helps soldiers abroad link up with loved ones back home, Jami's mom, Judy Connell said.



MSgt Mike Todd on the front lines in Iraq surprises his wife, Jami, on her 30th birthday in Midland, Texas in an enterprise class video conference provided by the Freedom Calls Foundation

Todd arranged the phone call and birthday lunch at Region 18 Education Service Center. Distance Learning Specialist Steve Welch said the center does this any time it's needed for soldiers.

With the U.S. and Marine Corps flag behind him, Todd told his wife; son, Lucas; family members and news media gathered in a conference room he had tried to arrange the video call a few times but was finally successful for this celebratory occasion.

To get her to Region 18, her family told Jami they were going to the center to pick up her sister-in-law for lunch at Red Lobster in Odessa. Her sister is taking a class at Region 18.

"It's amazing," Jami said. "It was just a complete shock, but I'm thrilled."

About 14 family members filled the room, the focus point of which was a large TV screen. Three-year-old Lucas tried

to touch his father through the TV screen and took up the first few minutes of the call by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. Family wisecracked, waved and cried as they got a glimpse of their loved one.

Although the couple e-mails or calls daily, seeing each other was something special.

"It helps, but we're almost done (with the deployment), so it makes it even more exciting to know that we're about to see each other," Jami said.

The Todds live near Camp Pendleton, Calif., and have lived all over the world. Stationed in Fallujah, Iraq, Todd is due back in Texas on Labor Day weekend. Jami has been staying with her parents in Midland since her husband was deployed more than six months ago.

Connell said Freedom Calls suggested the news coverage. "I hesitated on that because I knew she wouldn't want to be in the limelight that much, but for them I said OK because it shows people what they do and what their organization does," she said.

The Todds have been married 7 1/2 years, and Master Sgt. Todd has been on active duty with the Marines for 17 years. "He's been deployed a lot of places. They've been stationed all over the world," Connell said.

When he was deployed, her father, Jim, flew out to San Diego and drove her back to West Texas, where Jami grew up. After arriving in Texas, Todd will bring his family back to California.

"He's a wonderful man," Connell said. "We love him and we're glad he's our son-in-law. He's a good dad. He just wanted to do something special for (Jami). He was missing her birthday and he missed the little boy's birthday. He called me one day and said, 'I've got an idea for Jami's birthday,' so we thought it was real special."

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