

Don't worry, daddy's here

Soldier in Iraq participates in son's birth in Naperville

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Technology previously reserved for CNN's foreign correspondents enabled a U.S. Marine in Iraq watch as his son was born in Naperville.

Though his image was sometimes pixilated and the sound of his voice was delayed, Sgt. William Chevalier appeared at the bedside of his wife, Janelle, on a computer monitor hooked to a satellite telephone. He was able to be there, virtually, for most of the labor and delivery of their first son on Tuesday at Edward Hospital.



Edward Hospital Labor and Delivery nurse Dawn Mettille holds up Christian James Chevalier for his father, Sgt. William Chevalier, to see via video from Iraq.

HOW TO HELP

The Freedom Calls Foundation is a New Jersey-based charity founded in 2003 to provide communication services to American troops and their families free of charge. To donate, visit www.freedomcalls.org.

"He was just like, 'Push! You're doing good, sweetie!'" Janelle said.

In what could be described as the best Christmas present ever, Christian James Chevalier was born a healthy 8 pounds, 4 ounces and 21 inches long at 12:47 p.m. (9:47 p.m. Iraq time).

The family won't see the bill for the five-hour-plus video conference - the nonprofit Freedom Calls Foundation provided the connection to the Chevaliers for free.

William's parents, Cheryl and Constant Chevalier of Naperville, read about the organization in The Sun. Freedom Calls' satellite network connects some 40,000 American troops in Iraq and



Janelle Chevalier kisses her newborn baby, Christian James, while her daughter, Makayla, 7, watches at Edward Hospital's Labor and Delivery ward Tuesday afternoon in Naperville. A video conference call was arranged by Freedom Calls Foundation so that Chevalier's husband, William, who is a sergeant in the U.S. Marine Corps and currently stationed in Iraq, could witness the birth. (Danielle Gardner/Staff photographer)

Afghanistan with their families at home, providing \$4 million worth of phone calls per year. The Chevaliers' video conference was one of 150 new-baby conferences the organization hosts each month.

All William had to do was take a 15-minute bus ride across the airfield to a room set aside for such calls at Al Asad Air Base, near the Syrian border.

"But you'd go to the ends of the earth for this service, so it's no big deal," he said.

William's parents were sitting in the waiting room outside the labor and delivery unit when they heard a lullaby chiming over the hospital's public address system, indicating a baby had just been born. Their eyes lit up.

"Is that it?" Cheryl asked.

That was it.

They had stepped out when Janelle started pushing, but they had visited with their son over the satellite phone earlier in the day.

"He looks good," Cheryl said of William. "He's really healthy."

William, 33, works as a jet engine mechanic for an F-18 squadron and is a 1992 graduate of Naperville Central High School. Janelle, 30, was five months pregnant when her husband left for his first tour in Iraq. The family lives in San Diego, where William is stationed, but Janelle has been staying with William's parents in Naperville during her pregnancy.

William will meet his son and see their two daughters again when he returns home - for good - in March. He enlisted in the Marines in December 2002 and has been apart from his wife for 1 1/2 years of their four-year marriage.

"I am privileged to serve my country and to have done this," he said. "This is something I will never forget. ... It's time to put the family first and move on."

He said witnessing the birth of his son this way was unreal and bittersweet. Though it was getting late at night in Iraq, William pledged to stay on the phone "as long as I can maintain consciousness."

He gazed down at Christian, swaddled in white blankets and a blue knit cap and cradled in Janelle's arms.



Christian James Chevalier was born a healthy 8 pounds, 4 ounces and 21 inches long at 12:47 p.m. (9:47 p.m. Iraq time).
(Danielle Gardner/Staff photographer)

"I can't wait to get home," he said.

"I can't wait for you to get here," Janelle said.
"Can you see him? He's precious."

"He's beautiful," William said. "He looks like his daddy."

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