

Webcam keeps family connected

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From 7,000 miles away in Iraq, Capt. Derek Poteet met his newborn daughter for the first time. The meeting went the way many corporations conduct business - via videoconference.

His wife, Porsha Poteet, calmly sat in a chair in the conference room at Prince William Hospital, cradling day-old Susannah Karen Poteet in her arms, as their other four children went ecstatic over seeing their dad's face on a computer monitor.

For a little more than an hour, Poteet was able to see and talk to his wife, children and mother through a satellite feed provided by Freedom Calls Foundation, a not-for-profit organization that provides free communications services to soldiers and their families.

"You are a sight for sore eyes ... you look great," the Marine Corps Reservist told his wife.

"Yeah, I usually don't get dressed and curl my hair day two," she replied. "I can't wait until you can hold her."

Eight-year-old Clara Poteet and her younger sisters and brother sometimes spun wildly in front of the Web camera mounted on top of the monitor and made funny faces to which Poteet made funny faces back.

When they left with Poteet's mother, though, the room became quiet and Poteet spent time just gazing at his wife and baby.

It was the first time he wasn't at Porsha's side for either the pregnancy or the birth.

Poteet, who's been stationed in Al Asad since January, made the request to the foundation, which worked with the hospital to make the necessary arrangements within a matter of days.

Poteet, who inspects U.S. and Iraqi detention facilities to determine if they are in compliance with the Geneva Conventions, spends most of his time on the road. So, there was no absolute certainty that he'd be able to be at the base where the equipment is installed.

"It was really great ... an unexpected blessing," Porsha said.

Advances in technology have not only changed the way wars are fought, but how relationships are maintained during those wars.

The Poteet's have used that technology extensively, sending e-mails almost every day and usually talking at least every three to four days, Porsha said. Poteet even recorded a DVD of himself reading children's books for his other four children aged from almost 2 to 8.

"This is the first war we've been able to ... communicate so robustly," Poteet said in response to a reporter's question.

However, the technology can make life that much harder, Poteet said, because there is almost always some reminder of what you are missing at home.

"Your heart aches to be with them," he said. "But it's wonderful to see them."

The foundation has three facilities in Iraq, with 50 computers and 20 telephones at Camp Taji and videoconferencing facilities at Camp Fallujah and Al Asad Airbase, according to a Freedom Calls press release.

Poteet will return home in about a month.