

Hawaii-based soldier sees daughter

Videoconference lets Dad, stationed in Iraq, see his newborn girl

By **Suzanne Roig**
Advertiser Staff Writer
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SCHOFIELD BARRACKS — Across 8,400 miles and 13 time zones, the Cole family was reunited yesterday.

Army 1st Lt. Clayton Cole was in Iraq.

Second-time mom Nicole Foley-Cole was in a computer lab at Schofield Barracks with their two young daughters.



Seeing her dad on the big screen was a little embarrassing at first for Emma, though she soon had no trouble speaking to him



Emma and mom Nicole, with Jill, could hardly contain their excitement to speak to Clayton, who was deployed to Iraq in December.

They saw and talked to each other over a live video feed so Cole could see, for the first time, his newborn daughter — 4-day-old Jill.

For an hour, the soldier was able to feel the distance fade away as he asked Nicole how the baby was doing. Did she eat OK? How was her shoulder? Was she a good burper?

And he asked how his older daughter, Emma, was adjusting.

"It's amazing watching her and to see how gorgeous she is," Cole said. "I can't believe I have two girls now. This makes life good.



Emma Cole, 4, got up close and personal with her dad, Army 1st Lt. Clayton Cole, during a videoconference yesterday in a Schofield Barracks computer lab. Clayton also spoke to his wife, Nicole Foley-Cole, and met his newborn daughter Jill for the first time.

"When I come home I will bring you something special. I'll tell you a hint: It was once alive and an insect, and they're scary."

His daughter said in a little voice, "Like a spider?"

"That's right, I got you a spider in a picture frame. I tried to get you a camel, but it wouldn't fit in your box."

The video call was made possible by the Freedom Calls Satellite Network at the ACS Computer Lab at Schofield. Typically, families sign up for the video call and get 20 minutes of precious time. The Coles got more than a hour together.

"You search your whole life for what you're doing here and it's because of this. It makes it all worthwhile."

The family communicates via e-mails daily, Foley-Cole said. After the birth of Jill, they waited several days before they named the baby so Cole could see the picture via e-mail. That was when he learned that his newborn daughter's shoulder was fractured during delivery. It's healing well now, he learned.

Emma, meanwhile, listens to pre-recorded stories by Dad at bedtime and gets to tap into a jar of Dad's kisses — chocolates — every night before bed.

These are just a few of the steps the Coles take to stay in touch since Cole began his deployment in Iraq in December. He won't get a chance to meet his new daughter until May when he comes for his two weeks of R&R.

His only view of his daughter until yesterday were ultrasound pictures, said Foley-Cole.

"Hi Emma," Cole said, his face projected large on a video screen. "Can you introduce me to the new baby? Who's that, sweetheart?"



Mom and daughters were overjoyed to speak to Clayton, who will return home in May for two weeks of R&R.

Freedom Calls is a nonprofit charity that built a satellite network to provide video conferencing, telephone and Internet links for the troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. More than 50,000 soldiers tap into the network, which was authorized by the secretary of the Army to provide communication services to soldiers and their families.

Foley-Cole said she could tell her husband was excited to see her and their daughters.

"She has blue eyes," Foley-Cole told him. "You make cute babies. I am so happy we got to do this and I can see you."

Reach Suzanne Roig at sroig@honoluluadvertiser.com.