

Marine in Iraq sees new son via video conference

By TAMMY WALDEN
The Review

Thanks to the Freedom Calls Foundation, Marine Staff Sgt. Frederick A. Broache of the HMM-266 out of New River Air Station, NC, S-4 Section, saw his newborn son, Broderick Allen, on Tuesday via video conference, inside the obstetrics' unit at Mercy Medical Center in Canton.

Frederick, a 1996 Marlinton High School graduate, is stationed in the war zone of Western Iraq on his fourth tour of duty with the Marines. He "met" his newborn son during the video conference set up in his wife Alison's recovery room. "It went really, really well," said Alison, "I was so surprised and happy."

From a six-foot screen set up in her recovery room at the hospital, a video conference over Freedom Calls network was arranged from the Freedom Calls facility at Al Asad, a base near the Syrian border in Iraq.

The couple's first child, "Brody" was born at 10:43 p.m. Monday.

Alison said she heard about the Freedom Calls Foundation during childbirth classes she attended at Mercy. "It was really easy," she said, "I went on the Web site and contacted one of the co-founders, John Harlow, and he set everything up."

According to Harlow, executive director of the Freedom Calls Foundation, "the foundation is transforming a long standing family communication paradigm in time of war by enabling soldiers in the war zone to attend and participate in milestone family events like weddings, first communions and births, etc. Soldiers are now in a position to keep their commitments to their families at the same time they keep their commitment to their country.

"The long term vision of the Freedom Calls Foundation is that our war fighters will be able to come home from day on the battlefield and spend virtual time with their families every night using state of the art technology. Without the contribution of resources by community citizens like Mercy Medical Center, we could not execute our mission."

The Freedom Calls program serves deployed military personnel and their families 24 hours per day, free of charge.

The foundation is a public charity building a communications network providing state of the art video conferencing, telephone and Internet services to enable American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan to keep in touch with their families and loved ones at home. The foundation provides services to more than 30,000 soldiers and marines.



Photo Courtesy of Mercy Medical Center

Alison Broache and her son Broderick "Brody" Allen sit before the video screen connecting them with husband and father Frederick A. Broache, who is serving in Iraq

The U.S. Army has requested that the foundation install eight additional facilities in Iraq and two in Afghanistan in the coming months. The foundation is authorized by the Secretary of the Army to provide communications services to the troops and their families and recently received a commendation from the Army.

The Freedom Calls Foundation is funded by donations of corporations and the American people on the foundation's Web site www.freedomcalls.org

The program has been well-received at Mercy. "We would like to thank the Freedom Calls Foundation for making this connection possible. This is a great service. We appreciate how uniquely special and significant the birth of a baby is in the lives of parents, and so we were delighted to make these arrangements.

"We hope the videoconference lets the new family share this momentous occasion in a more meaningful way while dad is away from home serving his country," said Tom Cecconi, president and CEO of Mercy Medical Center.

When his tour ends in February or March, Frederick and Alison plan to return to their Marine base at New River Air Station, Jacksonville, N.C.

Alison said the Freedom Calls experience proved better than she expected. Her husband, she said, was equally awed by the experience. "I think he was a little overwhelmed," said Alison. "He spent a lot of time just sitting there and staring at us." 🌍