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Marine in Iraq sees daughter's birth in Jacksonville

BY Dan Whisenhunt
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JACKSONVILLE - For Marine Cpl. Terrence "Terry" Lambert, serving on the frontlines in Iraq, the birth of his first child was imminent early today, on Father's Day. For his wife, Jodi Lynn Lambert, lying in her room at Jacksonville Medical Center, the birth of their daughter, Katherine Annalee Lambert, was imminent at press time Saturday night.

And Terry was with her for the birth. The miracle of birth had met the miracles of modern technology.

A Marine serving on the frontlines in Iraq was able to be present for the birth of his child, via satellite. That's something that never has happened before, according to John Harlow of the Freedom Calls Foundation.

And it happened here.

In a cozy room at Jacksonville Medical Center, surrounded by family and friends early Saturday evening, Jodi, 20, waited patiently for the arrival of her daughter.

Terry blinked at her from a 50-inch television screen as they talked and waited. Jodi lay on her side, wrapped in white sheets. The baby's heart monitor beeped like a reassuring metronome.

"(When I heard about this) I thought it was amazing," Terry said. "It usually takes two months for us to get a letter. So this is a big improvement."

The military provided a waiting room at Alisade Air Base, near the Syrian border in Iraq. Terry kept himself pumped with coffee and Copenhagen snuff. He'd slept only 45 minutes in the previous 24 hours.

"With all of this media coverage, she better grow up to do something," he joked to his wife.

Jodi and Terry both grew up in Gadsden. When Terry isn't on the front lines, he's stationed in Beaufort, N.C. This is his second tour in Iraq. Jodi is staying in Gadsden with her mother while he's away.

It took a month to organize the videoconference. A joint effort was pulled together so that Terry could celebrate his first Father's Day in style. The satellite link was set up by Freedom Calls



Jodi Lynn Lambert lies in her hospital bed in labor Saturday as her husband, Terry Lambert, lends support via videoconference from his post at Alisade Air Base in Iraq. Photo: Brian Schoenhals/The Anniston Star

Foundation, a nonprofit organization that keeps soldiers overseas in touch with home. Cameras were provided by Perot Systems, owned by former presidential candidate Ross Perot. The widescreen television was provided by Handy TV Appliance in Anniston.

Harlow estimated the cost at \$2,000 an hour, with the connection beamed from Jacksonville, to Atlanta, to Germany, and finally into a war zone.

"There is no Internet infrastructure in Iraq," Harlow said. "This is priceless."

He said Freedom Calls has organized connections for such events as graduations and even parent-teacher conferences. But this was the first live birth. "There's been a lot of people involved that have made this possible," Jodi said. "This is the best Father's Day present he can ask for."

Terry is scheduled to return home in the fall. For more information about Freedom Calls, visit their website at www.freedomcalls.org.

Dan Whisenhunt covers Calhoun County and the city of Anniston for The Star.