

THE BUFFALO NEWS

Satellite hookup allows Marine in Iraq to see son's birth

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07/21/07

JAMESTOWN — Marine Sgt. Joseph Gardiner took a break Friday from the Iraq War to get the first glimpse of his new son, born 7,000 miles away in WCA Hospital.

Colby Gardiner had arrived just after 8 a.m. Thursday.

Satellite technology allowed Gardiner to view a five-minute videotape Friday of his son's delivery and to talk with his wife, Sarah, and his other two sons, Tyrell, 2, and Joseph "Bean" Jr., 4.

The Freedom Calls Foundation arranged the hookup, with help from the Marine Corps and hospital officials.

"It's a great opportunity," Gardiner said. "I didn't think I was going to be able to do anything until I got to talking to some of my superiors, and they said they would be able to hook something up. I got real excited then."

Gardiner has been stationed in Fallujah since January with the Marines 8th Communications B-N Unit out of Fort Lejeune, N.C.

He said he hopes to be home with his family in Steamburg soon.

Mother and baby, meanwhile, are doing well.

The Freedom Calls Foundation has worked to allow soldiers in the war zone to be a more meaningful part of family "milestone events," such as births and even weddings.

Foundation officials are looking for corporate and individual donations to help cover the high costs of the project. For more information, visit the Web site Freedomcalls.org.

In 2004, the foundation installed its first facility offering special telephone, Internet and video conferencing services in an Army camp in the Sunni Triangle north of Baghdad, according to the Web site.

In 2005, the foundation installed satellite links and communications facilities at Marine headquarters at Camp Fallujah and Al Asad Air Base in Anbar Province on the Syrian border.

The foundation reports that its facilities in Iraq serve 30,000 to 40,000 soldiers, Marines and Air Force personnel.