

Video link lets Marine dad in Iraq meet his new daughter

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BY JOSH SINGER Pioneer Press

Gunnery Sgt. Raymundo Galarza could not be with his wife for the birth of their daughter Thursday night. But the U.S. Marine was able to see his newborn almost immediately through a Baghdad-to-Hoffman Estates video conference set up on Friday.

"Say, 'Hi, Daddy!' " his wife, Monica Galarza, told their daughter, newly named Luciana Rae.

Gunnery Sergeant Raymundo Galarza, who is serving in Iraq, had a chance to meet his newly-born daughter, Luciana Galarza, after his wife, Monica, gave birth at St. Alexius Medical Center in Hoffman Estates using satellite technology and a laptop computer.

Freedom Calls Foundation, a public charity keeping families united during war time, made the arrangement possible.

Monica Galarza, 33, of Schaumburg, said her first child screamed loud enough for an "American Idol" audition when she was born at 8:42 p.m. Thursday at St. Alexius Medical Center in Hoffman Estates. Luciana Rae weighed 8 pounds, 12 ounces.

"Everybody's calling her 'Rae,' " Monica Galarza, a school social worker at Field Elementary School in Wheeling, told her husband. "When she opens her eyes, she looks just like you."

Raymundo Galarza, 32, has been serving his second tour in Iraq since September and is expected to return in August. The new father beamed during the video conference.

"I wish I could hold her right now . . . especially when she's this small," he said. "She looks beautiful."



Monica Galarza holds her wedding photo with husband Gunnery Sgt. Raymundo Galarza, who is serving in Iraq, and their newborn daughter, Luciana Rae Galarza.

(JOSH SINGER/FOR PIONEER PRESS)

His wife admitted not having her husband in the hospital was difficult, but appreciated the video link.

"It's hard because he's not here, but it was great to hear him and see him," Monica said.

Orchestrating the conference call required a combination of Internet and satellite technology from St. Alexius and the Freedom Calls Foundation.

Coordinating around the Marine's schedule was another hurdle, hospital spokesman Matt Wakely said.

"I mean, he's on the front lines," Wakely said.