

The Columbus Dispatch

Marine hears son's birth on phone, then has a 'visit'

Wednesday, August 31, 2005

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THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

MARION, Ohio — Nearly all weekend, Marine Sgt. Charles Van Voorhis stood in line waiting to use a phone at a military base in Iraq.

Each turn on the phone, Van Voorhis would call his wife, whose labor pains had started early Saturday. Had anything changed?

When his turn was up, he would go to the end of the line and wait to call again.

Then, he got lucky.

Just before 6 p.m. Monday, he reached his wife's cell phone in midcontraction.

Joy Van Voorhis spoke with her husband briefly, then handed the phone to her dad.

For the next 20 minutes, the Marine listened from a distance. At 6:16 p.m. Monday, 7-pound, 5-ounce Jacob Edward Van Voorhis debuted.

"The doctor even had someone hold the phone up as they were cleaning (Jacob)," an exhausted but elated Mrs. Van Voorhis said yesterday. "He got to hear his son's first screams, all the way over in Iraq."

But wait, it gets better. The family also spent a virtual two hours together yesterday.

The Freedom Calls Foundation worked with Marion General Hospital staff, who scrambled to install special computer software and high-tech recording equipment that enabled Van Voorhis to see his wife and new son.

Serving with the hard-hit 3rd Battalion, 25th Marines Division out of Brook Park, the reservist hadn't seen his wife since Jan. 3rd, 10 days after learning she was pregnant with their first child together.

Yesterday, his parents, mother-in-law and 16-year-old son joined his wife for the visit via a television wheeled into the private room by hospital staff.

When Van Voorhis got his first look at Jacob, everyone in the room choked up.

"He looks exactly like me," he said.



FRED SQUILLANTE | DISPATCH
Joy Van Voorhis cradles her infant son, Jacob

"Except," his wife replied as she nodded toward the newborn, "this one has more hair."

Van Voorhis remained jovial despite the dig at his military haircut: "It's pretty neat that I'm here and can still see this."

By the time the call ended just after noon, he was exhausted, having gone many hours without sleep.

To participate in the virtual visit, Van Voorhis was flown to another base where the Freedom Calls organization is equipped to make such connections. So far, the group is located at three Iraqi sites.

The nonprofit organization has helped 30,000 soldiers at those sites make virtual connections with home, and has helped many more witness weddings, graduations and births from the war zone.

Despite the sleep deprivation, Van Voorhis said he knew his wife was spent, too. But no one wanted the visit to end.

"It was the most amazing thing," Mrs. Van Voorhis said later.

Back in her hospital bed, she snuggled with the sleeping Jacob in her arms.

"Daddy got to see you," she whispered to him. "If you think that was good, wait until he holds you."

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