

# The Dallas Morning News

## Internet link gives troops face time with loved ones

**About 40 soldiers at base in Iraq meet with friends, family**

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**By LaKISHA LADSON / The Dallas Morning News**

IRVING – Tina Reyna of Fort Worth hadn't seen her son Rudy since his father died in March – the same day Rudy was to deploy to Iraq with the 980th Engineer Battalion Army Reserve Unit out of Seagoville.

On Saturday, Ms. Reyna couldn't finish her food or contain her tears as she waited at the SBC Center for Learning with the pregnant mother of her grandchild and Rudy's younger brother to see him.

Hearing Rudy's voice during two telephone conversations and constantly praying for him isn't as reassuring as seeing him face-to-face – even if it was via the Internet.

"That's my baby!" she exclaimed as her son at Camp Cooke, Iraq, appeared on-screen.

About 40 soldiers at Camp Cooke got to spend at least 20 minutes of face time with their loved ones Saturday as part of a program sponsored by organizations such as SBC Communications; SBC Pioneers, the company's volunteer arm; and the Freedom Calls Foundation.

"The quiet dignity and courage of our military families in this situation is the greatest untold story," said Richard Jubeck, Freedom Calls' director of development.

Ms. Reyna, son Abel Granado, and Rudy's girlfriend, Charlene Lucio, all of Fort Worth, shared wishes from loved ones, but they mostly couldn't take their eyes off the screen.

"Boy, you look good!" Ms. Reyna repeated over and over. She commented on his weight and tan and warned him to stop touching a cut around his eye "before it gets infected."

Rudy, a specialist who turned 21 last month, made faces, showed off his gun and took water breaks. Seeing Ms. Lucio's abdomen with their unborn daughter perked him up.

"Whoa – that's big!" Rudy said as she showed her profile.

Earlier Saturday, Jennifer Stricklin brought her 4-year-old daughter, Tara, and 7-year-old son, Tyler, from East Texas to see their father, Sgt. 1st Class David Stricklin. Because of the nine-hour time difference, the children are often sleeping when their mother and father e-mail each other. On Saturday, Tara got to interrupt conversations with "Daddy, Daddy."

After some final words and blown kisses, his family members moved from their spots in front of the camera one-by-one. He watched the screen until they were all gone, before quietly removing his headphones and walking away.

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