

Daily Chronicle

Sight for Sore Eyes

Videoconference brings soldier in Iraq closer to home

By Dana Herra - Staff Writer

ROCKFORD - Sycamore native Anthony Sosin, 22, an Army corporal stationed in Iraq, was about to see his 3-month-old daughter, Laynee, for the first time since she was 2 weeks old through a live video phone call connecting him with his family back in Illinois.

But just as the eager young father was about to sit down in front of the screen, the building he was in near the Jordanian border lost power.

Back in the United States, while staffers at the University of Illinois Rockford Extension office scrambled to figure out why they had lost the connection, Anthony's wife, father and sister waited nervously in front of a blank TV.



Michelle Sosin of DeKalb holds up her 3-month-old daughter, Laynee, for her husband, Anthony, a soldier stationed in Iraq, during a videoconference call in Rockford on Tuesday. Anthony last saw Laynee when she was 2 weeks old. Chronicle photo HOLLY LUNDH

“This will devastate him if they don't fix this,” his father, Howard, said. “He's been so looking forward to this.”

“How much do you think he's swearing right now?” sister Dani joked.

Meanwhile, Anthony's wife, Michelle, fussed over the baby, finding just the right pink bow to put in her hair so she would look perfect for Daddy.

Fifteen minutes later, power was restored, and the Sosin family found itself reunited courtesy of a high-speed Internet connection.

“There's my princess!” Anthony crowed as Michelle held up Laynee. “She's so beautiful.”

Then, as he caught sight of the bow, “Tell Mommy to take that ridiculous thing off your head.”

The last time Anthony saw Laynee was when he came home to DeKalb for two weeks right after her birth.

“He just missed her birth by two days,” Michelle, 25, said.

Anthony is on his second deployment since joining the Army at 18, but said having a wife and daughter at home makes this one a lot harder than the first.

“Missing the birth of my daughter was the hardest thing to deal with, and I'm still having a hard time dealing with it,” he said during the hour-and-a-half videoconference. “The first time I was single, and I didn't want to come back. Now I'm married and I have a daughter, and I can't wait to get home.”

Michelle said she and Anthony were married in June 2005, and Anthony was sent overseas the following November.

“He usually calls home two or three times a week,” she said. “But this (videoconference) made his day, his week, his month.”

Michelle and Laynee posed next to the TV screen for photos, and Michelle put the baby up against the screen to give her father a kiss. Anthony's eyes hardly left his daughter during the entire call.

Anthony's sister Dani, 27, who just completed a tour in Iraq last year with the National Guard, said being able to see and speak to loved ones can be both a blessing and a curse for soldiers.

“It's the happiest and the saddest you'll ever be,” she said. “You get into a pattern where you keep yourself really busy. You eventually have to call because your heart hurts and your family needs to hear from you, and it's wonderful. ... But then you have to hang up the phone and go back to your real life, and the reminder you can't be there is just so painful. But you wouldn't trade it for anything.”

The videoconference was set up by the Freedom Calls Foundation, a nonprofit organization that allows American troops in Iraq to see and speak to their loved ones for free. The group has made it possible for soldiers to witness family weddings, graduations, birthdays, even the births of their children.

Though the conversation was peppered with jokes about Iraqi food, comments about watching baseball games a day after they happen, and the good-natured ribbing that comes with any family gathering, everyone relished the chance to actually see the person on the other end of the phone in real time - especially Anthony.

“I can't take my eyes off her,” he cooed as Laynee slept in Dani's arms. “Don't worry, princess, I'll be home soon. Then you won't have to wear any more stupid ribbons in your hair.”

Dana Herra can be reached at dherra@daily-chronicle.com.