

Digital delivery

Soldier in Iraq able to witness son's birth with help of foundation

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By Karina Ramírez / Staff Writer

Technology brought together a couple separated by thousands of miles for the birth of their baby.

Hours before a pregnant Stephanie Denton was scheduled to take an online final exam in organizational behavior, her water broke. On her way to Presbyterian Hospital of Denton, she sent her husband — Marine Lance Cpl. Robert Denton — a message using Windows Messenger on her cellphone, hoping he would see it.

He sent her a text saying hello.

“By the way, I am having the baby,” Stephanie replied.

“What? Right now?” Robert responded.

“I am sitting in the hospital in labor talking to you,” answered Stephanie.

Robert saw Stephanie welcome their firstborn child, Robert Edward Denton III, at 8:52 p.m. Saturday via a computer screen in Iraq.

“He's got my blond hair and my crooked toes,” Robert said, after seeing his baby for the first time.

The new baby boy had gray eyes, weighed 7 pounds and 10 ounces, and was 20 3/4 inches long.

“He just had the biggest smile on his face,” said Stephanie, 19, of her husband.



Courtesy photo/Stephen E. Avery
Lance Cpl. Robert Denton, was able to participate in the labor and recovery of his wife, Stephanie, and their new son, Robert Edward III, on Saturday at Presbyterian Hospital of Denton while the Marine is stationed in Iraq.



DRC/Barron Ludlum

Lance Cpl. Robert Denton, shown below on monitor, was able to participate in the labor and recovery of his wife, Stephanie, and their new son, Robert Edward III, on Saturday at Presbyterian Hospital of Denton while the Marine is stationed in Iraq. The video teleconference was made possible by the Freedom Calls Foundation, a nonprofit organization that provides U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan the ability to use video conferencing, telephony and the Internet to help them share special moments with loved ones across the globe.

While searching for something that would allow her and her husband to share the birth of their child, Stephanie found the Freedom Calls Foundation. The nonprofit organization provides troops in Iraq and Afghanistan the ability to use video conferencing, telephony and the Internet to help them share special moments with loved ones.

“We never could have imagined that my husband could have been here for the birth when he is 9,000 miles away fighting a war,” Stephanie said. “This means the world to me and my family.”

Erica Avery, Stephanie’s twin sister, said she was thrilled to see her new nephew.

“I am really happy for her and her husband even though it is still a little weird to think that my twin sister is now a mom,” she said. The sisters will celebrate turning 20 together on Dec. 30.

Stephen E. Avery, Stephanie’s father, said he was thankful that his son-in-law got to participate in the birth.

“I will always remember the smile on Robert’s face as he watched his new son in the nursery. He couldn’t take his eyes off the baby,” Avery said.

The last time Robert, 21, saw his wife was July 9 before he deployed to Iraq — one day after he found out he would have a son.

“He never got to be part of the pregnancy,” Stephanie said, aside from watching a video of the ultrasound.

Stephanie learned about the Freedom Calls Foundation in September after finding it on a Facebook support group for military wives, girlfriends and fiancées. She said she was grateful to find such a service and that the hospital helped them with the setup.

It was the first time Presbyterian Hospital of Denton had used video conferencing technology in the delivery room.

“We believe the birth of a child to be a special and significant event in the lives of parents, and so we are delighted to make these arrangements so they may be together on this occasion,” said Ellen Painter, the hospital’s marketing director. “We hope this video conference will help provide these new parents with an additional boost of emotional and mental support.”

Freedom Calls, a nonprofit organization, provides more than 2,000 video conferences per month free of charge to U.S. military personnel and their families.

John Harlow, the foundation's executive director, said the couple can continue to use the video teleconference service three times a month as long as Robert is overseas.

"It is a privilege to help them," Harlow said. "They deserve whatever we can get and do for them."

Because of its efforts, the foundation received the 2008 Newman's Own Award for its support of military families.

Stephanie said she was happy her husband could take part in the birth, even if it was via a computer.

This Friday, she said, her mother-in-law will take care of Robert Edward while she takes her online final — another nod to the advancement of technology.

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