



## Video Conference Enables Marine in Iraq to Witness Birth of First Child in Oklahoma

Thursday, November 08, 2007

OKLAHOMA CITY — U.S. Marine Sgt. Chad Mortenson of Yukon is currently stationed in Iraq, but that didn't stop him from witnessing the birth of his daughter in Oklahoma City on Wednesday.

Through a video conference link set up by a New Jersey-based charity, Freedom Calls Foundation, the 25-year-old watched his wife, Denae Mortenson, deliver the couple's first child at Integris Southwest Medical Center.

"It was wonderful. The whole time he was talking to me," said Denae Mortenson, 20. "He could see me and I could hear him. It was like he was there, but he was just on a screen."

Jayden Faith Mortenson weighed 6 pounds, 13 ounces and was delivered via cesarean section at 8:11 a.m.

"She's doing great — 100 percent healthy," Denae Mortenson said.

In the last few days, the Freedom Calls Foundation has linked three Oklahoma soldiers with loved ones at home in Oklahoma, said the charity's founder and executive director, John Harlow.

Soldiers from Shawnee and Lawton also were able to see their newborn babies for the first time through satellite video links provided at local hospitals and the foundation.



Nov. 7: U.S. Marine Sgt. Chad Mortenson, shown on the video screen kissing his newborn daughter from Al-Asad Air Base in Iraq, witnessed birth of his daughter in Oklahoma City.

An attorney and venture capitalist, Harlow said he initially founded the charity to provide phone calls for soldiers after learning of a soldier who rang up a \$7,000 cell phone bill talking to his family from Iraq.

"I just didn't think it was right to have these families commercially exploited when they're making sacrifices on behalf of this country," Harlow said.

With limited funding, mostly through donations, the group is able to conduct about 2,000 video conferences a month, allowing soldiers to visit with dying relatives, watch their children graduate from high school and even "attend" funerals and memorial services.

"I had a first birthday where the guy came up on the screen and sang happy birthday to his daughter over the computer," Harlow said. "After he sang the song, she ran across the room saying, 'dada,' and kissed the screen. It was very touching."

Harlow said he's hoping to get additional funding and possibly corporate sponsorships so the program can be expanded.

"We're only serving 25 percent of the soldiers over there," Harlow said. "For every woman who calls me and asks me for help, and I tell them I can do it and she cries for joy, there are three others that are crying tears of disappointment because we just don't have the resources to do it."