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VIDEO SAVES 'MOMENT YOU CAN'T GET BACK'

A JOLIET DAD SHARES A VISIT WITH HIS NEWBORN SON AND WIFE WHILE SERVING WITH THE MARINES 6,500 MILES AWAY IN IRAQ.

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By **BOB OKON** bokon@scn1.com

JOLIET -- The Marine's stony face turned to a warm smile as he looked at his newborn son, Scout. Scout was in the arms of his mother, Emily, in Joliet. U.S. Marine Cpl. Ryan Anderson was in Iraq.

The moment was created through a video conference that united the family Thursday.

"He's good? He's been eating and everything?" Ryan asked Emily.

Yes, Emily said. Scout was born Wednesday morning. Last night, she said, "Each little noise he made, I woke up."

"I can hear him," Ryan said as Scout on cue cried just a little bit.

Those personal moments were made possible by the Freedom Calls Foundation, a charity that set up a satellite network so the men and women serving in Iraq can make video contact with families back home.

Provena Saint Joseph Medical Center, where the baby was born, provided the technology at the hospital with software from Freedom Calls.

The video reunion was a little awkward because it was being recorded by The Herald News and NBC5 News.

But it also was an opportunity the new mother and father appreciated.

"It's a good thing," Ryan said. "A lot of guys don't have an opportunity to be able to do this."

Scout's debut

He has been on the move for weeks and could have missed this chance to see Scout on live video barely a day after his birth.

Emily said the couple had talked about arranging the video conference for months. But making it happen only became possible when Ryan recently was stationed in one place.



Emily Anderson, of Joliet, introduces her husband, Ryan, a U.S. Marine serving in Iraq, to his newborn son, Scout, via video conference Thursday at Provena Saint Joseph Medical Center in Joliet. Ryan's mother, Lisa, of Naperville, sits with them. Emily and Ryan have not seen each other since January. Their interaction, a day after Scout's birth, was made possible by the Freedom Calls Foundation, a New York-based nonprofit organization which provides software to link family members with soldiers serving around the world.

Liz Wilkinson Allen/staff photographer

"It's a moment you can't get back," Emily said, waiting for the video linkup that would put Ryan on a screen in front of her. "I'm so excited to show (Scout) off."

Before Ryan was shown on the monitor, John Harlow, executive director of the Freedom Calls Foundation, appeared on the screen to talk to Emily.

He had a nice surprise for her. Freedom Calls would make it possible for Ryan to check on Scout live via the computer in their Joliet home.

"We'll get you set up at home so Dad will be able to see Scout on a weekly basis and see him grow," Harlow said.

Saving \$4 million

Freedom Calls provides such video links about 2,000 times a month for American soldiers and Marines.

About 50,000 servicemen and women have been able to see and talk with friends and family back home with the help of the foundation. One couple was married through a Freedom Calls video linkup, Harlow said. A little girl was able to show her dad that she had just learned how to tie her shoes.

Harlow said the creation of Freedom Calls was inspired when he learned of an American soldier who had a \$7,000 phone bill from making calls back home, "and I didn't think that was right. ... We're saving military families \$4 million a year right now."