

The Kaufman Herald

When freedom calls

Partnership enables soldier to meet newborn daughter

By Michael Gresham

There were a few tears Tuesday, but mostly smiles and laughs when U.S. Marine Cpl. Richard "Bo" Westbrook saw his newborn daughter.

Westbrook, who is stationed in Iraq, was able to see his one-day-old daughter, Avery Rhien, and congratulate his wife, Ashley, on their first child via a teleconference at Presbyterian Hospital of Kaufman. The teleconference was made possible by the Freedom Calls Foundation.

"This is just amazing," said Westbrook, a 2001 graduate of Kaufman High School. "I just can't say enough to thank the people who made this possible."

The new mother was equally as thankful.

"We're so grateful to Freedom Calls Foundation and Presbyterian Hospital for making this possible," she said. "This is a dream come true that Bo is able to share in the birth of our first child."

During the 90-minute conference call, Westbrook visited with his wife, new baby, mother and stepfather. Discussions ranged from the recent birth to remodeling plans to the baby's sleeping habits to plans for the birth of their next child.



U.S. Marine Cpl. Richard "Bo" Westbrook, who is stationed in Iraq, was able to see his wife, Ashley (seated), and newborn daughter, Avery Rhien, courtesy of a videoconference call at Presbyterian Hospital of Kaufman. Also pictured are Mike and Mary Bardin, Westbrook's parents. Photo by Michael Gresham

"Next time there had better be some better planning," joked Mary Bardin, Westbrook's mother. "I don't mind pinch-hitting once, but I don't want to do it again."

At times, the conversation would hit a lull, but Westbrook said that was OK.

"For me, just seeing her is good enough," he said.

And, despite the true distance between them, family members were able to agree that Avery more closely resembles his father.

"She's got a crooked smile just like her daddy," Bardin said.

"She definitely takes after him," Ashley Westbrook agreed.

John Beall, interim president of Presbyterian Hospital of Kaufman, lauded the Freedom Calls Foundation for its program, calling it a dose of good medicine.

"The hospital appreciates how uniquely special and significant the birth of a baby is in the lives of parents, and so we were delighted to make these arrangements," Beall said. "The hospital believes health is broadly defined to include the mind, body and spirit. Ms. Westbrook is facing not only the challenge of being a new mom, but of beginning the journey of parenthood on her own while her husband is serving his country. Presbyterian Hospital of Kaufman hopes this videoconference will help provide her with an additional boost of emotional and mental support before she and the baby go home."

John Harlow, executive director of the foundation, said its mission is to keep families together in time of war.

"Soldiers may now keep their commitments to their families at the same time they keep their commitment to their country," Harlow said. "The long-term vision of the Freedom Calls Foundation is that our war fighters will be able to come home from a day on the battlefield and spend virtual time with their families every night using state-of-the-art technology."