

THE LAWTON CONSTITUTION

Jonah and the Web

Thanks to technology and a 'Freedom Call' a soldier at war gets to be there for his son's birth

BY ROBERT FOX STAFF WRITER RFOX@LAWTON-CONSTITUTION.COM

April 16, 2008

Army Capt. Andrew Riise was able to be part of the birth of his son Jonah even though he is half a world away at Camp Taji near Baghdad, Iraq.

Riise's wife, Katherine, went into labor on Friday. By 11 a.m. Riise was able to talk his wife through the entire delivery — via Web cam.

It was the first time Southwestern Medical Center has had a "Freedom Call" during a delivery. Freedom Calls provided the videoconferencing that allowed Andrew Riise to be part of the once-in-a-lifetime event.

"The fact that he was able to share it made it even sweeter," Katherine Riise said.

Freedom Calls is a not-for-profit organization that provides more than 1.5 million minutes of free telephone calls every month. The foundation's network, funded entirely by donations, offers 70 phones, six video conferencing stations, 10 video email stations and 50 computers with e-mail and Internet access.

Andrew Riise said he was overjoyed to have been by his wife's side — even if by way of TV — for the birth of their second son. The two had a second opportunity to see each other Tuesday during another call.

Katherine Riise said they timed the birth of Larsen, their first son, so he was born while Andrew Riise was present. Their timing for the second birth was "a little off." She said they wanted to time it so Jonah would be born closer to the fall, when Andrew Riise should be home on leave.



MICHAEL D. POPE/STAFF Army Capt. Andrew Riise talks to his wife, Katherine, and his son, Jonah, who was born Friday, through a video conference set up by Freedom Calls on Tuesday.

"We didn't think this (Freedom Calls) was possible," she said. With the help of Southwestern Medical Center, Freedom Calls and Andrew Riise's commanding officer, they were able to plan for him to have access to the Freedom Calls network, Katherine Riise said. The original plan called for her labor to be induced. "I wasn't induced and there was no C-section, so it just kind of worked out well for us," she said. She said the nurses were great and kept making sure not only that she and the baby were doing well, but that dad could see and hear her all the while. "It renews your faith in the human spirit," she said. "It was important to have him there for the birth of our second son."