

Maine Sunday Telegram

Marine in Iraq sees son's birth in Maine

A proud Lance Cpl. Eric Bajpai witnesses his wife give birth via videoconference from Anbar province.

By ANNE GLEASON, Staff Writer June 8, 2008

When Lance Cpl. Eric Bajpai, a U.S. Marine, saw his newborn son open his eyes for the first time last week, he cried uncontrollably.

"He was trying to make Trina laugh during most of it," said Bajpai's mother, Cathy Robinson, referring to the 36-hour labor that Trina Bajpai, Eric's wife, experienced. "When they picked up the baby and the baby opened his eyes, he started to cry, shoulders heaving. He was saying, 'I really just want to come home.' "

Bajpai was deployed to Iraq in February. Since he couldn't be there for the birth of his son, Bradley, he got what Trina described as "the next best thing."



Gordon Chibroski/Staff Photographer

Marine Lance Cpl. Eric Bajpai smiles during a satellite conference call with his family on Saturday.

The family, from Benton, worked with the Freedom Calls Foundation to connect via satellite for a video conference. Bajpai stayed connected for the entire time Trina was in labor to support her.

Eric, 20, and Trina, 18, connected via satellite for a second time on Saturday morning at Maine Medical Center. They will be able to continue to connect over the Freedom Calls network up to three times a month during the remainder of Bajpai's deployment.

Bradley, who was born Thursday morning, is the first child for the two high school sweethearts. Eric Bajpai found out after Trina became pregnant that he would be deployed for the first time to Iraq. Bajpai has served in the Marines for two years.

He arrived in the Anbar province in February with the Combat Logistics Battalion 6 and could return home as early as August.

The Freedom Calls Foundation, a nonprofit based in New Jersey, has five facilities set up in Iraq.



Gordon Chibroski/Staff Photographer
Trina Bajpai holds 2-day-old Bradley.

The organization launched in April 2004, and now has the capability to serve 50,000 soldiers stationed at the five locations, said John Harlow, executive director. It's funded with private donations. Soldiers have connected with family for births, graduations, weddings and regular family visits, he said.

Bajpai stayed awake for nearly the entire labor, his mother said.

"As everything went along, he was right there," said Trina Bajpai. "He got front-row seats - probably more than he needed to see."

The two spoke briefly on Saturday morning, and Trina Bajpai and Robinson held Bradley up to the camera. He was wearing a baseball-themed Onesie, with the words "Dad's team."

"He's got my lips," Eric Bajpai said, admiring his son.

"Two short months, then you're on diaper duty," Trina said.

The experience on Wednesday and Thursday was "amazing" but also difficult, Eric Bajpai said via satellite on Saturday.

"I wanted to be there so bad," he said. "I'm thankful for what I got. I can't wait to come back and see them."

Soldiers in other states have connected for births before, Harlow said. However, it was a first for Maine Medical Center.

The hospital attempted to arrange a video conference in March between another soldier and his wife, but the baby came early that time, said Martha Davoli, hospital spokeswoman. When Eric Bajpai's mother inquired about options this time, hospital staff knew about Freedom Calls, Davoli said.

Trina Bajpai said she was surrounded by family for the birth. She rattled off the people in the room when Bradley was born, which included her mother, mother-in-law, Eric's cousin and his aunt.

And then she remembered, "Oh, and Eric."

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