

LIVE IN IRAQ: IT'S A BOY!

*Video Connection enables deployed Marine
to be in room as his second son is born in Mobile*



Above: Sgt Chad Matthews with the Marines in Iraq is pictured on the TV screen talking with his wife via video conference Monday at the University of South Alabama's Women's and Children's Hospital in Mobile.

Right: Little Braxton, who was born Saturday, is held by mother Cynthia as they visit with Matthews. The Marine was able to witness the birth through the video connection.



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By PENELOPE McCLENNY
Staff Reporter

When 3-day-old Braxton Matthews grows old enough to hear the story of his birth, his parents will recount a tale of timing, tears and technology.

Braxton arrived just after 9 a.m. Saturday at the University of South Alabama's Children's & Women's Hospital.

His delivery went well, but it was far from ordinary. While his mother pushed through the final, toughest hours, his father cheered her on -- from a video camera eight time zones away in Iraq.

"It was breathtaking. It was a very emotional," Braxton's father, U.S. Marine Sgt. Chad Matthews, said Monday while gazing at Braxton during a second video conference. "It was definitely an experience I'll take with me the rest of my life. It's not many times that you get to experience a life coming into the world while out here in Iraq."

The room Saturday morning was filled with tears of joy, Cynthia Matthews said, as friends and family members shared her connection with her husband during the final stages of Braxton's birth.

Weeks before, however, less joyous tears had been shed as Cynthia thought her husband would completely miss Braxton's delivery. Chad Matthews learned he wouldn't be able to take leave for the birth as he and his wife had hoped.

When he told his chaplain in Iraq, the clergyman got Matthews in touch with the Freedom Calls Foundation, an organization that sets up video teleconferences so troops can share important events in their families, such as births, graduations and first birthdays.

After several weeks of trying to plan the video link-up, Cynthia Matthews said she was skeptical that it would work.

Then, technicians entered her birth suite at Children's & Women's at 3 a.m. the day Braxton was born and, a few hours later, her husband was beamed into the room to follow his wife through the last stages of his son's birth.

For four hours, Chad Matthews watched and encouraged his wife through Braxton's birth, even throwing in a few jokes here and there.

By the time Braxton entered the world at 9:19 a.m. -- perfect timing for his father in Iraq, where it was late afternoon -- the room was filled with tears again.

"I was talking to him the whole time," Cynthia Matthews said of her husband. "He was just watching. He would throw in a joke here and there, something to cheer me up and make me smile, a 'You did awesome, babe' and that kind of thing."

Braxton's video birth was a first for the hospital, spokesman Bob Lowry said.

Chad Matthews, a Satsuma native, stayed closely involved in his wife's pregnancy after deploying in January, Cynthia Matthews said. The family was stationed at Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, N.C., but Cynthia Matthews, originally from Mobile, and their older son, 3-year-old Chaz, moved back to Mobile soon after her husband left, so she could be closer to family.

Having his wife back in their hometown reduced Chad Matthews' worries about his family, he said, but nothing compared to being able to see that they were healthy and well with his own eyes, he said Monday.

"It takes a lot off the mind knowing there's some stuff you don't have to worry about. You can concentrate on work more not having to worry about your family," he said. "You know they are well taken care of because you can see it."