

OPELIKA-AUBURN NEWS

Life links

Video unites deployed Army soldier, newborn

Jack Stripling / Staff Writer
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Sgt. John Davidson's story is one as old as war itself. Life goes on when soldiers are called to duty. Children grow up. A hometown changes. And sometimes, as is the case with Davidson, life begins when soldiers are away.

Davidson's daughter, Janecia, was born in LaGrange, Ga., Sept. 3 while he was nine months into his second tour in Iraq. He has never heard her cry. He has never held her. All he knows of Janecia is what he's seen in a photograph.

"I sent a picture, but he wasn't really satisfied with the picture," said Tunitha Davidson, the soldier's wife.

All that changed Monday. Using technology provided by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System at Auburn University, Davidson got to interact with his new daughter on a video conference.

"She looks like me," Davidson said, watching his wife hold up Janecia in full view. Davidson, whose family now lives in Lanett, is one of a host of soldiers who has benefited from the work of a non-profit organization called the Freedom Calls Foundation. The group links up deployed military men and women with their families for special events or just day-to-day interaction.

Tunitha Davidson said the thought of seeing her husband had her excited and a bit nervous too.

"I didn't sleep at all last night," she said.

John Davidson, 30, is an Army mechanic deployed with the 297 Transportation Unit. To participate in the conference, he went to the Freedom Calls facility at a base called Al Asad near the Syrian border in Iraq, according to a press release. The calls are carried through Freedom Calls satellite network, so there is no long distance cost incurred.

Davidson's other daughter, 10-year-old Reneshia, was also on hand for the call. The family says they talk to Davidson about once a week, often late at night. Their hope is that Davidson will return for the Christmas holidays, but nothing is certain for the family.

"I'm praying that if (he's not home) at least by Thanksgiving, then by Christmas," Tunitha Davidson said.

At her husband's advice, Tunitha Davidson says she never watches news coverage of the war.

"I do (worry) all the time," she said. "I pray a lot."

For more information on Freedom Calls, visit www.freedomcalls.org.

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