

Video introduces dad to newborn son

A Marine lieutenant serving in Iraq meets his 3-month-old son for the first time via a video link

Monday, January 29, 2007

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The Orange County Register

Max Sweatman met his dad for the first time Sunday.

He laughed. He squirmed. He babbled. And, inevitably, he started to cry.

"I agree, Max," said his dad. "I completely agree."

While father and son were finally face to face, they were still a world away.

The two met in a high-tech video conference. A court reporting agency in Costa Mesa arranged for military families to connect for free Sunday with their loved ones in Iraq.

Jessica Sweatman was the first to arrive. Wearing a red blouse and matching lipstick, the 25-year-old Huntington High School graduate had her new baby in her arms and her mom by her side when she walked into the conference room anxious to see her husband, who was already on the large video screen.

First Lt. Andrew Sweatman is a Marine stationed at Al Asad Air Base, 180 miles west of Baghdad.

He left Camp Pendleton, where the couple lives, Aug. 1 when his wife was seven months pregnant with their first child.



A JOYOUS HELLO, A SAD GOODBYE: Jessica Sweatman beams as she introduces her 3-month-old baby, Max, to his father, Marine 1st Lt. Andrew Sweatman, who's serving in Iraq, and then wipes away a tear when their time on the video conference is up.

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The couple hasn't seen each other since, except in pictures. When Jessica saw her husband on the screen, she caught her breath. Max, who turned three months old last week, mostly squirmed around on the table.

"Look at him," his dad said. "He's huge. He's round! He looks like a basketball.



THERE'S DADDY: Max's grandmother, Reese Landi of Newport Beach, approaches the monitor to show Max the face of his father, Marine 1st. Lt. Andrew Sweatman.

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"Max," he said, lowering his voice to invoke Darth Vader, "I am your father."

The couple laughed.

"Oh, gosh, Andrew, I can't wait till you get home. ... You can see the light at the end of the tunnel, and it's making me crazy now."

His tour is up in four weeks.

"So I was thinking, when you come home, unless you want to go out, I'll just cook at home that night. What do you think? I'll just make tacos at home."

That sounded great.

"I can't wait to hold him," Andrew said,

looking at his baby. "He's funny. He's floppy."

Andrew told his wife that he had just returned to base after traveling to Baghdad for a military conference at the former home of Saddam Hussein.

"His palace is amazing," he said. "It's like something out of 'Arabian Nights.' "

He took some pictures to show her.

Forget the pictures. Did he shop for any rugs, she wanted to know.

"Something for the middle of the room," she said, "under the coffee table."

Andrew smiled and told her he would be sure to do that.

"I love – I love how you, oh gosh," Jessica said. "I just miss you so much. ... So no more going outside the wire. No more. Just tell them your wife said no."

Going outside the wire means leaving the base. That's when things get dangerous.

"You look terrific," Andrew told her.

"I'm sitting down," she said. "You can't see my hips. ... Do you want me to keep my hair growing, or should I cut it?"

It was up to her.

She asked if he could come closer to the camera. He pulled his chair up so that his face took up the whole screen.

"It's strange," she said. "I want to reach through and just grab you. ... I could sit here all day and look at you."

When the signal was given that their 45 minutes was coming to an end, that other families were waiting to see each other, Jessica started to cry.

"I always hate saying goodbye," she said.

"We're almost done with this," he told her.

"I'm done," she said. "I want you home."

"I know," he told her, smiling. "Almost. Almost there."

"I love you, Andrew," she told her husband.

"I love you more, Jess."

"No, you don't."

A few goodbyes later, Andrew stood and walked out of the camera's view, leaving an empty chair on the screen.

Jessica started to cry and turned her head away. Her mom comforted her.

Only four more weeks to go.

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