

# The Sentinel

## Marysville family unites through video

Marine joined his wife for birth of his son through video conferencing between Camp Hill and Iraq

By [Kelly Wilson, Sentinel Reporter](#)  
Tuesday, September 9, 2008

For one military family, the distance between home and Iraq seems like only a few feet.

The Marysville couple used video teleconferencing technology Sunday to allow Marine Lance Cpl. Andrew Wertz, 21, to “be there” at Holy Spirit Hospital for the birth of their son, Bradley.

“I remember him telling me everything was going to be all right and I remember him telling me to push,” Amanda Wertz, 20, said.

The delivery took about 12 hours, Andrew Wertz’s mother, Ruth Wertz, said. Her son watched the whole thing from a tiny room in triple-digit heat in the Anbar Province of Iraq where he’s stationed.

When the baby finally came, Ruth Wertz said, the new father didn’t know what to say. He just cried a little and reached out to the camera.

Monday the family was “together” again, shifting conversation quickly from Andrew Wertz’s morning sandstorm to Bradley’s hair, feet and nose, and what feature had come from which parent.

### Freedom Calls

The moment was possible because of the Freedom Calls Foundation, a group that helps soldiers overseas stay connected to their families in the United States for free.

Of course, Amanda Wertz said, seeing and hearing her husband wasn’t the same as having him there.



Amanda Wertz holds her newborn son, Bradley, after her husband coached her through a 12-hour labor via video teleconference.

*Kelly Wilson/The Sentinel*

“It’s very hard,” she said. “The baby will be seven months old before he gets to hold him.”

It seemed like the couple was meant to find the program, Amanda Wertz said. Just a week after she learned her husband would be headed to Iraq, her stepfather heard a radio ad for the Freedom Calls Foundation.

It’s a project that Executive Director John Harlow founded in 2003 when he read about a National Guard soldier in Iraq who racked up about \$7,000 in phone bills just trying to keep in touch with his family.

The troops are trying to maintain a connection to their loved ones in the states, he said, and that’s impossible without some kind of communication.

### Big Goals

“The end vision is that a war fighter comes in from the battlefield and tucks his kids in to bed every night,” Harlow said. “That’s possible, it’s just a question of resources.”

All of the funding that fuels the foundation comes from corporate and private donations, he said, and there’s always room for more at the group’s Web site, [www.freedomcalls.org](http://www.freedomcalls.org).

In the meantime, the Wertz family manages the best they can.

Amanda Wertz said she hopes her husband won’t have to go back to the war once he comes home in April, but she knows it’s a possibility.

Going to Iraq was something he had to do, Andrew Wertz said. His country needed him no matter how much he wanted to be with his family.

For now, he said, he will try to focus on the dangers of his job and save thoughts of his family at home for another day.