

Fort Riley soldier witnesses birth

'Very emotional' experience took place at Oklahoma hospital

By Jason Smith
Morris News Service
Tuesday, November 27, 2007

SHAWNEE, Okla. — Staff Sgt. Jerame Johnson witnessed the recent birth of his twin sons, even though he is halfway around the world.

Johnson's wife, Rachel Johnson, gave birth to Nickolaus Shane and Alexander Sean just before noon Nov. 1 at Shawnee's Unity Health Center-North Campus. Johnson, who is deployed in Iraq, was able to watch the birth via webcam over the Freedom Calls Satellite Network.

Rachel Johnson holds her newborn twin sons, Alexander and Nickolaus, while their brother Tyler, 3, holds a photo of their father, Staff Sgt. Jerame Johnson, who is currently serving in Iraq. Johnson was able to see the birth of his twin sons.



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"It was nice to be able to see them born," Johnson said from Iraq. "It was very emotional for me."

Johnson has served in the U.S. Army for seven years. Rachel Johnson, a Los Angeles native, was serving as well when they met. They married in April, and Rachel Johnson came to Shawnee when her military service was over in September.

Johnson now serves with the 601st ASB, which is an aviation support unit based at Fort Riley, Kan. He will be in Iraq until December 2008 or January 2009, his wife said, and may be able to come home for a two-week visit during that time.

"He'll miss the babies' first year," she said.

Johnson's son from a previous marriage, Tyler, was 2 when his father left for Iraq. He will be 4 when his father comes home.

During a routine visit to the doctor, Rachel Johnson was told her blood pressure had gone up and she would have to undergo a Caesarean section.

"It was a regular doctor visit, and the visit turned into 'time to have the babies,' " she said, laughing.

She was due in only a few days, and plans had already been made to set up a webcam to let Johnson watch the birth of his sons. The plans had to unfold a little sooner than expected.

"The most challenging aspect of the webcam setup for my team was the coordination between us and the military channels," said Kena Jones, vice president of information technology at Unity. "We are fortunate in that many of the IT staff here at Unity are prior military and understand how to navigate through these channels."

Nickolaus, weighing 5 pounds, 5 ounces, was born at 11:56 a.m., and Alexander, weighing 5 pounds, 1 ounce, was born at 11:58 a.m. It was about 9 p.m. in Iraq.

Johnson said he wishes he could have been "there" instead of just there.

"It was really hard, but it was so much better seeing it than not being able to see it at all," he said.

Johnson, like any proud father, showed his fellow soldiers pictures of his sons. Congratulations were numerous, he said.

"The hospital did a great job and was very helpful," Johnson said.

"My husband and I both served in the military and experienced first-hand separations as a result of our tours of duty and military deployments," Jones said. "This enabled me to immediately identify with this family."

Jones said the technology employed by the Medical Information Systems Department at Unity allowed Johnson to participate in and experience the birth while serving thousands of miles away.

"My team and I were very excited about the opportunity to work with the various military agencies, such as Freedom Calls Foundation, that coordinated and established communications so this dad could share in this momentous experience," Jones said.

The babies, now a month old, are doing fine, Rachel Johnson said.

Tyler is excited about his baby brothers and said he can't wait until they are old enough to play ball with him.

Rachel Johnson praised the team at Unity and said they "went beyond what they had to do."

The only thing missing is having Johnson home, she said.

"I miss him so much, and he's such a great dad," she said. "Having him here would make it a lot nicer, getting to see him bond with his kids."