

Star Bulletin

Group helps Marine deliver for wife and baby

Videoconferencing at Castle Medical Center links Iraq and Kailua

By Gregg K. Kakesako

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On Monday, Kaneohe Marine Staff Sgt. Christopher Bockoven was able to talk his wife through her nearly nine-hour labor and delivery of the couple's first son even though he was deployed to Iraq 12,000 miles away and she was at Castle Medical Center's birthing room.

It was made possible through the efforts of the Freedom Calls Foundation, which sponsors 2,000 free videoconference calls a month between service members stationed in the war zones of Iraq and Afghanistan and their families back in the U.S., said John Harlow, founder and executive director of the Morristown, N.J., nonprofit organization.

Although the Freedom Calls Foundation has made its videoconference services available at Tripler Army Medical Center, Schofield Barracks and Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Monday's 10-hour videoconference call was the first from a private hospital.

Bockoven, an artillery Marine assigned to Kaneohe Bay's 1st Battalion, 12th Marine Regiment, coached his wife, Yubani, from Al Asad, where he has been stationed since September.

Yubani Bockoven, 34, said her husband was with her when she went into labor at noon until 10 that night. The couple's son, Kevin, was born at 8:45 p.m. and weighed 6 pounds, 11 ounces.

Yesterday, reporters got to talk with Bockoven, who was in Iraq, and Harlow, who was in New Jersey, from Castle Medical Center via the satellite Internet connection before the Marine spent the afternoon with his wife and new son.

"It feels really great," the Kaneohe Marine said from Iraq. "I didn't know it was possible. ... It's like a dream. I felt like I was actually there."

Yubani Bockoven said seeing the face of her husband on the large video monitor was comforting.



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Kaneohe Marine Staff Sgt. Christopher Bockoven, who is stationed in Iraq, participated in a videoconference yesterday with his wife, Yubani, and their newborn son, Kevin, who were at the Vera Zilber Birth Center at Castle Medical Center in Kailua

"It was a blessing," she added. "I felt that he was supporting me even if he wasn't here. He was connected to me the whole time."

Harlow said that after Yubani and her son are discharged from Castle, his charity has arranged that she get the necessary software and equipment to make videoconference calls from her home.

Kevin Roberts, Castle's president and chief executive officer, called Monday's event "a double celebration" since it also marked the blessing of the hospital's new birthing center.

Christopher Bockoven added, "I really didn't know what to expect since this is my first child. Everything was really amazing. I really wish I was there ... yet I am watching him while he sleeps. It really makes my day, my year."

His wife beamed as she cradled their 2-day-old son. "It was wonderful. It is amazing. ... We're living this moment together."

It will be another four months, however, until Christopher Bockoven will be able to physically cradle both Yubani and Kevin in his arms.