

Video links a New Jersey girl to happy Marine dad in Iraq

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BY ELIZABETH MOORE

Star-Ledger Staff

The Al-Asad Air Base in Iraq is more than 5,000 miles away, but Cresenzo "Chris" Terranova was able to meet his newborn daughter via a video-conference hook-up to Saint Barnabas Hospital in Livingston.

"She looks beautiful," he said upon laying eyes on his day-old daughter, Isabella Nicole, as the baby lay swaddled in a blanket in her mother's arms.

Natalie Paz, Terranova's fiancée, grew emotional as she saw her beloved on the television screen: "I miss you, but we're good ... Keep your head up. Me and the baby are doing good. We're just waiting for you."



LCpl "Chris" Terranova meets his firstborn hours after birth from the front lines in Iraq

For a half-hour yesterday, the young couple was reunited thanks to technology provided by the Freedom Calls Foundation, a nonprofit group started in 2004 to provide video and telephone connections between servicemen and women in Iraq and Afghanistan to their families in the United States.

From her hospital bed, Paz, 21, of Roselle Park, showed off their daughter's full head of brown hair. "I could definitely see the hair," Terranova, a Marine lance corporal, exclaimed. "It's awesome. It's wonderful to see her."

Terranova, 22, of Union, was deployed to Iraq in September. Though he was trained as a mechanic, his family members said he's working at a military prison. He sat at a table at his military base, wearing fatigues and a knit cap, greeting his fiancée, parents and twin brothers. "I'm all right," he told them over and over. "Everything is good."

His family has sent him cup cakes and cookies, magazines and birthday gifts. Paz kept him up dated by phone every few days as her delivery date grew closer. But the best experience was seeing him yesterday, she said.

"I'm happy to see you. I miss you so much," she told him from her hospital bed.

And Terranova, who had called hourly during his fiancée's labor the night before, teased her just a little: "Why are you crying? You look beautiful." He called the video-conference "the best idea anybody's had before" and said he thought he'd have to wait to meet his daughter.

"I thought I was only going to see her through the pictures, but through this you get to see her firsthand."

Lots of well-wishers showed up to greet Terranova yesterday, including his mother, Debbie Collier, who waved to her son and told him, "I love you;" his 8-year-old twin brothers, Mario and Joseph; his future in-laws, Miriam and Angelo Paz, and his dad, Steve Collier, who, after seeing him on the screen, said of his son, "He sounded good."

Paz said she and Terranova have known each other since high school, when, even then, he had an interest in the military. They have been a couple for more than three years.

Paz works at Port Newark and attends college. Terranova enlisted in the Marine Corps.

She saw him sporadically this year in between boot camp in South Carolina and additional training in the Mojave Desert in California. Before he left, he bought a congratulations card for his future wife, helped choose the baby's name, and took ultrasound pictures of his daughter with him to Iraq.

Paz said Terranova is not expected home again until April.

But Terranova couldn't steal the spotlight for long from his 8 pound, 3 ounce girl, who slept peacefully through her dad's video visit. Everyone wanted to hold the baby who took 23 hours of labor and a last-minute Caesarean section to come into the world.

"With all my heart I wish I could be there more than anything in the world," he told his daughter from across the miles. "I'll be home soon and we'll have lots of time together."

Elizabeth Moore may be reached at (973 -392-1852 or emoore@starledger.com)