

# WILLIAMSPORT SUN-GAZETTE

## Father sees new baby for first time — from Iraq

By CHERYL R. CLARKE - [cclarke@sungazette.com](mailto:cclarke@sungazette.com)  
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WELLSBORO — New father and Marine Cpl. Adam Vendzules hadn't seen his baby girl yet, as he is serving his country with the Marines in Iraq, but he got the chance to at least see her, if not hold her, Wednesday.

Through "Freedom Calls," an organization that sets up satellite feeds via video conferencing systems for soldiers to communicate with family members back home, is responsible for the visit, said Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hospital public relations spokeswoman Natalie Kennedy.

Jessica Charles Vendzules, 22, who is staying with her mother Regina Brown in Wellsboro while her husband is deployed, gave birth to baby Addison Jean on Tuesday at around 6:15 p.m.



CHERYL R. CLARKE/Sun-Gazette

Jessica Vendzules excitedly shows her baby daughter Addison to her husband, Adam, via a satellite feed in her hospital room at Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hospital Wednesday.

The baby was a week early, Vendzules said, but weighed in at almost 7 pounds and just shy of 20 inches long after a blessedly short labor.

The little girl joins a sister, 16-month-old Dominique Kay, who was delighted to see her daddy on the computer screen in her mom's hospital room Wednesday.

Blowing kisses and jumping up and down, Dominique said, "Daddy," when she heard his voice and tried to get up close to the screen.

Her mother held baby Addison as close to the camera as possible so Adam, 24, could see his newborn daughter.

A mechanic who works on the hydraulics systems of F-16 jet fighter aircraft, Vendzules, who is from New Jersey, works long hours, his wife said, often 12 hours a day or more.

It took his company at Al Asad Air Base, Iraq, a while to find him for the scheduled 2 p.m. transmission. He finally appeared just before 3 p.m. to the delight of his wife, who said, "I just want to see my husband. I miss him."

It was around 10 p.m., Iraq time.

This is Vendzules' second tour of duty. He was deployed Feb. 23, with the 115th Silver Eagles Airwing, she said.

"He is scheduled to come home in September," she said. By then his daughter will be six months old.

Vendzules said she has stayed in touch with her husband every day via instant messaging on the Internet, something that wasn't available during his first tour of duty in 2004. He was in Iraq for seven months that time.

He is stationed at Marine Corps Air Station, Beaufort, S.C.

Freedom Calls Foundation built a private satellite network dedicated to connecting military camps on the front lines in Iraq to the United States because there is no Internet infrastructure in Iraq, according to a news release issued by the organization.

It is funded 100 percent by the American public in tax-deductible donations. The Foundation receives no financial support from the government or the military and, according to the release, may soon have to shut down due to lack of funds.

John Harlow, executive director of the Freedom Calls Foundation, said that "the foundation is transforming a long-standing family communication paradigm in time of war by enabling soldiers in the war zone to attend and participate in milestone family events like weddings, first communions and new births without being commercially exploited by the monopoly rates that communications companies charge for service out of Iraq."