

Hollywood Soldier gets glimpse of daughter

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Fort Lauderdale · He couldn't hold her in his arms, but Spc. Emanuel Morales finally saw his new daughter on Tuesday, thanks to state-of-the-art technology.

The Army engineer from Hollywood connected with his wife Amanda and 4-month-old daughter Leilani via a videoconference set up by Freedom Calls Foundation, a nonprofit group based in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Morales, who is 10 months into his second tour in Iraq, missed Leilani's birth in May.

When she appeared on a video monitor at Al Asad Air Base near Fallujah, Morales couldn't fight back the tears.

"Look at my little pookie," he said. "She's gorgeous."

Leilani, who sported blue jeans, a pastel yellow sleeveless shirt and a ribbon in her curly dark hair, offered her father smiles, squeals and even a little bit of drool.

"I'm hoping she says 'Da da' or something," Morales said.

On his wife's end, the 23-year-old soldier appeared on a television screen in a conference room in the Bank of America Tower in downtown Fort Lauderdale.

"You look skinny," Amanda Morales told her husband.

After a year apart, she plans to see him on Dec. 15, when he returns to Schofield Barracks in Hawaii. He is part of Alpha Company, 84th Engineer Battalion.



Connecting with home

Amanda Morales and her four-month-old daughter, Leilani, of Hollywood, were able to videoconference with her husband, Army Spc. Emanuel Morales, in Iraq on Tuesday thanks to the nonprofit Freedom Calls Foundation. The family spent more than an hour talking and seeing each other on the satellite link.

(Sun-Sentinel/Lou Toman)

Freedom Calls Foundation says it has four facilities in Iraq, including Camp Taji, Al Asad Air Base and Camp Victory.

The secretary of the Army authorized the organization to provide communications services to troops and their families in April 2004. Users can link to the foundation's satellite network from its facilities, designated locations or homes with broadband Internet connections, said John B. Harlow II, Freedom Calls Foundation executive director.

The network handles between 1,500 and 2,000 calls and videoconferencing sessions a day, Harlow said.

"It's one of about 90 organizations who are doing remarkable work in helping our soldiers stay connected to their family members from the far distant battlefield," said Paul Boyce, an Army public affairs spokesman.

Freedom Calls Foundation wants to install 18 additional facilities at camps in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Harlow estimates the cost of expansion to be at least \$1.8 million. The foundation seeks to raise those funds through private and corporate donations.

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