



Yuma Marine meets new daughter via video

BY MICHELLE VOLKMANN, SUN STAFF WRITER

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Marine Cpl. Jose Rodriguez may be stationed in Iraq, but he is still bragging about his 3-day-old daughter.

She has dark hair, round cheeks and a nose shaped like his.

"I think she looks like me a little bit," the Yuma-based Marine said.

Thanks to donated satellite communications, Rodriguez saw his 9-pound, 4-ounce daughter, Stefany, for the first time on Friday morning.

"It's not the real thing, but it's pretty close," Rodriguez said.

Stefany was born at 11:21 p.m. Wednesday.

The Freedom Calls Foundation, a public charity, teamed up with the Yuma Regional Medical Center to make this satellite video conference possible. This is the first time the foundation has organized a satellite video conference in Yuma.

"It helps. It definitely helps. I was going to see my daughter when she was 3 or 4 months old when I got home and I would have missed the whole baby and newborn phase and all that," Rodriguez said. "I get to see her now and it really eases my mind."

The Freedom Calls Foundation works to put U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan in touch with their loved ones during milestone family events, such as weddings and new births, according to the foundation's news release. The families can talk to each other using state-of-the-art satellite video technology and the Internet.

The free service is available to 30,000 soldiers and Marines, according to the foundation's information. The foundation is financed through donations.

Rodriguez, an air traffic controller with Marine Air Control Squadron-1 at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, has been in Al Asad, Iraq, since August. He is one of nearly 100 MACS-1 Marines there right now.

He was checking his e-mail on Thursday when he found that his daughter was born. After talking to his wife, Carrie, he gave cigars to his friends.

Stefany's birth was one of many things Rodriguez was thankful for this holiday season.

"There are a lot of good things happening this year. Of course there are some little things like me being here in Iraq for my job (that aren't great). But there is nothing I can do about that," Rodriguez said.



The Rodriguez family sits together in front of a television camera so that daddy can see them from Iraq. The satellite teleconference was arranged by Freedom Calls Foundation and Yuma Regional Medical Center.
PHOTOS BY TERRY KETRON/THE SUN

Carrie Rodriguez was happy to see her husband.

"It's so wonderful to see him and to hear him. It's better than the telephone," she said. "He looks so good. He is so far away that you get worried."

Rodriguez talks to Carrie at least once a day. "Depending on how the phone works and all of that," he said.

On Friday, they weren't sure how much time they had to chat.

"I'm not really sure, but my command said I could have as long as it takes," Rodriguez said.

This is the second time in a row that Rodriguez has been in Iraq during the holidays.

During the satellite conference, their 3-year-old son, Anthony touched the television screen showing his father in Iraq. Rodriguez raised his hand to meet Anthony's hand. It was as though they were holding hands.

"When will you be home?" Anthony asked.

"In a little while," Rodriguez said.

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