



Trini Leonard delivered her second child via Cesarean section a year ago, her Marine Corps husband Capt. Timothy Leonard, was sitting in a chair in Iraq.

## Links in Labor

Webcams connect deployed dads during delivery.

BY HEIDI EVANS

When Trini Leonard delivered her second child via Cesarean section a year ago, her Marine Corps husband knew the baby's weight before she did. That would seem pretty normal except that her husband, Capt. Timothy Leonard, was sitting in a chair in Iraq, participating in the birth live via a two-way satellite video connection.

Technology can be a life saver for families with a deployed service member. Webcams, video teleconferencing, satellite communications and services like Skype make communication easier and cheaper. Deployed spouses can stay connected, which is soothing in tough circumstances like the birth of a baby.

In the Leonards' case, Tim

deployed to Iraq when Trini was four months pregnant with their second child. Trini needed a Cesarean to deliver couple's first child, Patrick, and doctors predicted the same for the second birth. Trini was still seeing the doctors from her first birth and living with her in-laws far from a military facility.

One of her doctors happened to read about Freedom Calls Foundation ([www.freedomcalls.org](http://www.freedomcalls.org)), a private nonprofit organization that provides free communications to service members and their families. Trini contacted the foundation, which could help, and got approval for a satellite video link from the administration at the private Greenwich (Conn.) Hospital where she was set to deliver the baby.

Meanwhile in Iraq, Timothy was permitted to fly from his location at Camp Korean Village to the place the equipment was located at Al Asad Airbase. He arrived a few days before Trini's due date in case sand storms grounded his travel.

When Trini arrived at the hospital in Connecticut, she was introduced to the information technician who would monitor the computer and satellite link.

"As soon as I walked in, it was about me and Tim," Trini said. "They put him on right away. He was able to see me. They treated him like he was in there. It was amazing. The doctors would go to him and say things like he was there in person. It was really funny."

For Tim, seeing his wife

### FREEDOM CALLS

Freedom Calls ([www.freedomcalls.org](http://www.freedomcalls.org)) is a nonprofit foundation that provides free communications for families with deployed service members. Freedom Calls has equipment in Iraq and increasing presence in Afghanistan. The connection used by the foundation is better than most Web services because it uses a satellite. To arrange a link, families must know where their deployed service member is located. The foundation cannot locate service members.





was a shock. "It was the first time I saw how big she was," he said. "I got some appreciation for that."

Best of all, he felt he was a part of the experience.

"She was interacting with me throughout the whole thing," he said. "It was as close as it could be given the circumstances."

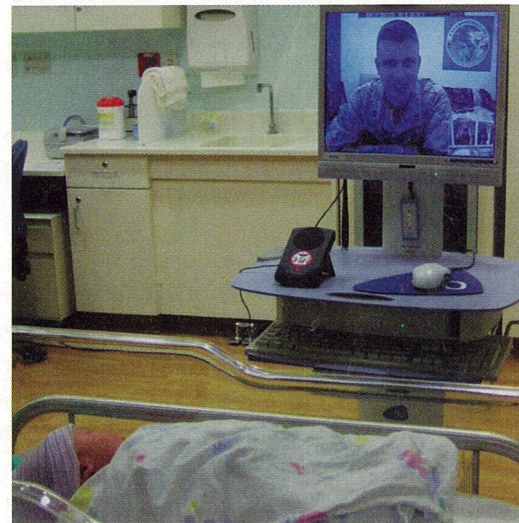
The equipment was placed on a portable cart the tech could wheel from room to room in the hospital,

taking the path of a normal expectant father.

"When the baby was weighed...I got to see it right away," Tim said.

The couple still laughs because Tim knew his son Andrew was healthy before his wife did, and took notes recording the birth weight and time. They were connected for six straight hours.

The couple was grateful for the assistance – both with technology



and administrative procedures – that they received from Freedom Calls Foundation. Timothy said the link calmed his nerves.

"Otherwise, I would probably find out via e-mail," he said. "Seeing it live, I knew immediately the baby was fine and Trini was fine. It definitely decreased stress. It decreased the separation. Even though it was an event I missed, I was still able to partake in it."

Timothy didn't see Andrew until the baby was 4 months old. Trini said it took Timothy a little time to switch from full-time warrior to family dad. But Andrew always seemed to know Timothy was his father. •

## HOW TO DO IT

Here's how to have your own virtual birth.

Some military and private hospitals have connected patients virtually with family members, but the process is not automatic. If you would like to use similar technology you must:



### LOCATION

Know where your spouse is located. The deployed spouse must have access to the technology and be in a known location. Hospital staff members cannot get this information.

### BE PREPARED

Contact your physician and the hospital administration well in advance. A hospital's IT staff must check if the technology is available. Doctors ensure the communication won't harm patient care. Hospitals must balance the

needs of one patient with all the others in the facility. If you are working with a nonprofit organization, they likely have practice coordinating these links and should be a great help to you.

### KNOW THE DETAILS

Know what type of technology you might be able to use. In the past, several military hospitals have used video conferencing technology to assist patients.

### GOOD REASON

Have a compelling reason to communicate. Hospitals are more likely to assist connections with immediate family: spouses, children, parents. They also consider the reasons a person can't travel, like medical concerns or a military deployment. •