

The Lawton Constitution

Dad's first glimpse!

Tuesday was the first time Cpl. Zachary Williams saw his baby girl in real time. Zachary Williams, Melissa and Hali Williams sat in front of computer monitors half a world apart. Zachary, currently deployed to Iraq, sat in a bland, brown room made of cinder blocks. The room was just big enough for him to sit on a chair in front of the computer. He stared at his 7-pound, 10-ounce baby girl and didn't speak for about half a minute. Melissa and Hali Williams sat together in front of a computer in a conference room at Southwestern Medical Center surrounded by cameras. Melissa was joined by her sister, Elaine Hilz, who planned to take advantage of the conference to introduce Zachary to his nephew, Christopher.

The meeting was thanks to Freedom Calls, an independent, nonprofit network provider that connects deployed service members with their families at no charge. John B. Harlow II, founder of Freedom Calls, said this conference was the first time a soldier was getting to meet a new baby at Camp Al Taqaddum, about 50 miles west of Baghdad. It was also the first call from Southwestern and the first time a soldier saw a new baby from Lawton/Fort Sill. "We couldn't do this without the hard work of people at the hospitals that set this up," Harlow said. Melissa has known she was going to get to see her husband for about a month. He found out two weeks ago.



Melissa Williams holds up her daughter for her husband Cpl. Zachary Williams to see.

The meeting was anxiously awaited by Melissa because it was supposed to happen a day earlier. "Sometimes the damn war interferes with our video conferences," Harlow said. Melissa said she was disappointed that she didn't get to see her husband on Monday as originally planned, but didn't mind too much because it gave her something to look forward to the next day.

Melissa had her family email Zachary pictures of Hali just hours after she was born Sunday. She said when he called Sunday night he heard a baby and asked if she was watching his nephew, Christopher. She told him it was his baby girl and that pictures were waiting in his e-mail. He said he has shown the pictures to everyone he knows at the camp. "I got the pictures of her when she was born, and I look at them every night before I go to bed," he said. The three had their first family portrait taken at the conference. Melissa Williams and Hali stood next to the monitor while Zachary Williams lined up to be as "close" to his family as he could.



Jeff Dixon/Staff Freedom Calls uses Web cameras and satellite feeds to connect soldiers deployed to Iraq with their families for free.