

Video conference links newborn with dad in Iraq

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By JOSH SINGER

While Gunnery Sgt. Raymundo Galarza could not be with his wife for the birth of their daughter Thursday night, the U.S. Marine shared in the special day through a Baghdad-to-Hoffman Estates video conference on Friday.

"Say, 'Hi, Daddy!'" Monica Galarza of Schaumburg told their daughter, Luciana Rae, who rested quietly in her mother's arms.

Monica said her first child screamed loud enough for an "American Idol" audition when she was born at 8:42 p.m. Thursday at St. Alexius Medical Center in Hoffman Estates. Luciana Rae weighed 8 pounds, 12 ounces.

"Everybody's calling her 'Rae,'" Monica, 33, a school social worker at Field Elementary School in Wheeling, told her husband. "When she opens her eyes, she looks just like you."



Monica Galarza holds her wedding photo with husband Gunnery Sgt. Raymundo Galarza, who is serving in Iraq, and their newborn daughter, Luciana Rae Galarza.

(JOSH SINGER/FOR PIONEER PRESS)

Raymundo, 32, has been serving his second tour in Iraq since September and is expected to return in August. The new father beamed during the video conference attended by several Chicago TV crews.

"I wish I could hold her right now ... especially when she's this small," Raymundo said. "She looks beautiful."

Orchestrating the conference call required a combination of Internet and satellite technology from St. Alexius and the Freedom Calls Foundation. Coordinating around the Marine's schedule was another hurdle, hospital spokesman Matt Wakely said.

"I mean, he's on the front lines," Wakely added.

The new parents appreciated the connection of the video conference.

"It's hard because he's not here, but it was great to hear him and see him," Monica said.