

Somerset soldier witnesses son's birth — from 9,000 miles away

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When Carson Charles Richards was born at 8:13 p.m. Thursday at Somerset Hospital, his father wasn't literally in the delivery room. But he was there virtually.

Pennsylvania National Guard Cpl. Nathan Richards, 24, is in his second tour of duty in Iraq. When he learned his wife, Danielle, 20, was to give birth to their first child, he was told he could return home. That trip was canceled.

Then a friend told him he was able to watch his baby's birth via videoconference and referred Nathan to the Freedom Calls Foundation, a Morristown, N.J., nonprofit organization that provides free phone, videoconferencing and Internet service to troops. Richards was able to watch the birth from more than 9,000 miles away.



Thanks to the Freedom Calls Foundation, Cpl. Nathan Richards was able to witness the birth of his child at Somerset Hospital while serving with the Pennsylvania National Guard in Iraq. Richards, his wife, Danielle, and their son, Carson Charles, also participated in a live press conference Friday at the hospital. Denise Kroon, Danielle's mother, is seen sitting behind her. (Staff photo by Roger Vogel)

"I was really surprised at how good the quality was and I was very excited," he said. "It was an excellent picture and I could hear everything in the background."

Somerset Hospital held a press conference on Friday. Danielle held baby Carson while Nathan watched on the videoconferencing equipment. He could be seen on two screens. Both their mothers and other relatives attended.

Danielle held up Carson so her husband could see the newborn's T-shirt that read: "My Daddy's a hero in Iraq." Nathan smiled broadly. She removed the blanket covering Carson so Nathan could see his fingers and toes.

"I could see Nathan (during the delivery), it was just a little choppy," Danielle said.

"I don't think she was focused on me," Nathan said. "I'm at least 9,000 miles away and it's only like I'm six feet away now."

"I wish," Danielle said. "When I first saw him yesterday, I started crying. I haven't seen him since January. I really appreciate everything Freedom Calls and the hospital did so I could see him."

Denise Kroon, Danielle's mother, said the hospital staff was very accommodating of the videoconferencing equipment.

"They didn't complain; they were happy making sure everyone could see," she said.

The Richardses live in Somerset. This is their first child. Carson weighed 8 pounds, 12 ounces at birth and is 20 1/2-inches long. Dr. Charles Camacho was the obstetrician.

Nathan was in the regular Army for three years. After his discharge, he enlisted in the Pennsylvania National Guard 56th Stryker Brigade, 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry Division. He was last home at Christmas. He anticipates he will return in September.

The hospital received the telesynergy medical equipment about two years ago through a grant supported by the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, the National Institutes of Health, the Department of Health and Human Services and Firstgov.

"Somerset Hospital greatly appreciates the work of the Freedom Calls Foundation and we are honored to take part in the very special moment," said Greg Chiappelli, director of corporate communications. "We believe the birth of a child to be a uniquely special and significant event in the lives of parents, and so we are delighted to make these arrangements so they may be together on this occasion."