

## Iraq Marine gets a glimpse of home

Edmond native to see baby's birth via video link

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EDMOND — A big moment for the country will occur in January when the next president will take the oath of office, but the month also will contain a big moment for an Edmond Marine serving in Iraq.

Gunnery Sgt. Adrian Walker grew up in Edmond and graduated from Memorial High School in 1991. He was a student at the University of Central Oklahoma for a semester and a half. He tired of college life and joined the Marine Corps in 1992.

In January, his wife will give birth to his first child, and while he still will be in Iraq, thanks to the Freedom Calls Foundation, he will get the next best thing — the ability to view the special moment live via video link.



Cpl. Tyler B. Barstow CAMP TAQADDUM, Iraq (October 11, 2008)  
Gunnery Sgt. Adrian J. Walker is the food services staff noncommissioned officer in charge for Headquarters and Service Co., 1st Marine Logistics Group. Walker, 35, from Edmond, Okla., is currently serving at Camp Taqaddum, Iraq.

**"It's a wonderful organization," Adrian said Wednesday morning, calling from Camp Taqaddum in Iraq. It was 10 a.m. in Edmond, about 6 p.m. in Iraq, where the temperature has been in the 90s and 100s — "cool" for Iraq standards.**

The Freedom Calls Foundation was created by John Harlow II, who heard about a National Guardsman in Iraq who owed \$7,000 for calling home. The phone company would not reduce the amount the soldier owed, infuriating Harlow.

In Iraq, the foundation has facilities at a number of military sites, linking Marines and soldiers to their loved ones via computer and telephone at no cost. More sites are being added as funding allows.

Stateside, Adrian's wife, Ashley, lives in Oceanside, Calif., near Adrian's home station, Camp Pendleton. Ashley said Camp Taqaddum just happened to be a part of the foundation's network.

"I think it's a wonderful organization," she said. "I'm just so thrilled that there's an organization like it out there."

Adrian said he is looking forward to being a parent. Missing the birth of his son will be difficult, he said, but he and his wife knew the risks related to being a Marine. Adrian was deployed in August, his third deployment to Iraq. His first deployment was in January 2003.

Ashley said her doctor already is aware of the video plans and hospital technology staff are prepared to set up the cameras in the birthing room.

The due date is Jan. 11, but labor may be induced to help the family make plans. Ashley said her best friend will be there for the birth, and several relatives will be around afterwards. Thanks to technology, Adrian will **get to see what's happening and talk her through the labor, Ashley said.**

**Valerie Thomason, Adrian's mother, lives in Guthrie. She said the military is very supportive of future parents, as is the Freedom Calls Foundation.**

**"I think that's wonderful," Thomason said. "The next best thing would be for him to be there."**

In Iraq, Adrian is the food services staff non-commissioned officer in charge of Headquarters and Service Company, 1st Marine Logistics Group. History has not overlooked the importance of feeding armies, which **"travel on their stomachs."**

**"We feed people and look out for the Marines' overall food safety," Adrian said.**

**Even though Adrian's job** has to do with food service, he did have a brush with death.

In 2003, he was traveling in a tracked, amphibious assault vehicle. The AAV was in Baghdad, the lead vehicle in a convoy, waiting to cross a river, when all of a sudden he heard a loud explosion. A land mine had blown a 6-inch hole in the hull, and the gunner took some shrapnel in his leg.

Moments later, when the AAV was going 25 mph, one of the tracks broke, sending the vehicle into a 180-degree powerslide.

The Marines got out, set up security while they waited for a tow. While waiting, a car came toward them that did not want to stop. The Marines engaged the vehicle and the passengers stopped and fired back.

**Thomason said her son's decision to become a Marine was influenced by his grandfather,** a Marine who was part of the second wave of allied forces that assaulted Guadalcanal during World War II.

Thomason said as a mother she had mixed emotions about her son joining the Marines, but now she is proud to have him in Iraq, which means that **someone else's son does not have to be there.**

**"I'm very, very proud of him," Thomason said.**

As a boy, Walker was in Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts, Thomason said. He was a typical son who enjoyed academic pursuits and he participated in academic contests, she said. He also enjoyed spending time with his grandparents. Thomason said she has had a special relationship with her son.

**"He and I have always been very close," she said. "He was always a very good kid."**

Thomason said Adrian calls every couple of weeks and they talk 30-40 minutes at a time.

Adrian said he appreciates all the support he receives from his family, especially from his wife, who regularly sends care packages.

FOR MORE information about the Freedom Calls Foundation, visit [www.freedomcalls.org](http://www.freedomcalls.org)