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Father witnesses birth of son

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by Master Sgt. Donna T. Jeffries
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8/20/2013 - **TRANSIT CENTER AT MANAS, Kyrgyzstan** -- Staff Sgt. Lamartrus Exley, a client support technician with the 376th Expeditionary Communication Squadron witnessed his wife, Staff Sgt. Brittney Exley give birth to the couple's first child Aug. 14 while assigned to the Transit Center at Manas, Kyrgyzstan.

He watched the birth of his son through Defense Connect Online, a military internet site used for web conferencing, instant messaging and other training.

With the accessibility of the internet and Wi-Fi at most deployed locations, service members find deployments a little easier to handle since they get to be a part of many cherished "firsts" or special family occasions they would have otherwise missed. Applications such as DCO, FaceTime, Skype and other popular web-based video chat sites make this possible.

While Exley is only one of many who have watched the birth of their child via the internet, others have sung happy birthday along with party participants back home or watched school graduations or a child's recital.

For all, the simple fact that they were "there" makes a huge difference.

Generally, it's as simple as clicking a few links to make the connection but sometimes the process takes a few more steps and calls for a few permissions.

It took Exley a day and half to set up a secured channel on DCO to watch this momentous occasion and hospital authorities had to grant special permission to have the internet connection brought into the birthing room.

To ensure he did not miss the birth, Exley preset two DCO locations on either side of TCM for the video chat session and remained on call until he got the word his wife was ready to deliver. Once he got word, he went to his primary DCO spot and was practically glued to the laptop screen for the two-hour process.

"At least I got a chance to see it, it's something," said Exley a native of Savannah Ga., who after the delivery was finally able to smile, relieved that the labor was without complications.

His response to the birthing process is shared by many expectant fathers.

"I hated to see her (Brittney) like that," said Exley, but I could tell she responded to my coaching by shaking her head and trying to talk."

On the other end of the camera emotions were just as strong in the hospital birthing room located at Royal Air Force Lakenheath, United Kingdom, where Brittney is assigned to the 48th Logistics Readiness Squadron and Exley is assigned to the 48th Communication Squadron.

"I love technology," said Brittney worn out from the delivery as she cradled her healthy son in her arms. "I was so glad he was able to see Joshua's birth and it helped because he was coaching me along. It felt just like he was actually here," she said.

It's moments like these that show the importance of ensuring Wi-Fi remains available here at the Transit Center said Col. John Millard, commander, 376th Air Expeditionary Wing. Every day TCM has hundreds of transients reaching back home either before they go downrange to Afghanistan or in anticipation of seeing their loved ones as they head back to the states.

Transit Center members can rest assured that maintaining internet and Wi-Fi connectivity is one of leadership's priorities.

"Keeping in touch back home helps our service members maintain the whole healthy person concept making it easier for them to stay focused on the job at hand," said Millard.

His sentiments are echoed by his top enlisted advisor.

"Wi-Fi is by far the biggest morale asset we have," said Command Chief Master Sgt. Gregory Warren, 376 AEW. "While there are things that will go away here, Wi-Fi will be among the last."

Chances are that Exley will not be the last deployed member to watch the birth of a child via the internet.

Although those members may not get to cut the cord of their newborns, witnessing the entire birthing experience will be the next best thing to being there.

Photos

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Staff Sgt. Lamartrus Exley, 376th Expeditionary Communication Squadron shares a special moment with his wife, Brittney as she shows him their newborn son shortly after delivery Aug. 14, 2013. Exley witnessed the entire birth from the Transit Center at Manas, Kyrgyzstan via internet connection and coached his wife through her labor pains. With the availability of Wi-Fi and video chat sites deployed service members can share in their family's special moments. (U.S. Air Force photo/Master Sgt. Donna T. Jeffries)

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