

Press Release

Bravery on Two Fronts Deployed Marine's Wife Gives Birth - But How to Share the News?



While Vanessa Anderson's husband battled Iraqi forces half a world away, she faced some uncertainties of her own on the home front. The 18-year-old wife of Marine Lance Corporal Paul Bryan Anderson was preparing to deliver the young couple's first child. During a visit with her husband's family in Morganton, the Camp Lejeune resident began to experience pregnancy-related complications.

"I wasn't going to have the baby here in Morganton at first," she said. "But I began having some problems with the pregnancy and with stress. Dr. Carroll Ellison saw me during an emergency room visit and told me it would be a better idea to stay here instead of going back to the base."

Drs. Walter Hall and Alfred Hamer, along with anesthesiologist Dr. Daniel Shapiro, cared for her and the baby. At 8:39 p.m. on March 22, Vanessa gave birth to 6 pound - 13 ounce Marissa Racquel Anderson at Grace Hospital in Morganton. Dr. Hamer, who delivered Marissa, said mother and child are healthy and happy and that Vanessa and her husband are both brave, just in different ways.

"She's doing her part on the home front, and he's doing his abroad. It's an inspiring partnership," he said.

Vanessa's mother Winona Berkheimer was able to fly in from Albuquerque, NM, for the birth, and her mother-in-law



Marissa Racquel Anderson gently sucks the finger of mother Vanessa in their patient room at Morganton's Grace Hospital.



Marine Lance Corporal Paul Bryan Anderson displays his favorite weapon at Camp Lejeune. He was deployed to Iraq on January 12.

Deborah Anderson was also on hand to lend support. "As soon as my mom got here I felt 100% better, just having someone to take care of me who could understand how I dealt with the pain and everything," she said.

"The doctors were really sweet," said Vanessa. "And the nurses were great to me. One of the nurses, Cindy Murphy, actually babysat my husband when he was a kid. She came by last night before going to church to see the baby and said 'I knew you could do it!'"

But how to get the good news to Lance Corporal Anderson, serving with 2nd Marine Division Combat Engineer Battalion, Alpha Company, in the Middle East?

"With the tremendous stress he must be under, I thought visual confirmation of a healthy new baby girl would be great news for Bryan and a real morale-booster for his buddies in the field," Dr. Shapiro said. That set the stage for a call to support staff at Blue Ridge HealthCare. They took digital photos and internet-ready video of Marissa and her brave mother. Blue Ridge's Marketing staff created a private web page, so Bryan could view and share images of his new family in a far-away field of combat.

Blue Ridge HealthCare Media specialist Tony Glenn said Community Relations representatives at Camp Lejeune were happy to try to forward the web site location to computer techs with the 2nd Marine Division's Combat Engineer Battalion.

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“They told me they would do their best to see that Lance Corporal Anderson gets to see the images of his wife and child. Those guys are fighting hard and I’m sure he’d like to know his loved ones are healthy and happy,” said Glenn.

Vanessa said she had not heard from her husband, in two weeks. “He was deployed on January 12. We have mostly corresponded through letters. He doesn’t get to call very often. He wrote two weeks ago asking if the baby had been born yet, but it takes two weeks for the letters to get from there to here. The Red Cross was going to try to get in touch with him to tell him Marissa was here.”

Vanessa is accustomed to the military lifestyle. She was born in El Paso, where her father was in the army. “Bryan’s grandfather was a career marine and his father was in the Air Force,” she said.

In her Grace Hospital room, Vanessa displayed family photos of an impressive husband in Marine camouflage, cradling an equally impressive weapon.

“In his group they find land mines and blow them up. He’s in demolition, and he helps build airstrips. He also works with artillery. His friends call themselves super-grunts – they get to fight and blow things up,” she said with a broad smile. “He loves his machine gun, and he was excited to get a pistol before he left.” Lance Corporal Anderson will have served in the Marines for two years in July and plans to do another four years after this term. He also plans to take classes through the GI Bill, Vanessa said.

“I was really scared when he first left, because I didn’t know if I could do this by myself,” Vanessa said. Now, as Lance Corporal Anderson faces the enemy in Iraq, she holds a precious gift in her arms – proof that she can persevere – and she hopes and prays for her husband’s safe return.