

MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Brothers will train together as they become Marines

Monday, April 5, 2010

By PAUL COLLINS - Bulletin Staff Writer

Brothers Juan and Gabriel Estremera of Martinsville have always been close. That's one of the reasons they are joining the U.S. Marine Corps together.

Juan, 21, and Gabriel, 19, are scheduled to report to Parris Island, S.C., today for 13 weeks of basic training. Then they will get a 10-day leave to come home, followed by about a month of Marine combat training in Camp Geiger in Jacksonville, N.C.

That will be followed by at least six months of initial training in electronics maintenance at Twentynine Palms, Calif., according to the brothers and USMC Staff Sgt. Travis Treloar, the local Marine recruiter.

How long and where they receive their second phase of job training depends on which area of electronics maintenance they decide to specialize in, Treloar said. If the brothers choose different areas of electronics maintenance, they could separate at that point, he said. After training, they probably will get to choose to serve on the East Coast or West Coast of the United States or in Okinawa, Japan, Treloar said.

Maj. Chris Devine, a spokesman for Marine Corps Recruiting Command, said it's not unusual for two siblings to sign up, because the calling and value system of the Marines gets passed among siblings. But it is rare for two siblings to go to basic training and go into the same job training field at the same time, he said.

Treloar said Juan and Gabriel's signing up speaks highly of their desire to serve their country, their commitment and their family's commitment and support.

"I personally am extremely proud of them for wanting to serve their country and proud of them for making a decision for their future," said Lisa Estremera, Gabriel and Juan's mother, referring to the educational and career opportunities the Marine Corps provides.

She said the two have taken some courses at Patrick Henry Community College, and joining the Marines is an opportunity for them to receive more college education.



Brothers Juan (left) and Gabriel Estremera recently joined the Marines together. The brothers will train at Parris Island, S.C., and in California, where they plan to specialize in electronics maintenance. Military service is a tradition for the Estremera family: Both their parents were in the Army. (Bulletin photo by Mike Wray)

"To be honest," she said, "there really isn't a lot out there as far as jobs go for kids right out of high school and college in this area.

"For me as a mother, it's reassuring to know they are going to be there for one another," having an opportunity to encourage each other, she said, calling it "a buddy system." Juan agreed. "The recruiter said when you're going through hell at boot camp, you can look at your brother and know he's going through hell too," he said.

In school, Juan was more interested in academics and Gabriel was more interested in sports, they said. Growing up in Fieldale from 1997 on, Gabriel played basketball, football, swam and ran cross country either through Parks and Recreation or on school teams, and Gabriel and Juan played soccer from the eighth through 10th grades.

Both graduated from Bassett High School, Juan in 2007 and Gabriel in 2008. Juan received an advanced diploma and was a Commonwealth Scholar. The family — including father Carlos Estremera and sister Natalia Estremera, 17 — moved to Martinsville in October 2009. Juan and Gabriel also share an interest in cooking and a desire to experience other cultures, which is why both say they would like to be assigned to Japan.

They also trained together in preparation for the physical demands of the Marines. They did weight training and ran several times a week.

Another bond is their faith. They are members of the Church at Mercy Crossing (formerly Martinsville Church of God), and they completed a yearlong discipleship training program in 2008 and 2009 at Mission Georgia Master's Commission in Cleveland, Ga.

There, they learned leadership and character development skills, learned more about following orders and serving, and grew spiritually, among other things, they said. Gabriel added that it was a good year of preparation for the Marines.

Both brothers said they eventually may get involved in missions work or a ministry, and both are thinking about making a career of the military.

Their mother, who served three years in the Army and was a military police specialist, said she has some concerns that her sons might be called to war, "but our faith is extremely strong. I can't dwell on the what-ifs. I experienced my husband going off to war. I'm really trying not to focus on that.

"Knowing God has a future for them (Juan and Gabriel) is where I find my peace," she said. Carlos Estremera served more than 10 years in the Army and was a supply sergeant. He entered the Army in 1982 during peacetime and was called to serve in the Persian Gulf War in 1990.

"It wasn't something we expected, but we were ready for it," he said.

He said when he learned of his sons' plans to join the Marines, he told them they might have to go to war. He supports them and "we're very proud of them," he said.

His wife said he now is on Social Security disability for conditions and injuries he has as a result of his war service, including disabilities related to exposure to chemicals, post-traumatic

stress disorder, and knee, lower back, spinal and joint problems. Now, she said, her husband is trying to get Veterans Administration disability benefits.

Both brothers have signed up for four years of active duty and four years of inactive duty when they could be recalled if needed.

Juan said he has been thinking about joining the military since he was in the ninth grade. Gabriel said he wanted to become an architectural engineer before deciding to join the Marine Corps about a year after graduating from Bassett High School. He eventually could switch his job area in the USMC to combat engineer if the job becomes open, he added.

Juan said he believes it will improve his self-discipline. Gabriel said he admires the Marine Corps' values of honor, courage and commitment, as well as the brotherhood of the USMC. The brothers realize they could be called to combat. "It's part of what we signed up for," Gabriel said, but he noted the Marines are well trained to protect themselves and each other. "If anything fatal happens, it's part of war, and we all have a time," he said.

Juan added that he researched the most dangerous jobs, and serving in the military did not even make the top 10.