

# **‘Brothers’ bid farewell to fallen Marine**

## **Severna Park grad laid to rest at Arlington Cemetery**

[By E.B. FURGURSON III, Staff Writer](#)

This band of brothers did not wear the uniform of their fallen comrade. They wore dark suits like the other mourners who packed into St. Bernadette Catholic Church in Severn yesterday to say goodbye to Lance Cpl. Eric W. Herzberg.

Bonded by tribulations and joys of high school life, forged in adolescent doubt and bravado, they came together from colleges and jobs across the country. They stood together at the altar to make their peace as a team.

Today they gathered again to lay him to rest among the rows of marble monuments to the nation’s fallen at Arlington National Cemetery.

“Eric was more than a friend, he was a brother,” they said. He was one who stood by his friends, teammates, family and faith with the same sense of duty that moved him to become a Marine right after graduating from Severna Park High School in 2005.

Cpl. Herzberg, a squad machine gunner, was killed in action Oct. 21 in Iraq’s insurgent-infested Al Anbar Province, from which so many reports bearing the worst news have been coming.

After the Mass — attended by a few hundred friends, relatives and fellow Marines in dress blues — the band of brothers stood again for the media gaggle of television cameras and microphones thrust at their young, clean-shaven faces. And again they spoke as one.

Individuals spoke up, surely. But when prodded to identify themselves they politely declined, twice, saying, “It is about Eric, not us.”

Their friend was undoubtedly proud of them, as they are of him. A few are following his example by joining the service — one at the Naval Academy, another in boot camp at Camp Lejeune, N.C., where Cpl. Herzberg was forged into a Marine last fall before being dispatched to Iraq in July.

They bore their brother, draped in Old Glory, past a phalanx of crisply saluting Marines and into the sanctuary Cpl. Herzberg and his family called home.

The throng stood to sing “All Are Welcome Here,” with the refrain “let us put an end to fear and danger,” as his coffin was brought before the altar.

The Marines quietly marched to their pews, standing until all three rows were filled in before turning crisply on command and being seated with a hushed “At ease.”

The Mass was filled with music, hymns and featured voices.

Friends stood to read scripture — lessons, mostly.

From Romans: “Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction , persevere in prayer ... Have regard for each other, do not repay evil with evil ... live at peace.”

And Ecclesiastes: “A time to love, and a time to hate, a time for war, and a time for peace.”

His Severna Park wrestling coach, Paul Joyce, stood to praise Cpl. Herzberg. “You have heard of young athletes that you need to mold, who need to be shown, shown the right way,” he said. “Eric was not someone who needed molding. Eric showed us.”

He noted the modern trend toward self-help books and classes. “People like Eric Herzberg give us all the inspiration we need.”

His pastor, Father Domenic Cieri, reflected on the young man he knew as a reverent servant of his God.

“When I was in the seminary there was a book that taught how to preside (in a congregation). It was called ‘Strong, Loving and Wise,’ ” he said. “Those who know Eric know he certainly lived up to that, strong, loving and wise. A loving friend ... a strong silent type.”

And a patriot, even at a young age, according to a story related to the pastor by his father, Eric F. Herzberg:

“There he was, 2 years old, jumping on a trampoline and singing, ‘You’re a Grand Old Flag.’ He wanted everyone to know how good this country is.”

That love of country made him want to serve after Sept. 11. He resolved to become a Marine.

Father Cieri said, however, that his gung-ho approach gave way, as it did for many in the country, to doubts about the war in Iraq. But his sense of duty never wavered.

The pastor wasn’t sure he should share the story with those attending the fallen Marine’s funeral service, but he said the young man’s mother encouraged him to do so.

“Just before he left for Iraq he came home, to be with family and get ready,” he said.

“After Mass he asked for a blessing. We talked, but he said he wanted to talk a little bit more.”

The young Marine told his pastor that he and a few of his friends “had changed their minds about our effort in Iraq.”

He said he no longer believed in the war in Iraq, and he wanted to know what to do.

The 20-year-old’s pastor said he was flustered.

“I thought, you know exactly what to do, what you’re going to do,” Father Cieri said.

“Then I told him, ‘Eric, we love you. Do your duty.’ ” He did.

Cpl. Herzberg’s grieving mother stood to give thanks to all who had come to her family in their immediate hour of need, but also to address the larger questions brought forth by grieving in all wars.

“I am able to speak because Eric is holding me up, asking me to, while bathed in the arms of Jesus,” Gina Barnhurst said.

“We are all crying here today, but those tears must not be wasted,” she said. “They must cleanse our minds and our hearts and lead us to a clear vision of God ... Allah ... Yahweh, a higher power, or whatever deity you call your creator.”

Then she made a simple plea.

“We can all do our part to keep peace in our families, our hearts, and our world. Let’s get our precious men and women home so no other families have to endure this pain.”

Rep. Wayne Gilchrest, R-Kent, also a former Marine, sat quietly among the mourners and stood in the background as the crowd mulled around outside the church. He and others watched Cpl. Herzberg’s band of brothers huddle together.

“I come simply to show respect ... to honor him and his family for his extraordinary life and their extraordinary loss,” Mr. Gilchrest said.

The Marine’s congressman struggled for words to express what he felt at this ceremony and too many others he has attended.

When Ms. Barnhurst learned that her son was going into the Marines, she started a group at the church. The Peace Keepers meet every Wednesday night to pray for peace, to support one another and all those serving.

“She is just an inspiration, and her son was just like her,” said Ann McDonald, a pastoral associate at the parish.

After the service yesterday, mourners gathered for a meal at the Elks Club up the road. Some laughter was heard as memories were swapped in table conversation.

Ms. Barnhurst, making her way between tables, said quietly, “We have to get the word out to get those boys home. Something good has got to come out of this.”

- No Jumps-

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