

Severna Park grad killed in Iraq

Well-mannered athlete said Corps was his calling

By E.B. FURGURSON III, Staff Writer

Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Eric W. Herzberg, a 2005 graduate of Severna Park High School, was killed in action in Al Anbar Province, Iraq, on Saturday, the second war casualty from the community in the past two months.

An athlete, a fan of Irish and patriotic country music, a wicked video gamer and rugby player, he was said to love his country and his Catholic faith. He was 20 years old.

Cpl. Herzberg's body has already returned to Dover Air Force Base. Following services at St. Bernadette's Church in Severn, he'll be buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

His mother, Gina Barnhart, along with his older sister Katie and younger brother Matthew, have been visited by relatives and a steady stream of friends bearing condolences at their home in Severna Park. His father, Eric F. Herzberg, lives in Laurel.

"We are a very private family," Ms. Barnhart's sister, and the fallen Marine's aunt, Bernadette Martin said. But reading from a prepared statement, she said: "We are deeply saddened by our loss of our wonderful Eric, yet we are so incredibly proud of him. He was proud to be a Marine and to serve his country which he loved dearly.

"He was a happy, quiet young man, with a deep compassion for others and a deep faith in God. While we grieve our loss we celebrate his life and the joy and laughter he brought into our lives."

Her voice cracked as she continued.

"We are so proud of him ... but so sad."

Cpl. Herzberg joined the Marine Corps after graduation. After leaving boot camp last October, he was deployed to Iraq on July 14.

He was a machine gunner with the 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, II Marine Expeditionary Force headquartered in Camp Lejeune, N.C.

The official U.S. Department of Defense statement said he was killed Oct. 21 "while conducting combat operations in Al Anbar province." A Web site tracking casualties noted that he was a victim of "hostile fire."

Cpl. Herzberg is believed to be the sixth soldier with local ties to die in the line of duty in Iraq or Afghanistan in the past three years, and the 91st American soldier killed in Iraq

this month. The next-highest number of fatalities was recorded a year ago this month, also the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.

A total of 158 Marines in the division have died in Iraq since March 29, 2005, according to the most recent data available from the Marine Corps.

Since the start of the war, 2,801 U.S. service members have died in Iraq, according to an Associated Press count.

Last month, Army Pvt. Eric Kavanagh, also from Severna Park, was killed by a roadside bomb in Baghdad. He had attended Folger McKinsey Elementary, Severna Park Middle School and Chesapeake High School.

Born and raised in Olympia, Wash., Cpl. Herzberg had lived in South Carolina, Nova Scotia and Ontario, before coming to Severna Park in 2000.

He wrestled one year at Severna Park High School and worked at Big Vanilla Fitness Club in Arnold.

His wrestling coach, Paul Joyce, who now mentors Cpl. Herzberg's brother, Matt, remembers the slain Marine's manners and even keel from working with him on the junior varsity wrestling and football squads.

"He was a coach's dream," Mr. Joyce said. "I never had to yell at him for lack of effort. He might not have been one of the better players, but it was not from lack of effort."

The coach said Cpl. Herzberg was a great kid, "never absent, never cursing, never being in trouble."

And the young man's manners were impeccable, he said, not just when in front of adults: "He was that kind of kid 365 days a year, perfectly mannered and did whatever you needed."

For that he credited the young man's mother.

"She did a great job," the coach said, explaining that he had both brothers in the same class. "I don't ever remember a bad word or attitude out of them, ever."

Coach Joyce said Cpl. Herzberg was determined to become a Marine, recalling how he asked students in their senior year what they planned to do.

"He looked me right in the eye and said, 'I am going to be a Marine.' "

News reports said his mother tried to talk him out of it. "Gina was anxious to talk him out of it," his uncle, Doug Barnhurst, told *The Washington Post*. "She was worried about it.

She was worried that he didn't know what he was getting into. But he convinced her it was a calling."

His Roman Catholic faith guided his decision to join the Marines and helped him convince his mother of the surety of his vocation, said his maternal grandfather, William Barnhurst.

"Mom, I'm so happy," he told his mother by phone from boot camp at Parris Island, S.C., his uncle said. "This is what I want to do."

Gary Bulkley's son, Matt, was one of Cpl. Herzberg's best friends.

"There was a group of them, maybe 10 or 12, who were always over here," Mr. Bulkley said. "They set up four or five TVs and every Friday and Saturday during the year, and all summer, they were here. Eric was one of those terrific kids. That group was really close."

Mr. Bulkley said he, too, tried to talk the young man out of joining the Marines right out of school.

"I said maybe he should wait, at least see if your enthusiasm is consistent," he said. "But he wanted to be a Marine in the worst way.

"When my son called to tell me, it was heart-wrenching. I was so sad."

Matt Bulkley, reached at his Longwood University dorm last night, said the group was really close.

"We were brothers," he said. "We saw each other every day. We were like family - we were all there for each other."

He added that all his friends know people who are going into the military, but "we never thought it would be him. We could not picture this happening to him."

Another of his band of "brothers," Chris Larkin, who attends Anne Arundel Community College and will transfer to UMBC next year, said simply, "He was just the best friend a guy could have."

Now that close-knit group of friends is coming home from colleges across the country for services this weekend.

"Every one of us is coming home to be there for him and his family," Matt Bulkley said.

They'll join the slain Marine's family and other friends to say goodbye. Together, they'll partake in the family's invitation noted in the simple statement released to the public:

"Please join us as we pray for all of the brave men and women still serving our country in harm's way, and for their families.

"And join us as we pray for the peace which will let them all come home."

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

- No Jumps-

Published October 25, 2006, [The Capital](#), Annapolis, Md.

Copyright © 2006 [The Capital](#), Annapolis, Md.