

IN MEMORIAM ~ July 30, 2020

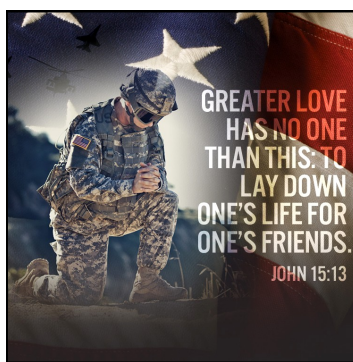


July 30, 2020 - A day that started like so many others but ended in a nightmare for the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), the United States Marine Corps, the Navy and for all Americans. A training mission in an Assault Amphibious Vehicle (AAV) that went horribly wrong, resulting in the deaths of 9 heroes - Marines and 1 Sailor. Young men who had a purpose greater than themselves and who so selflessly served, knowing that it was possible that they would pay the ultimate price for the freedoms we all enjoy. Taken far too young, far too soon; the faces of the high cost of the freedoms that too many take for granted.

It would be shameful of us to not pay tribute to these brave young men on the third anniversary of their deaths; the third anniversary of the deadliest AAV accident in the history of the Marine Corps. May those who perished that day continue to rest in peace and may their families, loved ones and the entire Corps be comforted during this extremely difficult time.

Pfc. Bryan J. Baltierra, 18, of Corona, California
 Lance Cpl. Marco A. Barranco, 21, of Montebello, California
 Pfc. Evan A. Bath, 19, of Oak Creek, Wisconsin
 U.S. Navy Hospitalman Christopher Gnem, 22, of Stockton, California
 Pfc. Jack Ryan Ostrovsky, 21, of Bend, Oregon
 Cpl. Wesley A. Rodd, 23, of Harris, Texas
 Lance Cpl. Chase D. Sweetwood, 18, of Portland, Oregon
 Cpl. Cesar A. Villanueva, 21, of Riverside, California
 Lance Cpl. Guillermo S. Perez, 19, of New Braunfels, Texas

All the Marines were riflemen with Bravo Company, Battalion Landing Team 1/4, assigned to the 15th MEU. Navy Hospitalman Gnem was assigned to the same unit.



Bryan Juan-Carlos Baltierra was born in Federal Way, WA on September 18, 2001. He was the only son of Carlos and Evelyn Baltierra and brother to Natalie, Emily, and Sara. He died on the anniversary of his Marine Corps enlistment and just about 6 weeks shy of his 19th birthday. As a young boy, Bryan aspired to join the military and made it a reality after graduating from Centennial High School in Corona, CA in June 2019. Bryan radiated positivity through his engaging smile and infectious laugh. He loved the company of his family and friends, whether it was discussing world news, listening to old school hip-hop music, or sharing a meal at his favorite restaurants. USMC Pfc. Bryan J. Baltierra reported to Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego on July 29, 2019. Upon graduation, he reported to the School of Infantry, Camp Pendleton, California, on Nov. 11, 2019, where he was trained as a 0311, rifleman. On Jan. 29, 2020, he reported to 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, 1st Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, aboard Camp Pendleton, California.

Lance Corporal Marco A. Barranco “Andy,” 21, was born June 13, 1999 in Los Angeles, CA. He was a son of Marco Barranco and Guadalupe Garcia, and is survived by his two sisters Catherine and Selma Barranco. In addition, Andy had his niece, unborn nephew, and his maternal grandmother Angela Moreno. Shortly after Andy graduated from Montebello High School in 2018, he enlisted in the United States Marine Corp to show his gratitude toward the country which gave his immigrant parents an opportunity to excel. He had dreams of continuing his service through law enforcement after completing his enlistment period. Andy is described by his friends and family as a fearless leader who knew how to love unconditionally and as an inspirational role model.

United States Marine Corps **Private First Class Andrew Bath** died in a training accident off the coast of California on July 30, 2020, at the age of 19. 2001 was a year of incredible change and the year began with much hope and national pride. It was upon this wave of pride and hope that, on May 28, 2001, Memorial Day, Aleta (nee Williamson) and Andrew Bath welcomed their son into the world at St. Luke’s Hospital in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Born on the day our nation honors our soldiers who died in battle, and growing up in the wake of 9/11, Evan’s childhood was built on the firm foundation of faith, loyalty, and the willingness to be of service. The only child of Aleta and Andrew, Evan grew up in a loving home where he learned the importance of hard work and sacrifice.

Generous and kind, passionate and committed, a life rich in faith, family, and service to others. Never one to demand the spotlight, Evan possessed a strong moral code and a willingness to stand for what he believed was right. Devoted son, grandson, brother, and friend, he had a terrific sense of humor and just enough sneakiness to keep life interesting.

At the age of 14, Evan received the Holy Ghost August 30, 2015 at Parkway Church. Evan loved God, and he enjoyed helping out at the Church Sunday School and Bible study. Though he didn’t like getting up early on Sunday morning to go to church, his mother would often find him in his room praying.

As Evan’s senior year in high school approached, he decided to transfer from Oak Creek High School to Connections Academy. The on-line school afforded him the flexibility to set his own schedule. Answering the call to protect his country, it was at this time that Evan decided he would enlist in the Marines once he graduated.

On July 29, 2019, Evan proudly joined the United States Marine Corps. While facing the rigors of boot camp, Evan began reflecting on life and family relationships. He wrote his mother frequently and often sent home prayer requests for his friends. Evan quickly became good friends with Zach Nichols. He and Zach shared their faith and prayed together, and Evan even grew close to Zach’s parents.

Evan served the first half of boot camp with Lima Company, however due to medical issues he graduated boot camp with Bravo Company. Based on his score on the Department of Defense’s rigorous Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test, he was given the option to choose from the majority of the possible Military Operational Specialties to focus his military career. Without hesitation, Evan chose the infantry. After Infantry Training Battalion and Military Operational Specialties training, his Permanent Duty Station was at Camp Pendleton as an infantryman in the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, 1/4 Bravo Company. Honored to be a part of two great units he cared deeply about, Evan embraced his call to service with dignity, discipline, commitment, and courage. Ultimately sacrificing his life for his country, along with eight of his military brothers, Evan proved a hero whose life will long inspire those who will carry his legacy forward.

Cpl. Cesar Villanueva, 21, of Riverside was born on January 28, 1999 in Clark County, Nevada. Cpl. Villanueva was a newlywed. Sarah, his wife of one month, says her husband was a beautiful soul. "He was more than just a man in uniform. He was a great guy, the greatest person I ever got a chance to meet," she said.

Cpl. Villanueva was committed to his service. One of the Marines who served with Cpl. Villanueva was quoted as saying "I served with Nova with FAST Co. Bravo Co. 4th Platoon and deployed to Bahrain with [Villanueva], he constantly exemplified what hard work and what ‘Right’ looks like as Marine. Nova was more than kind-hearted and always was cracking jokes. These are some things that he should be remembered for forever."

Corporal Wesley A. Rodd, age 22, passed away July 30, 2020. He was born on December 1, 1997 in Houston, Texas. Corporal Rodd is survived by his wife, Jamie Rodd, his son, Ezra and mother, Valarie. He was born in Houston and was a resident of Cypress for 17 years. After graduation from CyFair High School Wesley enlisted in Marines 2016. He loved his Houston Texans Football team.

Jack-Ryan Ostrovsky, age 20, died 2 weeks shy of his 21st birthday on July 30, 2020 in a training exercise while serving our country in the U.S. Marine Corps near San Diego, CA. Jack-Ryan and his fraternal twin brother Samuel were born August 18th and 21st 1999, respectively, in Bellingham and Seattle, WA to Peter and Lynn (Fischman) Ostrovsky. Jack-Ryan and his brother Sam were raised in the South Hill neighborhood, but they grew up on Washington State and Whatcom County's trails, forests and mountains and were a product of Bellingham playgrounds and parks. From an early age Jack-Ryan was interested in military service. Jack-Ryan and Sam graduated from Sehome High School in 2018.

Jack-Ryan was a patriot and he loved serving his country; you had to look no further than the American flag bandana that he wore just about everywhere he could. Jack-Ryan was preceded in death by grandparents Jack & Arlene Fischman. He is survived by his parents, Peter and Lynn, his brother Samuel, grandparents Benjamin & Thelma Ostrovsky, step-grandmother Christine Sears, uncles and aunts John & Rose Fischman and Mary & Larry Wittnebert, and many loving relatives and friends.

U.S. Navy Hospitalman Christopher Gnem, 22, was born on February 28, 1998 and was raised in Stockton, CA attending Oakwood Elementary and August Knodt, then continuing at Lincoln High, where he graduated in 2016 and joined the Navy. He was an enthusiastic athlete, favoring basketball, football, judo and jujitsu, the latter he was asked to help train younger kids.

"In high school, he found his love of the game and played basketball all four years. During those years, he wasn't the 'All Star' of the team, but he was 'All Heart,' and he gave it his all every chance he had," the family friend said. Because of his positive attitude, Gnem was voted captain by his teammates in his senior year as well as "Most Inspirational Player."

It was during high school that a military recruiter visiting campus sparked his interest and he soon decided he wanted to serve his country. He signed up for the Navy at his mother's urging, believing "that would be the safest option," the friend said. Gnem left home for boot camp in May 2017, going to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas. That was followed by postings in Florida and Camp Pendleton back in California. He chose to work on amphibious assault vehicles, the kind of craft he was on the day he died. He was serving as a medic to a group of Marines during the fateful training mission that also took the lives of 8 Marines.

In previous social media posts, his aunt, Alana Sam Hem, wrote: "He was proud to serve his country and loved his Marine team whom he was with until the end. - We will miss his ear-to-ear smile, goofy laugh and kind heart. He was the heart of the family."

His fiancée, also a Navy hospital corpsman posted "I know he was pushing his Marines out first trying to be the true hero that he's always been. He didn't need to doc up right then, but I'm sure two people are still alive because of him".

Lance Corporal Guillermo "Willie" S. Perez died at the age of 19 in La Jolla, California on July 30, 2020. Willie was born to Romelia Escobedo and Faustino T. Perez, Jr. on November 27, 2000 in San Antonio, Texas.

Guillermo, also known as Willie, was a kid who once you met, you could never forget. When he was young in Kingsville, Texas, one would say he was loud, adventurous, hyper, and dirty but that was him. He spent the majority of his childhood outside, avoiding the shower, and always being a kid full of life. It seemed as if he never ran out of energy. Others would say he was caring, optimistic, a helper, and a loving person - which are also true. With him being the youngest, he still did a lot for his family and loved ones. He always offered a helping hand or helped without being asked. He grew up to become a genuine and good person.

He enjoyed his teenage years. He loved to play his game till all hours of the night, only leaving his room for Whataburger - living the life. Willie worked at Schlotzsky's for 3.5 years with his four best friends and he volunteered with the New Braunfels Noon Lions Club throughout his high school years. He graduated from New Braunfels High School, Class of 2019, and went straight into the Marines. One could never say Army or any branch other than the Marines, because you would get an earful from him telling you how disrespectful that was.

He began his Marine Corps career as a Private First Class and had recently been promoted to Lance Corporal, where he received a certificate of Infantry Rifleman (0311) Course and a Sharp-Shooter Medal. Willie would randomly call his loved ones, it was sure to put a smile on their face, make you laugh and even cry. When he would visit his family, he would address Whataburger first. He would then take the time to go visit the entirety of his family, surprising his sisters and making it special for them.

A family member was quoted as saying "Not only did we lose a special person, we lost a loving son, brother, fiancé, cousin, nephew, and friend! He touched so many people's hearts. He was literally one of a kind. If you didn't know him, you truly did miss out in one of the good things in life! You will forever be missed, Willie. We all love you more than you know - always and forever!"

Willie was preceded in death by his grandfathers and niece. He is survived by his parents, his fiancé, Monika Mendoza and parents, grandmothers, sisters and brother. His step family includes, April Jimenez, Amy Elizondo, Yesenia Elizondo, Maddison Elizondo, Veronica and Anwar Anderson, Monica and Gerardo Garza, Erica and Ricardo Rodriguez, Joey and Mayra Escobedo as well as 18 nieces and nephews, and 2 great-nieces.



Lance Cpl. Chase D. Sweetwood was born on July 31, 2001 in San Diego, CA at Mary Birch Hospital and grew up in Chula Vista until the age of 10. He attended high school in Portland. Lance Cpl. Sweetwood paid the ultimate sacrifice at the age of 18 on July 30, 2020, a day before his 19th birthday. He left behind seven siblings.

Christiana Sweetwood of Danville, Virginia, said she never wants another mother to experience what she has over the past year. "When they took my son, they kind of took my life," she said through tears. "There's a hole in my family I can't fix. And I don't want another mother standing at a door at 7 a.m. and two casualty officers telling her that her son is missing."

His mother said she and the other families who lost loved ones plan to spend the anniversary of the accident together, sharing memories. She may put flowers in the ocean. On Saturday, July 31, Sweetwood plans to visit her son's grave at Miramar National Cemetery in San Diego and eat his favorite dish - peach pie - to honor him on what would have been his 19th birthday.

LCpl Sweetwood was serving with the US Marine Corps and currently assigned to Bravo Company, BLT 1/4, 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) when he sadly perished with his other Marine brothers during a training exercise aboard an amphibious assault vehicle (AAV) that went down off the coast of Southern California on July 30, 2020.

