

## Despite dad's, best friend's deaths, recruit presses on to become Marine

Pvt. Evan Plunkett's eyes welled up and tears rolled down his cheeks when he heard the news during the first week of boot camp.

He was called to the company office for a telephone call from his mother, who told him his father and his best friend were both killed in separate incidents on the same day.

On the morning of July 24, Plunkett's best friend since the sixth grade, James, was at a park with another friend when he was killed in a drive-by shooting.

Later that day, his father, Thomas, a former Marine, was struck and killed by a car while crossing the street during a business trip in Tampa, Fla.

"Oddly enough, it was him who told me that everything was going to be okay," said Holly Miles Plunkett, his mother.

Emotionally devastated, Plunkett was allowed 10 days of leave to be with his family. Plunkett remembers spending time with his father, whom he looked up to, less than a week before.

"Before I left for boot camp, I asked my father if he would be at my graduation," said Plunkett, Platoon 2146, Company G. "He hesitated as if he knew he might not be there. The last thing he told me was that he loved me and was proud of my decision to join the Marine Corps."

Plunkett turned down several college scholarships to follow his father's Marine Corps legacy.

He said his father rarely spoke about his Marine Corps career but he always tried to instill a military lifestyle and discipline in Plunkett.

"I felt like I wasn't mentally ready to come back to boot camp," said Plunkett, a West Lake, Calif. native. "I came back because of my father. He was a Marine. He was a go-getter and he got things done. I wanted to be just like him."

His parents separated when Plunkett was young, and his father moved out, which created a barrier between them. Several years later, his parents reunited and he began to rebuild the relationship he had lacked with his father.

He learned that his father was loving and hardworking, and Plunkett wanted to be "the best," just like his father.

"He is a lot like his dad, who has a lot of positive aspects," said Holly.

Plunkett was active in high school sports, which made the physical part of boot camp easier, but the deaths of his father and friend made the mental aspects more difficult.

Plunkett said climbing the hills at Edson Range, Camp Pendleton, Calif., tired and hungry, took a mental toll on him.

"There were times in training when his mind was somewhere else," said Sgt. Wade Winfrey, senior drill instructor, Platoon 2146. "But he had a lot of heart and pulled through. He was admirable, and I am glad to say he was in my platoon."

Plunkett said he was able to pull through boot camp because of his father.

He felt his father was constantly with him, encouraging him to move forward as he struggled through training.

As Plunkett graduates with Company G today, he will continue his Marine Corps career as an aviation mechanic. He believes his father will always be watching over him, guiding him through future struggles.