

Former NFL Lineman Joins Marines

Giving up the fame of the football field at 29 years old, one Company B recruit looked for a glory that was more permanent than any trophy.

At age 13, Pfc. Jeremy Staat was 75 inches tall and weighed 230 pounds. It seemed as if he was built for football, according to Staat.

"I really didn't have to work hard at it," said Staat.

Starting as an offensive lineman, Staat grew as a football player and saw his first glimpse of the Marine Corps not long after starting at Arizona State University as an offensive lineman.

Fond memories traced back to his first encounter with the Marine Corps.

"I had a buddy who was a combat photographer in the Marine Corps," said Staat. "He came back from the desert with pictures of these big C-130s and I said, 'I want to do what you are doing.'"

Playing football began losing its appeal. Seeing other men and women around the world in their service uniforms kept Staat thinking about those "what-ifs."

Following his time at the university, Staat moved up to the National Football League, playing with the Pittsburgh Steelers, Oakland Raiders, Seattle Seahawks, St. Louis Rams and one year of arena football with the Los Angeles Avengers.

Early thoughts of leaving the league were deflected after college teammate Pat Tillman influenced Staat to stay in until he could get a retirement plan. Staat and Tillman became good friends while sharing a room at ASU. Over time, Tillman decided to leave the NFL to serve in the U.S. Army before he was killed in action in 2004.

"That was the turning point for Jeremy," said Janet Goodheart, Jeremy Staat's mother. "After Pat was killed, he began to dwell on things. He visited me at home and we had a real serious talk. He told me that he was through with football."

He decided to enlist in the military. Because of his larger-than-life exterior, Staat had to pass a few tests before he could enlist.

His mother said he passed tests everyday.

“He called me and said, “Mom, you can’t be any more than 78 inches, 29 years old and 261 pounds,”” said Goodheart. “He was all three.”

There were certain reasons for joining that went beyond the passing of Pat Tillman, according to Staat.

“The big reason was because I was just really disgusted with the amount of money entertainers get and what they pay troops overseas,” said Staat. “It didn’t seem right that we pay all those entertainers millions to catch a football and we pay our Marines pennies to a dollar to catch a bullet,” said Staat.

Determined to leave, Staat spoke with a recruiter and left as soon as possible.

“I came in two months early, like “Let’s get it on,”” said Staat. “I wanted to be a part of something that is going to live forever instead of getting trophies. What are trophies good for? collecting dust? Most trophies get thrown in the garage. Who knows where they go after that?”

Arriving at the depot, Staat did what he could to keep his past under wraps, but within five hours of his landing, his secret was out.

Staat said a drill instructor asked the 77-inch stack of muscle if he played football. “I played a little in college,” said Staat, who enlisted to become a machine gunner.

The drill instructor kept digging and eventually the truth came out.

“From what I knew of Marine Corps training, drill instructors are extremely professional,” said Staat. “With all the attention I’ve drawn to this platoon, they have done an awesome job being professional.”

When he started training, Staat took a different outlook on his environment than most recruits do during the first phase of boot camp. To him, playing for a team was temporary; being part of a legend was something people wouldn’t forget.

Since entering recruit training, Staat realized he wasn’t used to the strenuous environment.

?I've run three miles four times in my life, once at (Military Entrance Processing Station), and three times here,? said Staat.

Besides the physical training, boot camp is aimed to place stress on recruits to prepare them for stressful situations they may encounter on the battlefield.

Stepping away from the life of an entertainer to enjoy the priceless experience of Marine Corps boot camp, Staat said he couldn't feel more at home.

?I would wake up every day and smile,? said Staat. ?Recruits look at me like I am crazy, but I am just happy to be here; to be on a practice field as big as Camp Pendleton is crazy.?

According to Goodheart, the letters Staat sent home during training let her know that her son was doing fine in his training. ?He was very happy,? she said.

The only thing that Staat couldn't grasp about training was the other recruits. He couldn't understand why 60 recruits would rather have to do push-ups in the dirt than sound off when told to by their drill instructors, though Staat never lost his motivation, according to Goodheart.

?If there was something that gave Jeremy any kind of doubt, he would pursue it until he was convinced,? said Goodheart.

?If you change the mindset of what you are doing, you can turn it into a whole new experience,? said Staat. ?I looked at field training like I was going camping. They are going to pay me to learn how to train and survive in the field.?

Staat said he found it amusing that people pay for the training that Marines are paid to complete.

?They train you to keep in shape. They put you on a diet,? said Staat. ?People pay to do that.?

Staat recalled a day during training when his company ran the obstacle course. There are a number of high walls, logs and bars to get over throughout the course including the rope, which is strung from a high beam of wood to the ground. Staat attempted to climb the rope but failed. He was trained on the proper techniques, he got a second chance.

Staat's senior drill instructor told him to climb the rope again. One of the

many things that are stressed during training is bearing, but when Staat climbed to the top of the rope, he broke his bearing and smiled.

?I asked him what happened the first time and he smiled and said, ?This recruit didn?t have the technique down, sir,?? said Staff Sgt. Miguel R. Saenz, senior drill instructor, Platoon 1065.

?I was just happy,? said Staat. ?I had never climbed a rope before.?

Beyond the training, there were adjustments Staat had to make.

?It was fast,? said Staat. ?The sounding off was difficult because I am not used to yelling and screaming.?

Even the combat utility uniforms took some getting used to, according Staat.

?I looked at them as a new uniform,? said Staat. ?Instead of having a football helmet, I had a Kevlar. Instead of wearing shoulder pads, I wore a flak jacket.?

Departing the depot as a squad leader, and one of many new Marines graduating from Co. B, Staat plans on leaving a lasting impression in the Marine Corps and maybe watch a few football games on his days off.