

# From the rush of LA to quiet Eastern North Carolina Hernandez never forgets what home means

By Cpl. N.W. Huertas | 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing | October 7, 2015



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Maj. Jose R. Hernandez poses for a photograph in an observance and control room of the air traffic control tower at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, North Carolina, Oct. 7, 2015. The Marine Corps is made up of people from various backgrounds and locations who have found the honor, courage and commitment to uphold the traditions of a 239-year-old community. The Corps' diverseness holds no prejudice for the men and women who are willing to pay the ultimate price to defend their nation. Hernandez is a proud member of the Hispanic community and an example of Hispanic Heritage Month being celebrated and Hispanic-Americans serving at the air station. Hernandez is an air traffic control officer with Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron.

### **MARINE CORPS AIR STATION CHERRY POINT, N.C. –**

When Maj. Jose Ricardo Hernandez surveys the group of Marines and civilians who share his work area at Marine Corps Cherry Point's Air Traffic Control, he is firmly aware of how close he came to wasting his life with a much worse kind of gang.

Hernandez never forgets how the strong support of family and friends led him from the mean streets of Los Angeles to a fulfilling career in the Marine Corps -- a career that allows him to lead young men and women down many possible paths toward success.

"I think, like all teenagers, when I was growing up I rebelled against some of the things my parents were trying to teach me and went off on my own," said Hernandez. "I ended up doing some regrettable things when I was going through high school in an effort to fit in due to peer pressure."

Hernandez found himself slowly sinking into a dangerous lifestyle. Many young Mexican Americans in his community became involved with that lifestyle in the late 80's and early 90's. Even after several brushes with the police, Hernandez's parents never gave up on him and held hope for their son's rise in life.

"When I enlisted in the Marine Corps over 20 years ago, I was looking for a change and a way to get myself out of my home town. I realized the Corps was asking the same thing my parents had been asking of me for years," explained Hernandez.

Coming from a traditional Hispanic family, the bond he shares with his Marines reminds Hernandez of his family's strong bonds with each other and their sense of pride and unity.

"Growing up, I had a strict upbringing," said Hernandez. "My father was a very tough guy who taught me how to be courageous and to never be scared to do the right thing. My mother was a loving woman who showed me compassion and understanding."

Being the oldest out of four children and a part of a large extended family, he learned many life lessons and cultural traditions that he holds dear till this day.

"Culture is everything," explained Hernandez. "A huge source of our strength as Marines is our diversity, not just the color of our skin or our ethnic background, but the way we think. Our cultures teach us so much and shape us into who we are."

Marines are made from people of all different backgrounds who have found the honor, courage and commitment to uphold the traditions of a 239-year-old community. Its diverseness holds no prejudice for the men and women who are willing to pay the ultimate price to defend their nation.

"It brings a lot of richness and strength to our organization because we don't all think the same," said Hernandez. "It has allowed the Corps the ability to spring forth some really brilliant ideas as to how we are going to move the Marine Corps forward into the future."

According to Hernandez, the biggest lesson his family and culture have taught him is humility. It is a trait he has carried over through his career and a lesson he passes to his Marines.

"For me, humility is never forgetting where I came from. I came from very humble beginnings, farm workers that toiled the earth with their hands under the hot sun and I cannot forget that. I try to make that part of who I am, and whenever I start to think that I've been empowered or that this rank I wear makes me better than somebody else, I remember it does not."