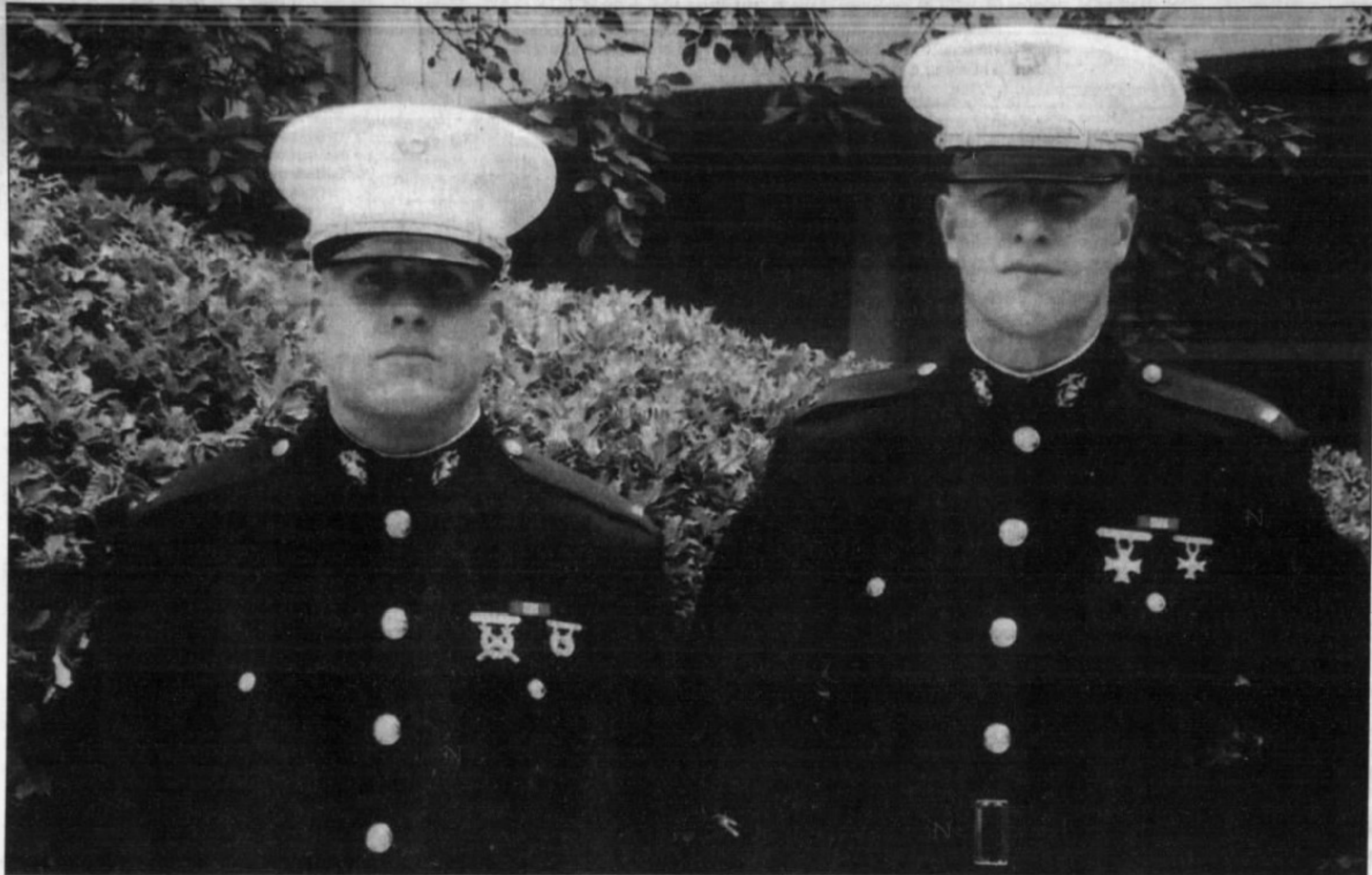


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SPORTS

FOOTBALL



Special to the Times

Ricky Posselt, left, with Chris Hubbard in Virginia, was a regimented athlete in high school and at Delta State, where as a sophomore he signed up for the military.

No longer a game

■ Ricky Posselt, the boy with a wild streak and much athletic success at Crystal River, now is 23 and facing war in Afghanistan as a second lieutenant in Marines.

By DAWN REISS
Times Staff Writer

CRYSTAL RIVER — Lillian Posselt always wondered if her son's birth on Veteran's Day had a deeper meaning.

Even at a young age, Ricky was a man-child; a mixture of quiet maturity and crazy youthfulness.

He never liked Band-Aids, duct-taping his head and various body parts scarred from his outdoor adventures. There was the old oak tree Ricky and his best friend, Stephen Langemayr, had scaled since his ninth birthday. The tree fort platform made a perfect spot to throw a few lighters on for a blazing campfire. On one of their wild nights in high school, no portable toilet was safe from being tipped over, even with someone inside.

"What haven't we done?" Langemayr joked. N

But that was then and this is now.

Now Ricky Posselt is a 23-year-old former state weightlifting champion at Crystal River High



(who quit the NFL to join the military and was killed in Afghanistan). He's devoted to whatever he does."

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It was during his sophomore year at Delta State that Posselt saw a military recruiting booth.

"I didn't feel like I was ready to teach at high school and go coach," Posselt said. "I needed some more action."

So he signed up for the Marines and that summer went to officer candidate school. Six weeks seemed like a year.

No phone, no computer, and anything you came with was taken away. No contact with anyone but the drill instructors, platoon sergeants and other newcomers. Beds were kicked over and had to be cleaned up in 10 seconds. Learning how to put on a right sock first, then left, then shirt. Belly-crawling through the mud, under barbed wire. Then 3-mile runs in the morning in boots and camouflage.

"It was hard at times," Posselt said. "They'd throw you in a classroom, feed you information while you were basically trying to stay awake. You don't learn anything. It's just learning discipline, which is what the military is all about."

After college came marriage and basic training.

"They would have to dig big field holes and Ricky would have his done and build two benches out of dirt before anyone else was finished," said his wife,



Posselt

who's facing war in Afghanistan as a second lieutenant in the Marines. A regimented athlete in high school and at Delta State, where he practically lived in the weight room, Posselt has taken that discipline to the next stage of his life.

"He's just a structured person," Langemayr said.

The military seemed like a perfect fit to Posselt when he signed up his sophomore year at Delta State. He came home to Homosassa that summer and seemed busy. That's when his mother inquired about the books.

"I'm studying," he said.

"Studying what?" she asked.

"I'm going to take a test to get into the Marines."

Shocked, his mother questioned his reasoning.

"Then he explained how things were going to work," she said. "I thought if he wanted to do it, he should."

"Now that he's going over to Afghanistan, you worry," she said. "I was kind of upset when I found how quickly he was going. You know it's coming, but I just didn't think it was going to happen so soon."



Slim and athletic as a ninth-grader, Posselt turned his frame into ripples of muscles and strength by his junior year.

At 5-foot-10, 211 pounds, Posselt, a tailback/defensive end, finished his senior season with 1,029 yards on 121 carries and 11 touchdowns and was second-team All-State. In four years, he helped lead Crystal River to a 36-10 record.

Ricky Posselt (25) runs for some yardage in a 1998 Pirates game against Central.

Times photo

"He made us lineman look good," said Crystal River assistant football coach John Crawford, who played with Posselt. "On a simple trap or dive, he could bust it open for 60 yards. He was one of those power backs that if he hit the outside you couldn't catch him."

At the state weightlifting championship Posselt scratched on the first two clean-and-jerks, then set a Class 4A record on the third with a 720-pound (405-315) total in the 219-pound class.

"He had a great impact on Crystal River, because he had such a strong work ethic," athletic director and former football coach Earl Bramlett said. "If you had a whole team of Ricky Posselts, you could have a football state championship year in and year out."

It was at Delta State (Miss.) that Posselt found his true calling. Other Division II colleges had expressed interest in his tough-as-nails attitude, but none like the Statesmen.

"It was a perfect fit," said his father, Rich. "He could have walked-on to other schools, but Delta State was the only one who was definitely interested."

It didn't take long for then-coach Steve Campbell to notice Posselt.

"Ricky's the type that'll catch your attention real quick," Campbell said. "He's probably the most hard-nosed, mentally tough player on the team. He wasn't the biggest in stature, but pound-for-pound he was the hardest-working guy on the team."

When Delta State had the Ironstatesmen competition, a conditioning test of running, squats, benching and other

measuring sticks, Posselt "blew it out of the water."

"He was sort of iconic," Campbell said. "Nobody was close, all four years he was there."

Most would do 8-10 lifts of 315 pounds. Not Posselt. At 40 repetitions, Campbell made him quit.

"Ricky was the type that it never got too hot, never got too hard, and you could never push him too much," said Campbell, now the coach at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College. "An ambulance would come pick up kids with heat exhaustion after practice. Ten minutes after coming in from practice, Ricky would change his shorts and start doing power cleans."

If his teammates persevered more than usual, or did something crazy, it was called "doing a Posselt."

"I was going to his dorm one day and I noticed a lot of traffic," said Chad Huff, his running backs coach. "I realized he knocked a hole in his room so his single-door room became a suite with the one next door so everyone could walk through."

When teammate Randy Grierson, who now coaches running backs at Delta State, met Posselt, he was jumping on his bed like a trampoline.

"He was something else," Grierson said. "In conditioning, we had to run 110 sprints in a row, then he would do 16 more with another group and eight more with another, just to help motivate people. He wasn't real vocal, but his leadership spoke through his actions. He reminds me of the NFL player Pat Tillman

Jenny. "Not to out-do people, but to go the extra length just to prove to himself he can do it."



Lillian Posselt will forever remember her son as the young boy pounding nails into trees, riding his Big Wheels or stomping in puddles. It seems like a long time ago and like yesterday.

Now Jenny and Ricky have a baby, 7-month-old Isabella.

"You should have seen Ricky the day she was born. It was the most excited I've ever seen him," Jenny Posselt said. "He was the best coach, yelling 'Come on Jenny, Come on Jenny.' All the years of being an athlete and Marine were coming out of him."

"The excitement was just coming out of his skin. His smile looked like it hurt his cheeks. He held her first, and they just stared right into each other's eyes."

For the past month they've lived in a military hotel in Hawaii. With Posselt working from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m., they didn't see much of each other.

Ricky ships out to Afghanistan early Monday. Jenny already has returned home to her parents in Garland, Texas, where she'll wait for Ricky to come back.

"It's just starting to hit us that we will be separated," she said. "I've never seen a guy with such mental strength. He can make it through the worst possible situations."

"I know it's scary and a bad situation over there, but I really trust God. Ricky has a full life ahead of him. He's the kind of person that has so much to offer. I don't see anything happening to him because I see him having so much more to do. I just have a strong feeling. He's just got more people to touch."