

MATSS-1 Marine puts musical talent to use

By Penny Randall
Staff Writer

Pfc. Jin Soo Park's talent for playing the trumpet was soon realized shortly after he arrived at Marine Aviation Training Support Squadron One (MATSS-1) on board Naval Air Station Meridian.

Park surprised everyone in attendance at the annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Commemorative Service where he played the National Anthem on a borrowed trumpet.

"I asked my father to send me my trumpet and it broke during shipping so someone on base had a trumpet that I used," said Park who added, "I often notice people tearing up during my performances and I say to myself, 'How am I reaching these people?'"

Park didn't always think he had the talent to be a great trumpet player, but knew he had found a love for music at an early age.

"I started playing in middle school at age 10," he said. "My best friend started playing trumpet two years before me, but my father wanted me to play saxophone -- I really wanted to play the trumpet. For the first two years my teacher said I had potential, but I thought I sucked. I did have any formal lessons the first couple of years; I actually learned what I could from U Tub."

Once a freshman at Beverly Hills High School in California, Park said his high school band teacher really motivated and encouraged him.

"My band director was a trumpet player and taught me a lot. After a while I got pretty good -- I truly believe the harder you try, the better you get," Park said modestly.

"I was even accepted into the symphonic band at my school which is usually only for seniors -- I was a freshman."

During his high school years, Park participated in the Beverly Hills Police Department's Explorer Program.

"My first real solo performance was playing the National Anthem for the department's police recruit graduation," said Park who reads music but also learns by ear. "I think that was the first time that my dad realized I had talent and loved to play the trumpet."

After that performance, Park was invited to play the National Anthem at a Los Angeles Dodgers baseball game in 2009.

"It was exciting to stand in center field before 50,000 people at such a young age," Park said. "I also had the opportunity to play on the soundtrack for the movie Transformers 2 in a recording studio

at Paramount. I played at Larry King's engagement party and for several other celebrity events."

A native of a native of Seoul, South Korea, Park's love for music was blossoming at this time.

As a senior in high school, Park received eight college scholarships for either swimming or academics. He was training for the 2012 Olympic swim team -- he would compete for South Korea.

"I was really unhappy and very stressed out," Park said. "I believe that is what led me to wanting to play the trumpet more and more -- it is a stress release for me. People actually notice that type of mood I'm in when I play. When I'm in a bad mood or sad I play different."

Park said he wasn't ready for college and wanted a change in his life. After talking with a Marine recruiter he learned about the Marine Corps Band.

"I tried out and didn't make it the first time," Park said. "I'll admit I didn't know what to expect and I was very nervous. I tried out again a few months later and I made it only to find out that it was a year and a half wait for a trumpet position. The gunnery sergeant that was in charge suggested I try out for the Drum and Bugle Corps. It's probably the world's finest band next to the President's own."

Once again, Park passed the audition, but again there was a wait for a trumpet position.

His desire to experience the military was strong so Park decided to enlist.

Park's course supervisor at MATSS-1 said Park is very modest given his abilities.

"He wants to make his own way in the world," said Staff Sgt. James Nickerson. "He is dedicated to the Marines and understands what we are here to do. I asked him why he loves his music and he said, 'It relaxes him, it is his escape from the stressors of life.'"

Park will graduate from MATSS-1 on March 1 and heads to Miramar, Calif., where his goal is to try out for the Marine Band again and continue pursuing his U.S. citizenship.

"Music is something that no one can take away -- I believe you make your own music," Park said. "Playing an instrument is a special talent -- it's a language for some people. If you pursue a career in music you'll be one of a kind."