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# Young Marines: From Good To Better

by [USAA](#)

02-03-2015 01:27 PM



Andrew Halpin looks to spend another spring break wearing fatigues and combat boots instead of swimsuits and flip-flops. See what camp is like in this video filmed at a recent camp weekend.

Andrew Halpin is looking forward to spring break — but not because he'll be relaxing, vacationing or just sleeping in like many 15-year-olds.

This spring, Halpin is returning to his second boot camp at Camp Bullis Military Training Reservation in San Antonio with the [San Antonio Young Marines](#) — a week of 5 a.m. wake-up calls and rigorous mental and physical exercises.

"I wanted something hard and challenging, especially the physical activity," Andrew says.

And he got what he wanted. "There were 10- and 12-year-olds yelling at me to line up and get into formation," Andrew says. "I was thinking, 'I'm older than you. Why are you telling me what to do?'"

The young private and adopted son of USAA members John and Shana Halpin not only followed orders, he excelled at them. He was one of three cadets promoted to private first class by the end of his first camp experience. He has since been promoted to lance corporal and hopes to return to camp as a drill instructor.

An added bonus would be watching his younger brother, Abraham, also adopted by the Halpins, follow in his footsteps at boot camp this March. "I think he'll do well. His determination is the same as mine," he says. "I want to be there to help ... and kinda laugh at him."

The San Antonio Young Marines chapter was established in 2011. Since then, 130 kids have participated in

the annual boot camp. The group also meets monthly for an overnight drill practice.

"We try to give kids the most authentic version of the Marine Corps experience," says USAA member Albert Salas, a former sergeant in the Marines and now unit commander for the San Antonio Young Marines.

"We're not a recruiting entity pushing the kids to join the Marine Corps. The main purpose of the program is to make good kids better."

The Halpins say that's just what the program has done for Andrew.

"It's given him a focus," Shana says. "A lot of kids talk about what they want to be when they grow up, and he's already working on it now."

John adds: "He's matured a lot. The day he got home, he was taking out the trash without being asked. They teach them that they always need to be doing something."

Andrew is now eligible to attend Young Marines programs such as survival training, scuba school and others across the country.

"We didn't want camp to be s'mores and campfire songs," Shana says. "We were hoping it would be a serious camp that reflected what the Marines do."

For an aspiring Navy SEAL like Andrew, it's just the ticket.

Read how this Marine Corps veteran still honors and celebrates Marine Corps tradition.

214647 - 0215

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by Retired-N-College 02-15-2015 04:48 PM

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I was a Young Marine back in 1972 to 1977 in Southern California and I participated in the Marine Corps Devil Pup Program which was actually a lot harder and more like real Marine Boot Camp in the summer of 1976 and 1977. Both programs gave me the discipline and motivation I needed to get not only through 30 years of military life but to get through other unexpected hardships in life that most never make it through. While on Active Duty in the Army I sponsored local Yougn Marines outfit for several years and though they may have gotten a little softer and more politically correct, it is still a first class program that can give kids the extra boost they need to be successful and overcome a lot of obstacles that life can throw at them. If you know of a local Young Marine organization in your area please support it regardless of what branch you served in and remember you do not have to have been a Marine to have your kids join and all branches are welcome to support and mentor these Young Marines so help where you can please!  
Semper Fi!

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#### Briana Hartzell

Briana knows all about moving. This Navy wife has helped her husband relocate to four different naval air stations in the last three years. A former USAA employee, Briana is co-founder of [The Triple Dish](#), a blog focused on food, fitness and military life.

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#### Wendy Poling

Wendy is a social media strategist and founder of [MyMilitaryLife.com](#), featuring a popular military spouse blog and the hit podcast Navy Wife Radio and now Military Life Radio. She is the wife of a submariner who has also served in Afghanistan.

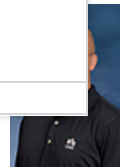
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#### Charles "Chazz" Pratt

Charles "Chazz" Pratt III is a former U.S. Army Captain who made the Military-to-Civilian career transition in 1994. In his book, [The Fort Living Transition Course](#), he shares valuable tips & help you succeed. Since his transition from military, he's worked for several Fortune 500 companies, including Pfizer, Genentech, and St. Jude Medical, among others.

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