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Marines killed in Iraq granted citizenship

By Chelsea J. Carter
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LAGUNA NIGUEL, Calif. — Marine Cpl. Jose Angel Garibay and Lance Cpl. Jose Gutierrez gave their lives in Iraq, waging war for the United States, a land they loved and believed in.

No matter that it wasn't their official homeland; they were determined that one day it would be.

That day came Wednesday. With the help of their families and fellow Marines, Garibay and Gutierrez became American citizens posthumously. The acting director of the Bureau of Citizenship and

Immigration Services signed the papers without fanfare, without the men's families or the media to watch.

An executive order signed by President Bush last year allows family of troops killed in war to apply for posthumous citizenship. The certificates will be presented to the families if that's their wish, according to the bureau.

Gutierrez, 22, of Lomita, Calif., died March 21 at the port city of Umm Qasr, one of the first casualties of the war.

When he was 14, Gutierrez crossed into California after taking trains from Guatemala through Mexico. The orphan found a foster family, attended high school in Southern California and then joined the Marine Corps. He was assigned as an infantry rifleman with the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, at Camp Pendleton, Calif.

Gutierrez's family said they were waiting for the paperwork before setting a date for a memorial service in Los Angeles.

"We're proud as a father that he was able to become a citizen because that's one of the things he wanted to do, we are honored," Lt. Cardenas, his foster sister, said. The Associated Press.

Gutierrez's body was buried in Delaware. Arrangements between the United States and Guatemala were finalized, family members said.

Garibay, 21, of Costa Mesa, Calif., died March 21. He was a native of Jalisco, Mexico, whose family moved to the United States when he was a baby. Garibay joined the Marines three years ago and assigned to the 1st Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Expeditionary Brigade, at Camp Lejeune, N.C.

Garibay's body was awaiting the return of remains. Gutierrez's body will be buried in Costa Mesa. Several phone calls to Camp Pendleton, which is conducting the citizenship request, were not returned.

Marine Maj. Brian Dolan, who has been helping the Garibay family, told the Orange County Register that the Marine Corps facilitated the citizenship process.

Garibay's mother, Simona, mentioned that it was her dream to become a citizen. "I took that on as something we possibly could help out with and do the right thing," Dolan said, adding that Garibay's mother is also in the process of becoming a citizen.

"Her son died fighting for this country, so I certainly think it is warranted that his son gained citizenship and be buried as an American citizen," Dolan said.

"We're proud as a family that he was able to become a citizen because that's one of the things he wanted to do."

— Lillian Cardenas
sister of honored Marine

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Texas OKs insurance reform

AUSTIN (AP) — The Senate approved legislation on Wednesday that would overhaul the way Texas regulates homeowners and auto insurance by forcing insurers to seek approval when they want to raise rates.

Supporters say the bill, approved on a 28-3 vote, will result in lower homeowners insurance rates. The bill now goes to the House.

"We'll see some reductions in homeowners insurance and we'll see insurance companies accountable to the rates they are charging," said bill sponsor, Sen. Mike Jackson, R-La Porte.

While the bill does not specifically provide for a rate rollback, the legislation requires Insurance Commissioner Jose Montemayor to set new homeowners insurance rates. Montemayor has said he believes homeowners insurance rates are as much as 25 percent too high, depending on the individual company.

Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst

said Montemayor will want lower rates because if "he doesn't, he's got a real problem with the Texas Senate."

Montemayor said rates have increased on average 45 percent since 2000, while customers getting between 22 percent and 24 percent less coverage. Some homeowners have testified before lawmakers that their rates have increased much more than 45 percent.

There is little the state can do now to control the rates because about 95 percent of Texas homeowners insurance policies are written by insurance companies who are not rate-regulated.

About two-thirds of auto insurance companies are regulated. The bill would change that. Nearly all companies would be required to file their proposed rate increases with the insurance commissioner, who would have up to 60 days to approve or reject the rates or the new rates would take effect.

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