



Overdose kills ex-Fort Bliss soldier

Renewed Hope, Inc.

YOU'VE SERVED US, NOW LET US SERVE YOU...

Former Fort Bliss Army Spc. Joseph Dwyer, whose photograph depicting him carrying a wounded boy to safety during the first days of the ground war in Iraq became a symbol of the U.S. Army, died late last month of an overdose at home in North Carolina, Army officials and police said Sunday.

Officials with the Pinehurst Police Department in North Carolina said no one would be available to talk about the ex-soldier's death until today, but Jean Offutt, a Fort Bliss spokesperson, said Fort Bliss officials were aware of the former soldier's death. The Army Times reported the day Dwyer died that he had apparently taken pills and inhaled the fumes from an aerosol can. "He was certainly a hero. ... He did have some difficulty dealing with it," Offutt said. She added that Dwyer was treated at Beaumont Army Medical Center. "It is certainly a tragedy."

In 2003, Dwyer returned to Fort Bliss after serving four months in Iraq with the 3rd Squadron of the 7th Cavalry Regiment. A native of Mount Sinai, N.Y., he had joined the Army as a medic two days after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, according to El Paso Times archives.

During his tour in Iraq, an Army Times photographer captured Dwyer as he helped a young boy to safety after his family was caught in the crossfire of a battle near Faysaliyah, Iraq. The photo ran in newspapers nationwide, including the El Paso Times.

In October 2005, Dwyer's friends told the El Paso Times he had returned from the war a different person. At first he was a religious man, but then problems including drinking, sniffing inhalants and nightmares started occurring, his friends said. Dwyer suffered from post traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, they said.

Dwyer was involved an incident in early 2005 in which he crashed his car and said he saw a box he thought was a bomb in the middle of the street, his friends told the El Paso Times. In October 2005, he was arrested for shooting up his East El Paso apartment in which the police SWAT team negotiated with him for more than three hours. No one was hurt.

Offutt said Dwyer's death should make people aware of PTSD symptoms. Details of Dwyer's mental-health history and treatment at Beaumont Army Medical Center were not available Sunday.

"He served his country," Offutt said. "It is unfortunate that these things sometimes happen to soldiers when they return. Our thoughts are with his family, spouse and children."

Valerie Miller Topp, a friend of Dwyer's, said she met him when Dwyer's wife, Matina, was pregnant with their daughter in 2005.

"When I first met him he was heavily medicated. ... He didn't really talk much," she said. "As the pregnancy progressed he began to open up and talk more. They were just a really nice couple."



Renewed Hope, Inc.

YOU'VE SERVED US, NOW LET US SERVE YOU...

Miller Topp said Dwyer said the couple moved to North Carolina from El Paso in 2006.

“He (Dwyer) said, ‘I just want to go fishing. I don’t want anything to do with violence, guns or war. I just want to meet my daughter and go fishing,’” she said.

Stephanie Sanchez may reached at ssanchez@elpasotimes.com; 546-6137.