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Soldier Dies in Apparent Suicide

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Funeral services are scheduled Thursday for Spc. Stephen Edward Colley, a 2003 Valencia High School graduate who returned from Iraq in November. He died in Texas on Wednesday at the age of 22.

Stephen - the son of Valencia High School's JROTC instructor and Castaic Lake Water Agency board member Ed Colley - is believed to have killed himself following his return from the Middle East where he worked as a helicopter mechanic.

"He served honorably and that was important to him," his father said. "He knew the value of serving his country."

Stephen was one of six Colley children - many of whom have served in the military.

Stephen and his oldest brother, Alan, were deployed to different parts of Iraq within days of each other.

However, when Stephen returned to Fort Hood, Texas - where he lived with Laura, his wife of only 18 months - he was troubled, and felt that he could not get the psychological help he needed from the military for fear it would jeopardize his future career in the army, his father said.

"The (army) wants its soldiers to be mentally healthy, but it's very hard for the soldiers to get the help they need," he added.

Indeed, a report released in December 2006, showed that 28 percent of soldiers felt they'd be considered "weak" if they sought mental health care - and earlier research showed that less than 40 percent of soldiers with mental disorders ever seek help.

Furthermore, on May 4, the Department of Defense issued a report that suicide among soldiers returning from Iraq was a concern, with 17.3 soldiers ending their own lives for every 100,000.

That same report showed soldiers who had been deployed multiple times or who had been in Iraq longer than six months - like Colley, who'd been in Iraq for a little less than 2 years - were "multiple times more likely to screen positive for a mental health issue."

Frank Ferry, a councilman for the city of Santa Clarita and a very close Colley family friend, described Stephen as being an excellent leader but at the same time, a very sensitive boy by nature.

"Stephen wasn't war-like. You wouldn't see him in the Alpha-male role," Ferry said. "Stephen was one of the most affable, loving kids (who) wanted to please anyone he encountered. He absolutely did not have a mean streak in him."

Stephen is survived by his wife Laura (Brown) Colley, mother and father Ed and Katheryn Colley, siblings Alan, Melissa, Carolyn, James and Matthew Colley and nephew Alex Colley.

Services will be held May 24 at Santa Clarita United Methodist Church located on Bouquet Canyon Road - the church Stephen regularly attended in the past.

A viewing is scheduled from 9 a.m. until 11 a.m. and the funeral is scheduled for 4 p.m. The public is welcome to attend.

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