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Reservist Commits Suicide After Return

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By Associated Press

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COLUMBUS, Ohio -- An Army reservist who unsuccessfully fought city officials for an expected promotion after he returned from service in Afghanistan has committed suicide, police said.

Lt. Brandon Ratliff was upset that he couldn't afford to pay for an attorney to fight the city to get the job, according to an e-mail sent from Ratliff's account to The Columbus Dispatch on Thursday.

The newspaper said Ratliff was found dead in his home about three hours after the e-mail was sent. Police spokeswoman Sherry Mercurio said Ratliff's death was ruled a suicide.

Ratliff said he was promised a promotion and a raise in September 2002 before he left to serve in a medical unit in Afghanistan. But when he returned, the higher-level job had been filled and he was forced to resume his old job, which pays \$4,000 less per year.

"I didn't think that I'd have to fight over there and come back and fight these guys," he said last week.

By law, employers must take back reservists returning from military service, with few exceptions. But health department spokeswoman Liane Egle said Ratliff didn't formally accept the promotion before his deployment and the city believed it didn't have to hold the higher job for him.

A department statement said: "Brandon served this department, this community and this country with high honor and valor. His death is a tragic loss." Kelly Hennen, a co-worker and friend of Ratliff, said whatever anger Ratliff had about his work was tied to depression he'd suffered after returning from Afghanistan. "He had seen children die," she said.

Ratliff was executive officer of the Army Reserve's 909th Forward Surgical Team. The unit provides medical care on the front lines, and Ratliff's duties included retrieving wounded soldiers from the battlefield. He was decorated six times.

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