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Ex-GI diagnosed with PTSD dies in collision

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Colorado Springs - A woman killed late Thursday while driving south in the northbound lanes of Interstate 25 was a former soldier who had served in Iraq and was troubled with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Jessica Rich, 24, who served in the Army Reserve, was killed at 10:25 p.m. Thursday when her 1996 Volkswagen Jetta smashed head-on into a 2003 Chevy Suburban. Four people in the Suburban were taken to Colorado Springs hospitals, although none of their injuries was life-threatening. They were on their way from Hobbs, N.M., to Denver.



Jessica Rich (the Denver Post)

Rich, a heavy-equipment operator in the 52nd Engineering Battalion, was featured in a December 2004 story in The Denver Post about soldiers who had spent months in the medical hold unit at Fort Carson.

Rich was medically evacuated from Iraq in January 2004 after serving nine months. Doctors diagnosed lower-back pain and PTSD.

According to friends, Rich was medically discharged from the Army in the spring of 2005.

Makayla Crenshaw, 24, a friend who had known Rich for six years and was in the same unit when they served in Iraq, said that when she talked to her friend two months ago, Rich said she was preparing to enter a treatment facility for PTSD.

"She was trying to get her life straightened back out again," Crenshaw said.

Rich was the mother of a 7-year-old son who lives with his father in New Mexico.

Crenshaw said Rich couldn't shake some of the memories from war, including witnessing the suicide of a fellow soldier in Iraq.

"She was having nightmares still, up until this point - flashbacks and anxiety and everything, the whole bucket of fun," Crenshaw said. "She said it was really hard to get over because she couldn't get any help from anybody."

Crenshaw said she believed Rich had struggled with personal issues before she joined the Army.

"I think a lot of her issues probably were worsened by the war, but I don't think that they started there,"

Crenshaw said. "I think she probably had a lot of issues before she even joined.

"I didn't see it ending like this."

Alan Hartmann, who was in the medical hold unit with Rich at Fort Carson, said, "I know she was struggling."

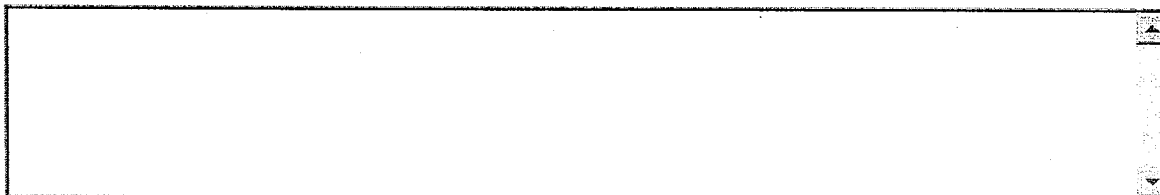
Colorado Springs police Lt. Rafael Cintron said Friday that police had not determined whether drugs or alcohol were involved.

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