

Could this Marine have been saved?

By Jimmy Biggerstaff

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MCAGCC — An autopsy report on a Marine who died here in May 2008 concludes he died of multiple drug toxicity from methamphetamine and several prescriptions for depression and hypertension.

Cpl. Chad Oligschlaeger of Round Rock, Texas, was found dead in his dormitory room at the base. His death was ruled accidental.

The report shows that methamphetamine and antidepressants were found in his system.

Tests revealed he also had taken hypertension drugs prescribed to him to treat post-traumatic stress disorder, along with an antipsychotic drug, according to the report, prepared by the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology.

Oligschlaeger was 21 years old at the time of his death.

He had returned from his second seven-month combat tour in Iraq in November 2007.

Family members had noticed a pronounced difference in the Marine's mental state. They say nightmares, hallucinations, sleepless nights and erratic behavior were fast becoming Oligschlaeger's normal state of being.

He was last known to be alive May 17, 2008, the autopsy report states. Adrianna Avena, Oligschlaeger's fiancé, alerted authorities that she had not heard from him in a few days. A welfare check revealed Oligschlaeger lying dead on the floor of his locked room.

Oligschlaeger had lain dead in his dormitory room for about 90 hours before his body was discovered.

It was only after Avena notified the Marines that he had not called her that they sent someone to check on him.

In the Circumstances of Death section of the examination, officials report, "A review of available medical records indicates that Cpl. Oligschlaeger was under treatment for multiple medical problems."

The nine-page report, meticulously and at points graphically written, contains an error on the first page, listing the decedent's place of death as Camp Pendleton.

As of Friday, the U.S. Marine Corps had not acknowledged receipt of a Freedom of Information Act request the Hi-Desert Star sent via e-mail and U.S. Postal Service Oct. 7 requesting information about Oligschlaeger's military service and the circumstances surrounding his death.

A spokesperson at the Marine base advised the Hi-Desert Star the only way to get information about the Marine's condition and death was by filing a Freedom of Information Act request.

Documents obtained from Oligschlaeger's family reveal the Marine Corps referred him for treatment of alcohol abuse in 2007.

Oligschlaeger's parents have claimed their son did not get proper medical or psychiatric care for the mental wounds he suffered as a result of his combat tours in Iraq.

A foundation in Oligschlaeger's name to help war veterans affected by PTSD is at <http://www.cplchado.org>.

Visitors to the site are in for an emotional roller coaster ride detailing a young man's life and military service, and his death two months before the end of his enlistment.

Oligschlaeger's boot camp portrait is of a typically serious Marine in his dress blues, perhaps slightly ill at ease in his military finery in front of the studio lights and camera.

By contrast, a trip through the site's photo gallery depicts a vibrant and photogenic young man, quite at ease in his surroundings and in front of a camera.

In a telephone interview from her Austin, Texas, home Thursday, Oligschlaeger's mother, Julie Oligschlaeger, said she knew her son had been psychologically wounded in combat, "From the way he acted. He would talk about it when he'd been drinking," she said, remembering conversations with her late son after returning from an evening out with his fiancé.

"He'd talk about the nightmares, hallucinations. At one point, he came to the house," the Marine's mother said. "He was crying. I put him on the bed. I just started hugging him and patting him on the back. He asked, 'Is God going to forgive me for killing the women and kids?'"

She alleges her son was discouraged from seeking help for his condition.

"Chad did not get help before his second tour because he was told that if he continued pursuing this avenue, Chad would be dishonorably discharged for under-age drinking," she wrote in an e-mail Thursday regarding the events that led up to her son's death. "Needless to say, Chad did not get help and he went on his second tour."

In the Kübler-Ross model, Julie Oligschlaeger is admittedly in the anger stage regarding her son's death.

She has been through the initial denial that her son had survived two combat tours only to die in his dormitory room.

The bargaining stage took place for Julie when reasoning that Chad's brother had nearly enlisted in the Marines, but the sibling changing his mind at the last minute.

Julie may or may not arrive at accepting Chad's fate. For now, she remains active in the Cpl. Chad Eric Oligschlaeger Foundation for PTSD.

The music at Oligschlaeger's funeral was Johnny Cash's rendition of "The Ballad of Ira Hayes," which tells the story of a Marine immortalized in the iconic photograph of the flag raising on Iwo Jima, found dead in January 1955, face down and lying in his own vomit and blood. His death was ruled the result of exposure and alcohol.

"They always played that before they went into battle," Julie said. "Because he talked about it so much, his dad thought it was appropriate that Chad would want it at his funeral."