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2 wounded GIs die mysteriously at BAMC

[By Sig Christenson](#) - Express-News

The Army is investigating the deaths of two soldiers who were recovering from wounds at Brooke Army Medical Center, one of them a survivor of a car bomb blast in Baghdad.

Chief Warrant Officer 1 Judson Erik Mount and Spc. Craig Reginald Hamilton died April 7 and March 27, respectively, prompting criminal intelligence division investigations and autopsies, the Army said Thursday.

Both GIs were recovering in an Army warrior transition battalion, a system designed to improve medical care for wounded soldiers. Deaths in those units, however, prompted the Army's surgeon general, Lt. Gen. Eric B. Schoomaker, to tell the House Armed Services Committee last year that "we're seeing a pattern" of overdoses and suicides.

Hamilton, 35, of Milford, N.H., had been injured at Fort Sill, Okla., while Mount, a 37-year-old former San Antonio resident, suffered extensive wounds in a blast near a market that killed Staff Sgt. Timothy H. Walker.

"Jud kept seeing Timmy's eyes staring at him. He kept having the flashbacks every night," said his mother, Joyce Mount of Franklin, Tenn.

Just what happened to Hamilton and Mount isn't clear, and their deaths have not been explained. BAMC and Defense Department did not give information about either man prior to a San Antonio Express-News inquiry, and declined to elaborate when asked for details, citing ongoing probes.

One issue arising from deaths like these is the mixing of medications. At least three soldiers may have died of drug interactions nationwide, one of them Sgt. Robert Nichols, 31, at Fort Sam.

BAMC spokesman Dewey Mitchell said the cause of his death, one of 10 in the post's warrior transition unit, was due to accidental mixed-drug intoxication.

The Army has instituted new measures to better control the distribution of drugs to troops.

Suicides in the Army have risen over the past four years, with about one-third of them occurring after a deployment. The Army logged 128 suicides among active-duty soldiers last year — a record — with another 15 cases still to be resolved. At Fort Sam, BAMC's Mitchell said one soldier in the post's warrior transition unit, which has averaged about 600 troops at any one time since its creation in September 2007, has killed himself.

Family members for Hamilton couldn't be reached. But Mount's mother said Thursday that her son had undergone multiple operations and had seemed to turn the corner mentally and physically as he prepared for a surgery that promised to relieve him of intense pain caused by his injuries.

In their last phone call, on the night of April 6, she said that he had started driving and had just seen his wife and children.

“He sounded fine. He was better than ever. The old Jud was back,” said Joyce Mount, a retired banker.

Mount, on a medication to help him sleep through nightmares, didn't wake up the next morning. Mitchell, the BAMC spokesman, said he was found “unresponsive” in his room at the Fisher House. The same thing happened with Hamilton, who was discovered in his room on a post barracks.

Both had been long-term patients at BAMC.

Hamilton, injured at Fort Sill, Okla., came to Fort Sam in March 2008 and was assigned to the warrior transition battalion two months later. Mitchell said he didn't know the nature of Hamilton's injuries and could not elaborate anyway, citing federal privacy law.

Mount's journey to BAMC began on a five-truck convoy driving from Camp Taji to Baghdad. Near a market, he and his troops saw Iraqis talking on cell phones — a sign of a possible attack. The bomb blew as they tried to drive away.

Walker, 38 of Franklin, Tenn., died instantly. Mount, suffering shrapnel damage to his arms and chest, and traumatic brain injury, was flown to BAMC.


Joyce Mount said her son, who lived with her in Alamo Heights from 1977 to '81, was “the funniest guy you could ever meet.”

On the last night of his life, Mount called his mother, brother, wife and two daughters. His mom said that was typical. He often phoned his family and saw a brighter future now that he had a car and hope for living with less pain.

“He felt like he was able to be freer and not depressed anymore about any of it,” Joyce Mount said. “He was always positive about the outcome, that he would be OK and would cope with whatever was ahead, that it was going to be all right.”

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