

MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Report faults military in death

Bassett soldier shot during basic training



Pvt. Daniel Fisher

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By BULLETIN AND AP REPORTS -

LAWTON, Okla. — A lack of control and accountability of ammunition and officers' failure to properly inspect and account for the ammunition contributed to the death of a 19-year-old Fort Sill soldier during a training exercise, according to an investigation.

Pvt. Daniel Patrick Fisher, of Bassett, Va., died Oct. 4 when a machine gun accidentally discharged and struck him in the abdomen on the Army post's East Range.

Fisher was a member of the Bassett High School Class of 2007. He was married to Brittany Fisher and was the son of Rhonda Bowman Walker of Bassett and Mark Joseph Fisher of Patrick Springs.

The training was intended to teach new soldiers in basic training how to load and unload the weapon using only dummy ammunition. Live rounds weren't supposed to be involved. Maj. Gen. Peter M. Vangjel, commanding general of the U.S. Army Fires Center of Excellence and Fort Sill, said trainees unknowingly loaded into the weapon a live .50-caliber round that had inadvertently become mixed with dummy ammunition. Officials said Fisher was struck by the round as he was walking toward the training site in front of the machine gun, the Lawton Constitution reported. The investigation concluded there was a violation of muzzle awareness principles. Drill sergeants and leaders lost sight of the fundamental principle of treating each weapon as if it is loaded and not pointing it in the direction of personnel during training. There also was little control and accountability of the ammunition, the investigation concluded. Non-commissioned officers failed to properly inspect and account for the ammunition prior to executing the next day's training, resulting in the live round going undetected.

The investigation also identified several contributing factors, including poorly planned training, ammunition misidentification, inadequate risk assessment and inadequate inspection of the unit's training prior to the incident. The probe determined the accident occurred as a result of systemic shortfalls and individual negligence on the part of several members of the 434th Field Artillery Brigade, but was not a result of any criminal intent, Vangjel said. The 434th Brigade conducts Initial Entry Training, or Basic Combat Training, for recruits who are entering the Army.

Fisher was in his sixth week of training when the accident occurred. Administrative and disciplinary actions are being taken against leaders at several echelons in the brigade,

officials said.

All of the leaders involved with systemic failures contributing to the incident have received formal letters of reprimand, Vangjel said. Specific leaders also have been informed of the commanding general's intent to relieve them from their duties, and disciplinary action is ongoing, he said.