



CHEYENNE WIMBERLEY IS RUNNING FOR ARMY SPC. KAREN N. CLIFTON

22, of Lehigh Acres, Fla.; assigned to the 554th Military Police Company, 95th Military Police Battalion, Kaiserslautern, Germany; died June 21 in Baghdad of wounds sustained when her vehicle was hit with a rocket-propelled grenade.

Herald and Review
By Earhuey Freeman

MOUNT ZION - Army Spc. Karen N. Clifton, a military police officer serving in Baghdad, was scheduled to complete her one-year tour of duty in Iraq early this month.

Shortly before she was scheduled to come home, her tour was extended until October.

Clifton, 22, was killed when a rocket-propelled grenade hit the Humvee she was driving. Three other soldiers were injured in the attack, which occurred in northern Baghdad about 12:30 p.m. Iraq time, according to The Associated Press.

"She was my whole world," said her grandmother, Carol Clifton of Mount Zion, who talked to her almost every day she was in Iraq. "She was my everything. She was my little angel, 5-foot-1 and 102 pounds; 5-foot-2 if she stretched it."

Born in Decatur and raised in Mount Zion, Karen Clifton moved to Fort Myers, Fla., during her junior year of high school. She moved in with her half sister, completing high school in 2003. Shortly after graduation, Clifton returned to Illinois, where she signed on for a five-year hitch with the Army.

"Being an MP was really important to her," said her father, Douglas Clifton. "Being in the Army was her dream. We tried to talk her out of it, but that was her dream, and she wanted to see it through."

Carol Clifton said Karen Clifton's sergeant called her from Iraq to tell her Karen Clifton was highly regarded by her fellow soldiers and that she died painlessly.





"He described her as one of the most loved and outgoing people that he had the pleasure of knowing," Carol Clifton said. "He told me how well respected she was over there.

"He said Karen did it all."

The sergeant told her he was in a Humvee ahead of hers, and he believed he saw the blast that took her life in his rearview mirror. Apparently, someone stepped out from the shadows, firing the rocket-propelled grenade from a short distance away.

"He said they got her from the side," Carol Clifton said. "She never knew what hit her. He said you can rest assured she died painlessly."

Carol Clifton asked the sergeant how she could be sure that it was Karen's remains that would be returned home. The sergeant replied that he personally picked up what he could, and that was what was placed in a casket.

"I appreciated that he called me and told me that she did not die in pain. That's what I needed to hear," Carol Clifton said. "He said what a delight she was. It's a big hole in your heart, and it will never be filled again."

Karen Clifton, who celebrated her 22nd birthday in Baghdad on May 10, was an avid Indy car racing fan who hoped to see the day a woman would win a big race, her father said. She loved to shop and eat out, especially at El Matador and Red Lobster restaurants when she returned home on leave.

Her mother, Chris Hancock of Illiopolis, recalled that she ate out a lot during her last visit home, just before Christmas.

"We had a blast," said Hancock, 40. "She's my best friend. We were getting pretty close. When we would go places, people thought we were sisters."

Hancock said her daughter was attending college in Germany, where she was stationed with her unit, the 554th Military Police Company, 95th Military Police Battalion.

"She loved college," Hancock said, adding that she had talked about possibly joining the state police later in her life.

Her sister, 18-year-old Cindy Blackston, said Karen Clifton was very happy in the Army. The sisters frequently talked on the phone and sent text messages to each other.





"She loved her career," said Blackston, who drove to Mount Zion with her husband from her home in Alabama after hearing the news. "She cared about everybody. She said she had like a family over there. She was never down. She never cried. I love her, and I miss her."

Douglas Clifton recalled that the last time he heard from his oldest daughter was on Father's Day, four days before she died.

"She e-mailed me a Father's Day message," he said. "She told me 'Happy Father's Day' and that everything was all right and she was trying to stay fit and look good for when she came home."

