



TIANY SCHUSTER IS RUNNING FOR ARMY SPC. JESSICA L. CAWVEY

21, of Normal, Ill.; assigned to the 1544th Transportation Company, Illinois Army National Guard, Paris, Ill.; killed Oct. 6 when an improvised explosive device detonated near her convoy vehicle in Fallujah, Iraq.

Jessica hadn't been assigned to go on the mission that ended in her death.

She volunteered to be with her best friend, Andrea, because it was her first night mission.

Before they got in their trucks, Andrea told Jessica she was so terrified she didn't know if she could do it. Jessica assured her she could and that everything would be fine.

Jessica smiled, and Andrea instantly believed her.

The Army rewarded Jessica's service posthumously with the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star and the Army's Good Conduct Medal.

But at a memorial service in Iraq, her fellow soldiers painted a portrait of her with words from their hearts.

"Any task she was given she would always get accomplished. ... She was an excellent battle buddy. ... She would do everything in her power to protect me. ... She cared about the important things: her daughter, her friends and her family. ... She had sincerity in her sarcasm and charm in her pessimism. ... I will always remember her incredible laugh that would get everyone around her laughing. ... She was definitely an entertainer. ... We may never understand why she was taken from us so early, but trust me, she won't be afraid to ask when she gets there. ... She knew the extent of the dangers that await us every night out there on the road, she had been through ambushes, she had IEDs go off near her, yet she did not hesitate to volunteer for any mission. ... If her fellow soldiers were there, she was there. No questions asked."





Jessica didn't enlist in the National Guard because of an overpowering desire to be in the military. She was a young, single mom who wanted the college benefits so she could get a good job to support her daughter, Sierra. When she enlisted a year before the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, she expected she'd be filling sandbags at floods, not dodging bombs in the Middle East.



When activated, she'd just started her junior year at Illinois State University in accounting, but she packed up her gear, kissed her daughter goodbye and did her duty.

As her fellow soldiers made clear in their eulogies, that duty as she saw it meant doing all she could to make sure her buddies were safe.

It's a great tribute to their friendship that many of those women from Iraq visit Sierra or keep in touch through e-mail or phone calls. Some have come to her birthday parties or taken her to movies and to Six Flags.

Sierra soaks up the time she spends with them because they make her feel close to her mother, Jessica's mother says.

Sierra wears Jessica's earrings and likes that her hazel eyes are the same color as her mother's.

In kindergarten, Sierra used crayons to draw a picture of her mom with those hazel eyes. It shows her mother dressed in camouflage and boots, smiling, with a blue sky and a glowing sun.

Beneath the picture, Sierra summed up the momentous loss of her mother as only a kindergartner could.

"this is my mom," she wrote. "she's in the army. she got Sacrifist. she was in irac."

"the end."

