



MOLLY OTTO IS RUNNING FOR ARMY SPC. MARY JANE JAENICHEN

20, of Temecula, Calif.; assigned to the Brigade Troops Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, Fort Stewart, Ga.; died May 9 in Iskandariyah, Iraq, of a non-combat related injury.

Mary Jane Jaenichen served for four years in the Marine Corps ROTC at El Camino High School in Oceanside. She loved the beach and hanging out with friends but, especially, she loved the drill team.

When instructors yelled questions and the team shouted back, Jaenichen, who was about 5 feet 3, “would always scream loud,” said her friend Emily Ricci. “And everyone would laugh because she was so short and skinny. But she had so much power behind her voice.”

It is the memory of that enthusiasm, of a young woman with a soft heart and a strong will, that her friends and family now treasure.

Jaenichen, 20, died of a noncombat-related injury May 9 in Iskandariya, Iraq, south of Baghdad, according to the Department of Defense, which has not released details of an ongoing investigation. It was her only tour of Iraq.

The 2006 graduate had signed up for the Army Reserve at age 17 with the promise of a military-funded college education. She attended boot camp between her junior and senior years.

At the time of her death, she was assigned to the Brigade Troops Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division at Ft. Stewart, Ga.





Her father, Alfred Alan “Jay” Jaenichen of Santa Ana, who recently retired as a Marine master sergeant, said she was serving as a military police officer at a “detainee holding area” -- a prison.

He said it was hard for her: “The detainees were young kids -- 17, 16 -- and they’d be there crying. She told me, ‘I’d like to comfort them, but knowing why they’re there, I couldn’t do it.’ ”

At his daughter’s request, he sent her coloring books and stuffed animals to distribute to children.

Born in Fallbrook, Mary Jane Jaenichen lived with her mother, Julieta, in Temecula, and, after her parents divorced when she was 11, visited her father and stepmother every other weekend, her father said.

While in Iraq, one comfort was a stuffed doll from home -- a 2-foot-tall Elmo, the lovable Sesame Street figure with the red fur and goofy smile.

“She said she was always saving Elmo from the rest of the squad,” her father said. “The guys in her unit would pin him to the dart board. They would hide him. Once they taped him to the front of her Humvee. They would pick on Elmo just to pick on her. . . . But mostly it was in fun.”



On her belt loop, Jaenichen wore a brass medallion, a religious token from her mother’s Filipino family that her father had worn during the seven months he had served during Operation Desert Storm. “Now I understand some of the stuff you were going through,” she wrote him.

He said he treasures a Bible his daughter gave him, with a note saying, “You’ve done your time. It’s time for me to protect the country.”

She was buried with a rifle volley salute May 24 at Eternal Hills Memorial Park in Oceanside. Her high school classmates turned out to mourn her.

In addition to her parents, Jaenichen is survived by two half sisters and two half brothers.