“They view soldiers as expendable”: Mother speaks out on son’s suicide at Fort Hood Army base

Chase Lawrence
30 September 2020

The *World Socialist Web Site* recently spoke to Patricia Troyan, mother of Pfc. Logan Castello, who was the 11th soldier to commit suicide at the Fort Hood military base in Killeen, Texas in 2019. The base, which is one of the largest US military installations in the world, is notorious for its high suicide and homicide rate.

The army as a whole has seen a spike in suicides among active duty soldiers and reservists of 20 percent this year, with the Army, the largest branch by manpower, seeing a 30 percent increase.

Castello’s death is yet to be recorded as a suicide by the Pentagon, with his case still labeled “cause unknown.” This is despite the fact that an autopsy was already performed by the Army, and Killeen County immediately ruled it a suicide.

Troyan explained that she thought her son “would be safe going into the military, there would be an exemplary standard of care, and it wasn’t.”

Castello was put on isolation duty after reporting suicidal ideation and was assigned to grueling shifts with one of those involving “watch[ing] a parking lot for 24 hours shifts” by himself.

Troyan, a licensed therapist in Ohio, noted that for someone in Castello’s condition “the last thing that should happen is to be isolated” and that the Army “had an obligation to hospitalize him. They just don’t care; they view soldiers as expendable.”

Castello was at Fort Hood for five months following basic training at Fort Benning in Georgia. He had been in the Army for a year and had no prior history of mental health issues. He was never deployed.

Speaking to the failure of the Army to deliver an investigation packet or autopsy results on Castello’s death, Troyan stated, “It has been over nine months, November 20 it will be one year, they [the Army] told us that we’d have everything in six months.”

The exact nature of the work that Castello was doing up to the point at which he reported suicidal ideation to command is not clear as it has not been released by the Army to the family. Troyan knew that he was “in his unit training to drive a tank” and that “he told me in October he was working 24-hour shifts.”

Troyan elaborated on how the Army treats rank-and-file soldiers reporting mental health problems: “The Army is very reactive and not proactive; they don’t do anything preventative. After there is a suicide, there is education and training and beautiful memorials. If they were proactive and took the slightest bit more effort to save lives they wouldn’t have to backpedal afterwards. “

“I don’t know what happened to Logan, that’s what I’m trying to find out,” Troyan said. Castello reportedly “always wanted to be in the military” since he was a child. He left excited “planning a career” and expected to “advance through the ranks.”

Castello was well regarded by his peers and fellow soldiers and was motivated. “He was class president, captain of the football team, he excelled at everything, academically, in sports, anything he did he excelled in.

“Logan excelled at everything, he was everybody’s best friend, people were naturally drawn to him, people in basic said they wouldn’t have made it through if it weren’t for Logan, he was just exceptional. His best friend in basic said he thought Superman wore Castello pajamas. Everyone liked him, everyone was shocked when they heard what happened.

“Logan helped everyone, anyone, whether he knew

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them or not. When he needed help the most, the Army failed him. I don't want them to fail anyone else … it is too late, but they need to help the next kid."

Asked why Fort Hood has seen so many deaths from suicide, Troyan cited a culture where if "you do the right thing and ask for help you are ostracized and viewed as less than, so that discourages people from asking from help and the ones who do ask for help and don't receive it, that sends a pretty strong message.

"The general public needs to know how prevalent it is, and how lax they are in responding when someone is struggling, and needing help, because suicide is 100 percent preventable death and you expect a high level of care and safety and camaraderie, and that's not what it is at Fort Hood. If it was, all these kids wouldn't be dying.

"It is a complete misconception that young men and women that are dedicating their lives to serving the country and keeping everyone else safe are safe themselves on their own base, and that's hard to wrap your head around. And the fact that 22 military veterans commit suicide every day is appalling, and they need to do something about that.

"They need to do better; they need to fix this. Fort Hood is primarily a deployment base, so you do not expect that high level of risk while they are there. That's where they should be safe."

"He was a good kid. He was a really good kid, he deserved better," Troyan concluded. "I don't think they are going to do better until more people are talking about it and more people know about it."

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