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Fort Bliss soldier shot, killed at party

By Chris Roberts / El Paso Times
Posted: 12/20/2009 12:00:00 AM MST

EL PASO -- A Fort Bliss soldier died early Saturday after a gun went off -- apparently accidentally -- and struck him in the head when his friends tried to startle him awake at an East Side party, police and family members said.

Spc. Jacob Bige Engle, of Virginia, died at University Medical Center soon after he was transported from a home in the 2200 block of Tierra Bonita, police said.

The call was received at 12:34 a.m. Police do not think the shooting was intentional, but the investigation continues, spokesman Darrel Petry said.

"He had a big heart and he was just trying to have a good time and get through life," the soldier's father, Bige Allan Engle, said in a telephone interview from his snowbound home in Culpeper, Va.

Engle said El Paso police told him that his son had been drinking at the party and fell asleep.

"Somebody grabbed a gun because they were trying to scare him and wake him up when the gun went off," Engle said. "It was like a drill sergeant was in your face yelling, 'Get up. Get up. Get up.'"

Engle said police told him the gun was fired by the wife of one of his son's friends.

"It's tragic for us and for them," he said.

The elder Engle retired after 20 years in the Air Force as a computer programmer. His son joined the Army and learned to be a computer support specialist.

Jacob arrived at Fort Bliss in August 2008 and had been working in the 11th Air Defense Artillery Brigade's motor pool.

"He liked it. He liked the people he was

working with," the father said. "He was thinking about re-enlisting. He planned to start college in January."

Post spokeswoman Jean Offutt said Jacob Engle was deployed for six months in the Persian Gulf and returned in October. His official job title was signal specialist.

Bige Engle said his son was a "normal kid" who played catcher and second base and loved animals. As he grew older, he began to show a talent for drawing, and his subjects often were animals, portrayed realistically, the father said.

And like most other men in their 20s, Engle said, his son loved video games.

Jacob Engle joined the military looking for a challenge.

"He wanted to be different," the father said. "He wanted to do something with his life."

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