



Spc. Alyssa Peterson was one of the first female soldiers who died in Iraq. Her death under these circumstances should have drawn wide attention. It's not exactly the Tillman case, but a cover-up, naturally, followed.

Peterson, 27, a Flagstaff, Ariz., native, served with C Company, 311th Military Intelligence BN, 101st Airborne. She was a valuable Arabic-speaking interrogator assigned to the prison at our air base in troubled Tal Afar in northwestern Iraq. According to official records, she died on September 15, 2003, from a "non-hostile weapons discharge."

A "non-hostile weapons discharge" leading to death is not unusual in Iraq, often quite accidental, so this one apparently raised few eyebrows. The Arizona Republic, three days after her death, reported that Army officials "said that a number of possible scenarios are being considered, including Peterson's own weapon discharging, the weapon of another soldier discharging, or the accidental shooting of Peterson by an Iraqi civilian." And that might have ended it right there.

But in this case, a longtime radio and newspaper reporter named Kevin Elston, not satisfied with the public story, decided to probe deeper in 2005, "just on a hunch," he told me in late 2006. He made "hundreds of phone calls" to the military and couldn't get anywhere, so he filed a Freedom of Information Act [FOIA] request. When the documents of the official investigation of her death arrived, they contained bombshell revelations.

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