

Navy lieutenant, mom admired by everyone

She died Friday in Afghanistan attack

By Ronald W. Powell

STAFF WRITER

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The window blinds were closed at the East County home of Navy Lt. Florence Bacong Choe, where grief-stricken family members gathered yesterday to mourn her death while she was serving in Afghanistan.

Lt. Choe, 35, was killed Friday afternoon in northern Afghanistan when an insurgent posing as an Afghan



Navy Lt. Florence Bacong Choe

National Army soldier opened fire on troops assigned to Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan at Camp Shaheen, Mazar-e-Sharif.

Lt. j.g. Francis L. Toner IV, 26, a civil engineer from Narragansett, R.I., also was killed. A third service member was wounded, the military reported.



Florence Bacong Choe, in a family photo with daughter, Kristin. -

Military officials said the insurgent killed himself after the shooting.

Lt. Choe was serving as a medical administration and logistics mentor to the Afghan National Army. Her home duty station was the Naval Medical Center San Diego, where she was born. She had volunteered to serve in Afghanistan, according to a biography released yesterday by a spokeswoman for the naval hospital.

She is survived by her husband, Lt. Cmdr. Chong "Jay" Choe, a urology resident at the medical center; her daughter, Kristin, 3; mother, Francisca Bacong; father, Rufino Bacong Sr., retired Navy; and brothers Rufino Bacong Jr. and Ron Bacong.

Memorial services are pending.

"She was a professional naval officer who was extremely smart and extremely pleasant," said Sonja Hanson, a hospital spokeswoman who knew Lt. Choe. "She always had a smile on her face, and everyone admired her. All of us at the Naval Medical Center are proud of her, and we are grieving for her."

The medical center is offering chaplain services to staff members. The hospital also is creating a memory book on its internal Web site for staff to share memories or offer condolences to the Choe family.

The family did not answer the door yesterday, and family members arriving at the home near El Cajon declined to comment.

Lt. Choe was educated in San Diego County. She attended Spring Valley's Loma Elementary School and Monte Vista High School; she earned an associate's degree from Cuyamaca Community College in 1994.

She earned a bachelor's degree in biology from the University of California San Diego in 1997, and a master's degree in public health and health care administration in 2001 from San Diego State University.

She was commissioned as a Medical Service Corps member in the Navy on Feb. 21, 2002.

Afghan Minister of Defense Abdul Rahim Wardak expressed his condolences, saying he was "saddened and deeply regretful this tragedy occurred," according to a joint news release from the Headquarters United States Forces Afghanistan and the Ministry of Defense, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Wardak promised to fully investigate the incident.

Said Wardak: "It is too early to speculate, but the investigation will bear out the truth." He also promised that "full corrective action will be taken."

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