



Their loss gave the couple "enormous purpose," says Graham (in Colorado with his wife).



SPRING 2001  
Kevin accepts  
his ROTC scholar-  
ship at U of K  
with Jeff (right).



The brothers are buried  
in their mother's home  
town of Frankfort, Ky.

## 'THEY WERE GREAT BOYS'

One son died in battle. Another, by his own hand. Now Maj. Gen. Mark Graham is confronting the rising problem of suicide in the military **BY VICKIE BANE**

The walls in Mark and Carol Graham's Fort Carson, Colo., home are dotted with photos of their children. There are the oldest two, sons Jeff and Kevin, smiling as toddlers in matching red, white and blue shirts; golfing as teens; and Melanie, posing with her big brothers

on the Great Wall of China. Jeff's pictorial time line stops at age 24, Kevin's with a still-baby-faced portrait at 21. In February 2004 Army 2nd Lt. Jeff Graham died saving his platoon from a bomb on a bridge in Khaldiya, Iraq. Near his photos are the plaques and flags that were showered on the

Grahams to commemorate this fallen hero. Eight months earlier, ROTC cadet Kevin Graham, suffering from depression, hanged himself in his apartment at the University of Kentucky. Kevin had expected to follow his father and brother into the service as an Army doctor. He never had the opportunity to earn any stars, though a friend fashioned one from wood, which the Grahams display. "You get all this honor and respect when your son dies trying to warn his platoon, and I'm thinking, 'Kevin would have done that too,'" says Carol, 53. Her husband, Maj. Gen. Mark Graham, a 32-year military man who served in Desert Storm, adds quietly, "My sons died fighting different battles."

Now this decorated veteran, 54, faces a war on two fronts: He prepares troops for battle, until recently as commander of Fort Carson and Division West-First Army. He also helps lead the Army's response to the rise in suicides among its troops (see box). In 2008, 140 soldiers killed themselves, pushing the Army's suicide rate past that of the U.S. population for the first time. Since June, there have been 88 suspected cases. "We're devastated," says Maj. Gen. Graham. "To lose one

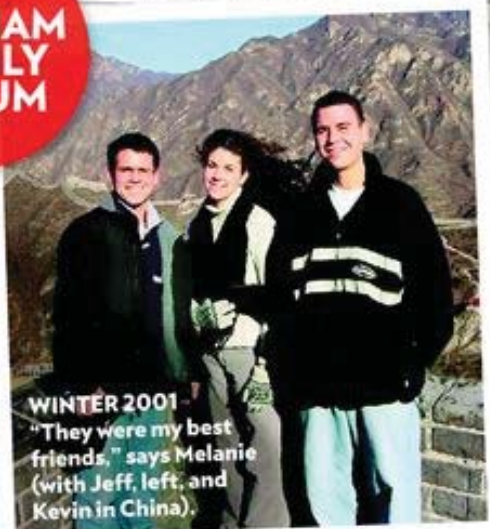


**CHRISTMAS 2002**  
 "I don't want anyone to characterize Kevin's life by that one act; he was so much more than that," says Graham (with Kevin, left, and Jeff).

**GRAHAM FAMILY ALBUM**



**JUNE 1989**  
 Graham (center) says his sons were so close, they had their own language: "Grahamese."



**WINTER 2001**  
 "They were my best friends," says Melanie (with Jeff, left, and Kevin in China).

“Welcome ceremonies are hard. You think, ‘Maybe there was a mistake and he’ll come marching in’”—MAJ. GEN. GRAHAM

soldier to suicide is too many.”  
 He helped make Ft. Carson, where nine soldiers took their lives within 15 months, the epicenter of the Army’s new approach to prevention. Along with many other measures, including a hotline, Ft. Carson now uses a training video that features Graham pleading, “I’ve lost a son to suicide. . . . Let us help you.”  
 This open display of emotion marks a profound change for Graham. After Kevin’s death, he says, “it was over a year before I could speak about it.” Besides being a grieving father, he was the product of a military that stigmatized mental health problems. Now, he says, “we tell soldiers we expect them to come forward, just as if you broke your leg, you would get help.” It is a slow but crucial attitude shift. “People used to say, ‘Don’t mention the word *suicide* because it might cause someone to take his own life.’ What we know now is you need to ask. They normally won’t hide it when you directly ask.”

It’s just part of what the Grahams understand about depression that they wish they had learned earlier. A decorated ROTC cadet, Kevin was a junior at U of K when he was screened at the university clinic in the fall of 2002 and started to take an antidepressant. “He was always smiling. I didn’t know inside he was so sad,” says Carol, who believes he went off his medication in the spring of 2003 while preparing for ROTC summer camp.  
 In one of their last phone conversations that June, Kevin told Carol about playing a life-simulating video game for nearly three days without sleep. “He sounded horrible. He said that [in the game] ‘I did everything the world says is success. I went to the right schools, married the right girl, got my kids in boarding schools, worked my way up the corporate ladder. At my retirement ceremony . . . even the President came.’ Then he said, ‘I hate the way the world measures us.’ You know what I said? ‘Hon, you need to get some sleep.’ I

didn’t know.” His father even offered to pay Kevin’s tuition if he wanted out of the ROTC scholarship. “He said, ‘But Dad, you know the soldier’s creed. I’d be a quitter.’”  
 His sister, then also his roommate, recalls seeing him close his door after midnight on June 21. “I really didn’t think anything of it. Kevin was the perfect son,” says Melanie, now 25 and a nurse in Boston. The next morning she discovered his body hanging by a power cord from his ceiling fan. “We will never know the struggle he had that night,” says Carol, then stationed with her husband in South Korea.  
 On hearing the news, Carol crawled from their bedroom to the dining room to get her Bible. “I didn’t know you could die from depression,” she says. Adds her husband: “We blamed ourselves: Why didn’t we see it?”  
 After his brother’s death, Jeff was told by the Army that he would not have to deploy. “But he was determined,” says Carol. Jeff left for Iraq