17 deaths not included in the US military pneumonia investigation

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The US Army Surgeon General's investigation is focusing on 19 severe cases of pneumonia, including two deaths, among US service personnel from March 1 until August 20. Sergeant Michael Tosta, 24-years-old, died from alleged pneumonia on June 17 and Private Joshua Neusche, 20-years-old, died on July 12.

Thirteen of the cases occurred in Iraq, three were in Kuwait, one in Qatar, one in Djibouti and one in Uzbekistan. They fell ill between one day and 189 days after they began their overseas deployment, with the median being 81 days. Eighteen were male and one female. Seventeen belong to the US Army, one Navy and one Marine Corp. According to the military, there is no evidence any case was infected by contact with one of the others. Two of the soldiers belong to the same unit, but fell ill four months apart.

Two cases were infected with the common streptococcus pneumonia. One was infected with the bacteria coxiella burnetti and another soldier was infected with the bacteria acinetobacter baumannii. There is no obvious infectious cause in the other cases according to investigators. Nine of the cases had the condition eosinophilia—a higher than normal level of the white blood cell eosinophil. (See the associated WSWS article: "More questions on the deaths and illnesses of American soldiers")

The diverse and mysterious nature of the illnesses makes it inexplicable as to why the military has limited the inquiry to these cases. At least 17 other people—16 military and one civilian—have suddenly and unexpectedly died while on deployment or preparing to deploy to Iraq during the same time period. The fact that some of the deaths involve pneumonia and other respiratory and pulmonary conditions makes the narrow scope of the investigation even more inexplicable.

With the exception of Specialist Rachael Lacy and NBC correspondent David Bloom, the initial details on the deaths below were reported by the US Department of Defense and are archived on its website at http://www.defenselink.mil/news/

* Specialist William Jeffries, 39-years-old, was evacuated from Iraq and died in Kuwait on March 31 from a pulmonary embolism—a blood clot in his lungs.

* Specialist Rachael Lacy died from lung damage on April 4 in Rochester, Minnesota, after being hospitalised with pneumonia while her unit prepared to deploy to the Middle East.

* NBC journalist David Bloom, 39-years-old, died in Iraq on April 6 from a pulmonary embolism.

* Staff Sergeant Kenneth Bradley, 39, collapsed and died in Baqubah, Iraq, on May 28 from what was subsequently diagnosed as a heart attack.

* Specialist Cory Hubbell, 20-years-old, died in Kuwait on June 26 after being hospitalised with what an Army statement described as "breathing difficulties". Hubbell had been in the Kuwait since February.

* National Guard Sergeant Craig Boling, 38, collapsed on July 8 from an alleged heart attack and could not be revived.

* Private Robert McKinley, a 23-year-old Airborne Special Forces soldier, collapsed and died in Iraq on July 8, reportedly from heat stroke.

* Specialist Craig Ivory, 26, collapsed in Kuwait on August 1 and died in Germany on August 16 from a blood clot in his brain.

* Specialist Zeferino Colunga, 20-years-old, died at the Homburg University Hospital in Germany on August 6. He was evacuated from Iraq on August 4. In the letter his family wrote to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld demanding access to his medical records, they report that he died "after a battle with

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pneumonia and a subsequent diagnosis of acute leukemia".

* National Guard Staff Sergeant David Loyd, 44, died on August 5 from a heart attack after complaining of severe chest pains.

* Sergeant Leonard Simmons, a 33-year-old chemical operations specialist, died suddenly in Iraq on August 6. The military told his family he suffered a heat-related seizure.

* Specialist Levi Kinchen, 21, was found dead in his bed in Iraq on August 9. The military subsequently implied to the *Washington Post* that his death was due to heat stress.

* Private Matthew Bush, 20, was found dead in his bed in Iraq on August 9. As with Kinchen, the military has implied his death was due to heat stress.

* National Guard Sergeant Floyd Knighten, 55, died suddenly in Iraq on August 9 from what the Army described as heat-related causes.

* National Guard Private David Kirchhoff, 31, collapsed in Iraq with what was diagnosed as heat stroke on August 9. He was evacuated to Germany, where he died on August 14.

* Staff Sergeant Richard Eaton, a 37-year-old military intelligence specialist, died on August 12 from fluid in his lungs, a condition known as a pulmonary edema.

* Lieutenant Colonel Anthony Sherman, 43, reported in sick at his Kuwait base with pains in his legs on August 27 and died later that day from what the military said was a severe heart attack. His wife told UPI he was an extremely fit man and that she is "suspicious" about his death.

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