

American military sent hundreds of soldiers' remains to garbage dump

Tom Eley
9 December 2011

The US Air Force sent the incinerated remains or partial remains of at least 274 soldiers to a Virginia garbage dump over a period lasting several years, Pentagon records have revealed. Military officials purposefully hid the practice from families who had believed that their loved ones' remains had been disposed of in a dignified manner.

The story came to public attention last month when the *Washington Post* documented that at least one soldier's remains were transported from Dover Air Base in Delaware, the main entry point for troops killed in the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, to the King George County landfill in Virginia. On Wednesday, the *Post* revealed that, based on official records, the remains of at least 274 soldiers were dumped at the site.

The real number could be far higher. According to military records, the incinerated remains from an additional 1,762 unidentified corpses returned from Iraq and Afghanistan were also disposed of at the landfill between 2004 and 2008.

Trevor Dean, formerly the Dover Air Base mortuary director, told Gari-Lynn Smith that the practice goes back to at least to 1996, the first year he worked there. Smith learned this when she demanded information on the remains of her husband, Scott R. Smith, who was killed in Iraq in 2006. Upon her first inquiry she received a letter from Dean informing her that her late husband's remains had been dumped at the King George County landfill, before concluding, "I hope this information brings some comfort to you during your time of loss."

More garbage dumps may have been used. At least

one private contractor that disposed of the remains—unwittingly (military officials falsely told the firm that they were disposing of medical waste)—hailed sealed boxes from Dover Air Base to a separate land fill.

During the time when it is known that the remains were being disposed of at the garbage dump, 2004 through 2008, George W. Bush had put in place a ban on media coverage of coffins arriving at Dover Air Base. The American media, which had led the propaganda campaigns for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, obliged.

To date no Air Force or Pentagon officials have been fired over the scandal, and a military spokesperson has told the *Post* that there is no intention of even informing those families whose loved ones' remains were dumped in the landfill.

"It would require a massive effort and time to recall records and research individually," Jo Ann Rooney, the Pentagon undersecretary for personnel, wrote in a letter to US Congressman Rush Holt of New Jersey, who had requested information on the fate of the remains of the husband of one of his constituents.

Scrutiny of the morgue at Dover Air Force base began after workers there raised questions over the treatment of the bodies of dead US soldiers. A subsequent federal inquiry found that the morgue suffered "gross mismanagement" and that, among other failures, body parts were randomly stacked and stored away in coolers, where they might remain unidentified for years.

A year earlier an inquiry into Arlington National Cemetery found that grave sites frequently held the wrong remains, and that burial urns had been haphazardly dug up and piled with other debris.

The Pentagon's disposal of soldiers' remains in a garbage dump, and its systematic lying to surviving family members, exposes the real attitude of America's military and ruling class toward the men and women who carry out imperialism's bloody work in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Endlessly celebrated by politicians and the media as heroes, US soldiers are in reality nothing more than cannon fodder in neo-colonial wars waged against hostile populations. Once killed, in the estimation of the richest military in the world, these "heroes" are not even worthy of a dignified burial.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact