



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on December 9, 2011

Air Force Admits It Dumped Remains of Fallen Soldiers in Landfill

According to an [earlier report in the Post](#), the Air Force had acknowledged that for years the Dover Air Force Base mortuary had disposed of the remains of soldiers in this manner, after assuring families that it would deal with the remains of their loved ones in a dignified and respectful manner. Families never knew that the remains had been dumped at the landfill, and officials said they had no plans to contact specific families now.



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Air Force documents indicated that the landfill is in King George County, Virginia, and is operated by Waste Management Inc. A spokesperson for that company said it was not told of the origins of the ashes, which were delivered there by a military contractor. “We were not specifically made aware of that process by the Air Force,” Lisa Kardell told the *Post*.

Air Force officials “said the procedure was limited to fragments or portions of body parts that were unable to be identified at first or were later recovered from the battlefield, and which family members had said could be disposed of by the military,” the *Post* reported. The procedure was stopped in 2008, and since then the remains of cremated soldiers have been placed in urns and buried at sea.

In addition to dumping remains at the landfill, reported the *Post*, the Air Force admitted “that the mortuary had lost a dead soldier’s ankle and an unidentified body part recovered from an air crash; had sawed off a Marine’s arm so his body would fit in his casket; and had improperly stored and tracked other remains.”

In its latest admission that it had dumped more remains than originally thought, the Air Force said that determining the exact number would be next to impossible, requiring a search through the records of more than 6,300 fallen soldiers whose remains passed through the mortuary since 2001.

When pressed by U.S. Representative Rush Holt (D-N.J.), who had contacted the Pentagon on behalf of a constituent whose husband had been killed in Iraq, the Air Force said there had been no intent to deceive or hold back information on the number of troop remains that had been dumped in the landfill. Officials provided a rough estimate, based on the Dover mortuary’s electronic database, that 976 fragments from 274 military personnel had been cremated and hauled to the landfill between 2004 and 2008.

In addition, 1,762 unidentified remains had been retrieved from battlefields and disposed of in the same



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way. "Those fragments could not undergo DNA testing because they had been badly burned or damaged in explosions," reported the *Post*. "The total number of incinerated fragments dumped in the landfill exceeded 2,700."

A federal investigation into the procedures at the Dover mortuary documented, among other practices, that body parts retrieved from bomb blasts and battlefields had collected in the morgue's coolers for years before being identified and disposed of.

Gari-Lynn Smith, whose husband was killed in Iraq in 2006, said that she was "appalled and disgusted" by the actions of the Air Force. Smith was informed earlier this year by a senior official at the Dover mortuary that her husband's remains had ended up in the landfill. "My only peace of mind in losing my husband was that he was taken to Dover and that he was handled with dignity, love, respect, and honor," Smith told the *Post*. "That was completely shattering for me when I was told that he was thrown in the trash."

The Air Force said that it has established a call center (1-855-637-2583 / e-mail: dover.pm@pentagon.af.mil) to help families of fallen soldiers find out what happened to their remains. Air Force officials also said they would apologize to families who objected to the way it had disposed of the remains of their loved ones. "We regret any additional grief to the families past practices may have caused," said Air Force Lt. Gen. Darrell Jones, deputy Air Force chief of staff. "We are prepared to apologize. It causes great pain to know we have brought suffering to a family."

According to [CNN](#), Jones stopped short of admitting that the now-abandoned Air Force practice was disrespectful of the soldiers who had given their lives in the line of duty. "It is certainly not the way we would have done it, looking back," he conceded. "That's why in 2008 when we saw that practice, we changed that practice."



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