



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on February 29, 2012

Pentagon Reveals Remains of 9/11 Victims Disposed of in Landfill

The Pentagon (left) released a report February 29 revealing that some cremated remains of individuals killed in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the Pentagon, as well as from the jetliner that crashed in rural Pennsylvania, ended up in a Virginia landfill. The revelation came from a report by an independent Pentagon panel commissioned to correct procedures at the Armed Forces Mortuary at Dover Air Force Base. As reported by *The New American*, last year the Air Force admitted that from 2004 to 2008 the mortuary had disposed of the remains of at least 274 fallen soldiers in the landfill, after assuring families that it would deal with the remains of their loved ones in a dignified and respectful manner.



The investigating panel, led by retired Army General John Abizaid, referred to the 9/11 remains only briefly in the larger report, noting that the policy of incinerating and disposing of unidentified remains “began shortly after September 11, 2001, when several portions of remains from the Pentagon attack and the Shanksville, Pennsylvania, crash site could not be tested or identified. These cremated portions were then placed in sealed containers that were provided to a biomedical waste disposal contractor. Per the biomedical waste contract at that time, the contractor then transported these containers and incinerated them.”

[ABC News](#) said that the Abizaid report “makes no mention of how many remains from September 11 victims may have been disposed in this manner. Presumably they could not be identified because there was no DNA matter remaining in the small charred pieces of tissue that may have remained.”

Dover mortuary officials said that they had assumed that all remains had been taken care of, but following an inquiry were informed, according to the Abizaid report, that “there was some residual material following incineration, and that the contractor was disposing of it in a landfill.”

Two other brief references to 9/11 remains are made in the appendix of the Abizaid report, the first concerning a July 25, 2002 memo from the acting director of the Army’s Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Operations Center, which cited the disposal of “remains from the attack on the Pentagon as nonassociable and nonbiological specimens through incineration.” The remains, identified as “Group F,” were specified as “fragment[s] that cannot be further identified.”

The other reference was to an August 7, 2002 note from the commander of the 436th Air Wing to his master sergeant, concerning the disposal of the Group F remains, with a subsequent e-mail specifying “incineration.”

Although the exact number of victims involved was unclear, the Pentagon report said the disposal of



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remains included some from the 184 victims killed when a terrorist-hijacked airplane struck the Pentagon, as well as some remains from the 40 passengers killed when another terrorist-commandeered plane crashed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, on 9/11.

According to ABC News, a “March 2, 2002, memo from David Chu, then serving as Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, authorized that ‘non-associable fragmented remains’ of Pentagon 9/11 victims that could not be further identified or were mixed with ‘non-biological material’ could be treated ‘in the same manner as any biological tissue removed for surgical or diagnostic purposes.’ The sole example listed for disposition of such remains was ‘by incineration.’”

While a 2011 investigation found “gross mismanagement” in how the Dover mortuary had disposed of the unidentified remains of service members, Abizaid’s findings about the 9/11 remains, revealed in a Pentagon news conference on February 28, appeared to catch Air Force officials by surprise.

“This is new information to me,” Air Force Secretary Michael Donley claimed. Standing next to Donley, Air Force Chief of Staff, General Norton A. Schwartz, [told reporters](#): “You got the report before we did. We’ve both been on Capitol Hill for the last four hours. Allow us at least the opportunity to go through the report ourselves.”

A Defense Department spokesman responded to the news by declaring that Defense Secretary Leon Panetta “never would have supported” the disposal policy. “He understands why families would have serious concerns about such a policy,” the spokesman said.

[Fox News](#) reported that Debra Burlingame, sister of Charles Burlingame, “the pilot of the plane that was driven into the Pentagon by terrorist hijackers, said she was confused by the report. She said she attended a ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery at which unidentified 9/11 remains were buried in an engraved casket.”

Burlingame recalled that during the ceremony the unidentified victims “were treated with great respect and great ceremony. The Department of Defense was exceedingly sensitive and treated those unidentified remains with great respect.” She added that she “would want to know more” about the apparent mishandling of other 9/11 remains.

Lisa Linden, a spokeswoman for the families of United Flight 93, the jet that crashed in Pennsylvania, said in a statement: “This is impossible to believe. The remains from the Flight 93 crash were under the care and control of the great Somerset County coroner, Wallace Miller. He has said that no remains were sent to Dover.”

Miller reiterated that position after the Abizaid report was released, telling Fox News, “I wouldn’t know how there would be any possibility how any remains would get to Dover.” He said that, as far as he knew, the only remains to be transferred out of Pennsylvania were those of four of the jet’s hijackers, which the FBI was holding for future investigations.

Among those looking for more clarity on the issue is U.S. Representative Rush Holt (D-N.J.), who originally got involved on behalf of a constituent whose husband was killed in Iraq. Holt complained that the Pentagon has continued to be less than forthcoming in its explanations of how human remains ended up in landfills. “The Pentagon must provide absolute clarity and accountability as to what human remains were dishonored in this manner, and it must take far more aggressive steps to ensure this never happens again,” Holt said.

In a February 6 letter to Panetta, Holt asked for more disclosure on the remains disposed of by the



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Dover facility. “Regarding the aftermath of the 9/11 attack on the Pentagon, can the Air Force confirm that no 9/11 victim’s remains were incinerated, mixed with medical waste and sent to a landfill?” Holt asked the Defense Secretary. The answer to his query came through the investigation led by Abizaid, who told reporters during the news conference that “we don’t think it should have happened.”

Fox News noted that more than 9,000 human remains recovered from the rubble of New York City’s World Trade Center “remain unidentified because they are too degraded to match victims by DNA identification. The remains are stored at the city medical examiner’s office and are to be transferred to a subterranean chamber at the National September 11 Memorial & Museum, once set for opening this year but now delayed.”



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