



PERSONNEL AND  
READINESS

## OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

31 JUL 2009

MEMORANDUM FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY  
(MANPOWER AND RESERVE AFFAIRS)  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY  
(MANPOWER AND RESERVE AFFAIRS)  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE  
(MANPOWER AND RESERVE AFFAIRS)

SUBJECT: Department of Defense Coverage of Dignified Transfers at Dover Air Force Base

This memorandum establishes policy guidance to authorize the DoD to provide internal coverage of dignified transfers at Dover Air Force Base when the primary next of kin (PNOK) has not authorized external media, but wishes to receive a DoD-produced recording of their fallen's dignified transfer. For the purpose of this policy, DoD internal coverage is the recording by still photography and video by the Air Force Mortuary Affairs Operations Center Public Affairs Office. External media are news agencies outside of the DoD.

The Secretary of Defense established new policy concerning media access of dignified transfers at Dover Air Force Base on 6 April 2009 based on the overarching premise that the families of the fallen make the decision. Specifically, the policy requires the Primary Next of Kin (PNOK) be the decider of external media access and recording by internal coverage of their loved one's dignified transfer. A script was developed for use by the Services in advising the PNOK of their options and documenting their decision. However, this script only advised the PNOK that they could allow or not allow media access, but was silent on the option of allowing DoD internal coverage only.

The Secretary of the Air Force was charged with developing procedural guidance that included photography of media access-approved dignified transfers for later presentation to the family. The Air Force Mortuary Affairs Operations Center's Public Affairs Office was charged with performing this mission on behalf of all Services.

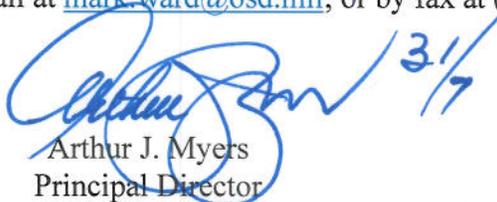
To date, media access has been approved by the PNOK for more than 70 percent of dignified transfers. However, in some cases the PNOK approved media access only to ensure they would receive a DoD produced recording of the dignified transfer, and several PNOKs changed their initial position for the same reason once they arrived at Dover. This must be remedied; our policy should provide family members all information needed to make a fully informed decision regarding coverage options of their fallen's dignified transfer.

Accordingly, the following actions are directed and will be effective 21 August 2009:

(1) Casualty notification scripts will be revised to ensure the PNOK is advised of all three options available to them as to the coverage of their loved one's dignified transfer. Options include:

- a. Allow media access and recording of their dignified transfer. If this option is selected, Air Force Mortuary Affairs Operations (AFMAO) will be required to provide internal coverage and provide the family a copy the recording.
  - b. Disallow media access, but request AFMAO internal coverage of their dignified transfer and provide a copy of the recording to the family. If this option is selected, PNOK must be made aware of that the internal coverage is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which means external media and the general public may request and be provided a copy of the internal coverage.
  - c. Disallow all coverage and recording of the dignified transfer by media and the Government.
- (2) Services will advise AFMAO of each PNOK's decision.
  - (3) The Commander, Air Force Mortuary Affairs Operations Center will ensure the PNOK's decision is carried out.
  - (4) The Commander, Air Force Mortuary Affairs Operations Center will ensure compliance with FOIA requirements and will immediately notify the appropriate Service Casualty Office of all FOIA requests. Services will be responsible for notifying the PNOK when a FOIA request is made.

My point of contact for this action is Mr. Mark Ward, Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy. He may be reached by telephone at (703) 571-2379; by e-mail at [mark\\_ward@osd.mil](mailto:mark_ward@osd.mil); or by fax at (703) 695-1977.

  
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