



United States Air Force

Presentation

Before the House Oversight and  
Government Reform Committee

**Disposition of Remains – Extortion 17**

Witness Statement of Colonel John M.  
Devillier, Commander, Air Force  
Mortuary Affairs Operations

February 27,  
2014

Not for publication until released by the House Oversight and Government  
Reform Committee, Subcommittee on National Security





# BIOGRAPHY

## UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

### COLONEL JOHN M. DEVILLIER

Colonel John M. Devillier is Commander, Air Force Mortuary Affairs Operations, Dover Air Force Base, Del. AFMAO has global responsibility for all Air Force mortuary matters for current and past conflicts, operates the nation's sole port mortuary, and provides global contingency mortuary response teams in support of Air Force and combatant command requirements. The mortuary also serves as the single focal point for all Air Force mortuary affairs matters under the Deputy Chief of Staff, Manpower, Personnel and Services, Headquarters Air Force.

He is a 1993 graduate of officer training school and is a career personnel officer having served in a variety of positions at Wing, Staff, Joint, and Headquarters Air Force levels.

Prior to serving in his current command, he was the Commander, 466th Air Expeditionary Group, Afghanistan.



#### EDUCATION

1992 Bachelor of Science in Education, Florida State University, Fla.

1997 Master of Arts in History, California State University, Calif.

2001 Master of Organizational Management, George Washington University, Washington, D.C.

2007 Master of Business Administration, Naval Postgraduate School, Calif.

2011 Master of Strategic Studies, Air War College, Ala.

#### ASSIGNMENTS

1. July 1993 - August 1994, Chief, Personnel and Relocations, 319th Mission Support Squadron, Grand Forks AFB, N.D.
2. August 1994 - February 1995, Squadron Section Commander, 325th Civil Engineer Squadron, Tyndall AFB, Fla.
3. February 1995 - July 1996, Executive Officer, 325th Support Group, Tyndall AFB, Fla.
4. July 1996 - May 1997, Assistant Flight Commander, 325th Mission Support Squadron, Tyndall AFB, Fla.
5. May 1997 - December 1998, Recorder, USAF Officer Evaluation Boards, Air Force Personnel Center, Randolph AFB, Texas
6. December 1998 - July 1999, Chief, Officer Separations, AFPC, Randolph AFB, Texas
7. July 1999 - June 2001, Air Force Intern, Pentagon, Washington, D.C.

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8. June 2001 - June 2003, Flight Commander, 56th Mission Support Squadron, Luke AFB, Ariz.
9. June 2003 - July 2004, Joint Personnel Plans Officer, United States Forces Korea, Yongsan, South Korea
10. July 2004 - November 2004, Chief, Personnel Plans, United States Northern Command, Peterson AFB, Colo.
11. November 2004 - June 2005, Executive Officer to the Chief of Staff, United States Northern Command, Peterson AFB, Colo.
12. June 2005 - July 2006, Chief, Air Force Personnel Division, United States Northern Command, Peterson AFB, Colo.
13. July 2006 - July 2007, Student, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, Calif.
14. July 2007 - June 2009, Commander, 435th Mission Support Squadron, Ramstein Air Base, Germany
15. June 2009 - July 2010, Executive Officer to the Third Air Force Commander, Ramstein Air Base, Germany
16. July 2010 - July 2011, Student, Air War College, Maxwell AFB, Ala.
17. July 2011 - March 2012, Commander 466th Air Expeditionary Group, Afghanistan
18. March 2012 - Present, Commander, Air Force Mortuary Affairs Operations, Dover AFB, Del.

### **MAJOR AWARDS AND DECORATIONS**

Defense Meritorious Service Award with oak leaf cluster  
Meritorious Service Award with three oak leaf clusters  
Joint Service Commendation Medal with oak leaf cluster  
Air Force Commendation Medal with oak leaf cluster  
Joint Service Achievement Medal  
Air Force Achievement Medal with oak leaf cluster  
Afghanistan Campaign Medal with star  
Armed Forces Service Medal  
Humanitarian Service Medal  
Korean Defense Service Medal  
NATO Defense Medal

### **EFFECTIVE DATES OF PROMOTION**

Second Lieutenant July 28, 1993  
First Lieutenant July 28, 1995  
Captain July 28, 1997  
Major Jan. 1, 2004  
Lieutenant Colonel Sept. 1, 2007  
Colonel Sept. 1, 2011

*(Current as of February 2014)*

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Chairman Chaffetz, Representative Tierney, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the process of disposition of remains from Extortion 17. Since March 2012 I have had the honor and privilege to serve with some of the finest Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Civilians who work behind the scenes as quiet professionals to provide dignity, honor, and respect to our nation's combat fallen as well as care, service, and support to their families.

While the Port Mortuary has been associated with Dover Air Force Base, Delaware since the 1950s, the organization I command, Air Force Mortuary Affairs Operations, was activated in early 2009 in response to Department of Defense directed changes surrounding authorized family travel to Dover Air Force Base and media access to Dignified Transfers. My organization has both Air Force specific roles along with being the lead service component for Dignified Transfers, Media Policy, and effecting final disposition of our fallen as directed by the Person Authorized to Direct Disposition. While we are an Air Force organization, our sister services provide liaison teams who work in our facility to support their individual service fallen and the families of these fallen. Currently our team consists of just over 100 Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Civilians serving within the Charles C. Carson Center for Mortuary Affairs at Dover Air Force Base.

For our Air Force specific role, we provide subject matter expertise to the entire Air Force in the areas of mortuary entitlements as outlined in statute, general honor guard policy, and we also serve as a direct link to families of airmen still unaccounted for from Korea, Vietnam, and the Cold War. Furthermore, we serve as mortuary officers for

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airmen who are killed in overseas operations, providing direct assistance to their families in terms of travel to Dover for Dignified Transfers and assisting these families with mortuary entitlements and associated disposition instructions. In our lead service component role, my team executes all Dignified Transfers as well as implements media policy for those Dignified Transfers. Additionally, we serve as the only continental United States Port Mortuary and in conjunction with our sister services we prepare and ship all of our nation's fallen to their final destination, regardless of branch of service. Lastly, given the size of the mortuary and our co-location with the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System, we are tasked with supporting mass fatalities as directed by the leadership of the Department of Defense.

Since the implementation of policy changes in April 2009, Team Dover has welcomed home 1,820 of our nation's fallen (military, civilian, and contractors) and supported 8,706 of their families at Dover. Families travel to Dover to welcome home their loved one for 83 percent of our Dignified Transfers, and families elect some level of media coverage in 90 percent of these Dignified Transfers. Since April 2009, we have supported 52 mass fatality events, defined as a single event with 5 or more casualties.

The events surrounding the return of the fallen from the CH-47 incident in August 2011 are seen as a watershed for our operation at Dover in terms of mass fatalities. In this incident, we received 38 fallen of which 22 were Sailors, 5 were Soldiers, 3 were Airmen, and 8 were Afghan nationals. Team Dover supported well over 800 family, friends, and unit members as well as more than 40 distinguished visitors, to include the President of the United States, the Secretary of Defense, Service Secretaries, and others desiring to pay their respects to these brave individuals. While I was not present for this

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event in 2011, it was a monumental undertaking for the entire team in terms of support.

As with every fallen service member who arrives at Dover, the fallen from this event were taken into the medical-legal custody of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System for scientific identification, which may include finger printing, dental, and/or DNA testing followed by a medical autopsy. Upon the scientific identification, the chain of custody for the fallen is then passed to my organization to effect final disposition. For each case, the branch of service of the fallen, interacting with the Person Authorized to Direct Disposition, provides written instructions for final disposition, which my organization then executes.

For the three airmen involved in the incident, the Person Authorized to Direct Disposition (PADD) were initially briefed at the Center for the Families of the Fallen at Dover AFB prior to the dignified transfer. The briefing included the dignified transfer process, an entitlements briefing, and a review/completion of the AF Form 970, Statement of Disposition of Remains. Through this form, the PADD provided written instructions for disposition of their loved one to the Air Force, regardless of the condition of the remains. Upon receipt of the remains from the Armed Forces Medical Examiner, the licensed funeral directors who performed the embalming process made a recommendation of viewability via DD Form 2063. In all three cases, the funeral director responsible for the embalming recommended the remains be considered non-viewable. Given the fragmented condition of the remains, an additional form was required from the PADD of these three airmen, the Central Joint Mortuary Affairs Board Form One in which the PADD provided specific instructions regarding any additional remains found of their loved one. This form is required when the Armed Forces Medical Examiner determines

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the remains are considered non-intact. These written instructions were then executed by the Port Mortuary to return the fallen as expeditiously as possible to their final destination.

For the Extortion 17 incident as a whole, my organization effected these disposition instructions for our 30 heroes, 8 of which included requests for cremation from the PADD. For those 8 cases, 4 were cremated at the Port Mortuary, and 4 were cremated at their final resting place. Regardless of the size of the incident in question, the internal process for receiving and then executing disposition instructions has remained unaltered since this event with the exception of a change implemented in 2012 where we no longer perform full body cremations at Dover. Cremations now occur only at the final destination through a funeral home directed by the PADD.

Again, we consider this incident a watershed moment because of the size and scope of the event, particularly in terms of family support. Prior to 2009, families could travel to Dover but it was at their own expense, thus, in past cases, while families traveled to Dover, the numbers were relatively small. Based upon this incident, we have made a number of changes in terms of our in place support mechanisms. In January 2013 we opened a new command and control facility to enhance communication between the branches of service and my organization for mass fatality situations. This command and control cell is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Additionally, in February 2013, a new chapel was opened on Dover, with one-third of the space dedicated to our operation in terms of facilities to further support families during a mass fatality event.

In my nearly 21 years of active military service, I have never served in a more

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honorable or humbling mission. The men and women who work tirelessly behind the scenes at the Charles C. Carson Center for Mortuary Affairs at Dover Air Force Base see the worst side of conflict. Not only do they honor the fallen, they serve the families who are often experiencing the worst moments of their life. These silent professionals ask for nothing in return and I'm proud to serve as their commander. Thank you for your strong support of the men and women of the Department of the Air Force.