

AIR FORCE MORTUARY AFFAIRS OPERATIONS CENTER



MISSION

LINEAGE

Air Force Mortuary Affairs Operations Center

STATIONS

ASSIGNMENTS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

Vert, a chief Or, charged with four stylized aircraft ascending to dexter, the "Missing Man" formation Sable, above twenty-eight headstones, nine, ten and nine Argent, in base a folded flag, point up, Azure charged with nine mullets, one, three, and six of the fourth, all within a

diminished bordure Or. Attached below the disc, a White scroll edged with a narrow Yellow border and inscribed "DIGNITY HONOR RESPECT" in Blue letters. **SIGNIFICANCE:** Ultramarine blue and Air Force yellow are the Air Force colors. Blue alludes to the sky, the primary theater of Air Force operations. Yellow refers to the sun and the excellence required of Air Force personnel. The emblem is symbolic of the unit's function. The folded U.S. flag alludes to the enormity and scope of the care, service and support provided to families of our nation's fallen. The rows of headstones represent the dignity, honor and respect afforded to those who paid the ultimate sacrifice in the defense of the United States of America. The "Missing Man" formation is evocative of the nation's everlasting watch and remembrance for those who are no longer with us.

MOTTO

OPERATIONS

On 15 December 2008, the Air Force Mortuary Affairs Operations Center (AFMAO) activated as a named activity under the command of Colonel Robert Edmondson. The Port Mortuary became a division of the AFMAO along with Headquarters, Air Force Mortuary Affairs which was previously located at the Air Force Services Agency in San Antonio, Texas, on 5 January 2009.

The Mortuary Affairs (MA) Division has the global responsibility for all Air Force active duty deaths, dependents, retirees, their dependents and other eligible personnel while serving the USAF, education and training and policy for the mortuary affairs program, personal property program, and the "Families of the Fallen" program. Additionally, the MA division administers the past conflict repatriation program for all eligible deceased personnel who perished in previous conflicts, are recovered and identified by the Joint Prisoner of War Missing Persons Accounting Command's Central Identification Library in Hawaii.

The creation of an Operations Division streamlined daily functions and allowed each division the ability to focus on their specific tasks. This resulted in the AFMAO consisting of three divisions all located at the Charles C. Carson Center for Mortuary Affairs reporting to Headquarters Air Force. Shortly after the final relocation of Mortuary Affairs personnel from San Antonio, the Secretary of Defense authorized media coverage of the dignified transfer of our fallen upon arrival from theater dependent upon the primary next-of-kin's consent.

Included in this authorization was the entitlement for up to three family members, or more as authorized by each Service Secretary, to travel to Dover AFB to witness the dignified transfer of their loved one. This required extensive family support mechanisms, media rules of engagement, flightline coordination and transportation solutions for arriving family members to be created in a very short period of time.

All of these functions were expertly completed and a family support team was created consisting of a Chaplain, Chaplain assistant, mental health technician and a funeral director to be with attending family members throughout the dignified transfer in order to provide the

necessary care, service and support. Today our fallen are received at the facility at all hours and are cared for with the highest level of dignity, honor and respect. Once they arrive at the mortuary, the first step is to declare the remains safe of any unexploded ordnance, such as personal firearms, rescue flares or hostile rounds. This is accomplished using scanners similar to those used at commercial airports. These units are operated by the 436th Civil Engineer Squadron Explosive Ordnance Disposal personnel. Once determined to be "safe" a numbered bar code is assigned which is used to track the progress of the remains and personal effects through processing and shipment.

Medical photography is utilized to document the condition of the remains upon arrival and to visually record personal effects. Personal items that can be returned to the families are cleaned and returned. Again, the bar codes and nine computer stations come into play in the monumental task of maintaining accountability.

The Air Force adopted the policy of foot printing all flying personnel, aiding in their identification and was accomplished at the member's annual physical exam. The finger/foot print station is manned by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Forensic dental and medical radiology personnel man X-ray stations including a state-of-the-art Magnetic Resonance Imaging System (MRI). X-ray film processing is also provided at the facility. Once scientific positive identification is made the next step is autopsy.

These ten stations are manned by pathologists from the Office of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner (OAFME) from Rockville, Maryland. They bring all their own instruments and support personnel consist of both OAFME and Port Mortuary staff. It is their job to determine the cause of death and to chart any trauma or disease. Each of our fallen has a personal escort whose duty it is to see the remains safely home and to carry necessary documentation to the funeral home. When the family chooses a military escort, each service will assign a uniformed member of equal or higher rank, preferably from the same unit or career field to escort them home. The person authorized to direct disposition of remains may also request a "special escort" who may not be a military member.

The escort is frequently requested to stay for the funeral. Military honors are made available by the base closest to the place of internment. This consists of military pallbearers, firing party, color guard, bugler and an officer or non-commissioned officer in charge and a chaplain if requested. Families have the choice of two caskets, either an 18 gauge metal protective casket, silvertone in color with a white crepe interior, or a hardwood casket, walnut finish with a rosetan crepe interior. A United States flag drapes the casket of an active duty member. This is presented to the person authorized to direct disposition of the remains, with additional flags for the spouse, children and parents.

Provisions are made for all authorized recipients to receive a flag. In order to provide sentimental significance, each flag will have draped the casket at some time. In addition, each flag is presented with a hardwood flag case. The interior of each case displays a complete set of awards and decorations, badges, collar devices and grade insignia. If cremation is selected in

lieu of earth burial or entombment, the hardwood casket is used in order for the casket to be consumed during the cremation process. In 2008 Port Mortuary personnel in collaboration with area casket companies, designed a special hardwood cremation casket similar in design to the standard hardwood. This casket, aptly named the "Dover," is constructed using specialized dowels and polymer clamp nails which reduced the metal content down to .4 pounds and is finished with an ecologically friendly satin finish suitable for cremation.

The choice of urns consists of either American black walnut or bronze. Both of these choices have the branch of service emblem attached and are engraved with the name, rank, date of birth and date of death. Since cremation is an irreversible process, families are encouraged to have the cremation performed at service destination in order to allow them the opportunity to have the casket at the service prior to the cremation process should they change their minds. In the event families choose to effect cremation by the Government, the DoD's sole crematory is housed at the AFMAO under the direction of the Port Mortuary and Operations Divisions to carry out their wishes.

The crematorium was built into the facility and employs the use of two retort-designed cremator units with full operational capability as of October 2009. Since the opening of the Port Mortuary in 1954, these professionals have reunited more than 57,000 fallen heroes with their families and loved ones with dignity, honor and respect. The total equates to nearly three casualties a day for 54 years. Although we do not know what the future holds through times of turmoil, war and disasters, the dedicated professionals of the AFMAO stand ready to answer the nation's call and render dignity, honor and respect for the fallen heroes and care, service and support to their families.

USAF Unit Histories
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Sources
Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.