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## As Families Gather at Dover, Efforts to Ease Pain



Luke Sharrett/The New York Times

Marine Sgt. Frank J. World of Buffalo, N.Y., was carried from the back of a C-17 plane to a mortuary truck at Dover Air Force Base on Easter Sunday.

By ELISABETH BUMILLER  
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DOVER AIR FORCE BASE, Del. — Shortly after 4:20 a.m. on Easter Sunday, a pair of flag-covered cases with the remains of two **Marines**, both killed the previous week in Afghanistan, were carried out of the belly of a C-17 into the sight of their waiting families.

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Luke Sharrett/The New York Times

The remains of Lance Cpl. Tyler O. Griffin were carried in a flag-covered transfer case at Dover Air Force Base on Easter Sunday.

As two mothers, a widow and a knot of other kin watched from the tarmac, the bodies of Sgt. Frank J. World, 25, of Buffalo and Lance Cpl. Tyler O. Griffin, 19, of Voluntown, Conn., were loaded into a large van. Marines in white gloves and camouflage fatigues gave a final salute in the dark chill, then marched in formation behind the van as it rolled slowly toward the base mortuary, the largest in the nation.

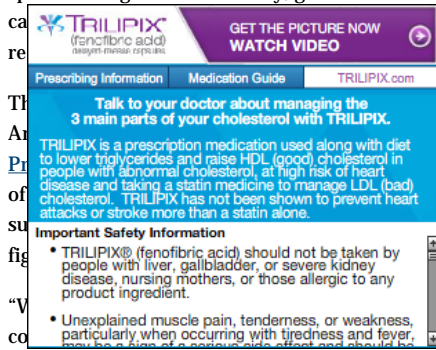
In the past year, as the remains of 462 service members along with nearly 2,000 relatives have passed through Dover, the experience on the flight line has become as common as it is excruciating. Now, to meet the demand and to accommodate what Dover officials expect to be increasing casualties from Afghanistan, the military has embarked on a building surge at this main entry point for the nation's war dead.

In January, Dover opened the Center for the Families of the Fallen, a \$1.6 million, 6,000-square-foot space of soft lighting and earth-toned furniture where parents, spouses,

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children, siblings and other relatives assemble before they are taken to the flight line. On May 1, there is to be a groundbreaking for a new \$4.5 million hotel for families who need to spend the night. The same day, ground will also be broken on what Dover officials are



al space with an adjacent garden where is winding down — some 50,000 country between now and August — and as of withdrawals from Afghanistan. But most to Afghanistan are still due to arrive this at country to nearly 100,000. Heavy

Col. Robert H. Edmondson, the operations Center at Dover. “Clearly, there’s a big requirement right now, and it’s a real requirement. So we have to deal with that.”

The need to provide for families at the base began a year ago last week, when a new Pentagon policy reversed an 18-year ban on photographs of the flag-covered cases and allowed news coverage, if relatives wished, of the return of the war dead. At the same time, the military began paying travel and lodging expenses for families who wanted to be present for the transfers. Before then, expenses were not paid and families were not encouraged to come.

Dover officials had no idea how many families would travel to witness the 15-minute transfers, but so far about 75 percent have. Some 55 percent of families have allowed news coverage, these days often just a single Associated Press photographer. (Steve Ruark, 80 trips to Dover since last May.)

Of the 462 service members whose remains have come through Dover from April 5, 2009, the first day of the new policy, to this past Thursday, a great majority — 332 — were killed in Afghanistan.

Dover officials acknowledge that the new amenities can hardly soften the impact and that many family members are so stunned — typically they arrive at Dover only 24 or 36 hours after they have been notified of a loved one’s death — that they barely notice the surroundings. Chaplains have learned to be ready to catch family members, typically mothers, whose knees sometimes buckle when they first see the flag-covered cases of their children come off the planes. Because of military schedules, the flights land at any time, but often in the middle of the night.

“You’re kind of numb, and getting up that early in the morning, you’re even number,” Sergeant World’s mother, Susan World-Missana, said by telephone from Buffalo a few days after the return of the body of her son, who was killed by a homemade bomb near the southern Afghan town of Marja. Sergeant World left behind a wife, Beth World, and a 3-year-old son and a 2-month-old daughter he had never met. He was due home in two months.

The family center, Mrs. World-Missana said, “looked like a mortuary, but it was impressive.”

“I mean, it was very nice,” she added. “But due to the circumstances, I don’t think anything’s going to matter.”

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