



Fruitland Township  
White River Light Station Museum

# Fruitland Township E-News

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May 9, 2022

## Memorial Day Service

**Monday, May 30, 2022  
9AM**

### **Fruitland Township Cemetery**

Opening Remarks and Invocation – Jeff Marcinkowski, Fruitland Township Supervisor

Breann Comstock - In Flanders' Fields

Memories/Comments – Fruitland Township Residents

Closing Remarks – Jeff Marcinkowski, Fruitland Township Supervisor

Taps – Michael Malloy

WASHINGTON -- The months following the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001, would forever shape the way the military does business.

In an effort to provide some sense of comfort to the families of those who perished that September day, the U.S. Army Human Resources Command established the Joint Personal Effects Depot at present day Joint Base Myer- Henderson Hall, in Arlington, Virginia.

Its close proximity to the Pentagon made Arlington the perfect area to account for and process personal items of fallen warriors, return them to the families, and help provide closure.

But as America's resolve strengthened, the young men and women of this country took up arms to defend the freedoms of its citizens against an unconventional new enemy in a war against terror thousands of miles away.

With the possibility of a rising number of casualties stemming from this new war, America's military was faced with a new challenge - how to care for its fallen?

## THE HISTORY

As the war on terror intensified, the need for an expanded personal effects facility soon became evident and the JPED was relocated from Arlington to Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland.

Working out of old and sometimes dilapidated World War II era warehouses, workers at the JPED ran an assembly line operation without heat in the winter or air conditioning in the summer until 2005, when the decision was made to consolidate the Joint Personal Effects Depot, along with the services' mortuary, to Dover Air Force Base in Delaware.

"I was assigned to the depot in Aberdeen as a mortuary affairs specialist with the Army Reserve and I can say it was less than ideal conditions to work in," said Nelson Delgado, JPED operations management specialist and retired Army Reserve master sergeant.

"Back then everything was moved from station to station," he said. "It was cramped and there was too much room for mistakes. One day General Schoomaker (retired Gen. Peter Schoomaker, 35th Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army) showed up and asked us what we needed.

"That's how we got to Dover."

In March 2011, construction of the current 58,000 square-foot state-of-the art facility was finally completed by the Philadelphia District Corps of Engineers at a cost of \$17.5 million. A few months later in May, the first personal effects processed there.

Staffed by a mix of active and Reserve component Soldiers, Airmen, and Marines, as well as a handful of Department of the Army Civilians and contractors, the JPED, along with the Air Force Mortuary Affairs Operations facility provides dignity, honor, and respect for the families left behind.

## THE PROCESS

When Soldiers make the ultimate sacrifice in theater, their personal effects are inventoried, packed and rushed to the JPED, usually within five days.

"If it comes through the front door, it has to be accounted for by us and sent to the family," said Delgado. "We don't throw anything away.

"Sometimes what might seem insignificant to you and me may in fact be very important to the families. We've actually had instances where families have called back asking for something like a gum wrapper that was given to the service member by a child," he said.

As items arrive at the depot, they are carefully x-rayed and screened for unexploded ordnance in a blast-proof corridor before they are ever brought into the main facility.

From there, items are brought into an individual cage where they are inventoried and packed for shipment to the service member's primary next of kin.

"All the preparations are done, from start to finish, in one single room," Delgado said.

"We ensure there are two Soldiers present in the cage at all times in addition to a summary court martial officer. This gives us a system of checks and balances and also reduces the risk of cross contamination of items," he added.

Each cage is equipped with photographic equipment, washers and dryers, and cleaning materials. As items are inventoried, they are carefully inspected and then individually photographed. Soldiers go through great pains to ensure each item is soil-free and presentable for the family members.

"We want to make sure everything that the individual service member had with them in theater is returned to the family," Delgado said. "What we don't want to do is make a difficult situation worse.

"If an item is soiled, or blood stained, we will stay here as long as it takes to get it clean so it can be returned. Besides memories, this is all the families have of their loved ones," he said.

## THE PRESENTATION

After items are cleaned and inventoried, they are carefully packaged into individual plastic foot-lockers.

Each item is pressed and folded. They are placed neatly in the containers, and wrapped tightly with several layers of packaging paper and bubble wrap. Smaller items, such as rings, watches or identification tags, are placed into small decorative pouches, inscribed with the service member's individual branch of service.

Items such as Bibles, flags, or family photos are placed at the top of the first box, so that they are the first things the families see upon opening it.

"We emphasize box one, because that is usually the box the families will open first. But that doesn't mean we neglect box two, or box six, or even box 10," Delgado said. "We treat each box the same way because we really want the families to know we care about their loved one.

"That's why we take our time and make sure items are neat and presentable, not just stuff thrown in a box."

After the items are finally packaged and sent to the transit room, Soldiers scour the cage one last time and sweep the floor before exiting. Great attention to detail is given to make sure everything is accounted for and nothing is overlooked.

## THE CONNECTION

Soldiers at the JPED are meticulously screened for duty fitness by HRC's Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Operations Division before they are ever assigned there.

Assignments at the JPED can be emotionally taxing on the Soldiers working there.

Soldiers regularly attend resiliency training to help them cope with the tasks they are asked to perform. The JPED chaplain is as much there for them as he or she is for the grieving families attending dignified transfers.

"This is a job that not a lot of people want, or can do, but at the same time this can be the most rewarding job you will ever do," Delgado said.

"Taking care of the personal effects is the last part of the process. This is what helps bring some sense of closure to the families. The families don't see what goes on here, but we get to know the service members and their loved ones by working here. We develop a closeness and connection with them," he added.

For Delgado and others working at the JPED, that connection sometimes hits close to home.

"Sometimes you see kids as young as 19 years of age coming through here," he said. "I have a 19-year-old kid at home. Sometimes it hits a little too close to home. I don't know anyone working here that hasn't cried at one time or another.

"I spent 23 of my 25-year Army Reserve career as mortuary affairs and I was blessed to get assigned to the JPED. This is our way of giving back to the families of the fallen. It's an honor to do this."

# To honor the fallen: inside the Dover Port Mortuary

By Master Sgt. Brian Hamilton November 14, 2017

DOVER, Del. -- In keeping with the Department of Defense's commitment to honor its fallen warriors, the Port Mortuary was established in 1955 at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware.

Operated by the Air Force since that time, management of the Port Mortuary shifted between multiple Air Force units until 2008, when Air Force Mortuary Affairs Operations took control.

Today, the Port Mortuary finds its home inside the Charles C. Carson Center for Mortuary Affairs, a sprawling 73,000 square foot, state of the art facility, built in 2003 at a cost of \$30 million.

Service members from all branches of the military, in addition to DOD civilians and contractors, work tirelessly to comfort the families of the fallen serving in contingency operations overseas.

Their mission is to provide dignity, honor, and respect to fallen Soldiers by preparing them to be returned home to their families.

Like their counterparts from the Air Force, Navy, and Marines, Soldiers assigned to the U.S. Army Human Resources Command's Joint Personal Effects Depot assist with mortuary operations within the Dover Port Mortuary.

They serve as liaisons for families who travel to Dover for the dignified transfer of a loved one. They assist with the final preparations of the fallen in the uniform shop. They work side by side with Airmen, Sailors, and Marines to achieve their mission.

## THE DIGNIFIED TRANSFER

When a service member perishes overseas, their remains are flown into Dover Air Force Base for what is known as the dignified transfer.

Upon arriving at Dover, a detail from that service member's branch of service transport the warrior's remains from the aircraft to the Charles C. Carson Center for final burial preparations.

Currently, families have the option to attend the dignified transfer, and when they do, it's up to Soldiers such as Sgt. 1st Class William Carson, a transport noncommissioned officer assigned to the JPED at Dover, to ensure their needs are taken care of.

"Once we get notification of a deceased service member, it's my job to get the family members from the airport in Philadelphia to Dover, and back again," Carson said. "I also provide transportation for the military escorts who transfer the fallen service members from the flight line to the Carson Center."

Carson, now performing his second tour with the JPED, says a lot has changed since his first tour in 2007.

"Back in 2007 at the height of contingency ops overseas, families didn't have the option to attend," he said. "Now they do."

"Dealing with the families can definitely be a roller coaster ride," he said. "You have to keep in mind that they just lost the one person that meant the world to them and you never know how they're going to cope with that fact, whether it be through tears or through anger."

"It's not easy but we just try to be as respectful as we possibly can so that they can get through this part of the process."

Carson said that in addition to the family aspect, operations at the JPED have also changed.

"It used to take several weeks for us to get the service member's personal effects," he said. "There were several stops in between the time those items left theater and the time they actually arrived at the JPED. Now it's a straight shot from there to here and that time frame has been cut to a matter of days."

## A TRUE JOINT MISSION

"When service members get assigned here, they become a part of a unique team; a joint team," said Maj. Laura Wood, who oversees the Joint Personal Effects Depot as its officer in charge. "At any given time, you can have a Soldier working right alongside an Airman, or a Marine."

While typically Soldiers assigned within the JPED handle the personal effects of all service members, others are routinely called in to assist with the handling of personal items.

"Take our Marine LNO's for example," Wood said. "They come from all over to assist with Marine personal effects that we as Soldiers wouldn't know. They help with those cultural nuances, like the shark's tooth, that only a Marine would know. The same goes for the Air Force and Navy as well."

Wood is charged with ensuring the Soldiers assigned to the JPED are well-rounded and prepared to execute their joint mission at a moment's notice.

"We don't know when we will have to perform our mission so we spend our time here when we don't have a casualty training as if we do," Wood said.

"Because we only have one shot at getting this right, we take the time to go over things such as Department of the Army Pamphlet 670-1."

## THE UNIFORM SHOP

As the fallen reach the Charles C. Carson Center, the service members who care for them take the time to prepare that warrior's remains in such a way that brings dignity to the deceased as well as to the service.

Attention to every minute detail is made. Flags that will drape the caskets of the deceased are individually pressed. Uniforms that will clothe the deceased are custom tailored to fit.

Within the uniform shop, the walls are lined with every decoration and appurtenance from each individual service. Each uniform is meticulously assembled in accordance to the service member's service records. They are then checked and rechecked for proper order of precedence and measurements.

"We take a lot of pride in what we do here because you can instantly see the impact on the families with the work we are doing on the uniforms," said Air Force Staff Sgt. Giuseppe Francioni, uniform shop noncommissioned officer in charge. "So you can take a lot of pride in what you do and knowing that that uniform going out is the best that you can do."

Francioni's counterpart in the Uniform Shop, Army Reserve Staff Sergeant Luis Diaz, reemphasized that point.

"We have been working together in the uniform shop for about a year now," Diaz said. "This is our signature going out the door. This is our final product and this is our way as service members of saying thanks to those who gave the ultimate sacrifice."

Diaz said the difficulty in working with families adds an extra degree of pressure to the job.



"It is difficult going out there and helping with the families who wish to attend the Dignified Transfer and then coming back inside here and helping to prepare their loved one for final burial," Diaz said. "That's one of the hardest parts and sometimes we have to step away."

While both Francioni and Diaz point out that working at the Port Mortuary can be both emotionally rewarding and draining at the same time, they also said that they wouldn't want to do anything else.

"This has such a greater impact than anything else I do in my day-to-day duties," Francioni said. "With each uniform that I do, I can say this is my final product to you, the family, and my way of honoring your loved one for their service."

## FOR THE FALLEN

Wood, having served 16 years in the Army, said that while every mission she has undertaken in the military has been important, "this one has been the most purposeful."

"With our work here, you see the families start the grieving process," she said. "You get to see the appreciation in the faces of the families for the job we do for them. Those things provide a purpose for what we do here."

That purpose, Wood said, is what drives the Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors, and Marines assigned to the Port Mortuary and Joint Personal Effects Depot to continue with their mission of honoring the fallen.

"I think our motto probably captures it best," she said. "To honor the fallen. I think that no matter what the circumstances are out there, the service members inside here would take as much pride in what they are doing and the final product that goes out because they know this is the last memory those families will have of their loved ones."