

Weather

Today: Rain, cooler.
High 60. Low 54.
Saturday: Storms possible.
High 76. Low 52.
Details, B10

The Washington Post

**DISTRICT
EDITION**

35¢

Prices may vary in areas outside metropolitan Washington. (See box on A2)

128TH YEAR No. 145 S DC

FRIDAY, APRIL 29, 2005

M1 M2 M3 M4 V1 V2 V3 V4

Pentagon Releases Hundreds of Casket Photos



DEFENSE DEPARTMENT VIA NSARCHIVE.ORG

In this undated image, one of more than 700 photos released by the Pentagon in response to a lawsuit, honor guards at Ramstein Air Base, Germany, remove the remains of four soldiers killed in a helicopter crash in Afghanistan. A gallery of the photos is available at washingtonpost.com. Story, A10.

Hundreds of Photos Of Caskets Released

Pentagon Action Is in Response to Lawsuit

By ANN SCOTT TYSON
Washington Post Staff Writer

From a row of silhouetted hearses on a rain-drenched tarmac to a convoy of olive-green trucks each bearing a casket, hundreds of images of flag-draped coffins of American service members killed at war were released by the Pentagon this week in response to a lawsuit.

The more than 700 photographs, taken by military photographers from 2001 to 2004, show coffins from Iraq and Afghanistan lining the mechanical silver interiors of Air Force C-17 jets. Many depict solemn honor guard ceremonies for the fallen troops at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware and other U.S. military facilities.

"This is an important victory for the American people, for the families of the troops killed in the line of duty during wartime and for the honor of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for their country," said University of Delaware professor Ralph Begleiter, whose October 2004 lawsuit spurred the release. He sought the release under the Freedom of Information Act.

"This significant decision by the Pentagon should make it difficult, if not impossible, for any U.S. government in the future to hide the human cost of war from the American people," Begleiter said in a written statement.

The Pentagon, however, said the release of the photographs, which it termed "historical documentation," does not signify any lifting of the ban on media coverage of returning casualties. That ban, first imposed in January 1991 during the Gulf War and continued by President Bush with the start of the Afghanistan war in October 2001, is intended to "ensure privacy and respect is given to the families who have lost their loved ones," said Col. Gary Keck, a Defense Department spokesman. Both Republican and Democratic administrations, however, have made several exceptions to the ban in the past decade. "The historical documentation done by military photographers is designed for a completely different reason than a photograph taken by the media very soon after the announcement of the death of an individual," said a Pentagon official, adding that such "historical" photographs are still being taken and will be released "when appropriate." Many of the photographs released were censored, with black rectangles blocking out faces, uniform insignia, name tags and other images that could reveal the identities of military personnel involved in the honor ceremonies.

"Individual judgments were made to black out some faces and identifying information to protect privacy information," said James Turner, a Pentagon spokesman.

Thomas Blanton, director of the Na-

tional Security Archive, which assisted in the lawsuit, said it was "an outrage and an insult that they blacked out those faces of the honor guard, when today on . . . [the Pentagon Web site] you can see photos of U.S. soldiers in Iraq. I can only imagine they put those black boxes there to make the photos unusable."

Not all images were of victims of today's conflicts. Some show coffins containing remains of U.S. service members from Korea and Vietnam.

Earlier publications of both private and military photographs of flag-draped coffins have spurred intense debate in the U.S. military, with some arguing that the images honor military sacrifice and others contending that they were used to make an antiwar statement.



The Pentagon blacked out the faces and identifying information in some photos showing honor guards for coffins lining the interiors of C-17 transports. Thomas Blanton of the National Security Archive called the edited images "an outrage and an insult."



Soldiers conduct a memorial service at Kandahar Air Field, Afghanistan, over caskets containing the remains of Army Staff Sgt. Anthony Lagman and Sgt. Michael Esposito of the 10th Mountain Division.



The Defense Department released more than 700 photos of the coffins of American troops killed in Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries. Many of the photos are undated and unidentified, such as this photo of a convoy of coffins.



Soldiers prepare to unstrap the casket holding the body of Navy SEAL Chief Hospital Corpsman Matthew J. Bourgeois, killed in Afghanistan in March 2002, from the floor of a C-17A transport at Ramstein Air Base, Germany.