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31 July 2011

To the People of the United States of America –

"Integrity first. Service before self. Excellence in all we do." These words comprise our Air Force values, but these words are meaningless without the requisite actions they demand of us. The synergy of these values should imbue every aspect of the operation at Air Force Mortuary Affairs Operations (AFMAO). Unfortunately, when personal egos and empire building is more important than our sacred mission, our core values take a backseat. The lack of leadership to take responsibility and be held accountable for all their failings further erodes our nation's trust for the Port Mortuary to take care of our service members' solemn gift.

I thank the Secretary of the Air Force's (SECAF) efforts to delve into extremely complex issues in an industry most people are unwilling to understand. The staff of the SECAF's Office of the Inspector General (IG) is very dedicated, yet I question why they did not avail themselves of the legal resources available within our profession. To me, this inquiry is analogous to the National Transportation Safety Board investigating an aircraft mishap without a pilot on the Board. I felt that I had to teach the investigators how to fly before I could explain why current procedures and standards were inadequate, non-existent or simply not followed. The investigators were unable to understand and fully appreciate all the issues.

This is demonstrated by the contradictions that appear within paragraphs, from page to page and between sections. As stated numerous times, the Port Mortuary strives to attain the "highest industry standards" in a unique environment. However when these standards are not met, as in the case of removal and non-anatomical placement of a service member's limb, the IG staff cite the lowest standards and claim that no law, rule, or regulation was violated. They disregarded all opinions that did not fit within their preconceived concepts and made no opinion whether the action was ethical.

Too often AFMAO leadership accepted luck in place of proper procedures and industry protocols. This is nowhere more evident than in the case that was possibly contagious and transported out of the country. Leadership evidenced a lack of care and respect for the personnel who would have direct contact with the unembalmed remains. Instead, the Port Mortuary Director chose to replace a licensed, experienced professional with someone who had never dealt with deceased remains nor even attended the Air Force Mortuary Officer's course. A knowledgeable professional would have delayed transport until the contagious state was verified or until the remains were rendered non-contagious. Furthermore, the IG staff allowed unsubstantiated and pejorative statements that were immaterial to the matter at hand.

I firmly trust in the intelligence and wisdom of the American public. It will become apparent to the reader that more information is between the lines than in the actual written report. It is very disheartening that the IG staff chose to quibble over the phrase "Honor, Dignity and Respect" in order to find no fault with AFMAO and Port Mortuary leadership.

I welcome the changes that have occurred at AFMAO because of the SECAF's intervention. This investigation did not have to happen. Time and time again, my colleagues and I raised these issues with our leadership. Instead of listening to those of us with more experience, leadership

turned a blind eye. They allowed themselves to be led by an individual who evinced "a lack of candor" throughout the investigation and who remains in a leadership position within the Port Mortuary. It was easier to denigrate our professionalism and honesty. These actions forced me to look beyond AFMAO leadership which I truly loathed. I pray that my actions and those of the current leadership have restored the faith of you, the American public.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary Ellen Spera", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Mary Ellen Spera
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