



USAMRMC STRATEGIC INFORMATION PAPER

ARMED FORCES MEDICAL EXAMINER SYSTEM (AFMES)

MISSION

Provide comprehensive and innovative medicolegal services worldwide.

BACKGROUND

The Armed Forces Medical Examiner System is committed to being the DoD leader in providing medicolegal services and emerging technologies essential for the readiness, sustainability and survivability of our service members. It provides DoD and other federal agencies comprehensive forensic investigative services, to include forensic pathology; DNA technology; forensic toxicology; and medical mortality surveillance. It is the only worldwide medical examiner system, and the only one that supports the entire U.S. federal government.

The Office of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner is the center of medical-legal investigations for the AFMES, and is responsible for determining the cause and manner of death for all active duty members who die within federal jurisdiction, as well as for identifying the decedent. For the first time in any conflict, since 2003 all combat and non-combat cases have been autopsied.

Working closely with investigative arms of the branches of the military, forensic investigation of crime scenes are conducted upon request. The AFMES also has memorandums of understanding/agreement to support a variety of additional federal agencies. Operational deployment can be accomplished worldwide in 4–48 hours, depending on location. Board certified forensic pathologists, forensic anthropologists, medical-legal death investigators, photographers, and histotechnicians all support this key function.

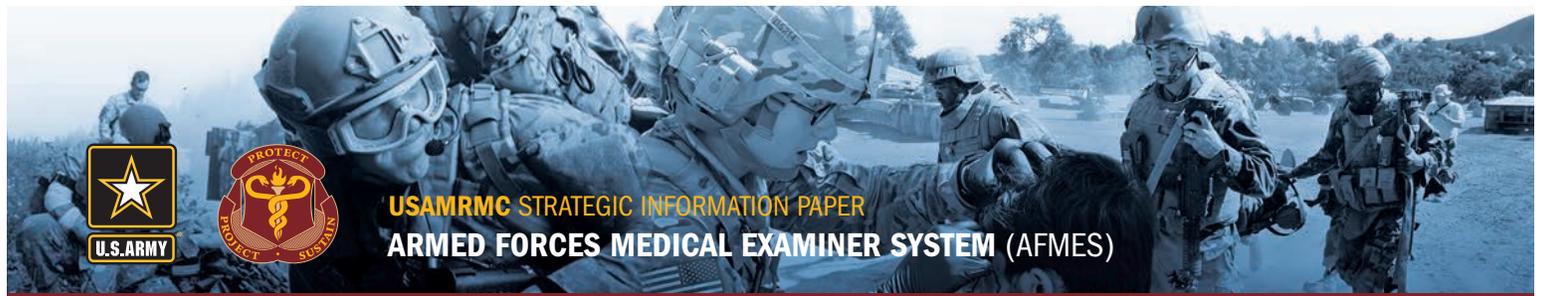
In addition, the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System is the acknowledged expert in the area of military aircraft mishaps. A team consisting of a forensic pathologist, forensic anthropologist, investigator, and photographer can deploy to the mishap site for recovery, identification, re-association and return of remains to the families of the deceased.

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AFMES maintains and operates the DoD DNA Registry, which consists of the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL), and the Armed Forces Repository of Specimen Samples for the Identification of Remains (AFRSSIR). AFDIL provides worldwide scientific consultation, research and education services in the field of forensic DNA analysis, and is a key partner in helping identify the remains of service members from both current and past conflicts. AFRSSIR maintains a DNA reference specimen collection and maintains a database to assist in their retrieval for human remains identification.

The organization's Division of Forensic Toxicology is DoD's centralized laboratory which performs routine toxicological examinations on all military aircraft, ground and ship mishaps and fatalities. The Division's Post-Mortem and Human Performance Testing Laboratory performs testing in support of autopsies, military criminal investigations, legal alcohol determinations, fitness-for-duty inquiries, special request drug testing, and selected forensic cases of national interest. And its DoD Drug Testing Quality Assurance Laboratory performs quality oversight of the DoD Drug Testing Program through certification, proficiency testing and inspections.

AFMES' Scientific Investigations section has dual missions of providing continuing education opportunities and operating the Medical Mortality Surveillance Division (MSD). MSD supports AFMES by providing epidemiological and biostatistical analysis of U.S. military deaths for DoD stakeholders and public requests for information. MSD identifies distribution and patterns of military deaths; develops statistical analysis to interpret crude data; and analyzes medical and evidentiary facts to identify trends, improve equipment, and support preventive medicine efforts.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Q *How did the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System come to be?*

A The Armed Forces Medical Examiner System evolved over a 30-year period as the field of forensic science began and expanded. AFMES can trace its beginnings to the now closed Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (AFIP), which in the early 1960s created a division of Aerospace Pathology that focused on injuries from military aircraft accidents. Gradually, this expanded to include forensic pathology in deaths from other causes, such as criminal activity and unexplained deaths.

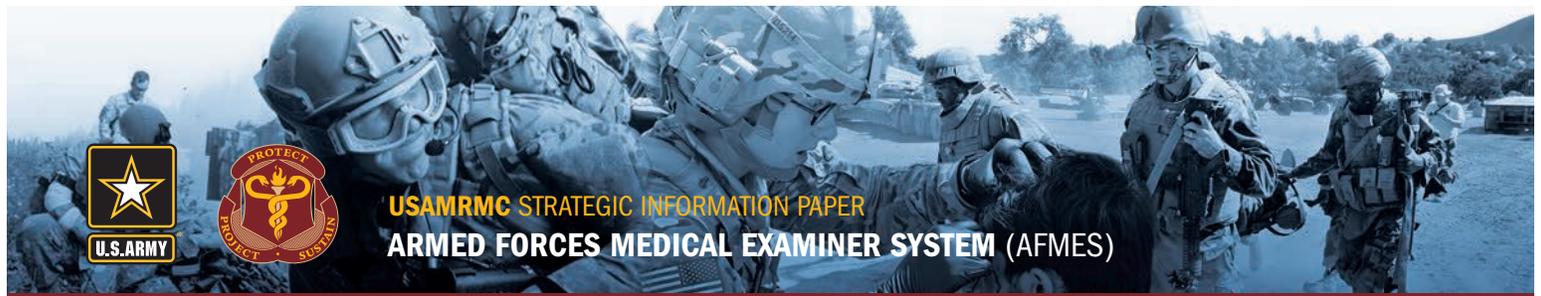
KEY THEMES AND MESSAGES

The Armed Forces Medical Examiner System is a medical service and provides an unbiased, full evaluation of death to law enforcement, legal authorities, and commanders.

AFMES is the only medical examiner system authorized to support DoD and other federal agencies and missions.

The integration of pathology with investigations, DNA, forensic toxicology, and mortality surveillance provides an unprecedented capacity for rapid, accurate, high volume case processing.

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By 1988 the AFIP established the Division of Forensic Sciences and created the position of Armed Forces Medical Examiner. The authority to conduct autopsies was codified into federal law the following year by United States Code 1471. This law explained and expanded the Armed Forces Medical Examiner's jurisdiction, provided direction for divisions in the medical examiner system, and addressed support to non-Department of Defense federal organizations. In 1992, the DoD DNA Registry, to include the DNA reference repository and Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory, were established and integrated into the medical examiner system. AFMES was further expanded in 2003 through Department of Defense Instruction 5154.30, which called for creation of a mortality registry and authorized AFMES to conduct psychological investigations for select unexplained deaths.

Q Why does the AFMES conduct medical-legal examinations on service members?

A The examination helps determine the cause and manner of death, as well as confirming the identity of the service member. These investigations also can assist in identifying potential public health issues or possible criminal activity, as well as helping AFMES provide a full accounting to families of how their loved one died.

Q What does the medical-legal process entail?

A A medical-legal examination entails reviewing the circumstances of the death, scientifically identifying the decedent, performing an autopsy and writing a report. The circumstances of the death are provided to the AFMES by the local commanders or investigative agencies such as the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command, U.S. Naval Criminal Investigative Service, U.S. Air Force Office of Special Investigations, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Scientific identification is made by performing fingerprint, dental and/or DNA analyses. During the autopsy, photographs of the decedent are taken, physical characteristics are noted and any natural disease or trauma is documented.

Q Why does AFMES maintain a DNA reference specimen on service members?

A The DNA reference specimens, often referred to as blood stain cards, are used to assist in the identification of deceased service members. All service members are required to have a card on file with AFMES. If necessary to identify a deceased

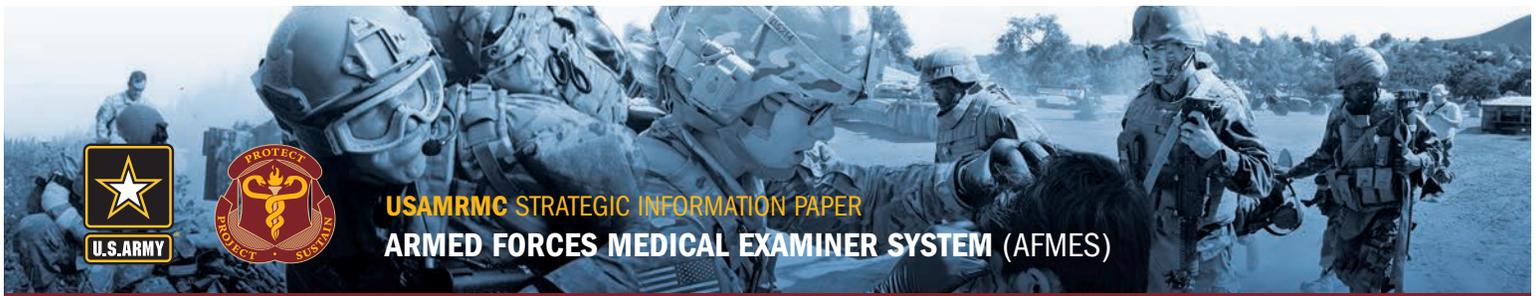
KEY THEMES AND MESSAGES

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For the first time in any conflict, all combat and non-combat cases have been autopsied; the effects of explosives and other threats have been identified and quantified; and emerging trends in vulnerabilities and enemy tactics have been identified. As a result, AFMES is providing valuable information to those DoD stakeholders dedicated to improving personal protection equipment and vehicles so that solutions can be found to prevent or mitigate traumatic injuries.

AFMES' innovative and world-class DNA lab is helping provide answers to families who have been waiting decades for their loved ones to be located, identified and brought home for burial.

AFMES is a leader in integrating technology into its services, and was the first medical examiner's office in the nation to incorporate CT scans into the autopsy process.



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service member, a DNA profile is created from the reference specimen on file and compared to the DNA profile from the service member's remains to make a positive identification.

Q *How does AFMES contribute to military health care?*

A Upon request, AFMES shares data from its forensic investigations with DoD agencies and health care providers so that they can improve treatment on the battlefield and in military treatment facilities, such as the U.S. Army Institute of Surgical Research and the Joint Trauma Analysis and Prevention of Injury in Combat program. AFMES also provides observational feedback to the health care community on placement of medical intervention devices, such as tourniquets, that are documented during the medical-legal investigations.

Q *What types of career opportunities are available at AFMES?*

A The AFMES is staffed with highly qualified military and civilian medical, scientific, administrative and logistical personnel from a variety of disciplines. For more detailed information on careers with AFMES, please visit our website at www.afmes.mil and click on the "Join Us" tab.