

Media Underplays U.S. Death Toll in Iraq

Soldiers Dead Since May Is 3 Times Official Count

By Greg Mitchell

Any way you look at it, the news is bad enough. According to Thursday's press and television reports, 33 U.S. soldiers have now died in combat since President Bush declared an end to the major fighting in the war on May 2. This, of course, is a tragedy for the men killed and their families, and a problem for the White House.

But actually the numbers are much worse -- and rarely reported by the media.

According to official military records, the number of U.S. soldiers who have died in Iraq since May 2 is actually 85. This includes a staggering number of non-combat deaths. Even if killed in a non-hostile action, these soldiers are no less dead, their families no less aggrieved. And it's safe to say that nearly all of these people would still be alive if they were still back in the States.

Nevertheless, the media continues to report the much lower figure of 33 as if those are the only deaths that count.

A Web site called Iraq Coalition Casualty Count (<http://lunaville.org/warcasualties/Summary.aspx>) is tracking the deaths, by whatever cause, of U.S. military personnel in Iraq, based on official Pentagon and CENTCOM press releases and *Army Times* and CNN casualty trackers. Their current count is 85 since May 2.

Looking at the entire war, there was much fanfare Thursday over the fact that the latest U.S. combat death this week pushed the official total to 148 -- finally topping the 147 figure for Gulf War 1. However, according to the Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, the total number of all U.S. deaths, combat and otherwise, in Iraq is actually 224.

This Web site not only counts deaths, it describes each one in whatever detail (often sketchy) the military provides, along with the name and age and home town of each fatality.

An analysis of the 85 deaths by *E&P* reveals that nearly as many U.S. military personnel have died in vehicle accidents (17) as from gunshot wounds (19). Ten have died after grenade attacks and seven from accidental explosions, another seven in helicopter crashes. Six were killed by what is described as "non-hostile" gunshots, and three have drowned.

The vast majority of those killed -- at least 70% -- were age 18 to 30 but several soldiers in their 40s or 50s have also perished. Pentagon officials also disclosed that there have been about five deaths among troops assigned to the Iraq mission that commanders say might have been suicides. As inquiries continue, one official said the suspected suicides were not clustered in any single time period that might indicate a related cause.

The most recent non-combat death was Cory Ryan Geurin, age 18, a Marine lance corporal from Santee, Calif. "He was standing post on a palace roof in Babylon when he fell approximately 60 feet," the site said.

On July 13, Jaror C. Puello-Coronado, 36, an Army sergeant, died while "manning a traffic point when the operator of a dump truck lost control of the vehicle."

Another soldier, still officially listed as "Unknown," died on July 13 "from a non-hostile gunshot incident," according to the site.

Before that, on July 9, another Marine Lance Corporal, age 20, died in Kuwait "in a vehicle accident."

Many other deaths are only vaguely described as the "result of non-combat injuries." One recent death occurred in a mine-clearing accident. Others "drowned" or "died of natural causes," and still others lost their lives in a "vehicle accident."

Editor & Publisher Online

July 17, 2003