

# 7 Years Later, 9/11 Hijackers' Remains Are in Limbo

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Seven years after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, the remains of 13 of the 19 men responsible have been identified and are in the custody of the [F.B.I.](#) and the New York City medical examiner's office.

But no one has formally requested the remains in order to bury them.

"Politically, one can understand that this is a hot potato," said Muneer Fareed, secretary general of the Islamic Society of North America and a former professor of Islamic studies. "People don't want to identify with the political equivalent of Jeffrey Dahmer."

What would happen if someone asked for the hijackers' remains is not clear.

Neither the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which holds the remains of the nine hijackers whose planes hit the Pentagon and crashed in a field in Somerset County, Pa., nor the New York City medical examiner's office, which holds the remains of 4 of the 10 hijackers who flew planes into the World Trade Center buildings, has policies to deal with such a request.

"If and when it comes up, we'll address it then," an F.B.I. spokesman, Richard Kolko, said.

The bureau could turn down such requests, Mr. Kolko said, because the Sept. 11 investigation is an open case.

The medical examiner's office, which, like the F.B.I., refuses to say where exactly the remains are being kept, will eventually put together a committee

to come up with a policy, said Ellen Borakove, a spokeswoman for the office.

Groups representing the victims of Sept. 11 are not sure what should be done with the remains.

“It would be sadly ironic if they ended up being properly buried or sent to a Muslim country when many of the remains of the victims remain buried in a garbage dump,” said Kurt Horning, a founder with his wife, Diane, of the group WTC Families for Proper Burial. “I know we’d feel very distressed.”

The Hornings’ son, Matthew, 26, was working at the World Trade Center and died there on Sept. 11. Their group has been advocating for excavation of the Fresh Kills landfill on Staten Island where ash and other debris from the World Trade Center site was buried. The group believes the debris may contain identifiable remains.

The identified remains of the victims of Sept. 11 are regularly returned to their families upon request, after officials have made positive identifications.

At the Pentagon and in Pennsylvania, investigators first identified the victims, and the remains that could not be linked to a victim’s DNA profile were assumed to belong to the terrorists.

For the World Trade Center site, with a much larger area to search and an initially undetermined number of victims, the F.B.I. identified the 10 terrorists’ DNA profiles from personal items, Mr. Kolko said, which included recovered luggage and cigarette butts left in a rental car. The unnamed DNA profiles of those terrorists were then supplied to the medical examiner’s office.

But, since the DNA profiles were unnamed by the bureau, the office could not say which hijackers have been identified, just that 4 of the 10 have been so far.

Three of them were identified as hijackers within two years of the 2001 attack. But the fourth set of remains was not found until September 2007, when the discovery of numerous bone fragments at a building near the World Trade Center site prompted a reinvestigation of the entire site.

The only semblance of a request from a hijacker's family member to any of the agencies that handled the recovery of remains came in the summer of 2002 from an uncle of one of the men on Flight 93, which crashed in Somerset County.

"I got a call from Beirut at 4 a.m.," said Wallace E. Miller, the Somerset County coroner. "He said he was an uncle of one of them and wanted to know what the situation was. I said if he sent a DNA sample, we'd make a cross-reference to confirm, but I never heard anything more from him."

The uncle — Mr. Miller said he could not recall his name or who his nephew was — was apparently prompted by a British or South African journalist who had put the man on the phone after interviewing him about the events of Sept. 11.

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