

# Fallen Soldier



His mother's request is simple: Treat the fallen Soldier's return home to Colorado from Iraq with dignity; honor him in the photographs.

The plane lands at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado on an otherwise quiet Friday morning. The engines quit and the whine of the hydraulics become the only sound as the door slowly raises. A gentle cry breaks the silence as senior military leaders, service members and the family get the first glimpse of the flag-draped coffin in the doorway.

The coffin lowers. The Army's 4th Infantry Division honor guard sharply marches into position. The members carry the casket to the hearse and carefully position it inside. The honor guard sergeant slowly salutes. The door closes as the family sobs and the leaders pay respect. The color guard marches out of the way. The hearse slowly departs, leading the entourage of family off the base. Service members and civilians along the route slowly salute in tribute.

On Monday, the respectful silence returns as the same honor guard marches to the rear of the hearse parked near the pavilion at Fort Logan National Cemetery in Denver. The sounds of the honor guard movements echo in the crisp air as the members carry the coffin to its place. Final taps sound and three shots ring out as the gun salute joins the emotional sobs. The honor guard returns to surround the coffin. The members carefully lift and fold the flag. One member gives the flag to the Army general and the general gives it to the mother. She clings to it. The family cries. The grandmother approaches the coffin. She places her hand on the center of the wooden top. After a long tearful moment, she walks away.

The family and friends get into the black car that brought them to the cemetery. The Army general salutes as the car rolls slowly past the pavilion where the fallen Soldier remains.

— Michael L. Howard



Photographs taken Nov. 13 and 16 at Peterson Air Force Base, Colo., and Fort Logan National Cemetery in Denver, Colo., in tribute to SPC Jonathon M. Sylvestre. Sylvestre was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 10th Field Artillery Regiment, 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division. He was killed Nov. 2 in Kut, Iraq.



Photos by: Michael L. Howard