

Good Morning Chairman Waxman, Ranking Member Davis and Members of the Committee. Carol and I would like to thank you for giving us the opportunity to provide you information on the treatment of our Son, Msg. James. C Coons. There's nothing that can be done to help Jimmy now, however, with our information and that of the others present here today, change can and must be made in hopes of providing the proper care for our returning Heroes so they may enjoy a healthy and productive life.

Our Story!

Thursday, February 13, 2003

“Don’t sweat the small stuff.. This is my life. I’m a Soldier. With that comes an inherent amount of responsibility and self sacrifice. All of my adult life has been spent as a soldier.....I knew many years ago what I was getting myself into. I would not change anything. Yeap...I’m dog tired and my body hurts....But there is not another place on the face of the planet earth that I would want to be right now. What I do now is not about me. It’s about the American Flag. Some folks don’t have a clue. They curse it, they spit at it, they burn it....Well....one day I will be buried with and under it. This is my generations war.....and if you are a soldier then it’s your profession-----the “Profession of Arms.” Now, rest easy and tell everyone not to worry. I will find my way home again....one day.”

These words were from my son, a United States soldier. A proud soldier who loved his country, his God and then his family. Msgt. James Curtis Coons was a true soldier through and through for all his life. At a very early age, he was fascinated with anything military. Pass a truck hauling a tank or any military equipment and he would get excited. Drive by the Port of Beaumont and you would have to stop so he could watch the gear being loaded for shipment overseas. Pass an Army Surplus You had to stop...Who would think a 5 year old kid would eat C rations. He had to have a parachute hung above his bed...He took the harness and tried to jump out of a small tree...well he did...we had to cut him out of that tree.

Our son James was born on April 3, 1968 in a small town in Texas. He died on July 2003, under the care of Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Washington D.C. 35 years old, a military man happily married to a wonderful wife with two beautiful daughters, 16 years of military service, on a fast track for promotions, and slated to attend Sergeant Majors Academy at Ft. Bliss, in El Paso, Texas in August, 2003.

What happened to my son???

Does anyone really know??

I began to wonder.

And I wondered why, if they know, won't they tell us?

What we did know is this. Jimmy was doing a tour in Iraq. He was always rock steady. He was strong willed and of good spirit all of his life but in April and May of 2003, his emails and phone calls from Iraq took on a completely different tone. A tone that alarmed us. On June 12, 2003 in an email to his mother he said, "This place has really put a beating on me.....I have found myself struggling to understand and deal w/my own personal demons...I don't know what started this downward fall I'm in...I'm just ready to come home....I love you....jimmy." This was the time he started complaining about not sleeping and seeing images of a dead soldier he had seen in the morgue. For some unknown reason that image remained burnt into his mind, an image he saw over and over again in his sleep and would wake him. He sought help for the fatigue and anxiety he was experiencing and was given only medication. No one counseled him, no one sought to find out the underlying reason. Just take these sleeping pills. No follow up. No more concern. Just another soldier with a sleep disorder. No one cared enough to find out why.

The medicine did not help. On June 17, 2003, James called is OIC and ask for help. Capt. Singleton and another soldier raced to his quarters where they had to break in to find him laying on the floor semiconscious. He was then rushed to the medical facility at Camp DOHA for evaluation and treatment. He was diagnosed with PTSD. During his three day stay at the medical facility he was unwilling to discuss his situation with the medical staff. On June 21, 2003 he arrived in Landstuhl as an outpatient. He left on a medevac flight on June 29, 2003 arriving at Walter Reed Army Medical Center on June 30, 2003. He was evaluated upon arrival and the evaluation did not find that he was a threat to himself or others. He had a scheduled appointment the next day and was released to his own custody with instruction to follow up at the outpatient clinic. He was sent to a room, alone, had appointments set up for the following days that he never made and no one ever made any attempt, even after our calls to check on him.

Records indicate that James checked into his room at the Malogne House. He never left his room again.

The next four to five days were a total nightmare. Carol and my daughter-in-law began calling Walter Reed the next day trying to find Jimmy. We have documentation of repeated calls to various departments trying to verify that Mgt. Coons had arrived at Walter Reed. No luck. No one had any information. They did have a room registered to Msgt. James C. Coons, but no one could tell us if he was actually on the property. During this time we were told that this is a Holiday weekend and it would be difficult to get someone to check his room. Policy will not let us go in the room until three days if there is a "Do not Disturb" sign on the door. (A letter from the Base Commander Kiley says the rooms will be entered daily to check on the well being of the guest). We were passed around and around. A call to the Hospital's Clergy, a Captain, told us, "He's a Senior

Non Commissioned Officer, I can't get into his business." Calls to the Military Police and no one responded to us.

Finally, on July the 4th, someone took our calls seriously and went to check his room. We were still calling and now are really getting the run around. They know something they say but they can't tell us until the Army, "Officially" notify his wife. Well thank God a worker at the Malogne House finally had enough compassion to tell my wife that James had passed away. The next day my daughter-in-law was notified of Jimmy's death at 6:30 a.m. and Carol and I were notified around 9:00 a.m.

Now the story gets interesting. Our casualty officer was not informed of the cause of death and we were not being told the cause of death either. We would not learn of it until after Jimmy had been buried. No matter what we did we were met by a stone wall. One bureaucrat or officer after another would either say they did not know or would pass us to someone else who in turn would pass us on to another person. No one, it seemed, knew or were willing to tell us the actual cause of our own son's death. We are, to this day, still unsure of his actual date of death.

James' body was returned to us on July 13, 2003 and was buried on July 15, 2003. During the visitation on Monday July 14, the Funeral Home received a call from a retired Colonel saying that he had knowledge of how my son had died and he was on his way to inform the family. Our casualty officer got a copy of the Death Certificate faxed to him and he had the unfortunate task of telling me and I, in turn, 10 days after my son's death, had to gather the family and tell them how Jimmy died.

We, Carol and I, are here today to relate our experience to you in the hopes that some other soldier who is having a problem won't be ignored. That he or she will be given the best care and treatment available. This is a great country and its greatest asset is our men and women in uniform. They deserve, and we expect that they would receive the absolute best medical care this country can provide its service people, to whom those parents have entrusted their children, and to whom this country turns to for protecting us and our country's values in times of need.

Don't sweep these people under the rug. Out of sight, out of mind. Not my problem. That's just not acceptable.

They deserve so very much more. We, the parents who entrust our children to you, deserve more.

Thank you.