

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

January 4, 1968

To: Dr. Garcia

MEMORANDUM TO

VICENTE T. XIMENES

Re: PFC Angel Vega
Serial No. 547-20050
Killed in Viet Nam - December 22nd, 1967
Was with: 27th Infantry
25th Infantry Division
Company D

Funeral Arrangements by: Poland Funeral Home
Refugio, Texas

Burial: St. Teresa Catholic Church
Woodsboro, Texas

Mother: Felicita Vega
Woodsboro, Texas
543-4810

Military Escort: PFC Domingo Vega

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Contacts were made with: Sgt. Welborn, Adjutant General's Corps, DA, and Mr. Kershner of the Adjutant General's Support Services Division, DA.

Mr. Kershner explained that the Army ceases to have control or jurisdiction over the deceased when the funeral director signs for the body. At that time, it becomes a matter of the funeral director complying with the wishes of the next of kin as to the disposition of the body.

Mr. Kershner states that many funeral directors feel that the only reason for sealing a coffin is death by a disease and therefore refuse to open a sealed coffin. In the case of Angel Vega, he died of gun shot wounds in the chest. Identification was positively made by the FBI comparing the fingerprints taken from the body to those on file in Angel Vega's service record.

PFC Domingo Vega is a cousin of the deceased and was returned from Viet Nam by the Army to serve as military escort because of his relationship.

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Sgt. Welborn said the escort's refusal to agree to the opening of the coffin is undoubtedly due to the presence of a letter from the overseas mortuary recommending against opening the coffin. Mr. Kershner pointed out that this letter does not have the effect of an order but only that of a recommended course of action.

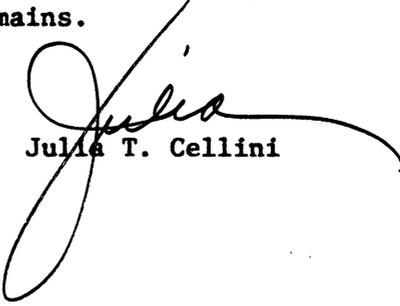
Mr. Kershner is checking further on the present condition of the body and will advise us later this afternoon.

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More from Mr. Kershner who checked with the Oakland, California, mortuary which received the body upon arrival in the U.S. The Director in Oakland stated that prior to the arrival of the body at the overseas mortuary, decomposition had set in. The mortuary there did what they could to make the face presentable. However, they felt that the family should not view the remains because of this decomposition.

PFC Domingo Vega reached Oakland while the remains were still in Oakland and escorted the body to Texas. Prior to leaving Oakland PFC Vega was instructed that he had no authority to refuse viewing of the body. However, he was to attempt to persuade the family "to remember Angel Vega as they knew him."

Mr. Kershner agrees with your recommendation that one of the brothers of Angel Vega view the body, if they positively insist that the coffin be opened, and report to the family identification and persuade others not to view the remains.



Julia T. Cellini