

From:

1/28/2022

The Parents & Siblings of PFC Zachary Wayne Riffle, Deceased Marine

To:

Doug Parker, Current American Airlines President and CEO

Robert Isom, Incoming American Airlines President and CEO

On 1/27/22 we awaited the arrival home of our son and brother, Zach. Zach and his escorts were coming from North Carolina to Pittsburgh via American Airlines. He was killed in a military vehicle rollover on 1/19/22 in North Carolina. The pain we suffer for his loss and our relief to get him home was vastly overshadowed yesterday by the lack of respect and disregard for our family and, for a portion of the trip, Zach's two assigned Marine escorts as well as Zach himself.

Upon our arrival at a cargo terminal at Pittsburgh International Airport we began to see that our reception of Zach's body at the airport was unlike those before him. We were told that policy changes were in place due to COVID restrictions/staff outages.

Upon our arrival we found that our Marine Casualty Assistance Calls Officers had to push for us to be afforded accommodations in the break room of the building. AA had intended to place four parents and four siblings in a very small room with a handful of chairs. We cannot thank them enough for advocating for us and Zach.

The precedence for reception of a military service member killed during duty allowed for immediate family to watch the plane land and view the body deplaning on the tarmac. We were told this would not be happening for us and that we would be forced to stay in the breakroom and not allowed to see the plane land or view our son and brother's flag draped casket until he was brought into a cargo terminal.

This news was crushing to say the very least. In the moments that followed we had to quickly accept that we were at the mercy of AA and would not see this sacred moment in person. It was then that we asked our Marine Casualty Calls Assistance Officers to request this moment be recorded for us, even if only on a cell phone. We were again denied because of concerns that an AA employee with this type of footage on their personal device was a risk for inappropriate dissemination. It was only after asking our advocate to call again and explain to the tarmac manager that we would sign a release of liability for the person recording and will be airing our grievances about this publicly that it was agreed to allow one of the Marine escorts to hand off their personal device to someone on the tarmac to record Zach deplaning.

Zach's escorts had a significant layover in Charlotte, NC. Since they cannot leave Zach's side, they stayed in the cargo terminal there with him from approximately 9am – 5pm. While we do not know the policy of the airline, we were disappointed to hear that despite knowing a fallen Marine was being escorted and knowing the length of the layover, no one from AA offered them any opportunity to obtain anything to eat. Basic human decency should have prevailed, at the very least.

Upon completing Zach's journey home we also learned that on the final flight (AA 2738) from Charlotte, NC to Pittsburgh there was no announcement made on the plane that it was carrying a fallen service member. On the previous flights this was done and allowed the escorts ability to deplane first to immediately take their positions next to Zach as they cannot leave his side during the journey.

Lastly, Zach's escorts' checked bags were sent to baggage claim in the main terminal. The escorts cannot leave their fallen comrade's side and were unable to retrieve their luggage. As of this morning these Marines are in a hotel 100 miles from the airport without their belongings.

We will never have these moments back. We could not have imagined the disrespect that took place. There is nothing that can be done to remedy this for us. We hope airing these grievances in a very public manner will save another military family from suffering further mental anguish due to the inconsideration and disrespect of this airline.

To our fellow Americans reading this letter, we ask you to consider a boycott of American Airlines and choose another airline for your future travels. They MUST do better or they MUST NOT be allowed to receive the funds spent by the government to get fallen service members home.

Best,

The Family of PFC Zach Riffle