

Lebanese Casualties Held in Mass Grave; with a Silent Absence of Mourners, 32 Are Buried to Await Peace and Loved Ones

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Byline: Betsy **Pisik**, THE WASHINGTON TIMES

TYRE, **Lebanon** - A dozen exhausted hospital workers buried 32 bodies in a shallow **mass** grave yesterday, a temporary resting spot for casualties of weeks of Israeli bombardment.

No mourners were at the grave site, a dusty industrial lot in a sunbaked corner of Tyre.

None of the dead was from this southern city, and when the conflict is over, each will be disinterred and sent back home.

The plain plywood coffins held children, multiple members of the same families, and men who were identified, barely, by grieving widows.

"These are temporary burials only; they will have proper burials when their families can claim them and take them home," said Ali Chouman, a technician for Tyre's municipal hospital. Mr. Chouman found eight of the bodies Thursday.

"We need to bury them now because the neighbors are getting sick from it," he said of the stench.

The Health Ministry said more than 450 Lebanese have been killed in the fighting, the Associated Press reported yesterday.

Some estimates range as high as 600 dead, with many bodies buried in rubble.

Thirty-three Israeli soldiers have died, and Hezbollah rocket attacks on northern Israel have killed 19 civilians, the Israeli army told the AP.

Given the massive displacement caused by the Israeli bombardment, many of the dead cannot be buried where they belong: alongside previous generations in towns where their families have lived for decades. So the Lebanese army yesterday dug a shallow trench in the ground and laid in the coffins with heads facing toward Mecca.

The grave site was uncharacteristically silent, with a noticeable absence of family and tears. Instead, three area imams led a short prayer for the dead, "to all believers, God rest your souls," with only reporters and photographers as witnesses.

No one knows how many unclaimed bodies are lying in morgues throughout **Lebanon**.

Nor can anyone say how many are still unidentified.

An estimated 750,000 Lebanese have fled their homes since fighting began after the July 12 abduction of two Israeli soldiers near the border.

For those who remain, even in the unscathed center of Beirut, life's rhythms have been fragmented.

To Manal Mdayhli, who arrived at the hospital yesterday morning to make sure her cousin and neighbor were properly interred, the deaths are a symbol of how chaotic and diffused life has become in only two weeks.

"When it is safe to go home, we will take them back" to their village of Mansouri, about 20 miles away.

"We have lived our whole lives there, and our grandparents are buried there," Mrs. Mdayhli said.

She said the family owned fruit trees and vegetable gardens, although she doubts that anything is left after the aerial bombardment that crumbled houses, started forest fires and blackened the once white sand beaches with thick layers of oil and sludge.

Dr. Ahmed Mrowe, the administrator of Jabel Amel Hospital in Tyre, said 21 bodies were in his morgue, several of which had not been identified. He fears none of them will ever be claimed.

"We will hold them until the family comes; we don't want to bury them until we know" who they are, he said at the **mass** grave site. "But after two days, four days, a week, it becomes more difficult [to identify the bodies]."