

and Brandon's three sisters were left stranded. The Pentagon, after queries from



PICKING UP THE PIECES

Penny Flitcraft, Andrea Floyd's mother, holding pictures of her murdered daughter, was visited by four officials who told her to wake up Andrea's three children and tell them their parents were dead.

the *Fayetteville Observer*, had belatedly determined that it would be unseemly for someone who had killed his wife and committed suicide to be buried among our national heroes.

The children of Jennifer and Bill Wright face other grueling issues, because their father is still alive, in jail, waiting to be tried for their mother's murder. If the army discharges him other than honorably, and it has begun steps to do so, they will lose their dependents' benefits after three years. Moreover, at the end of three months they had not collected any money at all. Jennifer's parents, Archie and Wilma Watson, live in a trailer on limited resources. Their daughter Donna Walker, who has custody of Jennifer's three children, has two children of her own. Because Jennifer's children were homeschooled, they were with their mother literally 24 hours a day, and so they have had to adjust to regular school. Donna Walker was on a stress leave from her job as a corrections officer when she got the news of her sis-

Archie Watson was in tears as he told me of the struggles he had had getting his daughter's remains and her children's belongings from Fayetteville to Mason, Ohio. The army contributed only \$550 toward Jennifer's funeral expenses. Watson considers Jennifer a casualty of war and thinks she should be treated that way. At one point, the family says, Donna Walker was told to tell her father to "shut up" and stop talking to the media so the army could do its job. Watson, like the other survivors, was not made aware that he might be eligible for casualty-assistance grants or loans.

Jonathan Sams, a local attorney, is working pro bono for Jennifer Wright's children. He has written to the House Armed Services Committee asking that legislation

"Military wives don't complain about deployment. That's the price they pay for their husbands to serve the country."

be passed so that the Wright children can have their benefits until age 18 and then have their college educations paid for. In his letter he says, "As the military demands that its soldiers rely upon it for their cares and needs, so it resultantly demands that the children of soldiers rely upon the military to care for them. Though not soldiers themselves, these children are, nonetheless, reliant upon the military."

Family members are often very angry and grieving, and they have no tolerance for bureaucracy," says Dr. Connie Best, who has served as a consultant to the Department of Defense on these issues. "There need to be mechanisms—whether it's a phone call or a personal liaison—where a victim's family member can call and say, 'This is what I need,' and the person giving assistance ought to be authorized to say, 'This will happen.'"

In late September, the House Armed Services subcommittee on military personnel held a daylong series of closed-door meetings in Fayetteville to discuss

installations—previously that was not obligatory. In October, the *Fayetteville Observer* reported on a two-day workshop at Fort Bragg on ways to strengthen programs to prevent domestic violence and to cooperate more with the surrounding community to deal with its effects.

Last May, before the deaths had occurred, the House subcommittee's chairman, John McHugh, Republican of New York, wrote to the Department of Defense detailing his concerns about Lariam. In September he received a 22-page reply stating that the Defense Department was waiting for the results of a detailed study of Lariam that the Centers for Disease Control began in early 2001. The C.D.C.'s review process will begin in January.

As part of the Defense Department's recently passed appropriations bill, Congress has allotted \$5 million for victim advocates at military installations to provide confidential assistance to victims of domestic violence. The army itself has investigated the Fort Bragg cases and is expected to issue a high-level report prepared by "an EPICON team," which includes psychologists, psychiatrists, and epidemiologists studying the pharmaceutical effects of any prescribed drugs these soldiers took. However, no member

of the victims' or perpetrators' families I spoke with had ever been contacted. Colonel Davis told me that, beginning this month, Fort Bragg and other army bases will install a 24-hour hot line for victimized individuals, but it will not guarantee confidentiality in cases of domestic violence.

The army, however, has already begun to demand more accountability with regard to how the survivors of such tragedies are treated. As a result of inquiries made by *Vanity Fair* to army chief of staff General Eric Shinseki, I received a call from Colonel Gina Farrisee, the adjutant general of the army, whose duties include overseeing the handling of casualties, missing persons, and mortuary services, to thank me for bringing these matters to the army's attention. The army, she said, is currently rewriting instructions for personnel regarding cases of domestic violence such as those at Fort Bragg. "We owe them a lot more," she added, "and I'm going to make sure they have clear guidance and can call us at the top while we are rewriting instructions for the future." □