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## Treating the War Dead

Tuesday, May 17, 2005; Page HE07

What happens when U.S. soldiers die in action? Comrades risk their lives to recover their bodies, forensics experts go to great lengths to identify their remains, and an honor guard oversees their interment with full military ritual. All to pay respect and allow for closure for their families and loved ones.

In "Soldier Dead" (Columbia University Press, 2005), freelance journalist Michael Sledge explores "the complex political, social, religious and forensic reasons why we go to the lengths we do to recover our [military] dead," he said in a phone interview.

The dense and often disturbing book shows the impact of soldiers' deaths on military staff dating as far back as the Civil War. Sledge writes that some feel "handling a soldier's personal effects" like wedding pictures and stopped watches "is more emotionally wrenching" than handling the dead themselves.

The book includes graphic, nearly unidentifiable photos of the dead. In some cases, a soldier's remains can be identified only by comparing their DNA with blood samples that are now taken from all new members of the U.S. armed forces.



Author Michael Sledge, at a military cemetery in Normandy. (Courtesy Of Columbia University Press)

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Sledge will discuss his book on Sunday, May 22, at 1 p.m. in a free lecture and book signing at the National Museum of Health and Medicine, on the campus of Walter Reed Army Medical Center, 6900 Georgia Ave. NW. To reserve a seat or learn more, call 202-782-2200.

-- **Samantha Sordyl**

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