

**Senate Democratic Policy Committee Hearing**  
**“Contractor Misconduct and the Electrocution Deaths  
of American Soldiers in Iraq”**

**Larraine McGee**  
Mother of Staff Sgt. Christopher Everett

July 11, 2008

Distinguished members of this committee, I would like to thank you for allowing me to be here and to speak to you.

My name is Larraine McGee from Huntsville, Texas. My son, Staff Sgt. Christopher Lee Everett, lost his life serving this great country on September 7, 2005, in Iraq. He was only 23 years old. He did not die from the bullet of a terrorist, a roadside bomb, or an IED. He was electrocuted. I would like to share his story.

Chris joined the Texas Army National Guard right out of high school. He loved the outdoors and he loved working with his hands. In the summer of 2004, when he was doing his two week training at Fort Hood, a unit from Fort Worth, Texas was also there. The Fort Worth unit of the Texas National Guard told of their upcoming deployment and asked for volunteers to join them to increase their numbers.

Chris was one of the first to volunteer. He had already spent 10 months at the Pine Bluff Arsenal in Arkansas from August 2002 through June 2003 providing extra security after 9/11. He felt that going to Iraq was an even greater way to help his country. On January 1, 2005, 3,000 Army National Guard soldiers from Texas left for Iraq. They were to be home in time for Christmas of 2005. Chris did not make it back alive.

On September 7, 2005, Chris was working in the motor pool at Camp Taqaddum in Iraq. He was power washing the sand from the underside of a Humvee that needed to be worked on. He was working alone at about 6:15 p.m. when he was instantly killed by an electrical shock.

In a report presented to me in December 2005, the Army stated that the generator supplying electricity to the power washer was improperly grounded, resulting in an electrical current passing to the power washer and through the water in the hose to the nozzle Chris was holding. The report also indicated that motor pool soldiers tasked with washing vehicles had previously complained about being shocked while using the power washer. The unit involved attached additional grounding rods to the generator prior to this incident, and all persons involved said they thought the problem had been fixed. The unit leadership had also asked for help performing electrical repairs, and was told that Base Operations was then currently working on the electrical issues.

When the Army presented me with this report, they led me to believe that Chris's incident was the first such fatality. They told me out right that as the result of Chris's death, ALL generators across Iraq were being properly grounded so that this would not happen again. That was the only consolation I had, that Chris's death would at least keep it from happening to someone else. All this time, I thought Chris's accident was an isolated incident.

Not until April 30, 2008, when Jim Risen from the *New York Times* contacted me, did I find out differently. I now know that Chris was the fourth soldier to be electrocuted due to faulty electrical grounding and that there have been at least 11 soldiers in all electrocuted since 2003. Not only have there been multiple electrocutions, but I also found out that the Army issued a report titled, "Electrocution: The Unexpected Killer" in October 2004. I quote from the report, "There are many hazards in combat, including the enemy and his weapons, the heat and cold, and vehicle and weapons accidents. However, another killer of soldiers has emerged in Iraq this past year—electrocution—and it's a killer that is growing at an alarming rate."

The report continues, "As we install temporary and permanent power on our projects, we must ensure we require contractors to properly ground electrical systems." My son should have never died. Ryan Maseth should have never died. Proper grounding of electricity is a basic safety requirement. The problem was known about long before Chris's death.

Posthumously, Chris was promoted to Staff Sgt. and was awarded the Bronze Star, the Combat Action Badge, and The Army Good Conduct Medal. One of the reasons he received the Bronze Star was because on May 4, 2005, while on patrol, Chris discovered a cache of hidden weapons. It was the largest discovered cache of weapons for the battalion. It eliminated a deadly threat to Camp Taqaddum, denying the enemy the ability to inflict casualties on Coalition Forces.

Chris was awarded the Combat Action Badge because on August 12, 2005, he responded to indirect enemy fire and assessed damage and was prepared to provide aid to any casualties as a result of enemy rocket fire in the battalion area at Camp Taqaddum. He received the Army Good Conduct Medal for exemplary behavior, efficiency and fidelity during his time in Iraq. Chris never knew he had been recommended for these honors.

Anger has now over taken my grief. I plead with you to do something to bring an end to this unnecessary cause of death to our soldiers. They should not have to worry about stepping into a shower or using a power washer in the safety of an established base. Chris believed he was making a difference in Iraq. Please do not let his death be in vain.

Thank you very much.