

MORTUARY AFFAIRS INFORMATION GUIDE



**FOR
COMMANDERS
AND
FIRST SERGEANTS**

13 Jan 2005



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS AIR FORCE SERVICES AGENCY

SAMPLE LETTER

MEMORANDUM FOR UNIT COMMANDERS AND FIRST SERGEANTS

FROM: **(Services Squadron)**

SUBJECT: Mortuary Affairs Information Guide for Commanders and First Sergeants

1. Certainly the most sensitive and probably the most important job I have as the (**____ Services Squadron Commander**) is that of Mortuary Affairs Officer. There are many complex aspects of mortuary affairs operations and, if they are not professionally managed, it can greatly embarrass the entire wing and can cause unnecessary anxiety to the next of kin. This guide is designed to define your role during a mortuary case in your unit.
2. Mortuary Affairs entails a number of very important do's and don'ts. The information in this guide is concise for easy reading and formatted for quick reference; also, remember that it is general in nature and may apply a little differently in each case. It is meant to give you a general overview, not to make you an expert. I encourage you to review the information and keep it handy for reference. Please feel free to call me if you have any questions or concerns that I can help you with.

(Services Commander)
Commander

Attachment:

1. Quick Reference POCs
2. Key Players
3. Death In Your Squadron
4. Active Duty Entitlements
5. Frequent Problems
6. Statement of Good Standing

QUICK REFERENCE POINT OF CONTACT (SAMPLE)

Headquarters, Air Force Mortuary Affairs	1-800-531-5803
Air Force Casualty	1-800-433-0048
Dover Port Mortuary	1-800-565-1398
USAF Survivor Assistance	1-800-872-3435
HQ (MAJCOM)	
(Base) Mortuary Officer	
Casualty Ass. Representative	
Chaplains Office	
Base Operator	
Command Post	
Security Forces	
Local Police	
Regional Veterans Administration	
Family Support Center	
Base Honor Guard	
Public Affairs	
Legal Assistance	
Mental Health Care (CISM)	

KEY PLAYERS

1. **Headquarters, Air Force Mortuary Affairs:** Exercises staff surveillance and operational control over all phases of the worldwide program and develops procedures, techniques, and mortuary processes for operations. Provides technical, and specialized assistance at installation or major commands' (MAJCOM) request, for search and recovery (S&R), identification of remains, preparation and disposition of remains, and any other mortuary affairs related concern. Briefs the Person Authorized to Direct Disposition (PADD) if they live CONUS and the death occurs OCONUS.

2. **Mortuary Officer & Alternates:** The base mortuary affairs officer is appointed by the installation commander in accordance with AFI34-242, *Mortuary Affairs Program*. The base mortuary affairs officer is the base Services commander, director, or deputy who administers and executes the program for the installation commander. All deaths involving active duty air force Members will be reported to the mortuary officer by the local authorities, base hospital, base command post, security police, commanders, or whoever first learns of death. The mortuary officer is responsible for the administration and operation of all activities related to the mortuary affairs program. These include: briefing the PADD of mortuary entitlements, search and recovery of remains of personnel from accidents or disasters, benefits related to funeral home arrangements including burial or cremation, transportation of remains to the final resting place, disposition of personal property of active duty members, escorts, summary court officers (SCO) for active duty members, honors, and paperwork associated with these activities.

NOTE: The above programs and duties are the responsibility only of the Base Mortuary Officer and Alternate Mortuary Officers.

3. **Casualty Assistance Representative (CAR):** The Casualty Assistance Representative (CAR) is designated in accordance with AFI36-3002, *Casualty Services*, the single source document for casualty notification and assistance; it may be available to the NOK. The CAR is responsible for transmitting casualty reports to the Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC), the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS), and other concerned agencies; briefing Casualty Notification Officers on their duties and responsibilities; and assisting the next-of-kin or other eligible beneficiaries in claiming all government benefits and entitlements. During their family briefings the CARs address: Air Force Benefits and Entitlements, Social Security Benefits, Veteran Affairs Benefits, miscellaneous benefits (commercial life insurance, credit union, banks, etc...), and educational assistance. The Air Force Casualty Branch, located at the Air Force Personnel Center, is manned 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to assist commanders, CARs, and others who require support in fulfilling the casualty duties and responsibilities.

NOTE: The Mortuary Affairs Programs and Casualty Assistance Programs are two distinct programs.

4. Person Authorized to Direct Disposition (PADD): The person most closely related to the deceased individual and entitled to direct disposition of remains. There is a specific legal order, which determines the NOK. The Air Force is bound by this legal order, regardless of personal feelings or family situations. Federal law determines this legal order.

5. Person Eligible to Receive Effects (PERE): As with the PADD determination, there is a legal (Federal Law) order for determining this entitlement. The order for receiving property is not necessarily the same as for determining disposition of remains.

NOTE: This entitlement is only to determine who receives the property from the Air Force. Ownership is determined by other civil statutes. The Air Force does not declare ownership.

6. Summary Court Officer (SCO): The Summary Court Officer (SCO) is a commissioned officer appointed on orders by the installation commander, pursuant to AFI34-244, *Disposition of Personal Property*, to collect, safeguard, and promptly dispose of property belonging to the deceased at the time of their death. The SCO process is part of the larger Mortuary Affairs program, and is specifically designed to help the PERE through the management procedures necessary to close out a member's service. The mortuary officer will immediately request that the installation commander appoint a summary court officer (SCO) on all active duty deaths. The selection of a summary court officer may be from any base organization. The SCO obtains property disposition instructions and the names and addresses of the authorized recipients from the mortuary officer. The SCO should secure, inventory, package, and ship personal property to the authorized recipient. The SCO will also turn in military identification and other military documents and equipment; dispose of mail, personal papers, funds, and negotiable instruments. The SCO should be removed from all other duties and responsibilities until all actions are complete.

7. Escorts: Only **ONE ESCORT** is authorized to accompany the remains or to hand carry the cremated remains of a deceased military member entitled to full mortuary benefits to the final destination. The escort accompanies the remains from shipping facility (CONUS) to final destination when the two places are not located in the same locale. In an overseas location, the Aircraft Commander acts as the Official Escort until arrival at APOD. The PADD may request, by name, a civilian or military "Special Escort" or request that the mortuary officer appoint an escort. Appointed escorts will be of same rank or higher.

NOTE: "Unit Reps", are not Official Escorts. The unit is responsible for funding all "Unit Reps". They are not authorized to travel under any mortuary entitlements.

8. Family Liaison Officer (FLO): The Family Liaison Officer (FLO) can be assigned to any NOK. However, a NOK can decline their assistance or support. The FLO is nominated to wing/installation commanders by unit commanders and is provided initial training by Services squadron or Services division. They are expected to make contact with the families to which they are assigned at least daily until the funeral is over or the family wishes otherwise. They will help families conduct benefits-related business with other Air Force personnel (casualty affairs, mortuary affairs, etc...) and to work with other supporting military personnel as needed. The FLOs role is to help facilitate communications between the family and subject matter experts and investigators. They will not attempt to perform the duties of other functions or subject matter experts described above but will simply relay questions or concerns to the appropriate personnel. FLOs may be Officers or Senior Noncommissioned Officers (E-7 or higher).

DEATH IN YOUR SQUADRON

1. Notification: When an active duty member or dependent death occurs, eventually, someone on base is notified---the security police, hospital, mortuary officer, command post, casualty representative, group, wing, or squadron commander. If you are contacted by anyone about a death, call the command post on base unless the caller tells you the command post has been contacted. The command post will make all other notifications.

a. **Active Duty Deaths:** The on call casualty assistance representative will be contacted by the command post and to ensure the PADD and NOK is officially notified of the death(as listed on the DD Form 93). Notification is made by a notification officer (all squadron commanders serve as notification officers), a chaplain and if determined appropriate, a medical representative. If NOK lives in the area, the squadron commander will make notification. If NOK is outside of area, the responsibility is carried out with the cooperation of other commanders and HQ AFPC/DPWCS.

b. **Dependents of Active Duty Personnel:** The unit commander accompanied by the appropriate staff members (i.e., first sergeant, chaplain, medical, etc..) makes the notification. If the NOK has already been notified, a visit to the family is still appropriate.

2. Notification to Mortuary Officer: The mortuary officer should be notified of the death by the command post or the appropriate local authority off base. Once notification has been made to the PADD, a call to the mortuary officer should be made to advise that PADD has been notified. The mortuary officer will then place a call to the PADD advising them of whom he is and his job. At that time he will either plan a visit (if local area) or arrange for a good time to call back for a telephonic briefing.

3. Recovery of Remains: This can be accomplished several different ways depending on circumstances of death and where the death occurred. If death occurred outside of base, remains are probably under the jurisdiction of the local county coroner or medical examiner. The remains could be at a local mortuary, hospital, or morgue. If on base, the local county coroner or medical examiner could still have jurisdiction. Either way, it will be the mortuary officer's responsibility to locate the remains and procure the release of the remains.

4. Secure Personal Property: The mortuary officer, working with the unit commander, security forces or local civil authorities if off base, will need to ensure that the members personal property is safeguarded and secure. This could include offices, workspaces, vehicles, or quarters on or off base.

5. Summary Court Officer: Active duty deaths only. The installation commander will appoint a summary court officer. The mortuary officer will brief the SCO on his duties and responsibilities. The SCO should not be the remains escort as no SCO actions can take place while SCO is escorting remains to destination.

6. Explanation of Mortuary Benefits: Once positive identification has been established, the mortuary officer will arrange his official mortuary briefing with the PADD. If a search and

recovery operation is ongoing, the mortuary officer will need to stay in contact daily with PADD to brief on search and recovery operations. Once briefing is completed, the mortuary officer can proceed with disposition (i.e., funeral homes, cemetery, transportation, escorts, etc.).

7. Transportation of Remains/Escort: The mortuary officer in conjunction with the funeral home will handle all arrangements for shipment of remains as well as travel for the escort.

NOTE: MILAIR is not authorized in CONUS, including Alaska and Hawaii.

8. Honors: Military honors are authorized for active duty personnel, retirees, and veterans. The mortuary officer will work with the honor guard from the closest installation at final destination to perform honors.

9. Entitlements for Mortuary Services: The mortuary officer will handle all entitlements dealing with expenses associated with funeral services. The mortuary officer will work directly with the PADD and funeral home to ensure they are comfortable with their decisions. Direction will be in the form of written, signed documents.

10. Personal Property: The mortuary officer will work with the SCO and TMO folks to make sure all personal property is shipped to the authorized recipient.

11. General:

a. There are considerable differences in benefits and available services when dealing with active duty deaths versus dependent deaths.

b. The mortuary affairs office and casualty assistance office are two distinct organizations that deal in different types of benefits. Do not confuse the two offices.

c. There are considerable differences in mortuary actions taken when death occurs outside of CONUS as opposed to within CONUS.

NOTE: The best help you can give the PADD and NOK during this tragic time is to console him/her and offer to assist in any way you can. However, any questions regarding the death, remains, search and recovery, arrangement of funeral services and entitlements should be forwarded to the mortuary officer. Blunt and inflexible as this statement is, most confusion, irritation, and dissatisfaction in how the Air Force assists the PADD occurs at this stage as a result of providing incorrect or inappropriate information. Call the mortuary officer regularly to receive an update on actions.

ACTIVE DUTY ENTITLEMENTS

1. **Mortuary Entitlements:** The Air Force will provide the following services for members who die on active duty:

A. Preparation of Remains.

B. Clothing:

- Service Dress Uniform
- Flight Suit
- Civilian Clothing

C. Casket:

- 18 Gauge Metal Sealer (Silver)
- Solid Hardwood

D. Urn (if cremation desired):

- Solid Bronze
- Hardwood

E. Transportation:

- Commercial Air
- Hearse

F. Escort: (Only one escort Authorized)

- Appointed
- Special

G. Travel to Attend Funeral Services:

- Spouse
- Dependent Children under 21
- Parents
- Or, if none above, the PADD and two others

H. Full Military Honors:

- OIC or NCOIC
- Pallbearers
- Firing Party
- Bugler
- Color Guard
- Chaplain, (If NOK Desires)
- Flyover (If Authorized)

I. Flag & Hardwood Flag Case:

- Presented to NOK

J. Headstone & National Cemetery Space:

- Provide by Veterans Administration

K. Summary Court Officer

NOTE: The mortuary officer at your installation is responsible for briefing the above entitlements.

FREQUENT PROBLEMS

1. Extending entitlements or making promises to NOK that are not authorized or can't be kept:

A. Transportation of Remains: Transportation of remains in CONUS, including Alaska and Hawaii is authorized using a commercial carrier or hearse. **MILAIR IS NOT AUTHORIZED.** The mortuary officer at your installation will brief the family and arrange transportation of remains.

B. Travel to Attend Funeral Service: The spouse, dependent children under 21 and Parents are authorized to travel to the funeral service. If there is no spouse and the children are minors, the parents would become the PADD, therefore their travel along with the children would be authorized. Consult your mortuary officer if the family dynamics are beyond the scope of this guidance. The mortuary officer at your installation will brief the family and arrange these services.

NOTE: THIS DOES NOT INCLUDE TRAVEL OF FAMILY MEMBERS TO ATTEND A BASE MEMORIAL SERVICE.

C. Escorts: ONLY ONE ESCORT IS AUTHORIZED. The family can request a special escort or an escort will be appointed by the mortuary officer. Any "UNIT REP" that a squadron promises will be funded by the squadron and will have no official duties for mortuary purposes. The mortuary officer at the shipping installation will brief the family and make all arrangements for the escort. Overseas deaths, the commander of the military aircraft will act as the escort to the APOD. Once the remains arrive at the APOD, an escort will be appointed or if requested by the NOK, the special escort will perform their duties.

D. Flag & Hardwood Flag Cases: Only three flags & hardwood flag cases are authorized. They are authorized as follows: One to spouse, and one to parents if married. If parents are not married, then one to each parent. If there is not a spouse or parent, then the flag would be authorized to go to the person directing disposition of the remains. These flags are not authorized to be used at the base memorial service.

2. Providing incorrect status to NOK:

A. Questions related to search and recovery, identification and viewability of remains should be directed to the mortuary officer at your installation. Exception: Overseas case inquiries should be directed to AFSVA/SVOM toll free number for use in CONUS.

3. Not directing NOK inquiries to the mortuary officer or casualty assistance representative

A. The casualty assistance representative will brief the family on the following benefits: Death Gratuity, Servicemen's Group Life Insurance, Unpaid Pay and Allowances, Dependent Indemnity Compensation, Survivor Benefits Program, Social Security, ID Cards, Medical and Dental Benefits, Educational Entitlements, Future use of base Exchange and Commissary, and DD Form-1300 (Report of Casualty).

B. The mortuary affairs officer will brief the family on the following: Funeral and Burial Entitlements, Memorial Service Arrangements, Military Honors, Headstone and Memorial Marker Program, Search and Recovery Operations, Identification, Viewability of Remains and BNR entitlements.



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS AIR FORCE SERVICES AGENCY

place this memo on the unit letterhead

DATE:

MEMORANDUM FOR: (NAME AND ADDRESS OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERY)

FROM: (DECEASED MEMBERS SQUADRON COMMANDER)

SUBJECT: STATEMENT OF GOOD STANDING

1. This letter is to inform you that Staff Sergeant John J. Doe, SSN# 000-00-0000, was a **(Flight Engineer)** in good standing, assigned here with **(MAJOR COMMAND)**, **(WING)**, **(SQUADRON)**, **(BASE)** at the time of **HIS/HER** death, **(DATE)**.
2. There were no pending actions against **HIM/HER**. **HIS/HER** service was honorable.

(SQUADRON CC NAME), Colonel, USAF
(NAME OF SQUADRON)
Commander



**MORTUARY
AFFAIRS**