



# MORTUARY AFFAIRS

TUCSON, ARIZONA

DAVIS-MONTHAN AIR FORCE BASE



**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE**  
355TH SERVICES SQUADRON (ACC)  
DAVIS-MONTHAN AIR FORCE BASE, ARIZONA

**MEMORANDUM FOR UNIT COMMANDERS AND FIRST SERGEANTS**

**FROM:** 355 SVS/CC

**SUBJECT:** Mortuary Affairs Information Guide for Commanders and First Sergeants

1. Certainly the most sensitive and definitely the most important part of my job, as 355 Services Squadron Commander, is my role as base 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 help you 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.

**Attachment:**

1. Quick Reference POCs
2. Key Players
3. If a Death Occurs in Your Squadron...
4. Active Duty Entitlements
5. Common Issues

# QUICK REFERENCE POINT OF CONTACT

## DMAFB LISTINGS

Mortuary Officer	228-5596
Mortuary NCOIC	228-5964
Casualty Assistance Representative	228-3686/3664
Chaplains Office	228-5411
Base Operator	228-1110
Command Post	228-7400
Security Forces Law Enforcement Desk	228-3200
Regional Veterans Administration	228-2928
Family Support Center	228-5690
Base Honor Guard	228-4189
Public Affairs	228-5092
Legal Assistance	228-5242
Mental Health Care (CISM)	228-5283

## OUTSIDE AGENCIES

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 ACC Mortuary Affairs	DSN 574-2921
Tucson Police	746-4500

# KEY PLAYERS

1. **Headquarters, Air Force Mortuary Affairs:** Provides operational control over all phases of the worldwide AF Mortuary program and develops procedures, techniques, and mortuary processes for operations. Provides technical, and specialized assistance at installation or MAJCOM request, for search and recovery (SAR), identification of remains, preparation and disposition of remains, and any other mortuary affairs related concern.

2. **Mortuary Officer (MO) & Alternates:** The base MO 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 MO by the local authorities, base hospital, base command post, security police, commanders, or whoever first learns of death. The MO is responsible for the administration and operation of all activities related to the mortuary affairs program. These include: briefing the next-of-kin (NOK) of mortuary entitlements; SAR of remains of personnel from accidents or disasters; initiating funeral home arrangements selected by NOK; initiating transportation of remains to the final resting place; establishing disposition of personal property of active duty members; training escorts, summary court officers (SCO) for active duty members, and family liaison officers (FLO) for active duty members; arranging honors, and completing paperwork associated with these activities.

**NOTE: The above programs and duties are the responsibility only of the Base MO and designated alternates.**

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. 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. **Next of Kin (NOK):** 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. Recipient of Personal Property:** As with the NOK 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. Other civil statutes determine ownership. 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 NOK through the management procedures necessary to close out a member's service. The MO 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 MO. 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 NOK may request, by name, a civilian or military "Special Escort" or request that the MO 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).

# IF A DEATH OCCURS IN YOUR SQUADRON...

1. **Notification:** When an active duty member or dependent death occurs, eventually, someone on base is notified--the security police, hospital, MO, 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 NOK is officially notified of the death. 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 next of kin has already been notified, a visit to the family is still appropriate.

2. **Notification to MO:** The MO should be notified of the death by the command post or the appropriate local authority off base. Once notification has been made to NOK, a call to the MO should be made to advise that NOK has been notified. The MO will then place a call to NOK advising them of whom he is and his job. At that time he will either plan a visit (if local area) or coordinate with the MO at the base nearest the NOK to ensure a face-to-face visit. This visit usually takes place following the Casualty Affairs benefits briefing, both within 12 hours of NOK being notified of the death.

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 MO's responsibility to locate the remains and procure the release of the remains.

4. **Secure Personal Property:** The MO, 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 (SCO):** (for Active duty deaths only) The installation commander will appoint an SCO on official orders prepared by the MO. The MO will brief the SCO on his/her duties and responsibilities. He/She will typically be a company grade officer from the same squadron as the deceased. The SCO should not be the remains escort as no SCO actions can take place while SCO is escorting remains to destination.

6. **Family Liaison Officer (FLO):** (for Active duty deaths only) The installation commander will appoint a FLO via memo prepared by the MO. When assigning a FLO, a Commander should look for someone who is compassionate, of equal rank or higher (E7 or higher), and have a similar background to the deceased. The MO will brief the FLO on his/her duties and responsibilities.

**7. Explanation of Mortuary Benefits:** Once positive identification has been established, the MO will arrange his official mortuary briefing with the NOK. If a search and recovery operation is ongoing, the MO will need to stay in contact daily with NOK to brief on search and recovery operations. Once briefing is completed, the MO can proceed with disposition (i.e., funeral homes, cemetery, transportation, escorts, etc.).

**8. Escort:** If desired by NOK, the unit commander will appoint an escort officer of equal or greater rank than the deceased. The MO will brief the escort on his/her duties and responsibilities and provide the travel orders for the escort.

**9. Transportation of Remains/Escort:** The MO in conjunction with the funeral home will handle all arrangements for shipment of remains.

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

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

**11. Entitlements for Mortuary Services:** The MO will handle all entitlements dealing with expenses associated with funeral services. The MO will work directly with the NOK and funeral home to ensure they are comfortable with their decisions.

**12. Personal Property:** The MO will work with the SCO and TMO folks to make sure all personal property is shipped to the authorized recipient.

**13. 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 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 MO. Blunt and inflexible as this statement is, most confusion, irritation, and dissatisfaction in how the Air Force assists the NOK occurs at this stage as a result of providing incorrect or inappropriate information. Call the MO 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 (if desired):**

- 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:**

- Primary Next of Kin
- Dependent Children under 21

**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**

**L. Family Liaison Officer**

**NOTE:** The MO at your installation is responsible for briefing the above entitlements.

# COMMON ISSUES

## **1. Be careful not to extend entitlements or make 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 MO at your installation will brief the family and arrange transportation of remains.

**B. Travel to Attend Funeral Service:** The primary NOK and dependent children under 21 are authorized to travel to the funeral service. Parents are authorized if there is no spouse. The MO 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 MO. Any "UNIT REP" that a squadron promises will be funded by the squadron and will have no official duties for mortuary purposes. The MO 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. Be careful when providing status info to NOK:**

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

## **3. Direct NOK inquiries to the MO or CAR (either directly or through the FLO)**

**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 MO 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, View ability of Remains and BNR entitlements.