



Understanding Investigations After the Death of a Service Member: An Information Sheet for Families

Purpose:

After the death of a loved one who served in the military, several investigations may take place. These investigations help determine the facts and circumstances surrounding the death. This information sheet is designed to help you understand the investigations, who conducts them and how to request copies of the reports.

Section 1: Survivor information

Full name:

Relationship to service member:

Phone number:

Email address:

Section 2: Service member information

Full name:

Rank:

Branch of service:

Date of death:

Location of incident:

Section 3: Investigation details

Military Criminal Investigative Organization family liaison contact info:

Name:

Phone:

Email:

Organization conducting investigation: (check one)

Army Criminal Investigation Command

Air Force Office of Special Investigations, or OSI

Naval Criminal Investigative Service, or NCIS

Coast Guard Investigative Service

Other:

Section 4: Types of investigations

Below are the potential investigations that may be initiated after the death of a service member. Not all investigations are conducted for every death; the specific circumstances will determine which are required.

Investigation Type	Purpose and Investigating Entity	How to Obtain the Report
Line of Duty, or LOD	An LOD determines if the death occurred in the line of duty, which can affect benefits. It's conducted by the service member's branch (Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force).	A "Not in Line of Duty" determination is provided to recipients of the Survivor Benefit Plan. Otherwise, the report can be requested via a Freedom of Information Act request, also known as a FOIA request.
Medicolegal: AFMES	The Armed Forces Medical Examiner System may conduct a forensic pathology investigation, including an autopsy, to determine the cause and manner of death.	The report can be requested using AFMES Form 3. AFMES determines when it has jurisdiction to investigate.
Military Criminal Investigation	This is conducted when criminal activity is suspected. These are performed by the specific branch's criminal investigative organization (Army Criminal Investigation Division, Navy Naval Criminal Investigative Service, Air Force Office of Special Investigations). In these cases, the investigative body is required to appoint a family liaison to keep the family informed. The MCIO must provide updates to the appropriate service Casualty Office at least every 30 days. For certain cases classified as "special victim" incidents, there is a monthly collaboration requirement to review the investigation's progress. The final report can be requested via a FOIA request.	The final report can be requested via a FOIA request.

15-6/JAGMAN/ Commander Directed Investigation, or CDI	A CDI is a commander's administrative tool used to gather facts and make recommendations for incidents like suspected misconduct or property loss. The Army is required to conduct an AR 15-6 for every death.	The final report can be requested via a FOIA request.
Legal Accident Investigation	A formal investigation is required for certain serious accidents (mishaps), especially when litigation is anticipated or there is high public interest. It is conducted by the service branch.	The next of kin will be briefed on the findings. The report is releasable to the public.
Safety Investigation	The purpose of this investigation is to prevent future mishaps. It is an internal, privileged report conducted by the service branch.	This report is privileged and not releasable to the public. Its findings are for internal military use, only to improve safety.
Local Authorities Investigation	Civilian authorities (e.g., city or county police, medical examiner) may conduct their own investigation, typically for deaths that are unattended, unexpected or occur off base.	Follow the guidance and procedures of the local city, county, or state authority to request reports.
DOD Suicide Event Report (DODSER)	This report is part of a government-wide suicide surveillance program. It gathers data on all suspected suicides.	This is an annual statistical report for public release and does not contain details of individual cases. An individual case report is not available for release to the family through this mechanism.

Section 5: Helpful references and governing policies

The investigations listed above are governed by a variety of War Department and military service-specific regulations such as Department of Defense Directives, Army Regulations, Department of the Air Force Instructions and Judge Advocate General Instructions. These regulations include:

- Line of duty, or LOD: AR 600-8-4, DAFI 36-2910, Navy MILPERSMAN 1770-060, JAGINST 5800.7G
- Medicolegal, AFMES: 10 U.S. Code § 1471, AR 638-8
- Safety investigations: DOD Instruction 6055.07, AR 385-10, DAFI 91-204
- Legal accident investigations: DODI 6055.07, AR 15-6, AFI 51-307
- Military criminal investigations: DODI 5505.03, AR 195-2 , DODI 5505.10
- Commander directed investigations: AR 15-6, JAGMAN (JAG Instruction 5800.7G)
- Suicide event report: AR 600-63, DAFI 90-5001
- Personnel casualty matters, policies and procedures: DODI 1300.18

Section 6: Freedom of Information Act

For many of the reports, you will need to submit a FOIA request. Use the primary FOIA website to start your request or identify the correct agency's contact information for your request: <https://www.foia.gov/agency-search.html>.

Section 7: Additional information

Families that have concerns about the thoroughness and accuracy of death investigations can submit requests for assistance to higher level commanders, the corresponding service inspector general or the DOW IG through the hotline: 800-424-9098.

- Military OneSource: <https://www.militaryonesource.mil>
 - Military investigations article: <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/casualty-mortuary-affairs/casualty-assistance/military-death-investigations/>
 - Military investigations eLearning course: <https://millifelearning.militaryonesource.mil/course/investigations>
 - The Days Ahead Essential Papers: <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/documents/the-days-ahead-essential-papers-english-version-d33/>
 - FAQs About Medicolegal Death Investigation: <https://dha.mil/Offices-and-Programs/AFMES/AFMES-FAQs>
 - DOW Directives Division: <https://www.esd.whs.mil/DD/>
 - Army Publishing Directorate: <https://armypubs.army.mil/>
 - Department of the Air Force e-Publishing: <https://www.e-publishing.af.mil/Product-Index>
 - Department of the Navy Issuances: <https://www.secnav.navy.mil/doni/JagInstructions.aspx>
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