

Military OneSource Podcast — Military In Lasting Tribute

Episode transcript

Intro voiceover:

Welcome to the Military OneSource podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department, with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit militaryonesource.mil.

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody.

The Defense Department's Military In Lasting Tribute is an online memorial dedicated to recognizing and remembering our service members who died while serving honorably on active duty from 1985 to the present. Joining me to discuss this will be Lisa Valentine, program manager for the Defense Department's Casualty, Mortuary Affairs, and Military Funeral Honors Program. Also joining us little later in the program will be Jennifer Carazo, who is a Gold Star wife and president of the Sugar Bear Foundation. Welcome to the both of you.

Lisa Valentine:

Thank you, Bruce.

Jennifer Carazo:

Thank you.

Bruce:

Excellent. So, Lisa, let's just begin with you. First of all, welcome back to the podcast, and why don't you tell us a little bit about what is Military In Lasting Tribute and how it came to be?

Lisa:

Military In Lasting Tribute is the Defense Department's online memorial, and it's dedicated to recognizing and remembering our service members who died while serving honorably on active duty from 1985 to the present. And it came to be as we met with survivors whose loved one died while serving our nation. And the biggest takeaway from that is they want to make sure that we never forget the sacrifices that their service members have made and how they died while serving our nation.

And what's really unique about this particular memorial is that this is for all of our active-duty deaths. It includes what we call peacetime deaths, as well. So, you don't have to be killed on the battlefield, but it's all deaths. Because we treat them all equally.

Bruce:

So, Lisa, you mentioned talking with families of service members. What are the sort of things that they said, in conveying to you the need or the value of this memorial?

Lisa:

The need and the value of the tribute is to ensure that those who die while serving our nation are not forgotten. And it doesn't matter how you died or where you died, but it's how you served. And so, this memorial, what's unique about it is that it's for all deaths on active duty.

So, a peacetime death. And examples of that could be you have someone that died from cancer, and that could be as a result of exposure from the burn pits or perhaps it's a car accident or they deployed five times and then, they're out in a training environment, they die in a training accident, or it could be as a result of suffering from PTSD and they died by suicide. And so, this memorial is for all who served and died while serving our nation.

Bruce:

So how long has this memorial been available to survivors? And how long will it remain online?

Lisa:

The Military In Lasting Tribute memorial launched on Veterans Day in 2021, and it will live forever in the digital landscape.

Bruce:

So, who can submit a service member for recognition in this memorial?

Lisa:

The submission process is opened to family members who have access to the service member's pertinent information that you can find on DD form 1300 or what we call, it's the Report of Casualty.

Bruce:

Once someone is able to submit a family member to this memorial, and what kind of a photo can they submit?

Lisa:

You don't necessarily have to submit a photo, but what you can do is go into the memorial. And on the top line, there's one, it's called "Add a Loved One." And so, when you click on that link, you have the ability to add your loved one's name, and you would then check what service that they served in. And so, then there would be a banner, but if you want to then add a photo, what we recommend is you want the photo to be very clear and you want it to be a photo of them. We don't want to have photos with other people in that picture, because the focus is honoring that particular service member.

We'd love it if they're in their military uniform, but it's not a requirement. And if they're not in military uniform, then we like them to be in some kind of a business suit or something like that, just to put them in the very best light that we can.

Bruce:

And can a family member add personal details of any sort to the website?

Lisa:

Today, we are not able to do that. However, that's what we hope to have in the future. We plan to expand this memorial, as our abilities expand.

Bruce:

Family members who have already completed their submission will be, at some point, able to go back and add more to it?

Lisa:

In the future. We don't have a timeframe, but in the future, that is our goal.

Bruce:

Understood. Not holding you to it, but maybe we'll do a podcast on that in the future. So how has the memorial been received among survivors that you've had the opportunity to meet with?

Lisa:

It really makes a positive impact, and it's one of those memorials that you can share digitally. And it's one that you can carry in your pocket. And so, when you have that moment, and you want to talk about your loved one, you want to share their story, you can pull it out on your phone and you can share it there, or you can pull it up on a computer. But it's always there. I think the biggest thing is that you can share it with others.

Bruce:

Well, I'd like to bring in Jennifer Carazo and spend a little bit of time and talk with you. If you could begin by telling us a little bit about yourself and also about your service member.

Jennifer:

Sure. Well, thank you for having me. As you previously mentioned, I'm a Gold Star wife. I, unfortunately, joined this community back in July of 2010, when I lost my husband, Mario. He was serving over in Afghanistan at the time. And on July 22, 2010, he and Maj. James Weis were shot down and killed. I have two children. So at the time, I was very consumed with raising them and sort of moving forward in life and trying to provide for them, but slowly started getting involved with different organizations and giving back.

And lo and behold, in 2016, I had an opportunity to form the Sugar Bear Foundation in Mario's honor. Sugar Bear was his call sign, and it was very fitting, if you see pictures of him. And he is also included in the memorial, just a very happy, jovial spirit. Really sort of captured the essence of the cereal, Sugar Bear. But had this opportunity to continue what Mario wanted to do, and that was serve and give back. And so, we are focused on serving my fellow Gold Star spouses and surviving spouses and their children, with career, education, financial and wellness programs.

Bruce:

Well, we thank you very much for that. We appreciate all that you're doing for the community. We're going to put a link to the Sugar Bear Foundation in the program notes, so people can visit the site and learn more about it.

Jennifer:

Thank you.

Bruce:

Now, how did you come to learn about the memorial?

Jennifer:

Sure. I actually had the honor, the honor and privilege, to meet with Lisa, gosh, in person now. I think it's been a little over a year ago. She gave me a wonderful tour at the Pentagon, and we've become fast friends in this circle, this community. And she had told me about it then, about the opportunity to be able to add Mario's information and his picture, which I just think it's amazing, because it, not only acknowledges the service member and their sacrifice, but in essence, the family's sacrifice, too. And it's really preserving history, which I think is just so important for our future generations.

Bruce:

Yeah, there's a lot to unpack there. First of all, Lisa's a very easy person to like, so that's understood. But if you could talk more about the memorial, what does it mean to the people around you, maybe even beyond family? What does it mean to have that memorial as a whole, but also, of your husband?

Jennifer:

Sure. Well, kind of connecting a little bit to what I was saying there. Future generations are going to be able to look up Mario and learn about him, and it's sort of a prompt, if you will, to maybe say, "OK, who is he? What did he do?" And just share a little bit of information about his life and his service. But also, it sort of reinforces that idea of the freedoms and the liberty that we all enjoy now have been fought for and sacrificed by our military, by our active-duty military community. Those are lessons that are very important, I think, especially for the civilian community, and as I said, future generations.

Bruce:

I can think of the times that I would go to a cemetery, and I would see a gravestone. And there would be a name and a date and not much more than that, perhaps a rank. And you really want to learn more. And this website really seems to do that. And so, what has it been like for you to share your service member's tribute with other people?

Jennifer:

I think, for me, my husband was a very, very humble individual. And so, for me, really, it goes back again to the families and just to make people understand that not only are we losing so many service members, whether, as Lisa was saying previously, whether it is to suicide or cancer or training accidents or on the battlefield, they put their lives on the line every day. Every day that they leave to go to the office, so to speak, they're putting their lives at risks and the deployments and all that that entails and puts on our military families. That's something that I think really needs to be emphasized, just again, to the general population, just to understand what it means to be both in former generations, but today, with our active duty, all that that entails, not just for the service member, but also, for the spouses and the children and extended families.

Bruce:

And it does entail more than, say, combat, but it may, as you say, be cancer. It may be suicide; it may be a training accident. It could be a number of things, but it's all service. And do you talk about that with the people that you know, if you are trying to talk to people about whether or not they should be submitting their loved ones to the tribute?

Jennifer:

Absolutely. In fact, kind of connecting to the Sugar Bear Foundation, we stress a loss is a loss, and it's so important, especially in this day and age, we need to have an emphasis on cancer and the growing numbers there, and suicide. If they served, it doesn't matter, a loss is a loss. A family still has to pick up the pieces afterward, so that is very important to me. And I have lost friends in all facets there, and I've seen how it impacts the family. And so, very important to emphasize that, that their loved ones served and they need to be a part of this memorial.

Bruce:

Well, Jennifer Carazo, thank you so much for joining the podcast. I wonder if you have any final words on this topic?

Jennifer:

Again, just very grateful for all that, with Lisa's work and Military OneSource and these opportunities to share our loved ones and their stories. It really makes a positive impact on the family, and it gives them hope and it makes them feel connected to this Gold Star community, which I think is equally important.

Bruce:

And Lisa, can we bring you back for any final words?

Lisa:

Sure. I just recommend going out and looking at the memorial. Whether you're a family member or not, there may be one of your comrades or a friend or another family member that's on there, that you would like to just pay your respects to. And just take a moment and just never forget the sacrifices of our men and women who serve and protect our freedoms every day.

Bruce:

Thank you to the both of you for your service and your passion for the community. I really appreciate both of you taking time to be on the podcast.

Lisa:

Thank you, Bruce.

Jennifer:

Thank you.

Bruce:

Jennifer Carazo is a Gold Star wife and president of the Sugar Bear Foundation. Lisa Valentine is program manager for the Defense Department's Casualty, Mortuary Affairs, and Military Funeral Honors Program.

We really appreciate the both of you being with us today and we want to remind everybody that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We are a website, a call center. We're on social media, and we are a podcast. So go ahead and subscribe wherever you listen to your podcasts, because we cover a wide range of topics, that help military families navigate military life.

I'm Bruce Moody. Thank you very much for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.