



**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES AIR FORCE  
WASHINGTON, DC**

MEMORANDUM FOR FOR DISTRUBUTION  
ALL MAJCOM/CD & A1  
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FROM: HQ USAF/A1  
1040 Air Force Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20330-1040

SUBJECT: Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Program and Travel Guidance in Response to  
Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

This guidance memorandum implements interim changes to current Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Program operations effective immediately in response to the Novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) national emergency. Department of the Air Force issues this document pending Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) guidance currently being prepared. Upon release of OSD's guidance, Air Force will modify this memorandum accordingly.

We developed these limitations based on DoD's priorities for the COVID-19 response, shelter-in-place orders, and the Office of Management Budget Guidance M-20-16 in support of the population we serve as part of the casualty and mortuary programs. Their intention is to help:

- Protect all Service members, Department of Defense (DoD) civilians, DoD contractors, and our family members.
- Safeguard our national security missions and capabilities.
- Support the interagency for a whole-of-government approach to combating the virus.

We anticipate resuming normal casualty and mortuary operations after authorities terminate this National Emergency.

**1. Emergency Family Member Travel (Mission Essential Travel for Very Seriously Injured/Ill (VSI) and Non-Mission Essential Travel for Seriously Injured/Ill (SI) and Hostile Not Seriously Wounded/Injured.**

Statute provides travel to the bedside for up to three family members for Airmen who become wounded, injured or ill, become hospitalized and the physician/Medical Treatment Commander determine the member is Very Seriously Injured/Ill (VSI), Seriously Injured/Ill (SI) or Hostile Not-Seriously Injured/Ill (Hostile-NSI).

## **ACTIONS**

- a. Bedside travel is limited to those family members required to make decisions and in only the case of an Airman who is considered by medical authorities to be VSI, where death is imminent (within 72 hours per definition) and end of life decisions may be required. VSI travel only within CONUS, Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico or other US Territories with a CDC Level 1 or Level 2 travel health notice and access to the medical facility is certified by the requesting physician and Medical Facility or Medical Group Commander. VSI bedside travel will not be executed from, or to OCONUS, or to any local area, state or US Territory with a CDC Level 3 travel health notice.
- b. Bedside travel is temporarily ceased for those who are SI or Hostile-NSI until travel restrictions are lifted. Exceptions may be granted by AFPC/CC or Executive Director where adequate justification is provided and access to the medical facility is certified by the requesting physician and Medical Facility or Medical Group Commander.

### **2. Escort and Unit Representatives Escorting Remains of Service Members and Civilian Employees to Final Destination.**

Per DoDI 1300.18 para. 4.4, the military and military-contracted aircraft commanders are designated as the official escort for remains traveling from OCONUS to the mortuary at Dover AFB. Uniformed military escorts are not required until the deceased are prepared by the CONUS Port Mortuary.

## **ACTIONS**

- a. OCONUS Escorts from place of death to AFMAO at Dover AFB, DE will be the military or military-contracted aircraft commander.
- b. For Air Force, we will use Air Force Mortuary Affairs Operations (AFMAO) Active Duty members assigned to AFMAO to escort remains from the Dover mortuary to the receiving airport (this escort would return to Dover via the same aircraft). A receiving escort will assume responsibility of escorting the remains from the receiving airport to the receiving funeral home or place of final disposition.
- c. Shelter of remains will be funded under primary mortuary entitlements at the Government's expense until further notice. Family may elect to wait to transport or inter their loved one until this national emergency is over or until additional guidance is provided

### **3. Dignified Transfer (DT) Travel (Non-Mission Essential Travel).**

Air Force will continue to invite family members to Dover Air Force Base (DAFB) to witness the DT of their Fallen. Consistent with actions in response to COVID-19, we have modified DT actions to keep family members, the teams assigned at DAFB, DVs, and other individuals as safe as possible while executing DTs with dignity, honor and respect. .

## ACTIONS

- Family: Family member attendance is temporarily limited to PNOK and immediate family members +2, unless the Director, AF Services (AF/AIS) grants a waiver request from the PNOK. Families must be health screened prior to travel and upon arrival at DAFB. In addition, all members who are directly involved with the DT, will be screened. The Air Force may temporarily suspend family access to DTs when shelter-in-place rules are in effect.
- Media: Media is limited to internal media, a press pool feed to be distributed to members of the press if external, and internal media is selected by the Primary Next of Kin.
- Carry Teams: For Air Force, we will use the Air Force carry teams at Dover AFB in lieu of having Air Force Honor Guard carry teams travelling to Dover.
- Unit Members: Unit member attendance is temporarily limited to the Commander and a Senior Enlisted member, who must be health screened prior to travel. If either of these members are unable to attend, we authorize a substitute.
- DVs:
  - Officiating officer: A GO is still required to attend the DT for this role.
  - Other DVs. In light of the national emergency, DVs should determine their attendance consistent with safety precautions. We ask that Principal DVs discuss attendance with respective senior offices in an effort to limit the number of DV attendees, thereby curtailing their potential exposure and possibly the exposure of other DT members.

#### **4. Casualty Notifications (Mission Essential Travel) and Casualty/Mortuary Assistance to Survivors (Non-Mission Essential Travel).**

Statute provides for the Service Secretary to pay the necessary expenses to notify Next-of-Kin (NOK) when an Airman becomes a Casualty. DoD and AF Policy stipulates how NOK notifications will be conducted. DoD and AF policy requires casualty and mortuary assistance to be delivered to recipients of benefits/entitlements and to the Person Authorized to Direct Disposition (PADD). There is no known statute or DoD policy requiring Casualty/Mortuary assistance or the mortuary entitlements briefing only be provided in person. Additionally, AFI 34-501 requires Mortuary Officers/FARs to deliver assistance to the PADD and eligible recipients of Mortuary Benefits and Entitlements

## ACTIONS

- In-person notifications will continue within CONUS, Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico or other US Territories and OCONUS CDC/Department of State Level 1 or Level 2 travel health notice locations and where permissible in accordance with state/local restrictions. To limit force exposure, the team will consist of no more than two military members, and not include a Chaplain or Medical Representative until the National Emergency is terminated. Where in-person notifications cannot be made in Level 1 or Level 2 travel

health notice locations, telephonic notification will be executed to avoid delaying NOK knowing the fate of their loved ones. Personnel executing in-person notifications will complete the COVID-19 questionnaire to protect the health/welfare of survivors being notified. All notification in Level 3 locations will be made via telephone.

- The Air Force will provide the casualty and mortuary entitlements briefing to the eligible/designated recipients and Person Authorized to Direct Disposition of remains (PADD) remotely until restrictions are lifted. Casualty Assistance Representatives, mortuary officers, and mortuary technicians can accomplish document exchange via email or FedEx.

#### **5. Past Conflict Coincidental (COIN) Travel/Missing Persons Reintegration NOK Travel (Mission Essential Travel).**

Statute provides for next of kin travel to attend annual briefings and receive information in the government's latest efforts to investigate, excavate, recover and identify unaccounted-for Airmen from our Nations Past Conflicts.

Statute also provides for next of kin travel to the reintegration location of Airmen who are captured or detained and returned to U.S. control.

#### **ACTIONS**

- COIN: Extend NOK travel if the National League of POW/MIA Families and DPAA host the annual government briefings to survivors of unaccounted-for Airmen from past conflicts in Korea, Southeast Asia and Cold War era.
- Reintegration: Travel only within CONUS, Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico or other US Territories with a CDC Level 1 or Level 2 travel health notice and/or where NOK access to the medical facility is certified by the requesting physician and Medical Facility or Medical Group Commander, if required.

#### **6. Installation and Unit Memorial Travel (Non-Essential Mission Travel).**

The Air Force is authorized to provide travel and transportation allowance to eligible family members to attend one installation or unit memorial service within 24-months from the death of their family member. Assumption is that installation and unit commanders have postponed any installation or unit memorial services currently scheduled, until the national emergency is terminated.

#### **ACTION**

- Installation and family travel to unit memorials is suspended until further notice.

#### **7. Military Funeral Honors (Mission Essential Travel).**

Pursuant to Section 1491 of Title 10 U.S.C., military funeral honors shall be provided upon request for the funeral of any veteran, except when military honors are prohibited. Additionally, "The Secretary of Defense may waive any requirement provided in or pursuant to

this section when the Secretary considers it necessary to do so to meet the requirements of war, national emergency, or a contingency operation or other military requirements.”

Suspending travel for military funeral honors is meant to heighten our efforts in protecting surviving family members and USAF Honor Guard members from potential exposure to COVID-19.

## **ACTIONS**

- Until OSD publishes guidance, Air Force asks that installations leaders and Force Support Squadron representatives work with families and local funeral directors requesting they suspend requests for MFHs until end of the COVID-19 national emergency.
- If families insist on having MFHs present, installation leaders may provide the two-person detail for veterans, retirees, and for active duty members, given the current national emergency and in line with the law.

My points of contact for this memorandum are Col Brian Eddy, Air Force Mortuary Operation Commander (AFMAO/CC), (302) 677-2920, and Mr. Todd Rose, Air Force Personnel Center, Chief of Casualty Affairs, (210) 860-6111.

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