

# Manual of the Medical Department

NAVMED P-117

**Department of the Navy**  
Bureau of Medicine and Surgery  
2300 E Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20372-5300

## **Chapter 17: Deaths**

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### Contents

#### **General**

17-1 Decedent Affairs Manual

17-2 Autopsies

#### **Certificate of Death**

17-3 General Requirements

17-4 Type of Certificate

17-5 Copy Distribution

17-6 Cost of Civil Certificates of Death

## Chapter 17: Deaths

### 17-1. Decedent Affairs Manual

(1) NAVMEDCOMINST 5360.1 series, Decedent Affairs Manual, implements the Navy's Decedent Affairs Program, which consists of all activities relating to the search for, recovery, identification, care, and disposition of the remains of deceased persons for whom the Department of the Navy is responsible.8-2 Mission

### 17-2. Autopsies

(1) **Deceased Military Personnel.** When deemed necessary by (a) the member's commanding officer, (b) an investigating officer, (c) other fact-finding body, or (d) a medical officer, to determine the true cause of death, to secure information for the completion of military records, or to protect the welfare of the military community, and autopsy (NAVMED P-5065, Autopsy Manual) will be performed on the remains of any person who dies in the military service while serving on active duty or active duty for training. When death occurs while serving as an aircrew member of a military aircraft, the medical officer will recommend to the commanding officer having custody of the remains that an autopsy be performed to determine the cause of death. Under these circumstances, the commanding officer may authorize such an autopsy. The "cause of death" in this connection is interpreted to mean any correlation between pathological evidence and the accident cause factors.

(2) **Other Deceased Persons.** When an autopsy is deemed necessary for retired personnel or nonmilitary persons who die in a naval medical treatment facility or at a Navy installation, obtain written authorization from the primary next of kin before performing an autopsy. Authorization will normally be obtained on an SF 523, Authorization for Autopsy. When the authorization is obtained by letter, telegram, voice-recorded, or monitored telephone call, medical facility authorities will complete an SF 523 and attach the letter, telegram, voice-recording, or memorandum confirming the telephone call of authorization. If permission is unobtainable, and an autopsy is required to complete records of death in compliance with local, State, or Federal law, make a report to civil authorities for necessary action.

(3) **Authorization for Autopsy.** When an autopsy is authorized by a member's commanding officer, and in other instances in which authorization from proper authority has been obtained, the appointed investigating officer, or other fact-finding body, will provide the medical officer designated to conduct the autopsy with a detailed preliminary report of circumstances surrounding the death. (When

## Chapter 17: Deaths

the authorization for autopsy has been granted by other than the commanding officer, the medical officer will advise the command authority that authorization has been granted.) Upon completion, the medical officer conducting the autopsy will provide the investigating officer, or other fact-finding body, with a copy of the preliminary autopsy findings as to the cause of death and, when completed, a copy of the final protocol. The investigating officer, or other fact-finding body, will provide the medical officer conducting the autopsy with a copy of the final investigation report. Record autopsies on Standard Form 503, Autopsy Protocol.

(4) **Autopsy Manual.** Perform autopsies (NAVMED P-5065, Autopsy Manual) promptly and with a minimum of disfiguration. The expeditious release of remains for preparation, encasement, and shipment to the primary next of kin is very important.

### 17-3. General Requirements

(1) **Active Duty.** For deaths of active duty Navy and Marine Corps personnel and Navy and Marine Corps Reserve personnel serving in an active-duty-for-training or inactive-duty-training status as defined in MILPERSMAN or the Marine Corps Reserve standard Operating Procedure (P1001R.43), as appropriate, a certificate of death will be processed by the Medical Department of the command to which the member was attached. If the member was on detached duty, awaiting orders, or on leave or liberty, the Medical Department representative of the naval region or fleet where the individual dies will process the certificate of death as detailed in article 17-5.

(2) **Inactive Duty.** Any Navy or Marine Corps activity that receives information, regardless of the source, concerning the death of a Navy or Marine Corps Reserve, or retired member of the naval service not on active duty will determine the identity of the decedent, service affiliation, permanent home address, date, place, and cause of death. Additionally, when informed of such a death, procure a copy of the civil certificate of death to use in closing the service and health records.

(3) **Other Deaths.** For all other deaths (dependents, other civilian personnel, and military other than those indicated above) occurring at a naval activity, on board a naval ship, or on a naval aircraft, a certificate of death (preferable civil will be processed by the Medical Department representative responsible for providing medical care to the activity. This requirement also applies to fetal deaths. (Fetal death is death occurring prior to the complete expulsion or extraction from the mother of a product of conception of 20 weeks or more gestation, or fetal weight of 500 grams or more; the death is indicated by the fact that after such separation, the fetus does not breathe nor show any other evidence of life, such as beating of the heart, pulsation of the umbilical cord, or definite movement of voluntary muscles.) Make reports of death of U.S. citizens (other than members

## Chapter 17: Deaths

of U.S. Armed Forces), who die in foreign countries, to nearest U.S. consular office.

(4) **Missing Persons.** Do not prepare a certificate of death if an individual is reported as "missing." However, the following is applicable when an administrative determination of death has been made by naval sources on individuals "missing" outside the 50 United States and the District of Columbia or along the coastline of those States that will not issue a death certificate in the absence of a body:

(a) **Active Duty Members.** The activity holding the member's Health Record will prepare A DD Form 2064. The Health Record will then be closed and forwarded following guidance in article 16-12(3). (Also see article 17-2(2).)

(b) **Naval Civilian Employees.**

(1) Military Sealift Command (MSC) Employees. MSC Headquarters, Washington, DC will prepare a DD Form 2064.

### 17-4. Type of Certificate

(1) Deaths Occurring Within the 50 United States and the District of Columbia. A civil certificate of death.

(2) Deaths Occurring Outside the 50 United States and the District of Columbia. DD 204, Certificate of Death (Overseas), as applicable, in addition to the civil certificate of death if required by local civil authorities.

### 17-5. Copy Distribution

(1) **Deaths in the 50 United States and the District of Columbia.** Follow local civil requirements for the processing of civil certificates of death. Additionally, provide copies (quick copy or "work sheet" copy is acceptable) of the civil certificate of death with the deceased member's social security number added in upper right margin, to the following:

(a) Active Duty.

(1) One copy with closed Health Record per article 16-12.

(2) One copy to Commanding Officer, Naval Medial Data Services Center, Bethesda, MD 20014.

(b) Inactive Duty.

## Chapter 17: Deaths

(1) For naval reservists, fleet reservists, and retired members of the Navy and Naval Reserve - one copy to the Naval Reserve Personnel Center, 4400 Dauphine street, New Orleans, LA 70149.

(2) For marines, marine reservists, fleet reservists, and retired marines - one copy to Commandant of the Marine Corps, Code MSPA-1, Navy Department, Washington, DC 20380.

(3) For deaths occurring at a naval activity, on board a naval ship, or on a naval aircraft - one copy to Commanding Officer, Naval Medical Data Services Center, Bethesda, MD 20014.

Custodial responsibility for health records of Navy and Marine Corps Reserve members not on active duty is set forth in chapter 16 of this manual.

(c) Other Deaths as Specified in Article 17-3(3).

(1) Follow local civil requirements (NAVMEDCOMINST 5360.1 series refers).

(2) One copy to Commanding Officer, Naval Medical Data Services Center, Bethesda, MD 20014.

(2) **Deaths Outside the 50 United States and the District of Columbia.** Follow local civil requirements for the processing of civil certificates of death.

Additionally, for the categories indicated, prepare DD 2064, Certificate of Death (Overseas), and provide copies to the following:

(a) Active Duty.

(1) Original with closed Health Record following article 16012.

(2) One copy to Commanding Officer, Naval Medical Data Services Center, Bethesda, MD 20014.

(b) Inactive Duty. Same as articles 17-5(1)(b)(1), (2), and (3).

(c) Other Deaths. One copy to activity indicated for following persons if death occurred at a naval activity, on board a naval ship, or on a naval aircraft.

(1) Army Members.

(a) Office of the Adjutant General, U.S. Army, DAAG-PEC, Washington, DC 20314.

(b) Commanding Officer, Naval Medical Data Services Center, Bethesda, MD 20014.

(2) Air Force Members.

(a) Office of the Surgeon General, Department of the Air Force, Bolling Air Force Base, Washington, DC 20332.

(b) Commanding Officer, Naval Medical Data Services Center, Bethesda, MD 20014.

(3) Coast Guard Members.

(a) Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard, G-PS-1/TP 56, Washington, DC 20593.

(b) Commanding Officer, Naval Medical Data Services Center, Bethesda, Md 20014.

## Chapter 17: Deaths

- (4) Veterans Administration Beneficiaries.
  - (a) Local regional office of the VA that authorized patient's admission.
  - (b) Commanding Officer, Naval Medical Data Services Center, Bethesda, MD 20014.
- (5) Dependents, Navy Civilian Employees, and Other Civilians.
  - (a) Original to Commander, Naval Medical Command, MEDCOM-332, Washington, DC 20372-5120.
  - (b) Commanding Officer, Naval Medical Data Services Center, Bethesda, MD 20014.

(3) **Transportation Copies.** In each instance, see NAVMEDCOMINST 5360.1 series, Decedent Affairs Manual, regarding copies required for transportation of remains.

### 17-6. Cost of Civil Certificates of Death

- (1) If a quick copy or "work sheet" copy of the civil certificate of death is not obtainable and a free copy is not provided by the State or city, the cost of each necessary copy is chargeable to the following appropriation:
- (a) 17\*1804.188M 000 00018 M 000179 2D LNT000 990030000LNT
  - (b) Enter applicable Fiscal Year in space for third digit (\*); e.g., 7=FY 1987 and 8=FY 1988.