

Preparation and Conduct of a Casualty/Death Notification

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ATS - Introduction to Chaplaincy

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This is a deeply sensitive and solemn procedure that needs to be done with care and following appropriate military protocols. The Chaplain works together with the Casualty Notification Officer to go to the home (in uniform) of the Next of Kin (of the deceased) to inform them of their loved one's passing, upon receiving a death notification from the Casualty Assistance Center and learning as much as possible about the casualty and NOK.

- It is done at the home of the NOK.
- Every diligent effort must be made to see the NOK at their home, showing up unannounced. If the NOK is not home, knock on the doors of neighbors to see if anyone knows the whereabouts of the NOK. Do not share the reason why you are looking for them. Wait 1-4 hours outside the home of the NOK to see if they show up during that time. After 4 hours, if you have no success in finding the NOK, contact the Casualty Area Command for further directions and guidance.
- If the NOK is home and you are able to enter and talk with them, enter respectfully and don't stay for too long.
- The Casualty Notification Officer is to read a script provided by the military to inform the NOK of the passing of their loved one. If for any reason, the Casualty Notification Officer is not able to read the script outloud, the Chaplain needs to be prepared to do so.
- After the NOK has had sufficient time to process what was shared in the first script, a second script is read to inform them of details concerning the Dignified Transfer.
- Communicate in ways the NOK can understand and avoid acronyms and military jargon.
- Be compassionate and empathetic, but avoid physical touch of the NOK.
- If the casualty was by suicide, you are to say it was "apparent self inflicted". You cannot give further details.
- Be prepared for multiple emotional reactions from the NOK, especially anger/rage. In some cases, the NOK may display an outburst of anger towards the military branch their loved one served in and even directly at the Casualty Notification Officer and Chaplain.
- Only provide follow up details from the information the military provides you and do not discuss information you are not qualified to discuss.
- Contact the Casualty Area Command upon departure from the home and be sure to complete appropriate documentation of your death notification home visit.

- The Chaplain is there to provide spiritual and emotional support for the Casualty Notification Officer and NOK and their family. The Chaplain can talk with the Casualty Notification Officer on the way to the home to give encouragement, prayer, support, and listen to the Casualty Notification Officer practice the script (while the Chaplain drives). The Chaplain can also minister to the NOK and their family while in the home.
- Be a good listener to everyone you speak with in this process.

Sources:

- Interview with Army Chaplain Captain David Borden on March 7, 2023
- Fort Lee Casualty Assistance Center Casualty Notification Guide for the Casualty Notification Officer 15 May 2013:

https://home.army.mil/lee/application/files/5815/3797/1469/CNO_GUIDE_2013.pdf