



Survivor's Link

COMMUNICATING INFORMATION AND RESOURCES



We Remember

In this edition of Survivor's Link, we honor those lost during several key moments in military history that occurred during the months of June, July and August.

June 4-7: Battle of Midway



BATTLE OF MIDWAY

U.S. Involvement in World War II

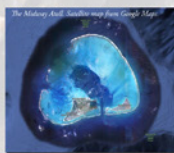


World War II began on September 1, 1939, when Nazi Germany invaded Poland. The U.S. remained neutral until December 7, 1941, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. The Japanese employed six carriers to destroy the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor; however, none of the U.S. carriers were present at Pearl Harbor during the assault.

PEARL HARBOR: BY THE NUMBERS

KILLED IN ACTION	TOTAL LOSS SHIPS	RETURNED TO SERVICE	CARRIERS LOST
2,008 U.S. NAVY	3	17	0
218 U.S. ARMY	USS ARIZONA (BB 39)	5 SHIPS SUNK, RAISED, AND REPAIRED	NONE OF THE SEVEN U.S. AIRCRAFT CARRIERS WERE AT PEARL HARBOR DURING THE ASSAULT.
109 U.S. MARINES	USS OKLAHOMA (BB 37)	12 SHIPS DAMAGED AND REPAIRED OR REBUILT	
68 CIVILIANS	USS UTAH (AG 16)		

The U.S. declared war against Japan on December 8, 1941. After several months of expansion, the Japanese Combined Fleet turned its sights on Midway, a small Pacific-based atoll, which then served as a U.S. sentry to Hawaii, refueling station, and landing point. The Japanese plan assumed the Pacific Fleet would arrive too late to defend Midway, but U.S. forces were waiting for them at "Point Luck."



THE IMPORTANCE OF INTEL



CAPT. JOSEPH J. ROCHEFORT
U.S. CRYPTANALYST

ADM. CHESTER W. NIMITZ
PACIFIC FLEET COMMANDER

Battle of Midway: The Turning Point

TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS JUNE 4, 1942

- 0700 Enterprise and Hornet begin launching
- 0838 Yorktown launches
- 1020 Enterprise and Yorktown torpedo squadrons attack
- ★ 1022-1026 Enterprise and Yorktown dive bombers attack and hit Akagi, Kaga, and Soryu.
- 1208 Japanese dive bombers attack Yorktown.
- 1441 Torpedo planes attack Yorktown.
- 1445 Yorktown hit.
- 1455 Yorktown abandons ship.
- 1500 B-17s take off from Midway.
- 1810 Two B-17s attack BB and damaged CV.
- 1830 Six B-17s attack damaged CV and DD.



U.S. and Japanese armed forces fought during the Battle of Midway, June 3-7, 1942 at and near the Midway Atoll in the central Pacific Ocean.



The victory at Midway represents a strategic turning point for the U.S. in Japan's war in the Pacific. Before the battle, Japan possessed naval superiority over the U.S. Afterward, opposing fleets were balanced and the U.S. soon took the offensive.

As a result of the battle on June 4th, the Japanese carriers Akagi, Kaga, and Soryu were hit and sank. The Japanese carrier Hiryu escaped the initial attack, but U.S. dive bombers found, bombed, and sank her.

BATTLE OF MIDWAY: SUMMARY OF LOSSES

CARRIERS	1	4
AIRCRAFT	150	256
MEN	307	2,204

Midway was a great success in U.S. Navy history. The only strategic regret might have been failing to locate and attack Hiryu before its aircraft struck Yorktown.

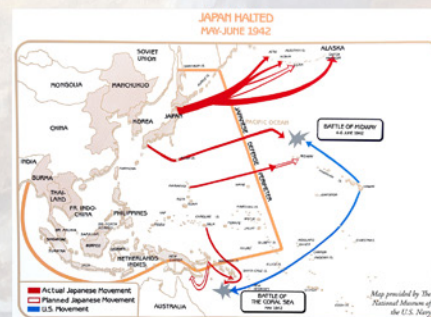


Victory at Midway: Impact on World War II



The Battle of Midway marked a technical revolution in displacing gunnery with naval carrier firepower as a primary means of delivering ordnance.

Prior to the Battle of Midway, the Japanese conquered several territories and expanded their resources in the Far East and South Pacific. By early May, the Japanese had an extensive defensive perimeter.



RESULTS OF THE VICTORY AT MIDWAY

- ✦ Japanese expansion halted, securing a central-Pacific guard post for Allied forces.
- ✦ Japanese losses at Midway made it possible for America's Navy to eventually reclaim maritime superiority in the Pacific theater.
- ✦ Naval Aviation proved to be a viable and necessary capability to win wars.
- ✦ Our Sailors' strength and resilience at Midway were a perfect illustration of the fighting spirit of America's Navy today.

June 8: USS Liberty Attack

On June 8, 1967, during the six days of war between Israel and its Arab neighbors in the Middle East, 34 American servicemen were killed when Israel attacked USS Liberty, a Navy intelligence-gathering ship in the Mediterranean Sea. We remember those who lost their lives.

CT3 William B. Allenbaugh
LCDR Philip M. Armstrong Jr.

SN Gary R. Blanchard

CT2 Allen M. Blue

QM3 Francis Brown

CT2 Ronnie J. Campbell

CT3 Jerry L. Converse

CT2 Robert B. Eisenberg

CT3 Jerry L. Goss

CT1 Curtis A. Graves

CTSN Lawrence P. Hayden

CT1 Warren E. Hersey

CTSN Alan Higgins

SN Carl L. Hoar

CT2 Richard W. Keene Jr.

CTSN James L. Lenau

CTC Raymond E. Linn

CT1 James M. Lupton

CT3 Duane R. Marggraf

CTSN David W. Marlborough

CT2 Anthony P. Mendle

CTSN Carl C. Nygren

LT James C. Pierce

SGT Jack L. Raper

CPL Edward E. Rehmeier III

ICFN David Skolak

CT1 John C. Smith Jr.

CTC Melvin D. Smith

PC2 John C. Spicher

GMG3 Alexander N. Thompson Jr.

CT3 Thomas R. Thornton

CT3 Philippe C. Tiedtke

LT Stephen S. Toth

CT1 Frederick J. Walton

June 17: USS Fitzgerald

We honor and remember the seven Sailors who lost their lives on June 17, 2017, when the USS Fitzgerald collided with a container ship 80 nautical miles southwest of Tokyo, Japan.



June 28: Operation Red Wings

We honor and remember the service members who lost their lives on June 28, 2005, when a MH-47 Chinook helicopter, carrying eight Navy SEALs and eight Army Night Stalkers, were dispatched as part of an extraction mission to pull out four embattled SEALs. The helicopter was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade, killing all 16 on the helicopter. Three of the four SEALs who were to be extracted died while fearlessly engaging in a gunfight.

LT Michael P. Murphy

SO2 Matthew Axelson

SO2 Danny Dietz

SOC Jacques J. Fontan

SOCS Daniel R. Healy

LCDR Erik S. Kristensen

SO1 Jeffery A. Lucas

LT Michael M. McGreevy Jr.

SFC Michael L. Russell

MSG James W. Ponder III

SO2 James E. Suh

SO1 Jeffrey S. Taylor

SO2 Shane E. Patton

SSG Shamus O. Goare

CWO3 Corey J. Goodnature

SGT Kip A. Jacoby

SFC Marcus V. Muralles

MAJ Stephen C. Reich

CWO4 Chris J. Scherkenbach

July 29: USS Forrestal

We honor and remember the 134 Sailors who were killed on July 29, 1967, aboard the USS Forrestal when a series of fires and explosions broke out after a malfunction caused a Zuni rocket on an F-4B Phantom to launch, striking the fuel tank of an A-4 Skyhawk on deck.

August 6: Operation Extortion 17

We honor and remember the 30 American military servicemen and a U.S. military dog who were killed in 2011 when a CH-47 Chinook helicopter, call sign Extortion 17, was shot down in Afghanistan. Among those lost were.

Operation Extortion 17 – We Will Never Forget

SGT Alexander J. Bennett

SPC Spencer Duncan

CWO Bryan J. Nichols

CWO David R. Carter

SSG Patrick D. Hamburger

TSgt John W. Brown

SSgt Andrew W. Harvell

TSgt Daniel L. Zerbe

P01 (SEAL) Darrick C. Benson

CPO (SEAL) Brian R. Bill

P01 (SEAL) Christopher G. Campbell

P01 Jared W. Day

**P01 John Douangdara & Navy SEAL Dog
“Bart”**

CPO (SEAL) John W. Faas

CPO (SEAL) Kevin A. Houston

Lt. Cmdr. (SEAL) Jonas B. Kelsall

MCPO (SEAL) Louis J. Langlais

CPO (SEAL) Matthew D. Mason

CPO (SEAL) Stephen M. Mills

CPO Nicholas H. Null

P01 (SEAL) Jesse D. Pittman

SCPO (SEAL) Thomas A. Ratzlaff

CPO (SEAL) Robert J. Reeves

CPO (SEAL) Heath M. Robinson

PO2 (SEAL) Nicholas P. Spehar

P01 Michael J. Strange

P01 (SEAL) Jon T. Tumilson

P01 (SEAL) Aaron C. Vaughn

SCPO Kraig M. Vickers

P01 (SEAL) Jason R. Workman

August 21: USS McCain

We remember the U.S. Navy Sailors that died on the USS John S. McCain, a U.S. Navy warship on August 21, 2017. The USS McCain was involved in a collision with the Liberian-flagged tanker Alnic MC off the coast of Singapore and Malaysia, east of the Strait of Malacca.

While these tragic events in military history represent only a small snapshot of valor and loss, we recognize that there are so many more to remember. The Navy Gold Star Program wants to pay tribute to all service members who died on active duty and honor their loved ones. We sincerely thank you for your sacrifices and everything you do to keep the memories of your loved ones alive. We encourage you to visit www.navygoldstar.com/tribute/add to include your loved one on our tribute page and/or visit <https://tribute.militaryonesource.mil/add-a-loved-one/> to include them in the Department of Defense online memorial.

Remembering Those We Lost Aboard USS John S. McCain (DDG 56) August 21, 2017



Kevin Sayer Bushell
Electronics Technician
1st Class



Dustin Louis Doyon
Electronics Technician
2nd Class



Timothy Thomas Eckels Jr.
Information Systems
Technician 2nd Class



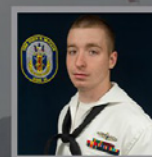
John Henry Hoagland III
Electronics Technician
2nd Class



Kenneth Aaron Smith
Electronics Technician
2nd Class



Corey George Ingram
Information Systems
Technician 1st Class



Jacob Daniel Drake
Electronics Technician
2nd Class



Charles Nathan Findley
Chief Electronics
Technician



Abraham Lopez
Chief Interior
Communications
Electrician



Logan Stephen Palmer
Interior Communications
Electrician 2nd Class



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SEPTEMBER 25, 2025

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August 1, 2025

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Looking Ahead: Why Remembrance Events Matter

By: April Tischler, Navy Gold Star Coordinator

For Gold Star families, connection doesn't end with a folded flag or a final ceremony. It endures—through shared traditions, cherished memories, and the collective act of honoring the fallen.

Each year, the Navy Gold Star Program brings families and communities together to ensure the sacrifices of our fallen Sailors are never forgotten. One such tradition is Bells Across America for the Fallen, a poignant ceremony held in September. As bells toll across the nation, the names of our fallen service members are spoken aloud, creating a powerful moment of remembrance and unity.

These events offer more than tradition—they offer presence, purpose, and belonging. For many families, hearing their loved one's name spoken is a powerful reminder: their story still matters, and so do they.

As we move into summer, we invite families to reflect on the power of remembrance—and consider joining us this September. Participation is always optional, but opportunities to connect, remember, and heal are always open.

If you'd like to be notified about upcoming remembrance events in your area, contact your Navy Gold Star Coordinator to update your email or mailing address.

Children's Day

In 2021, Congress officially designated August 1 as Gold Star Children's Day to honor the sacrifices and hardships of the children of fallen service members. The Navy Gold Star Program recognizes these very special children and knows that losing a parent is life-altering at any age. We wish to pay tribute to these resilient individuals and ensure that they know they are loved. To find out more about events that may be taking place in your area, please reach out to your Navy Gold Star Coordinator at www.navygoldstar.com/locations.



INDEPENDENCE DAY

Celebrating our freedom and those who fought for it

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Did you know...



How the U.S. Flag should be displayed?

Displaying the Flag Outdoors



On a vehicle -- Attach the flag to the antenna or clamp the flagstaff to the right fender. Do not lay the flag over the vehicle.



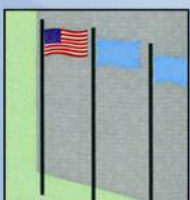
On a building -- Hang the flag on a staff or on a rope over the side-walk with the stars away from the building.



Over the street -- Hang the flag with the stars to the east on a north-south street or north on an east-west street.



Above other flags -- Hang the flag above any other flag on the same pole



Other flags, separate poles -- Hang all flags on equal poles. Hang the U.S. flag on its own right, hoist it first and lower it last.



In a window -- Hang the flag vertically with the stars to the left of anyone looking at it from the street.



Half-mast -- This is a sign of mourning. Raise the flag to the top of the pole then lower it to the half way point. Before lowering the flag, raise it to the top again.

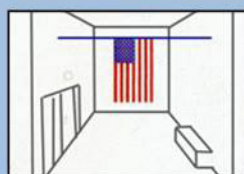


Upside down -- An upside-down flag is considered a distress signal.

Displaying the Flag Indoors



Multiple staffs -- If you display the flag on a staff with other flags around it, place the flag at the center and highest point. Crossed staffs - Keep the flagstaff higher and on its own right.



In a hall or lobby -- Hang the flag vertically across from the main entrance with the stars to the left of anyone coming through the door.



Next to a speaker -- Place the flag in a stand on the speaker's right. Use the same placement for a religious service.



Behind a speaker -- Hang the flag flat on the wall. Do not decorate the podium or table with the flag. Use bunting for decoration.



July 4 – Independence Day: Signing of the Declaration of Independence

"Happy Birthday, America"

By: Susanna Del Llano – Gold Star Coordinator

This July 4 marks 249 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Do you know what the Declaration of Independence consists of or who signed it? While many may know the answer to both questions, many others may not.

The Declaration of Independence outlines the principles on which our government, and our identity as Americans, are based. Written largely by Thomas Jefferson, the document summarized the colonists' motivations for seeking their independence. Its primary goal was to convince the colonies that the time had come for the United Colonies to break away from Mother England.

The Declaration of Independence has three primary purposes:

- 1) To urge the colonists to unite to fight for their rights,
- 2) To explain why their actions were justified, and
- 3) To give formal notice to King George III.

By declaring the colonies a separate nation, the hope was that foreign countries would recognize their sovereignty and provide support in the fight for freedom. Interestingly, while the Declaration of Independence was adopted on July 4, 1776, most delegates didn't sign it until weeks later, with the final signatures added in August.

So, what is the Declaration of Independence all about? Although not a legally binding document, it powerfully states the principles upon which our government and national identity are built. In just 1,320 words, the colonies laid out their grievances and made the case for independence.

Many of us have heard its iconic preamble:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

The Declaration of Independence has had a lasting influence on the American political foundation: equality, unalienable rights, and consent of the governed —each of which remains deeply embedded in the United States' social and political fabric. Though public opinion and perception of the document has undergone shifts over time, it remains a cornerstone of American identity and democracy. The Declaration of Independence stands as a model of reflection, rhetoric, and deliberate action.

So, this 4th of July, as you plan a backyard barbecue or pool party, take a moment to remember the real meaning behind the day. It marks the moment in 1776 when our forefathers affirmed our right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness — the consent to be governed, and the courage to resist tyranny. This document marks the birth of what we now know of the United States of America.



Connection Doesn't Pause for Summer

By: April Tischler, Navy Gold Star Coordinator

Last summer, a Navy Gold Star Spouse found herself juggling multiple challenges. Between preparing her children for the upcoming school year and managing her household's benefit documents, she felt overwhelmed. Despite her busy schedule, she decided to reach out to her Navy Gold Star Coordinator.

During the call, she discovered new educational resources available for her kids, as well as grief counseling sessions tailored for families like hers. She was also reminded to update her documentation to ensure her records were accurate and up to date. Additionally, her Coordinator helped her RSVP for an upcoming event that would take place in her local area during the fall.

The spouse ended the call feeling reassured and organized. She added her Coordinator's contact information to her phone and set reminders for benefit check-ins. That summer, she felt connected and supported—knowing the Navy Gold Star Program was there for her every step of the way.

While summer may bring a change of pace, we know your responsibilities and needs don't take a vacation. That's why the Navy Gold Star Program continues to provide support all season long.

Whether you're reviewing benefit documents, preparing for the school year, or simply looking to stay connected, now is the perfect time to check in.

You're Part of the Navy Family — In Every Season

We understand that some months feel quieter than others, but no matter the season, we're still here advocating for you, remembering with you, and helping you stay prepared.

If you haven't spoken to your Navy Gold Star Coordinator recently, consider reaching out this summer. We'd love to hear from you.

How the Navy Gold Star Program Supports You Year-Round

Care Coordination

Schedule a check-in to make sure your contact information, benefit status, and documentation are current—especially if your family circumstances have changed.

Resource Navigation

We can help you access programs for education, grief counseling, health benefits, and more. Not sure where to start? We'll walk through it with you.

Event Planning & Participation

We're already preparing for fall remembrance events—and summer is a great time to let us know if you'd like to take part. You can help shape upcoming ceremonies, campaigns, and tribute opportunities.

Communication Support

Staying connected means staying informed. If your contact details have changed or if you'd like to receive program updates by email, let us know. It only takes a minute to stay up to date.

Small Actions You Can Take Today:

- Add a calendar reminder to check benefits quarterly
- Save your Coordinator's contact info to your phone
- Review your VA account or eBenefits portal
- Create or update a folder for survivor-related documents
- Send a quick email to schedule your mid-year review



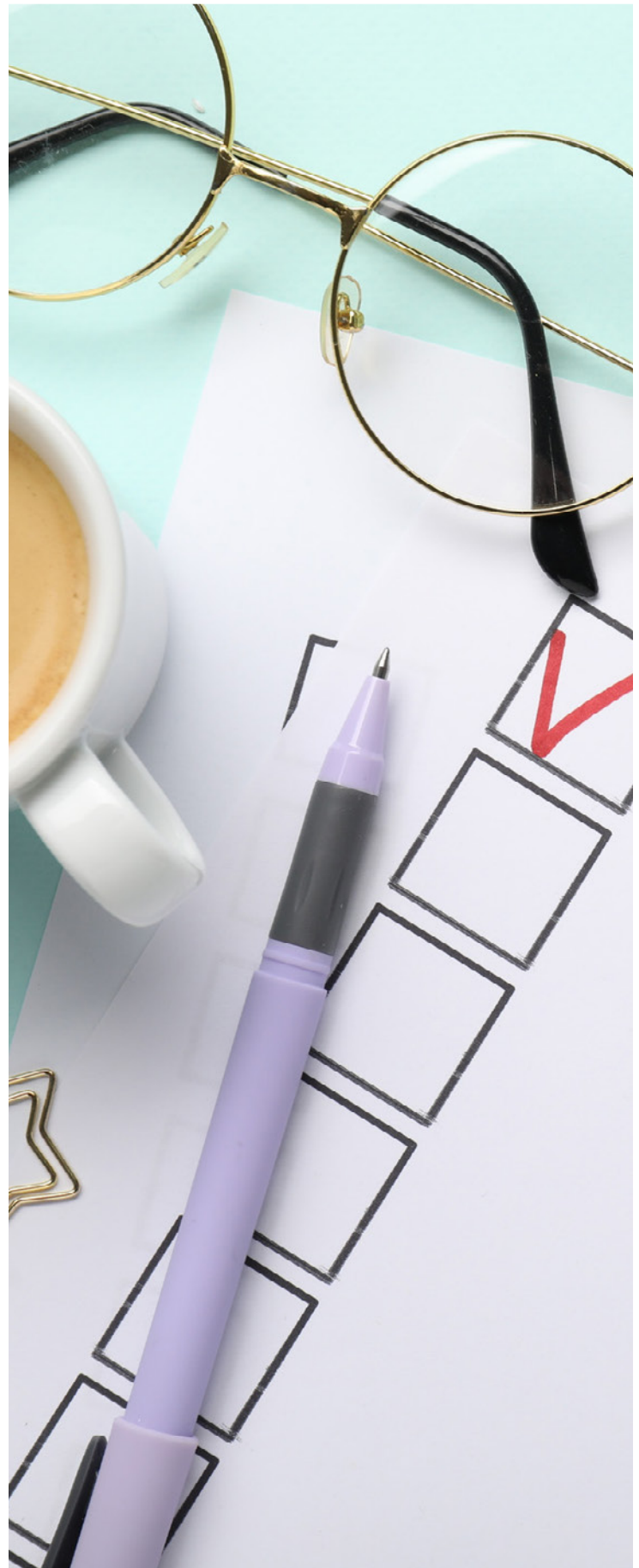
Survivor Benefits Checklist

Check-In | Navy Gold Star Program

Use this checklist to stay organized and proactive with your survivor benefits this summer. Even completing one or two items can help prevent last-minute issues later in the year.

- Add a calendar reminder to review your benefits every six months.
- Schedule any required school enrollment verifications (for Post-9/11 GI Bill, DEA, etc.).
- Confirm your current mailing address, phone number, and email with Navy Gold Star.
- Check your [VA.gov](https://www.va.gov) or eBenefits portal for current status of claims and documents.
- Review upcoming TRICARE Young Adult deadlines (if applicable).
- Update or create a benefits binder or digital folder. Include:
 - DD Form 1300
 - VA Letters
 - Survivor ID
 - Contact sheet with key support numbers
 - Any correspondence from DFAS or Education Services.
- Back up your important documents to a secure cloud or external drive.
- Book a mid-year check-in with your Navy Gold Star Coordinator.
- Set a reminder to revisit this checklist in early fall (September).

Questions or need help? Contact your Navy Gold Star Coordinator www.navygoldstar.com



Spring Clean Your House and Your Mind

By: Maura Bradshaw, Navy Gold Star Coordinator

With spring upon us, or perhaps finally upon us for some, you may start to think about spring cleaning. At first, the task can feel overwhelming. However, research shows there may be mental health benefits to this process.

Before we go any farther, it is important to note that the spring cleaning we'll discuss here refers to general cleaning and decluttering. It does not include sorting or clearing out a loved one's belongings. We acknowledge that is a personal process to take on only when you feel ready.

You've decided you're ready to clean, declutter, and embrace this season of new beginnings. So where do you start?

Tips To Get Started

- **Set an ultimate goal, as well as daily or hourly goals**

For example, your overall goal may be to clean the entire home or focus on just the kitchen. Daily goals can be broken down by room or area, while hourly goals might involve something smaller, like going through the cabinets on the north wall. You may not necessarily need both daily and hourly goals. Take time to reflect on your space, your schedule, and what you hope to accomplish.

- **Involve others**

Don't be afraid to ask for help if the task feels too big. A little company can also make it more enjoyable and go faster.

- **Declutter first**

Set out three boxes or bags for keep, donate, and discard. Ask yourself, "Do I love it?" or "Do I use it?" With clothing, consider whether you have worn the item in the last 6 to 12 months. If not, would you wear it tomorrow? If the answer is no, it may be time to let it go.

- **Let the cleaning begin**

Work from top to bottom: start with ceilings and walls, then move to surfaces, furniture, and floors.

- **Don't forget to make it fun**

Play your favorite music or movie in the background. Dancing with your vacuum is totally encouraged.

Now that your roadmap is established, why is this potentially good for your mental health?

- **Reduced stress and anxiety**

Decluttering can help create a sense of control and calm. Studies show that cleaning may trigger a release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter associated with feelings of reward and pleasure. Removing visual distractions can also improve your focus.

- **Encourages mindfulness**

Cleaning can be meditative and help you stay grounded in the present moment. Try engaging your senses as you clean. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? What do you feel? Since this is cleaning, you can skip the sense of taste.

- **Supports physical health**

Physical and mental health are closely connected. Cleaning helps remove allergens like dust, pollen, mildew, and pet dander. It can also reduce pollutants that affect your immune health.

- **Creates a fresh start**

Spring cleaning symbolizes renewal and growth. It can bring a renewed sense of positive energy and motivation.

It's amazing how something often viewed as a chore can bring clarity and peace to the mind. Which of these benefits resonates most with you? Let us know by posting a picture of you doing your spring cleaning with the hashtag #NavyGoldStarSpringClean.





Navigating Summer as a Gold Star Survivor

By: Alicia McCoy, Navy Gold Star Coordinator; proud surviving spouse of SGT Brandon G. McCoy, March 18, 2012, US Army, 101st ABN

June is here, and that means summer! With this new season come graduations, holidays, and family reunions. While these events may not normally sound daunting, they can feel completely different for Gold Star Survivors. Depending on where you are in your journey, these moments can be incredibly hard. Not everyone knows how to be compassionate, considerate, or thoughtful.

So how do you navigate these moments without feeling disconnected, as if you no longer belong, or as though you're losing your sense of control? How do you move beyond the habit of saying "I'm fine" and genuinely start to feel okay? How do you handle uncomfortable confrontations and sudden waves of loss?

Being prepared for the gauntlet of emotions that these events can bring is crucial. Consider the setting or occasion first, then plan accordingly. A good starting point is to acknowledge your grief, seek support, and prioritize self-care. We've all heard it before, but it's worth repeating: if you're not taking care of yourself, you can't truly care of anyone else — including your own household. So, tell people what you need. Communication is key. Sharing your needs and focusing on ways to honor your Fallen Hero's memory during an event can be incredibly cathartic. Below are a few suggestions for tackling those heavier-than-expected events.

Graduations

For a Gold Star family, after the loss of a parent, child, or sibling, graduations can bring conflicting emotions. You're trying to celebrate the achievement of a loved one who is moving on from high school or college, and it should be an exciting, happy time. But the absence of a parent, child, or sibling can weigh heavily on that joy.

Prioritize the graduate. This is their moment, and they've worked hard to reach it, so try not to undermine their special day. Be supportive, honor their needs, and don't overshadow the celebration with your own expectations. You can ask if they'd like to include their hero's memory in the day, but let it be their idea. Keeping the graduate at the center of the moment ensures the focus stays where it belongs.

At the first graduation for one of my children after their dad's death, I broke down. I cried, and all the thoughts of what he was missing rushed in. It was hard to hold it together because my kids deserved to be celebrated—and that's exactly what I did. When I got home, I cried behind closed doors, because sometimes, that's all you can do.

Holidays

I know what you are thinking: the big holidays that are hard are usually in the fall and winter months, and you would be correct. But in the summer, there's the 4th of July, and that means fireworks.

After a family goes through a military funeral with full honors and a gun salute or volley, the harsh sound of fireworks can be triggering. The sharp, loud, often multiple rounds of noise can cause a traumatic flashback to a day when your world changed irrevocably. There is a reason why so many Veterans have such adverse reactions to fireworks, and as a Gold Star Survivor, you too are now at risk for that same reaction.

If you can, avoid firework events altogether, or try to find refuge somewhere inside. If that is not possible, then bring earplugs or noise-canceling headphones. You might also download a calming app that can assist you by providing guided breathing or other supportive techniques to help ground yourself. Again, communication is key: talk to friends and family in attendance to make sure you have the support when needed.

Family Reunions

Saving the hardest for last: being around family, whether yours or your hero's, after the loss can truly be a test of your will, stamina, and all-around sense of self-preservation. Seeing so many people with happy bonds and smiling interactions when you are still fighting to just get out of bed every day is hard.

For some, choosing to attend a large family event helps restore a sense of normalcy. But be prepared of the possibility that you or your hero might become the subject of whispered conversations or even through a more direct approach. If people are whispering, let it go and brush it off your shoulders. If they wanted to understand what you're going through, they'd ask how you and your household are doing, instead of speculating.

For the direct, sometimes intrusive questions, choose your words carefully, should you choose to speak. Know your limits and don't feel obligated to share more than you're comfortable with. You are not alone — there are thousands of grieving spouses, parents, siblings, and children who understand what you're going through. Many of us have felt the urge to scream, "I'm fine," even when we're anything but. Earlier, I stated that communication is key, and this rings true when dealing with family reunions. Have a game plan and set your boundaries in advance. Identify a space where you can take a break from the crowd. And remember, it's okay to not answer every question.

Prepare for triggers. Hearing stories about your hero's childhood or watching couples get engaged can be unexpectedly painful. In the first few years after my husband's death, I watched so many people get engaged and embark on their happy life journey together and it often made me ache inside for what I had lost. Don't plant yourself into the past, stay in the "here and now." Give the happy couple well wishes and hopes for an exciting journey together. It's not their fault that they are happy while you are inwardly reeling from the pain of loss.

You may also face people asking for money, based on the misconception that Gold Star families receive tons of money. It's okay to say "no" to people who ask for money. Don't feel beholden to anyone for this, especially if you have kids. That money is meant for you to take care of your household, not the whole, extended family.

And lastly, if the family reunion turns out to just be too much, then leave. You and your household can do your own thing, including making new traditions or limiting your time at the reunions for a few minutes to say hello and goodbye. You are not betraying your hero, your family, or your children for leaving early. If you or your children aren't comfortable, you are completely within your rights to leave.

Navigating these moments without feeling disconnected, discombobulated, or as though you no longer belong isn't easy. The emotions can be overwhelming and disorienting. But knowing your needs, and/or those of your child(ren), can help you reclaim some control over a situation versus allowing it to control you. Breathing techniques, calming apps or music, or walking away from emotionally charged situations are small but powerful ways to protect your well-being. All of these steps can help you and your child(ren) be able to say genuinely that you are emotionally fine as opposed to an auto-response. You've got this. And no one can take away your power unless you let them.

Suggested Resources

- [Mindfulness] <https://mindfulness.com>
- [Meditation] <https://www.meditation.com>
- [PTSD] <https://www.ptsd.va.gov>
- [Grown and Flown] <https://grownandflown.com/help-teen-understand-loss-grief>
- [Vocal] <https://vocal.media/families/setting-boundaries-while-in-mourning>
- [Refinery29] <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/grieving-death-collectivist-culture-boundaries>

Streamlined Annual Eligibility Verification for Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) Annuitants

By: Katelyn Smetana, Navy Gold Star Coordinator

The Survivor Benefits Plan (SBP) provides ongoing financial support to eligible beneficiaries. To ensure continued disbursement of annuity payments, annuitants must confirm their eligibility each year. To make this process easier, the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) has implemented a simplified process for SBP annuitant to verify their eligibility.

The myPay platform offers a convenient way for annuitants to manage their SBP accounts. Through myPay, users can:

- Verify eligibility.
- Access Annuitant Account Statements.
- Update contact information and federal tax withholding
- Download tax documents

Annuitants who do not yet have a myPay account are encouraged to create one to streamline their account management. For help getting started, Navy Gold Star Coordinators can provide a step-by-step guidebook on how to set up a myPay account.

The Changing Seasons: A Reflection on Grief and Renewal

By: Patsy Jackson, Navy Gold Star Coordinator

Nature moves in rhythms and cycles, offering reminders of the passage of time and the inevitability of change. As seasons shift, from the bleakness of winter to the blossoming of spring, or from the warmth of summer to the contemplative colors of autumn, they carry with them subtle yet powerful influences on our internal landscape. For those who have experienced loss, the changing seasons can provide solace and a path toward renewal.

Grieving is often likened to winter: a period where emotions feel frozen, life seems dormant, and the world appears cloaked in shades of gray. It is a time for introspection, for huddling close to the pain and acknowledging its presence. But winter doesn't last forever—spring emerges. Just as the first crocus breaks through the snow, moments of hope and joy can sprout in the hearts of those who grieve. The smell of rain, the sight of budding trees, or the sound of birds returning can awaken emotions that were once dormant and invite thoughts of new possibilities.

Summer, too, offers its gifts. The sun's embrace warms not only the skin but also the spirit, encouraging us to step outside of ourselves and find connection with others. Grief often isolates, but summer nudges us to partake in the abundance of life, reminding us that even amidst loss, the world continues to offer beauty and light.

Autumn brings its own kind of healing. The vibrant, yet fleeting foliage echoes the ephemerality of life, helping us accept that all things—joy, sorrow, life—are transient. The crisp air and falling leaves encourage reflection, providing a quieter space for contemplation and a sense of gratitude for what remains.

The changing seasons teach us that life's journey is cyclical, with moments of loss followed by renewal. They remind us that grief is not a static state but a process, ebbing and flowing, much like the seasons themselves. For those moving through grief, the seasons serve as a gentle guide, offering moments to breathe, reflect, and eventually find a way forward. Though the pain of loss remains, the changing world around us can inspire a shift in perspective, illuminating the possibility of joy, hope, and resilience.

In the end, nature's seasons remind us of a profound truth: that even after the coldest winters of our lives, spring will always come.





Looking for Scholarships? The National Resource Directory Has You Covered

By: Stephanie Hunter, Navy Gold Star Program Analyst

Did you know the National Resource Directory (NRD) offers access to over 200 scholarship opportunities? Just visit the website, type “scholarship” in the search bar, and explore a wide range of vetted resources.

The NRD is a powerful online tool that connects Service Members, Veterans, wounded warriors, their families, and caregivers with programs and services that support recovery, rehabilitation, and community reintegration.

Managed by the Defense Health Agency’s Recovery Coordination Program, the NRD provides trusted information and resources at the national, state, and local levels. Whether you’re looking for education support, job training, housing assistance, or caregiver resources, the NRD is designed to help you navigate the path forward with confidence.

Explore what’s available – you might be surprised at the opportunities waiting for you.

Gold Star Graduates

Congratulations to our Gold Star graduates!

Your strength, resilience, and dedication are truly inspiring. Today, we honor not only your achievements, but also the legacy of your loved ones. We're proud to celebrate this important milestone with you.



Dylan Thomason, the son of CWO3 Charla Thomason, is graduating from Hickory High School in Chesapeake, VA on June 18, 2025. After graduation, he is heading to Longwood College in Farmville, VA to study business. His mother would be so very proud of him, as we all are. Love you so much, Dylan! Remember to always put Jesus first Dylan and listen to the voice of Jesus.

- Lesia Payne, Gold Star mother of CWO3 Charla Thomason and proud grandma of Dylan.



Luca DiGirolamo, son of PO2 Anthony Di Girolamo, is graduating high school from Wardlaw Hartridge in Edison, NJ. We are excited to see Luca take on his college journey after a successful high school experience. It's been such a joy to see him grow and excel. Luca has committed to Fordham University.

- Jennifer Di Girolamo, Gold Star spouse of PO2 Di Girolamo and proud mom of Luca



Izabella "Bella" Phelps, the youngest sister of AN Koletson Carpenter, graduated from Penta Career Center in May 2025 and chose to major in Digital Arts. Bella is a talented artist and has won an award for Gifted Artist as well as having her art on display at the University of Findlay. She and her brother, Koletson, shared a love of anime and manga, so her big plan is to go to Japan with her father after graduation. She is going to take a year off before starting college but knows that she wants to continue her journey of learning in Digital Arts. We are all very proud of her accomplishments and know that she has a bright future ahead!

- Kelly Phelps, Gold Star mom of AN Carpenter and proud mom of Bella



Jamel Freeman, son of the late MCPO Sylvester Freeman, graduated May 19, 2025, summa cum laude with a Master's Degree in Social Work through the Advanced Standing Program at the University of Maryland, Baltimore School of Social Work. His focus concentration was Leadership Social Policy Change (LSPC), with a specialization in Clinical Social Work. His program focused on social justice to advocate for the rights and well-being of humanity, poverty reduction with a goal helping to alleviate poverty and enhance economic opportunities, health equity to work towards addressing disparities in healthcare access and outcomes, and environmental justice to ensure that the environment is protected and that everyone has equal access to resources. Jamel recalls his father frequently counseled him to "encourage his aspirations" and he emphasized that "all his desires are beyond his comfort zone."



Angelina Rose Caboteja, daughter of SSgt Nick Lopez Caboteja Jr, USMC, graduated from Christ Chapel Academy in May 2025 with a Virginia Advanced Studies Diploma, along with 18 college credits from her dual enrollment with Northern Virginia Community College. Lina was active in sports throughout high school, participating in volleyball, basketball, and soccer. In 2024, her varsity basketball team won the State Division IV Championship. Lina loves being involved with her church, community, and with fellow military and gold star families. She volunteers for her community with her church, Girl Scouts, and her National Honor Society peers. Lina especially enjoyed advocating throughout the years in Congress for better benefits for the military, veterans, and her Gold Star family. In August, Lina will be attending Virginia Tech University, majoring in biology and a minor in foreign languages.



Elisha graduated on May 23, 2024, from William B. Travis High School in Richmond, Texas. Elisha is currently attending the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, where he is pursuing a major in Computer Science with a concentration in Video Game Design. He is very passionate about his studies and is eager to contribute to the field of technology and entertainment.



Sara Keita, sister of the late Djiba Keita, is graduating this year from St. Vincent Pallotti High School in Laurel, MD. She will be attending Bowie State University in the fall 2025.



Navy Gold Star Coordinators

Area of Responsibility	Phone	Postal Mail
California (Los Angeles County/Northern CA), Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, Japan, Korea & Philippines	901-581-2383	NAVY MEDICAL CENTER SAN DIEGO 34800 BOB WILSON DR BLDG 26, 3RD FL, Rm 349 NWW C/O NAVY GOLD STAR SAN DIEGO CA 92134
California (San Diego/Riverside) & Colorado	901-930-8290	
Arizona, Idaho, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Wisconsin & Canada	901-930-8062	
Alaska, Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington & Wyoming	901-671-7519	
Texas	901-930-8109	
Illinois, Indiana & Michigan	901-930-8593	
Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma & Tennessee	901-930-8300	
Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania & Rhode Island	901-671-6910	NAVY GOLD STAR PROGRAM 264 MARVIN SHIELDS BLVD, BLDG 1 GULFPORT, MS 39501
New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York & Vermont	901-930-8308	
Delaware, Maryland, Washington DC, West Virginia & all other counties in Virginia not listed below	901-930-8578	
Virginia (the following counties: Chesapeake, Hampton, Isle of Wright, Newport News, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Poquoson, Suffolk, Virginia Beach, Williamsburg & York)	901-930-8008	
Kentucky, North Carolina & Ohio	901-930-8210	
Georgia, South Carolina & Europe	901-671-5597	
Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi & Florida (the following counties: Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, Holmes, Washington, Bay, Jackson, Calhoun, Gulf, Franklin, Liberty, Gadsden, Leon, Wakulia, Jefferson, Madison, Taylor, Hamilton, Suwannee, Lafayette, Dixie, Columbia, Gilchrist, Levy, Alachua, Marion, Citrus, Hernando, & Pasco).	901-671-6521	
Florida all other counties not listed above	901-930-8189	