



COMMUNICATING INFORMATION AND RESOURCES



Service and Sacrifice: Armed Forces Day, Memorial Day, Veterans Day

By Stephanie Hunter, Navy Gold Star Program Analyst

Many people today view Memorial Day and Veterans Day simply as a day off and may not even be familiar with Armed Forces Day. These holidays often lose their meaning amidst the downtime, as people enjoy spending time with family and friends and taking a break from work. While this time of rest is important, it's equally crucial to remember the significance and unique purpose of these observances.

Armed Forces Day is celebrated annually on the third Saturday of May. This day is dedicated to honoring the men and women who are currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. Armed Forces Day is also part of Armed Forces Week, which begins on the second Saturday of May. The day was created to honor the unification of the U.S. Armed Forces under the Department of Defense, acknowledging those who defend the nation in real-time.

Memorial Day, observed on the last Monday of May, is a time to remember and honor the men and women who died while serving in the military. Traditional observances include raising the American flag briskly to the top of the flagpole and then solemnly lowering it to half-staff until noon. This half-staff position serves as a tribute to the more than one million lives lost in service to our country. At noon, the flag is raised to full staff, symbolizing the living's commitment to carry on the fight for liberty and justice for all, ensuring that the sacrifices of the fallen are not forgotten. Other Memorial Day traditions include wearing red poppies, visiting cemeteries, and placing flags or flowers on the graves of fallen soldiers.

In an effort to remind Americans of the day's true meaning, the "National Moment of Remembrance" resolution was passed in December 2000. It encourages all Americans to pause at 3 p.m. local time for a moment of silence or to listen to Taps, offering a voluntary and informal tribute to those who gave their lives in service.

Veterans Day, celebrated on November 11, honors all the men and women who have served in the military, whether during times of war or peace. Originally called Armistice Day, it was first observed on Nov. 11, 1918, to mark the end of World War I. In 1954, at the urging of veterans' organizations, the holiday was renamed Veterans Day to recognize the service and sacrifices of all U.S. veterans. It's a day to thank those who have served, regardless of whether they are still in the military.

Key Differences to Remember:

Armed Forces Day – Thanking service members who are currently serving.

Memorial Day – Honoring those who have died while serving.

Veterans Day – Thanking those who have served, but are no longer serving.

As the holidays approach, let's make an effort to recognize the true meaning behind each of these observances. Whether you're spending time with loved ones or enjoying a well-deserved break, take a moment to reflect on and pay tribute to those who have served our country.

Bereavement Camps: A Place to Grieve and Heal

From *MilitaryOneSource.com*

Bereavement camps, seminars and retreats offer a place for survivors to connect with others. Being with peers who have dealt with grief can reassure you that what you're feeling is normal and help you with your journey.

Professionals and volunteers run the camps. Grants and donations help support the camps, making them available at little or no cost to families. Separate camps are conducted for adults and children.

Camps for Children and Teens

Losing a loved one can be especially tough for children, so finding resources tailored to their needs is essential. Camp time is often a mix of physical activities and social events, such as swimming, hiking and games.

Physical and social activities can relieve stress. They can also help campers deal with the emotional struggles related to the traumatic experience of a loved one's death. The following camps and programs work to provide grieving children with a comfortable place to talk about their emotions and feel understood.

- **Comfort Zone Camp** is a nonprofit bereavement camp that brings together children who have lost a parent, sibling or primary caregiver. These free camps, which are held year-round across the country, include confidence-building programs and support groups for youths ages 7-17. Comfort Zone Camp also offers virtual camp programs. <https://www.comfortzonecamp.org/>
- **The Dougy Center** provides a safe place for children, teens, young adults and their families to share their grieving experience through peer support groups, education and training. <https://www.dougy.org/>
- **Eluna** provides comfort, hope and healing to children of military families and hosts a free weekend-long experience of traditional camp activities combined with grief education and emotional support at Camp Erin. <https://elunanetwork.org/>
- **Good Grief Camps and Family Camps**, offered through the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, pair young survivors with active-duty military and veteran mentors who understand the military and can help guide young survivors through their journey of grief. The camps are offered at different locations throughout the United States. <https://www.taps.org/youthprograms/camps#ggc>
- **Snowball Express'** mission is to create hope and new memories for the children of deceased service members who died while serving our country since Sept. 11, 2001. During December, it brings children together from all over the world for an all-expenses-paid, five-day gala filled with activities, such as sporting events, dances and amusement park visits. <https://www.garysinisefoundation.org/snowball-express/>

- **Project Common Bond**, a program of Tuesday's Children, provides camps and retreats for teens and young adults ages 15-20 who have lost a family member because of an act of terrorism. Each summer, new Project Common Bond participants attend a summer symposium focused on global leadership activities, peace building, skill building, and collaborative and therapeutic arts, music, drama, and sports. <https://www.tuesdayschildren.org/news-press/project-common-bond/>
- **SOFWOLF** is a nonprofit organization that offers a college and career outdoor leadership program for teenagers of the deceased Special Operations Forces service members, which includes Air Force Commandos, Green Berets, Navy SEALs, and Marine Special Operators. Each summer, students are flown to Park City, Utah, where they participate in team-building activities, career mentoring, resume-building, community outreach, and networking for internships. <https://www.sofwolf.org/>

Programs for Adults

Retreats and seminars are available for adults as well. They connect survivors with other adults who have lost loved ones and teach them coping skills. Consult "The Days Ahead" resource for a more complete list of support organizations. <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/products/the-days-ahead-essential-papers-english-version-33/>

If you're feeling overwhelmed by grief, contact one of the following services at any time:

Department of Veterans Affairs Bereavement Counseling https://www.vetcenter.va.gov/bereavement_counseling.asp

Military OneSource consultants at 800-342-9647 for CONUS, or <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/resources/tools/international-calling-options/>

Military OneSource's confidential, non-medical counseling service, available face to face, online, through video chat or by phone. <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/non-medical-counseling/>



Gold Star Remembrance 2025

By Stephanie Hunter, Navy Gold Star Program Analyst

Every year, thousands of military personnel make selfless sacrifices to defend our country and protect the freedoms we hold dear. The strong and patriotic families of those who serve understand the importance of this commitment, as they stand alongside the men and women who serve so valiantly.

As a nation, we support and thank these brave individuals for their service, but our support should not end there. Every year we lose hundreds of service members because of suicide, combat, training accidents, accidental occurrences, illness or homicide. In 2024 alone, the Navy lost 182 active-duty Sailors, leaving behind loved ones – our Gold Star families.

We have a duty to care for our Gold Star families and honor the legacies of their fallen heroes. This proud nation takes a moment every year at the end of May to remember the fallen on Memorial Day, which is why throughout that month, the Navy Gold Star Program provides opportunities for survivors to participate in events that pay tribute to the fallen and offer them a chance to connect with others who share similar experiences, while educating both our military and civilian communities on what it means to be a Gold Star survivor.

While no amount of gratitude can fully repay the debt owed to our lost heroes, we can recognize their service and sacrifice by helping their families preserve their memories. Regardless of military service, cause, location, or circumstances of the loss, surviving family members deserve our recognition and deepest respect. When you see someone wearing the Gold Star or next-of-kin lapel pin, please take a moment to acknowledge their sacrifice. Behind every Gold Star pin there are stories of fallen service members and strong survivors who continue to carry on their legacy.

For more information about the Navy Gold Star Program, please visit www.facebook.com/navygoldstar, www.navygoldstar.com or call 1-888-509-8759.



Memorial Day
May 26, 2025
We Remember.

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Gold Star Spouses Day

By Stephanie Hunter, Navy Gold Star Program Analyst

Gold Star Spouses Day will be recognized on April 5, 2025, a day dedicated to honoring the husbands and wives of those who died while serving on active duty.

Since 2010, Congress has annually acknowledged April 5 as “Gold Star Wives’ Day,” paying tribute to the contributions of individuals associated with Gold Star Wives of America, a nonprofit organization established in 1945 by women who lost their husbands in service to our country. As the military has evolved over the years, so has the role and demographics of the military spouse, leading to a more inclusive resolution that now recognizes April 5 as Gold Star Spouses Day.

The tradition of the Gold Star recognition traces back to 1918, when families would affix a gold star over the blue service star in their window to signify the loss of a loved one serving in the U.S. military overseas. In 1947, Congress approved the design, production, and distribution of the official Gold Star lapel button, which symbolizes service members who made the ultimate sacrifice in combat operations. The lapel button for next of kin of deceased personnel, featuring a gold star on a gold background surrounded by laurel leaves, was introduced in 1973 to honor active-duty service members who lost their lives in non-combat operations.

The survivor support community has embraced April 5 as an opportunity to recognize the sacrifices made by all Gold Star spouses and express gratitude for their unwavering commitment. The Navy Gold Star Program remains dedicated to providing support and fostering connections among Gold Star families, ensuring they remain connected to their Navy family for as long as they desire.

In commemoration of Gold Star Spouses Day, let us honor the families of the fallen, acknowledging that no one has given more for our nation. If you encounter someone wearing a Gold Star lapel button or the lapel button for next of kin of deceased personnel, remember that these symbols represent the families of our fallen heroes. If you know or meet a Gold Star spouse, please take a moment to acknowledge their loved one’s sacrifice and express gratitude for their continued service.

To learn more about how the Navy Gold Star Program is honoring Gold Star spouses in your area, we encourage you to connect with your closest coordinator. Visit www.navygoldstar.com/locations to find out more.



Celebrate National Park Week 2025: April 19-27

Mark your calendars! National Park Week in 2025 will run from Saturday, April 19 to Sunday, April 27. On the first day of the week, April 19, free admission will be offered to all National Park Service sites that charge an entrance fee.

Upcoming Free National Park Admission Days in 2025:

- **April 19** – First day of National Park Week
- **June 19** – Juneteenth National Independence Day
- **Aug. 4** – Anniversary of the Great American Outdoors Act
- **Sept. 27** – National Public Lands Day
- **Nov. 11** – Veterans Day

Free Entrance for Military, Veterans and Gold Star Families: The National Park Service also offers free entrance to national parks for current military members, veterans and Gold Star families. To learn more about how to obtain a pass, please visit <https://www.nps.gov/planyourvisit/veterans-and-gold-star-families-free-access.htm>.

Did You Know? The first National Park Week took place in 1991, celebrating the 75th anniversary of the National Park Service. Since then, National Park Week has been an annual celebration, proclaimed by the president, encouraging people to explore the NPS's rich history and extraordinary places.

National Park Week highlights the important role of the NPS and its partners in preserving America's natural and cultural heritage while providing opportunities for people from all backgrounds to connect with these remarkable spaces.

We Remember

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

April 10: USS Thresher - 129 crew members were lost aboard USS Thresher on April 10, 1963, 220 miles east of Cape Cod during a deep-diving test.

April 11: USS Kidd - 38 Sailors were killed aboard USS Kidd on April 11, 1945, when the ship was struck by a kamikaze aircraft off the coast of Japan.

April 19: USS Iowa - 47 crewmen were killed aboard USS Iowa on April 19, 1989, when an explosion occurred within the Number Two 16-inch gun turret during a fleet exercise in the Caribbean Sea.

May 17: USS Stark - 37 Sailors were killed aboard USS Stark on May 17, 1987, during the Iran-Iraq War, when an Iraqi jet aircraft fired two Exocet missiles at the American frigate.



The Weight of Advocacy: Gold Star Survivors and the Responsibility of Awareness

By April Tischler, Navy Gold Star Program Coordinator

For those who have never experienced the loss of a loved one in military service, symbols such as the Gold Star lapel pin or a Gold Star license plate affixed to a vehicle may go unnoticed. But for Gold Star survivors, they serve as quiet, yet powerful reminders of sacrifice and the personal connection with survivor families.

When someone asks about a Gold Star symbol, it is often an opportunity to educate and share the meaning behind it. These moments can also be emotionally heavy. Survivors decide, sometimes in an instant, how much they are willing to share. Some days, the words come easily and survivors may find strength in telling their story and have an opportunity to speak the name of their loved one. Other days, the weight of grief may make it difficult to explain.

Choosing How to Engage

Not every encounter requires an explanation, and it is important for Gold Star survivors to protect their emotional well-being. Below are some ways to navigate these moments, ranging from full engagement to politely disengaging.

Fully Engaging: If you feel comfortable, sharing your loved one's story can be a powerful way to honor their sacrifice. A simple response like, "This is a Gold Star lapel pin. It represents that my [relation] gave their life in service to our country. I wear it to honor them." can open the door for meaningful conversations.

Brief Acknowledgment: On days when you don't have the energy for a long conversation, a short response such as, "It represents the loss of a military loved one." allows you to acknowledge the question without delving into details.

Redirection: If you prefer not to engage, redirecting the conversation can be helpful. A simple, "Thank you for noticing. It means a lot." can close the interaction without requiring further explanation.

Non-verbal Responses: Sometimes, a nod, a smile, or even placing your hand over your heart can communicate acknowledgment without the need for words.

Opting Out: It is always okay to not respond at all. If you are in a situation where you don't feel like explaining, remember that your grief and your boundaries are yours to protect.

Remember, this is a shared journey of honor and remembrance. Each time someone asks about a Gold Star pin or plate, it is an opportunity for connection. Share your loved one's stories in your own way, in your own voice, when you are ready.

To those who see the symbols and wonder what they mean, thank you for noticing. And to our fellow survivors who carry this responsibility, you are not alone.

How to Obtain a Gold Star Lapel Pin or License Plate

Gold Star survivors can reach out to their Navy Gold Star Program coordinator for assistance in obtaining a Gold Star lapel pin or information about Gold Star license plates in their state. Your coordinator can help guide you through the process and provide additional resources tailored to your needs. For Gold Star license plates, eligibility and availability vary by state. Not all states issue them, and requirements may differ.

To get in touch with your Navy Gold Star Program coordinator, please visit the Navy Gold Star website locations page at <https://www.navygoldstar.com/locations>.



SYMBOLS OF HONOR

When you see someone wearing these pins, know that he or she has lost a loved one who selflessly served our nation.



Gold Star Lapel Pin

It is designated for eligible Survivors of service members who lost their lives during any armed hostilities in which the United States is engaged, dating back to World War I. This includes service members who lost their lives while deployed in support of military operations against the enemy or during an international terrorist attack.



Next of Kin Lapel Pin

It is designated for eligible Survivors of service members who lost their lives while serving under circumstances not defined by the Gold Star Lapel Pin. This includes service members who lost their lives while assigned to a Reserve or National Guard unit in a drill status. It is authorized for issue retroactive to March 29, 1973.



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 1-888-509-8759

A Survivor's Story

By Tonia Lott, Gold Star Mother of LT Julian Brown III

My name is Tonia Lott. I lost my son, Julian Brown III, on Aug. 15, 2023. My son graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 2019 at 22 years of age. Julian went to submarine engineering school in Charleston, South Carolina, and graduated in the top percentage of his class. He was then stationed in Norfolk, Virginia, and was quickly promoted to Lt. Level 3, working on the recently commissioned submarine USS New Jersey (SSN 796).

While at the Naval Academy, Julian pledged Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., in the Iota Mu Mu Chapter, and forged additional bonds with this brotherhood. Julian seemed to be excelling in his career and appeared to be well-adjusted with a ton of friends and was supported by a large, loving family. Unbeknownst to anyone, Julian was suffering from severe depression and died by suicide. His stepfather and I found support and resources by connecting with the Gold Star Program.

While journaling and trying to figure out how I missed signs that Julian was struggling, I remembered he lost an extremely close friend on May 25, 2023. Julian took this loss extremely hard, and I believe this is one of the things that triggered his severe depression. I had only met his friend once; I didn't attend the funeral and had never met her parents. However, I felt compelled to connect with them. I reached out to my Navy Gold Star representative, Patsy, to see if she could get me in touch with my son's dear friend's mother. I received an email from the mother within a week! This connection has been such a blessing. We have become friends – no, sisters! She included Julian in a birthday/memorial celebration for her daughter, which we are continuing to do again this year in May.

This is just one of the many blessings Navy Gold Star has provided me, but it has been the most impactful. Connecting with individuals that understand your loss is invaluable! Navy Gold Star provides that connection with their in-person meetings and online meetings, and my coordinator went above and beyond researching information to allow the connection of two mothers who lost children that were close friends, resulting in us becoming family.

To help me cope with my loss, I've written a memoir about my son's life and my grief journey, called "My Beautiful Black Son Died by Suicide." The book serves to help bring awareness and break the stigma of depression, mental health, and suicide. It is my goal that the book will help shed a light that depression may not look like what one would think and the signs that my family missed. Additionally, if tragedy does strike, the hope is that the book will help other parents not feel so alone in the confusion that suicide creates.

Through writing this memoir, it's my hope to bring a call to action, encouraging open conversations within families and communities about mental health. The book offers an intimate and powerful message that even in the darkest moments, there is space for healing and forgiveness. I've since started a company called Healing Out Loud (<https://www.healingoutloudllc.com/>). Healing Out Loud's vision is to empower inner peace, creating safe spaces where grief, mindfulness and mental health are embraced with compassion, empowering communities to heal, grow and live with emotional resilience while breaking the stigma surrounding mental wellbeing, depression and suicide. I'm grateful to the Gold Star Program for all the help and support they provide.





Meet Our Newest Navy Gold Star Coordinator

Jeannine Sataua provides support to our families living in Northern California, Japan, Guam, Korea, China, and the Philippines.



Jeannine Sataua Navy Gold Star Program Coordinator

Jeannine joined the Navy Gold Star Program in 2025, bringing nine years of experience from the Fleet and Family Support Center in San Diego, where she worked within the Work and Family Life Program. During her time there, she developed and delivered services and training for military members and their families, covering services such as Deployment Support, Family Employment, Life Skills Education, and Relocation.

Known for her expertise in information and referral, Jeannine excels at collaborating across programs and with other military-affiliated organizations. A natural event coordinator, Jeannine is passionate about creating opportunities to engage families and raise awareness of programs designed to enhance stability and quality of life.

Jeannine holds a Bachelor of Political Science degree from the University of Hawaii and is excited that her role includes supporting families overseas, with her own family connections in Germany and the Philippines.

While she is deeply committed to her professional role, Jeannine's greatest joy comes from being a mom to her daughter and son. As a strong advocate for a holistic lifestyle, she prioritizes balance in both her work and personal life. Her favorite place to recharge is at the beautiful Sunset Cliffs in San Diego.



Tax Tips for Survivors

February 2025

The Primary Next of Kin is responsible for the deceased Sailor's last tax return. Know your rights and benefits as a Surviving taxpayer.

What is my tax filing status as a Survivor?

YEAR 1	<p>If you were married at the time your spouse died, you may still file a joint return for the year of your service member's death. This gets you the best tax rate (and the largest standard deduction, if you do not itemize).</p> <p>Survivors filing a joint return may claim the full exemption amount for the decedent regardless of the date during the year when the death occurred.</p>
YEARS 2-3	<p>If you have one or more children, you may file as a "qualifying widow or widower" for the next two tax years, so long as you do not remarry. This status lets you use joint-return tax rates.</p>
YEAR 4	<p>Starting in year four, if you have dependent children, you may file your tax return as a "head-of-household." Tax rates are less favorable than those for joint returns but better than the rates for single taxpayers.</p>

Which of my benefits are taxable?

TAXABLE	Salary income (including the "pay" portion of an unpaid compensation claim).	Life insurance benefits (including Servicemembers Group Life Insurance (SGLI)).	TAX EXEMPT
	Income from Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) payments.	Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) payments.	
	Social Security Survivor benefits (up to 85%).	Death Gratuity.	

When will I get my service member's W-2?



The Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) issues a W-2 for deceased service members who had income during the tax year. The W-2 will be sent to the address on record for the service member after January 1 of the year following the member's death.

How do I replace a lost W-2?

If the address on record is incorrect and the W-2 cannot be delivered, or if the document is lost, you can request a reprint by contacting your Navy Gold Star coordinator for assistance.

Are there any special tax provisions for Survivors?



Yes. In certain cases, widows and widowers get a tax break on individual retirement accounts (IRAs) inherited from a spouse and on proceeds from the sale of a home.

If the service member died as a result of active service in a combat zone (according to the definitions provided in the benefit laws), the member's Federal income tax liability may be forgiven. Any taxes paid for the year of death will be refunded, and any tax liability at the date of death will be forgiven.

What about state taxes?



Don't overlook the possibility that your state may offer its own tax benefits. See, for example, <https://marylandtaxes.gov/individual/estate-inheritance/>.

Most states also have income tax forgiveness policies in place for veterans who serve in combat zones; check with your state's revenue department to find out if you qualify.

Parents of an unmarried deceased service member must file a tax return on behalf of their child for the year of the death. See <https://www.irs.gov/publications/p559> or consult a tax professional.



THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
**VIETNAM WAR
COMMEMORATION**



National Vietnam War Veterans Day March 29



PATRICK J TREMPER • JAMES WITT • DAVID
REGORY K... TA • JAMES BARR • F
CHARLES... HOFF • MICHAEL D C
DARYL... RUM • C
LUKE • ROY L ESTRADA
LARRY... IS • EDDIE DEAN GAM
GOI • ELVIN W... • WILLIAM R GOUDELOCK •
ARTHUR L HAWKINS Jr • EUGENE C JOHNSON • WALTER A

HONOR THEIR LEGACY

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“Join the Nation ... thank a Vietnam veteran!”

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APRIL 9TH


**NATIONAL FORMER
PRISONERS OF WAR
RECOGNITION DAY**




A prisoner of war is a person who is held captive by a power during or immediately after an armed conflict.




137,425
returned to US military control



Every military dining facility houses a memorial for current P.O.W and MIA personal



The black and white logo represents the sorrow, anxiety and hope felt by the men still missing



1,589 - Vietnam War
7,761 - Korean War
126 - Cold War
72,719 - World War II

THE NAVY & MARINE CORPS MEDAL OF HONOR



The Medal of Honor is the highest military decoration that may be awarded by the United States government. It is presented by the President of the United States, in the name of Congress, and is conferred only upon members of the United States Armed Forces who distinguish themselves through conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty.

IN RECOGNITION OF NATIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR DAY

Navy Gold Star Coordinators

Area of Responsibility	Phone
California (Los Angeles County/Northern CA), Japan, Guam, Korea	901-581-2383
California (San Diego/Riverside), Colorado, Utah, Hawaii	901-930-8290
California (San Diego/Riverside), Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada	901-930-8308
Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Minnesota, Canada	901-930-8062
Washington, Alaska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Iowa	901-671-7519
Texas	901-930-8109
Michigan, Illinois, Indiana	901-930-8593
Kansas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Tennessee	901-930-8300
Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Maine	901-671-6910
New York, New Jersey, Vermont, New Hampshire	901-930-8388
West Virginia, Delaware, Maryland, Washington, D.C., and all other counties in Virginia not listed below	901-930-8578
Virginia (these counties: Isle of Wight, Suffolk, Chesapeake City, Virginia Beach, Norfolk, Williamsburg City, Hampton City, Newport News City, Portsmouth City, York, Poquoson City)	901-930-8008
North Carolina, Kentucky, Ohio	901-930-8210
Georgia, South Carolina, Europe	901-671-5597
Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida	901-671-6521
Florida	904-542-5706

Note: All postal mail should be sent to the below address.

Commander, Navy Installations Command
 ATTN: Navy Gold Star Program
 716 Sicard Street SE, Suite 100
 Washington Navy Yard, DC 20374-5140