

Gold Star Family

Updated: April 7, 2021



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The Gold Star family is one that has experienced a loss of a loved one—an immediate family member who died as the result of military service. Those who have died on duty leave behind parents, siblings, spouses, and children. Those left behind are recognized as Gold Star families.

According to a 2019 USO official site article, there have been more than 16,000 American troops who died in non-combat circumstances, and some 7,000 “died in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars alone” since 9/11 as well as thousands of Gold Star Families who lost loved ones in both world wars, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and other conflicts.

The Army official site has a page dedicated to these families, reminding the rest of the military community and their loved ones, “The Army recognizes that no one has given more for the nation than the families of the fallen.”

Evolution Of The Gold Star

A tradition dating back to the First World War, [military service flags](#) were flown by military families. These flags included blue stars for every family member who served in uniform. Families who had loved ones who died in the line of duty would have the blue star replaced with a gold one.

The gold star was and is a signifier that the family has made the ultimate sacrifice. And families often had more than one gold star in their flags.

As time went by, the use of the gold star in this way extended to lapel pins and buttons; they are awarded to family members by the military services. In 1947 Congress approved an “official Gold Star Lapel Button,” which formally recognizes service members who lost their lives in combat.

A Gold Star lapel button ([awarded to next-of-kin](#)) was created in 1973. [This version symbolizes active duty service members “who lost their lives in non-combat operations” according to Navy.mil. Gold Star honors are typically presented to the next-of-kin during the service member’s funeral.](#)

Honoring Gold Star Families

Gold Star families are honored in several ways each year including:

- The last Sunday of September is designated [Gold Star Mother’s Day](#)
- The last Sunday in September is also Gold Star Family Day
- April 5 is [Gold Star Spouses Day](#)

What To Do If You Become A Gold Star Family

If you learn of a family member’s death as a result of military service, the first thing you should do is to contact the military member’s unit or command support staff (if known) to verify the information.

If you know the base but not the unit, or do not know the whereabouts of the service member for sure, call the Red Cross for assistance. During this process you should also contact the Department of Veterans Affairs to make inquiries and request assistance.

In some cases, a family may be notified of a service member’s death before a DoD Casualty Assistance Officer can get in touch. Sometimes the family is notified of the servicemember’s death by the Casualty Assistance Officer.

No matter how you are notified, this Department of Defense representative will work with you to make sure you know your benefits, rights, and responsibilities. It’s this person’s job to verify the accuracy of the information in DoD records so you will need to gather some information to provide the officer including:

- Copies of military orders, discharge paperwork, or other indicators of the service member’s status immediately before death.
- Copies of any official record of the last known address and other contact information.
- Copies of other official documentation such as death certificates, marriage licenses, divorce decrees, etc.
- Social Security information.

Do NOT give sensitive personal data such as Social Security Numbers, dates of birth, banking information, etc. over the phone or social media. A legitimate Casualty Assistance Officer will not request these details be provided by phone.

If you aren't sure how to proceed, call the Department of Veterans Affairs before you talk to the officer and request guidance on how to deliver the information. If you suspect you have been contacted by a scammer posing as a VA representative for death benefits or other programs, call the Federal Trade Commission at 877-382-4357 for advice and help.

Gold Star Benefits

- DoD Death Gratuity (\$100,000, tax-exempt)
- DoD Funeral and burial benefits
- [Servicemembers Group Life Insurance](#) claim payment
- [Survivor Benefit Plan](#) claim payment
- [VA burial benefits](#)
- VA [Dependency and Indemnity Compensation](#)
- [VA Parents' Dependency and Indemnity Compensation](#)
- Social Security payments to surviving spouses
- [Montgomery GI Bill death benefit](#)
- [Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship for children and surviving spouses](#)
- [Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program](#)
- [VA mortgages for surviving spouses](#)
- [Commissary](#), BX, and [TRICARE benefits](#) for surviving spouses and dependents
- [VA Survivors Pension](#)
- Free financial counseling services for beneficiaries of [SGLI](#), [FSGLI](#) and [TSGLI](#)

Gold Star Family Resources

A non-profit agency known as Gold Star Mothers has worked on behalf of Gold Star families since 1928. Gold Star Mothers have a mission to educate, remember, and inspire.

Their mission includes education, remembrance, inspiring “true allegiance to the United States of America”, and most importantly for many, offering “needful assistance to all Gold Star Mothers and, when possible, to their descendants”.

Other resources include, but are not limited to:

- Navy Long Term Assistance Program (901) 874-0083
- Army Family Programs Directorate (210) 466-1173
- Air Force Airman and Family Care Division (703) 697-2392
- Coast Guard Casualty Matters Office (703) 872-6647
- Marine Corps Gold Star & Surviving Family Member Representatives (703) 784-9580
- Tragedy Assistance Program For Survivors (TAPS) Hotline 800-959-TAPS (8277)
- DoD Casualty and Mortuary Affairs & Military Funeral Honors 571-372-5319
- [Children of Fallen Soldiers Relief Fund](#)
- [Duskin & Stephens Foundation \(U.S. Special Operations Community\)](#)
- [Faces of Valor USA](#)
- [Fallen Patriot Fund](#)

- [Green Beret Foundation](#)

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What is a Gold Star military family?

The title can be traced back to World War I.



[Nonprofit supports families of America's fallen soldiers](#)

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Nov. 7, 2022, 9:37 AM CST / Source: TODAY

By [Kait Hanson](#)

The death of a military service member in combat is a tragic and emotional time for all families and friends, and a loss that no loved one wants to endure.

The title given to families of military members who have died in the line of duty is “Gold Star Family.”

On June 23, 1936, Congress designated the last Sunday of September as Gold Star Mother’s Day. In 2011, President Barack Obama amended the observance to include Gold Star family members.

According to the United Service Organizations, a nonprofit that supports members of the United States Armed Forces and their families, "Gold Star Family" can be traced back to World War I.

"The phrase 'Gold Star Family,' dates back to World War I, when military families displayed service flags featuring a blue star for every immediate family member serving in the Armed Forces. The star’s color would be changed to gold if the family lost a loved one in the war, hence the term 'Gold Star Family'," the [USO states on their website](#).

Service flags are regulated by the Department of Defense and the number of stars on a flag denotes the number of service members actively deployed.

The DOD specifies that immediate family members authorized to display a service flag include: spouses, parents, children, siblings, stepparents, step children, step siblings, half-siblings, adoptive parents, adopted children and adopted siblings of a United States service member.

While "Gold Star Family" refers to immediate next of kin, the grief following the loss of a service member is immense and can be felt throughout entire communities.

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, or [TAPS](#) — a national nonprofit organization that provides care and resources for anyone grieving the death of a military or veteran service member — was founded by Bonnie Carroll in 1994 after losing her husband Brig. Gen. Tom Carroll in an Army plane crash.

"We are there to embrace all those who are grieving a veteran loved one and to honor their life and their service," Carroll told [TODAY Parents](#).

Carroll told TODAY that she founded TAPS to provide all of the dovetail support services that go beyond what the government is able to do for families.

"We don't define their life by the moment or manner of death and we don't differentiate the care and support and the love and the resources we provide based on that," she said of the organization. "It's honoring a life that included service to this country."

Carroll recognized the need for additional support for families from her own loss

"Grief isn't a physical injury you can put a band-aid on. Grief is about love. We only grieve because we love," she said. "At TAPS, it's really leaning into (the fact) that love doesn't stop."