

Casualty Statuses, Types, and Categories

In the military, a casualty is a person who is unable to serve in the line of duty due to death, injury, illness, capture, or desertion. Any Service member who is killed, injured, sick, or hospitalized becomes a “casualty.” Most military casualties are due to injury or death. When a Service member is classified as a casualty, they are assigned a status. The casualty is also coded as a type and placed in a category. There are several casualty statuses, types, and categories, which are described below. It may be useful for you to be familiar with these terms as you communicate with students and families about military injury and death. These statuses, types, and categories are very precise and technical, therefore the definitions provided here are taken directly from the Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI), which is a military-wide document that regulates procedures.¹

Casualty Status

Casualty statuses are reported to the Service member’s primary next of kin (PNOK), or family member who will be notified first. They provide information on the status of the Service member. There are several casualty statuses, which are described below.

Deceased: A casualty status applicable to a person who is either known to have died, determined to have died on the basis of conclusive evidence, or declared to be dead on the basis of a presumptive finding of death. The recovery of remains is not a prerequisite to determining or declaring a person deceased.

Duty status - whereabouts unknown (DUSTWUN): A transitory casualty status, applicable only to military personnel, that is used when the responsible commander suspects the member may be a casualty, whose absence is involuntary, but does not feel sufficient evidence currently exists to make a determination of missing or deceased.

Missing: A casualty status for which the United States Code provides statutory guidance concerning missing members of the Military Services. Excluded are personnel who are in an AWOL, deserter, or dropped-from-rolls status. A person declared missing is categorized as:

- **Beleaguered:** The casualty is a member of an organized element that has been surrounded by a hostile force to prevent escape of its members
- **Besieged:** The casualty is a member of an organized element that has been surrounded by a hostile force, compelling it to surrender.
- **Captured:** The casualty has been seized as the result of action of an unfriendly military or paramilitary force in a foreign country. This is sometimes referred to as a Prisoner of War (POW).

- **Detained:** The casualty is prevented from proceeding or is restrained in custody for alleged violation of international law or other reason claimed by the government or group under which the person is being held.
- **Interned:** The casualty is definitely known to have been taken into custody of a nonbelligerent foreign power as the result of and for reasons arising out of any armed conflict in which the Armed Forces of the United States are engaged.
- **Missing:** The casualty is not present at his or her duty location due to apparent involuntary reasons and whose location is unknown.
- **Missing in Action (MIA):** The casualty is a hostile casualty, other than the victim of a terrorist activity, who is not present at his or her duty location due to apparent involuntary reasons and whose location is unknown.

Very seriously ill or injured (VSI): The casualty status of a person whose illness or injury is such that medical authority declares it more likely than not that death will occur within 72 hours.

Seriously ill or injured (SI): The casualty status of a person whose illness or injury requires medical attention, and medical authority declares that death is possible, but not likely within 72 hours, and/or the severity is such that it is permanent and life-altering.

Not seriously ill or injured (NSI): The casualty status of a person whose illness or injury requires medical attention, may or may not require hospitalization, and medical authority classifies as less severe than SI.

Special Patient (SPECPAT) or Special Category (SPECAT): At the DoD Component's discretion, an additional casualty status of Special Patient (SPECPAT) or Special Category (SPECAT) may be used. This status is for those members whose illness or injury is not otherwise reportable such as SI or VSI but involves: personnel diagnosed with a psychotic condition requiring hospitalization; attempted suicide and suicide gestures verified by a medical authority, or other medical conditions that may require extensive medical treatment or hospitalization.

Casualty Types

In addition, you may hear terms describing casualty types. These are often used for reporting purposes; however, it may be useful for you to be familiar with them as you communicate with students and families. They types are described below.

Hostile Casualty: A person who is the victim of a terrorist activity or who becomes a casualty "in action." "In action" characterizes the casualty as having been the direct result of hostile action, sustained in combat or relating thereto, or sustained going to or returning from a combat mission provided that the occurrence was directly related to hostile action. Included are persons killed or wounded mistakenly or accidentally by friendly fire directed at a hostile force or what is thought to be a hostile force. However, not to be considered as sustained in action and not to be interpreted as

hostile casualties are injuries or death due to the elements, self-inflicted wounds, combat fatigue, and except in unusual cases, wounds or death inflicted by a friendly force while the individual is in an AWOL, deserter, or dropped-from-rolls status or is voluntarily absent without authority from a place of duty.

Non-hostile Casualty: A person who becomes a casualty due to circumstances not directly attributable to hostile action or terrorist activity. Casualties due to the elements, self-inflicted wounds, and combat fatigue are non-hostile casualties.

Casualty Categories

Finally, there are a number of casualty categories, which are used for reporting purposes and based upon the casualty type and status. They are described below.

Died of Wounds Received in Action: A casualty category applicable to a hostile casualty, other than the victim of a terrorist activity, who dies of wounds or other injuries received in action after having reached a medical treatment facility

Killed in Action (KIA): A casualty category applicable to a hostile casualty, other than the victim of a terrorist activity, who is killed outright or who dies as a result of wounds or other injuries before reaching a medical treatment facility.

¹ Department of Defense. (2009, August 14). *Department of Defense instruction*. Retrieved from <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/130018p.pdf>