



# NCIS Death and Suicide Investigation Process

**Mike Keleher - NCIS Headquarters Division Chief**  
**Karen Arita - NCIS Headquarters Family Liaison Coordinator**

# Death Investigation Protocol

- SECNAVINST 5430.107 – Mission and Functions of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service
- “NCIS shall investigate...any non-combat death, on or off naval installations, facilities, vessels, or aircraft, where the cause of death cannot be medically attributable to disease or natural causes...NCIS shall investigate the circumstances until criminal causality can be reasonably excluded.”

# Death Investigation Protocol

Every case is treated with the same diligence as a homicide --

- Prevents destruction or loss of valuable evidence at the scene and loss of important information from witnesses

# Death Investigation Protocol

- Medical Examiner determines cause and manner of death
- NCIS investigates circumstances surrounding the death
- NCIS presents results to medical, command and/or prosecutors for action deemed appropriate

# Death Investigation Protocol

## Timeline:

- Initial notification to duty agent and assignment of case agent
- Death scene MCRT response and review by Forensic Consultant
- Investigation and worldwide pursuit of all logical investigative leads
- Autopsy/Pathologist consult
- Family interviews and Family Liaison contact
- NCIS Field Office Death Review Panel
- NCIS HQ Death Review Board
- Authorization to close

# Death Investigation Protocol

## NCIS Death Scene Responders

### NCIS Special Agents

- Training at FLETC and advanced crime scene training

### Major Case Response Team (MCRT)

- Advanced training and evidence collection equipment
- Extensive death scene examination, measurements, photography, videotaping and gathering and packaging of evidence

### NCIS Forensic Consultants

- Masters Degrees in Forensics
- Consult with MCRTs on every death scene and review the physical evidence in every death case

# Death Investigation Protocol-Suspected Suicide

- Mandatory interviews of family, witnesses, friends, etc.
- Review of 911 calls
- Review of death scene examination by MCRT
- Review of cyber evidence
- Review of all records (service, medical, psychological, emergency room and ambulance)
- Criminal History: Data base checks
- Sworn statements obtained from witnesses

# Death Investigation Protocol-Suspected Suicide Investigative Steps (cont.)

- All logical leads are pursued worldwide
- Role of NCIS Forensic Psychologist
- Consultation with outside experts – U.S. Army Criminal Investigative Laboratory (USACIL), Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (AFIP), and other state, local and federal agencies
- NCIS HQ Death Desk Officers monitor the case and interact with the case control agent

# Suicide Prevention

NCIS participates with DON and USMC in Suicide Prevention activities to include the NCIS Crime Reduction Campaigns which proactively bring public awareness to problems with the goal of prevention

NCIS is currently participating with two USN and one USMC study on suicide and suicide prevention.

# Death Investigation Protocol

## Suspected Suicide – Autopsy

NCIS Special Agents work closely with Pathologist and Medical Examiners who conduct the autopsy

- Attend the autopsy and provide scene photos, evidence and personal records to MEs at autopsy
- Autopsy photos are obtained for the case file
- Agents obtain the final autopsy report and final death certificate
- Outside agency reports may be referred to AFIP for consult and opinion

# Death Investigation Protocol

## Suspected Suicide – NCIS Family Liaison Coordinator

- Specially trained Licensed Clinical Social Worker
- Point of contact for family on all questions and information regarding the death investigation

# Death Investigation Protocol

## Suspected Suicide – FOIA and Privacy Act

### Background:

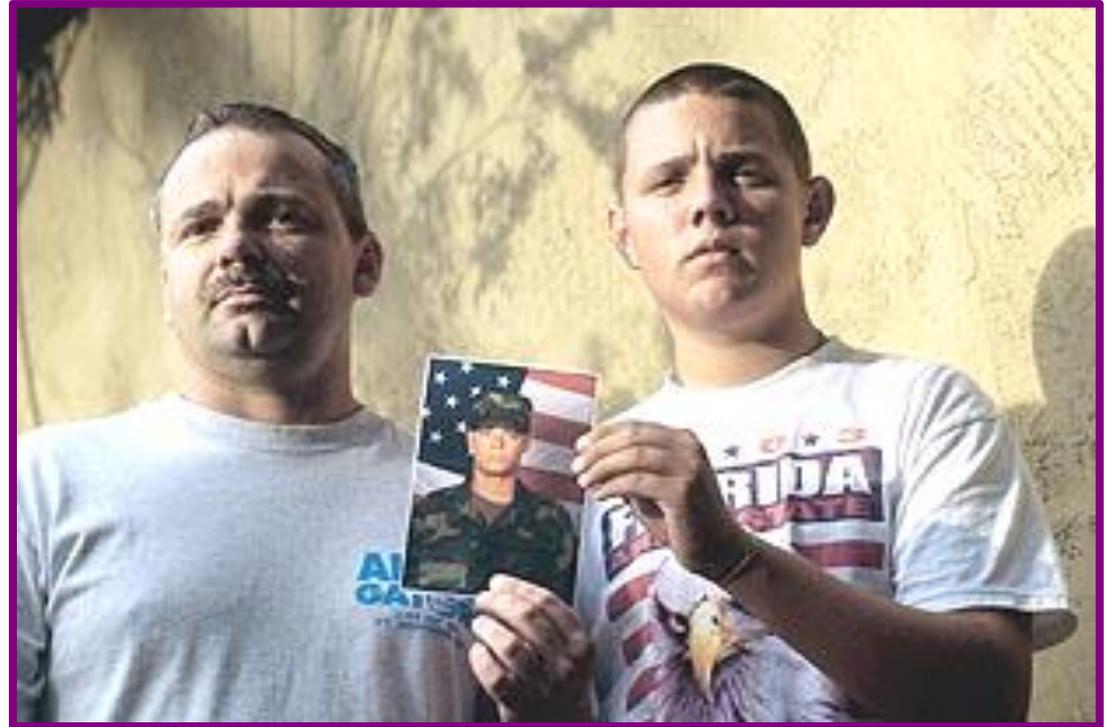
- Death cases routinely take one year or more to close-FOIA requests may take an additional two to three months to complete following closure
- FOIA requests
  - Executed to the letter of the law
  - Privacy and document control

# NCIS Family Liaison Program

## Families always have Questions

**“Anger Joins Grief as Marine's Family Feels Misled”** *The New York Times*

*Published: November 5, 2006*



**“Families Frustrated in Quest for the Truth”**

# NCIS Family Liaison Program

- **Background:**
  - NCIS Establishes Family Liaison Policy (1994)
  - DoD Instruction 5505.10 (1996)
    - Mandates establishment of Family Liaison Program
- **Purpose:**
  - To ensure all reasonable questions and issues raised by the family are addressed on a timely basis

# NCIS Family Liaison Program (cont.)

- Application
  - Family liaison involvement is appropriate when a military victim dies from an apparent suicide, an accident, or when the manner of death is undetermined.
- Benefits
  - Minimize problems or misinformation which can result in the perception of a cover-up or conspiracy
  - Provide a consistent Point of Contact

# NCIS Family Liaison Program (cont.)

- **Functions:**
  - **Agent Support:**
    - Keep field agent apprised of relevant concerns expressed by the family
    - Assist coordination of family interview
  - **Family Advocate:**
    - Provide grief assistance and support
    - Assists family in understanding the investigative process and temper expectations accordingly
    - Provide case status updates