### Section D. Lost Folders and Reconciliation of Duplicate Records in the Beneficiary Identification and Records Locator Subsystem (BIRLS)

#### Overview

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| In This Section | This section contains the following topics: |

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| Topic | Topic Name |
| 1 | Lost Folder Searches |
| 2 | Requests for 24-Hour Searches |
| 3 | Claims Folder Number Reconciliation and Cancellation |

#### 1. Lost Folder Searches

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| Introduction | This topic contains information on searching for lost folders, including   * general search procedure * rebuilding lost claims folders * rebuilding lost notice of death (NOD) folders or Dependents’ Educational Assistance (DEA) folders, and * combining folders when the original folder is located. |

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| a. General Search Procedure | Upon discovering that the claims folder of a living or deceased Veteran, a notice of death (NOD) folder, or Dependents’ Educational Assistance (DEA) folder is missing, make an exhaustive search of the entire office.  Follow the steps in the table below to search the office. |

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| Step | Action |
| 1 | Conduct a name search of the entire drawer where the folder should be filed. |
| 2 | Add the claims folder number to the search list. |
| 3 | Check the   * pending files of the transfer and correspondence activities, and * principal guardianship files. |
| 4 | If the computer system shows an active compensation, pension, or education record, check the records of recent payment history. If these records show payment of benefits by another regional office (RO), contact that RO to determine whether or not the folder is located there. |
| 5 | If completion of the preceding steps fails to result in location of the missing folder, consider the folder lost.  ***Note***: The RO that has mail for the folder and is requesting the folder should report the folder missing. |
| 6 | Maintain the end product (EP) with a 60-day suspense from the date of receipt of the claim. At the expiration of 60 days   * create a rebuilt claims folder for processing the claim, and * continue any incomplete search efforts to find the original folder. |

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| b. Rebuilding Lost Claims Folders | Follow the steps in the table below if the missing folder is a claims folder belonging to a living or deceased Veteran. |

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| Step | Action |
| 1 | Ask the Records Management Center (RMC) to conduct a “missing folder search*.*” Submit the request via e-mail to VAVBASTL/RMC/CIR.  ***Result***: The RMC searches for the claims folder in its holdings. If the claims folder is not at the RMC, the RMC   * places a “missing folder” charge card in its place, and * notifies the RO that the claims folder is missing.   ***Note***: The RMC does not maintain NOD or DEA folders. |
| 2 | Request a physical check for the claims folder in the file bank by   * sending an e-mail message to the Veterans Service Center Manager (VSCM) of any RO where there is reason to believe the folder may be located, and * requesting a response within a specific period of time.   ***Note***: For priority processing claims, request a response time of 24 hours. For routine requests, request a response time of five work days.  ***References***: For more information on   * 24-hour searches, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.D.2, and * Priority processing claims, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 1.D.1. |
| 3 | Upon receipt of negative replies from all locations, rebuild the claims folder using the table below.   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **If the claims folder to be rebuilt will be in a(n)...** | **Then ...** | | electronic format | * create a Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS) electronic folder (eFolder) * submit requests for copies of any relevant evidence or documentation in the possession of the claimant and, if applicable, his/her power of attorney * update of the Beneficiary Identification and Records Locator Subsystem (BIRLS) LOC screen to show the eFolder at the RO is a rebuilt eFolder, and * append the “Rebuilt Folder” corporate flash.   ***References***: For more information on   * creation of eFolders, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 3.B.2 * appending a corporate flash, see the [*Share User’s Guide*](http://css.vba.va.gov/SHARE/), and * updating BIRLS to show a rebuilt folder, see the [*Share User’s Guide*](http://css.vba.va.gov/SHARE/). | | paper format | * prepare a *rebuilt* folder * submit requests for copies of any relevant evidence or documentation in the possession of the claimant and, if applicable, his/her power of attorney * update the BIRLS FOLDER LOCATION screen to reflect that the folder at the RO is a rebuilt folder, and * prominently mark the cover of the rebuilt folder with the words Rebuilt Folder.   ***Reference***: For more information on standard notations for folders, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 3.B.4.b. |   ***Important***: Create a rebuilt folder no more than 60 days from the date a corresponding claim is received, if the original claims folder is not located. |

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| c. Rebuilding Lost NOD or DEA Folders | Use the table below if a NOD or a DEA folder cannot be located after   * completing internal searches, and * receiving responses to requests for searches at any other ROs where the folder might be located. |

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| **If the NOD or DEA folder to be rebuilt will be in a(n)...** | **Then ...** |
| eFolder format | * create an eFolder, and * append the “Rebuilt Folder” corporate flash.   ***References***: For more information on   * eFolder creation, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 3.B.2, and * appending a corporate flash, see the [*Share User’s Guide*](http://css.vba.va.gov/SHARE/). |
| paper format | * rebuild the folder * if necessary, include copies of documents from available claims folders, fiscal records, and education records in the DEA folder, and * prominently mark the cover of the rebuilt folder with the words *Rebuilt Folder*.   ***Reference***: For more information on standard notations for folders, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 3.B.4.b. |

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| d. Combining Folders When the Original Folder is Located | Use the table below when a lost folder is located. |

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| **If the rebuilt folder is in a(n) ...** | **Then ...** |
| eFolder format | * consolidate document that were obtained from the original folder into the rebuilt eFolder * remove the rebuilt indicator in BIRLS * remove the *Rebuilt Folder* corporate flash, and * if the lost folder was a claims folder belonging to a living or deceased Veteran, notify the RMC that the original folder has been found.   ***Result***: The RMC removes the *missing folder* charge card from its files.  ***Note***: Do *not* notify the RMC if the folder was a NOD or DEA folder. |
| paper format | * combine the rebuilt folder and the original folder * remove the rebuilt folder indicator in BIRLS * forward the folder to the controlling operational element for review, and * if the lost folder was a claims folder belonging to a living or deceased Veteran, notify the RMC that the original folder has been found.   ***Result***: The RMC removes the *missing folder* charge card from its files.  ***Note***: Do *not* notify the RMC if the folder was a NOD or DEA folder. |

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| ***References***: For more information on   * removing a corporate flash, see the [*Share User’s Guide*](http://css.vba.va.gov/SHARE/), and * updating BIRLS to remove the rebuilt indicator, see the [*Share User’s Guide*](http://css.vba.va.gov/SHARE/). |

#### 2. Requests for 24-Hour Searches

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| Introduction | This topic contains information about 24-hour searches for missing claims folders, including   * general policy on 24-hour searches, and * procedure to request a 24-hour search. |

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| a. General Policy on 24-Hour Searches | Request 24-hours searches   * by e-mail, and * *only* on priority processing claims.   ***Reference***: For more information on priority processing claims, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 1.D.1. |

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| b. Procedure to Request a 24-Hour Search | Follow the steps in the table below to request a 24-hour search. |

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| Step | Action |
| 1 | Compose an e-mail that   * provides the * Veteran’s name * claims folder number * type of mail that necessitates the search, and * name, address, and RO of the employee to whom the folder should be sent, and * *clearly* requests * a physical check for the folder in the file banks, and * a response within 24 hours. |
| 2 | Send the e-mail to the VSCM of the   * RO that BIRLS shows has custody of the folder, and * RO where it is reasonable to believe the folder is located (if different than the RO shown in BIRLS). |
| 3 | Upon receipt of *negative* responses from *all* the ROs that received requests in Step 2, prepare a rebuilt folder. |

#### 3. Claims Folder Number Reconciliation and Cancellation

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| Introduction | This topic contains information on claims folder number reconciliation and cancellation, including   * RO action when two BIRLS records exist for the same Veteran * requirements for consolidation, and |

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| a. RO Action When Two BIRLS Records Exist for the Same Veteran | Upon discovering that two BIRLS records exist for the same Veteran, forward all corresponding documentation, including claims folders and applications, if applicable, to the local intake processing center (IPC).  ***Exception***: Do *not* forward finance activity records to the IPC.  The IPC is responsible for consolidating the records. This is accomplished by using the duplicate claim (DUPC) command, which users access through the Benefits Delivery Network (BDN).  ***Reference***: For information about using the DUPC command, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.E. |

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| b. Requirements for Consolidation | In order to consolidate duplicate BIRLS records, the RO that is performing the consolidation must have custody of both of the corresponding claims folders. If one or both claims folders are available in an electronic format only (eFolder), the RO must hold jurisdiction over the eFolder(s).  If the RO that discovered the duplicate records does not have custody of, or hold jurisdiction over, the claims folder(s)/eFolder(s) involved, that RO must request a permanent transfer of the absent claim folder/eFolder.  ***Note***: If the RMC has custody of both claims folders, the RMC is responsible for consolidating the duplicate records. |