### 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 (old 15) | Lost Folder Searches |
| 2 (old 16) | Requests for 24-Hour Searches |
| 3 (old 17) | File 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 * missing claims folders * missing notice of death (NOD) folders or Dependents’ Educational Assistance (DEA) folders, and * steps to take when a folder is located. |

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| Change Date | May 8, 2015 |

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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 file 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 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 regional office (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.   ***Reference*:** For more information about creating a rebuilt folder in VBMS see, the Transformation Initiatives and Pilots (TIP) sheet titled [*Creating a Rebuilt eFolder in VBMS*](http://vbacodmoint1.vba.va.gov/bl/21/Transformation/docs/Creating%20a%20Rebuilt%20eFolder%20in%20VBMS.docx). |

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| b. Missing 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 folder in its holdings. If the folder is not at the RMC, the RMC   * places a “missing folder” charge card in its place, and * notifies the RO that the folder is missing.   ***Note***: The RMC does not maintain NOD or DEA folders. |
| 2 | Request a physical check for the 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 emergent cases, request a response time of 24 hours. For routine requests, request a response time of five work days.  ***Reference***: For more information on 24-hour searches, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 4.D.2. |
| 3 | Upon receipt of negative replies from all locations, rebuild the claims folder. To do so,   * 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, and * update the Beneficiary Identification and Records Locator Subsystem (BIRLS) FOLDER LOCATION screen to reflect that the folder at the RO is a rebuilt folder.   ***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.  ***Reference*:** For more information about creating a rebuilt folder in VBMS see, the Transformation Initiatives and Pilots (TIP) sheet titled [*Creating a Rebuilt eFolder in VBMS*](http://vbacodmoint1.vba.va.gov/bl/21/Transformation/docs/Creating%20a%20Rebuilt%20eFolder%20in%20VBMS.docx). |
| 4 | 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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| c. Missing NOD or DEA Folders | Follow the steps in 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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| Step | Action |
| 1 | Rebuild the folder. |
| 2 | If necessary, include copies of documents from available claims, fiscal records, and education records in the DEA folder. |
| 3 | Prominently mark the cover of the rebuilt folder with the words *Rebuilt Folder*. |

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| d. Steps to Take When a Folder is Located | Follow the steps in the table below when a lost folder is located. |

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| Step | Action |
| 1 | Combine the rebuilt folder and the original folder. |
| 2 | Remove the rebuilt folder indicator in BIRLS. |
| 3 | Forward the folder to the controlling operational element for review. |
| 4 | 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. Do *not* notify the RMC if the folder was a NOD or DEA folder.  ***Result***: The RMC removes the *missing folder* charge card from its files. |

#### 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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| Change Date | May 8, 2015 |

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| a. General Policy on 24-Hour Searches | Request 24-hours searches   * by e-mail, and * *only* in emergent cases. |

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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 * file 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. File Number Reconciliation and Cancellation

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| Introduction | This topic contains information on file number reconciliation and cancellation, including   * RO action when two BIRLS records exist for the same Veteran * requirements for consolidation, and * guidelines for reconciling duplicate file numbers. |

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| Change Date | May 8, 2015 |

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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. |

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| c. Guidelines for Reconciling Duplicate File Numbers | Use the criteria found in the table below to reconcile duplicate file numbers.  ***Note***: In all instances, cancel a file number that was previously assigned on the basis of a disability insurance claim. |

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| If … | Then … |
| entitlement to benefits has been granted | retain the file number under which benefits were granted. |
| both of the corresponding records   * exist based on past or current entitlement to monetary benefits, and * are associated with * active awards, and * a pre-conversion master record | retain the file number associated with the compensation or pension award. |
| * both of the corresponding records exist based on past or current entitlement to compensation or pension * one record is identified by an SSN * the other record is identified by a file number, and * both records are associated with a pre-conversion master record | * retain the file number under which the most information in the corporate record exists (longer duration of authorized benefits), and * terminate the erroneous record *before* consolidating the duplicate BIRLS records. |
| both of the corresponding records are   * associated with an active compensation or pension award, and * identified by file numbers | * retain the file number under which the most information in the corporate record exists (longer duration of authorized benefits), and * terminate the erroneous record *before* consolidating the duplicate BIRLS records. |
| * a claim for benefits is pending * both of the corresponding records exist based on past or current entitlement to monetary benefits, and * no benefits are being paid under either record | retain the file number under which the most information in the corporate record exists (longer duration of authorized benefits). |
| VA receives a claim based on the hospitalization of a Veteran with duplicate records | retain the file number under which the most information in the corporate record exists (longer duration of authorized benefits). |
| * one of the Veteran’s records is associated with a BDN education master record, and * there is a running award associated with the Veteran’s corporate record | retain the file number associated the running award in the corporate record.  ***Note***: Information in the BDN education master record will not be lost as a result of consolidation of the duplicate BIRLS records. |
| * both records exist *solely* because of past or current entitlement to education benefits, and * only one record indicates entitlement has been used | retain the file number associated with the record that indicates entitlement has been used. |
| * *both* records exist solely because of past or current entitlement to education benefits, and * *both* records are associated with active awards or terminated awards | retain the file number under which the most information in the corporate record exists (longer duration of authorized benefits). |
| * both records exist solely because of past or current entitlement to education benefits * one record is associated with an active award, and * the other record is associated with a terminated award | retain the file number associated with the active award. |