



United States Air Force

18th Wing, Kadena Air Base, Japan



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Advisory No: 20260624-01
June 24, 2026

UPDATE: Death following snorkeling accident

KADENA AIR BASE, Japan – An Air Force General Schedule employee deployed to Kadena Air Base was found unconscious by the Japanese first responders at Odo Coast in Itoman, Okinawa, and was later pronounced dead at 6:58 p.m. June 23, 2026, after being transported to a local hospital.

The individual has been identified as James J. Chopik, 48, a GS employee assigned to the 90th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, 3rd Wing, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska. Chopik went missing June 23 while snorkeling with coworkers and was located close to shore later that day. Coworkers and emergency responders immediately initiated life-saving measures and continued treatment during transport to YuuAi Medical Center. Despite those efforts, Chopik was pronounced dead at the hospital.

“James dedicated more than a two decade career to the U.S. Air Force, then remained in service to our nation and military as a civilian. He was an exemplary colleague and friend, and a role model to the men and women in his unit. His character, professionalism and commitment to others left a lasting impact, and will be sorely missed,” said Lt. Col. Rich Williams, 90th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron commander. “His loss is deeply felt throughout the squadron, and our thoughts remain with his family and loved ones.”

“We are deeply saddened by the loss of James, who served our nation with distinction,” said Brig. Gen. John Gallemore, 18th Wing commander. “On behalf of Team Kadena, I offer our deepest sympathies to his loved ones and to all those who shared the privilege of serving by his side.”

Individuals impacted by this tragic loss are strongly encouraged to seek assistance from their unit leadership, base chaplains or medical professionals.

No additional information is available at this time.