

May 1: Letter from Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) regarding COVID-19

May 1, 2020 - Defence stories

Dear Families and Members of the Canadian Armed Forces,

These are difficult days.

We lost six members of the CAF, four from the RCAF and two from the RCN, in a helicopter crash at sea off the coast of Greece. The crew were members of HMCS Fredericton and the embarked HELAIR Det, currently tasked under NATO command in the Mediterranean Sea.

This is a particularly difficult situation for the families, for all ranks of HMCS Fredericton, for 12 Wing and the RCAF, and for MARLANT and the RCN. It's also hard on Nova Scotia, the home base province of the crew; itself no stranger to recent tragedy.

What makes this all the more difficult to bear is our inability – thus far – to recover all of our fallen comrades. To the family and friends of the fallen, on behalf of all ranks of the CAF and our families, please accept our deeply heartfelt condolences. The investigation will proceed and answers about cause will hopefully be found. In the meantime, we grieve:

- **Captain Brenden MacDonald**, Pilot, from New Glasgow, NS
- **Captain Kevin Hagen**, Pilot, from Nanaimo, BC
- **Captain Maxime Miron-Morin**, Air Combat Systems Officer, from Trois-Rivières, QC
- **Master Corporal Matthew Cousins**, Airborne Electronic Sensor Operator, from Truro, NS
- **Sub-Lieutenant Matthew Pyke**, Naval Warfare Officer, from Guelph, ON
- **Sub-Lieutenant Abbigail Cowbrough**, Marine Systems Engineering Officer, from Toronto, ON

May they Rest in Peace. We will remember them.

COVID Response Ops

This week saw the CAF increase support to Long Term Care Facilities (LTCF) in Ontario and Quebec. The scope and scale of these operations will be reported on separately, but I wanted to convey to you some key aspects of this challenging and atypical mission. First, I am incredibly humbled by, and proud of, all our people, medical and non-medical, for their positive and professional response. The CAF has been tasked with helping Long Term Care staff save lives. The situation in many of the facilities was and remains dire, and we can and will help, to the best of our ability, until we are relieved of the task. The basic concept is to group small military medical teams with non-medical teams of approximately platoon size to cover off a range of jobs needing to be done in the facilities where we are needed. Medical staff perform medical duties and patient/resident care, while support troops help with facility support tasks and, under supervision, some patient/resident support functions. Maximum attention will be paid to force protection and the protection of residents. Medical and support staff will wear and use medical grade personal protective equipment (PPE), and will train on its use in pre-deployment. Procedures (think TTPs) will be taught to everyone based on the recce and the unique circumstances at each facility. Rations and quarters and other sustainment activities will be put in place to ensure our safety, the safety of our families and self-sufficiency of our deployed teams.

This is a unique task, and one that will be uncomfortable for many, but our professionalism and sense of duty prevails. The defence of Canada and Canadians comes in many forms, and in this case, has come in a form we are not routinely prepared for, but are dealing with very well. The response of our Health Services and those tasked to support has been superb. For those assigned to LTCF duties I want you to know that I have directed my staff to examine the assignment of Hazard Pay to set the level of allowance that this task deserves.

Postings

As I write, the APS 2020 posting plot is approved and posting messages are being cut. Expect to experience delays and added difficulty managing house hunting trips (HHT), pack, load and move, as well as interim accommodations and meals, due to COVID-19. My senior leadership and I are committed to ensuring that anybody experiencing insurmountable difficulty in conducting their move will have their posting delayed or cancelled based on the best outcome for you and your family. The CAF will be sensitive to and respect local situations, real estate market conditions, regional self-isolation requirements, schooling and many other factors which may be specific to you and your posting situation. You are expected to do your best, and you should seek help early if experiencing any difficulty. This is a team effort between the CAF, you, and your families. Please stay in touch with your chain of command and begin the process of studying what factors might influence your move, whether it be real estate (such as using virtual tours), access to education, child care or family health care. From there we can work collectively to try to remove some of the uncertainties from your posting and work towards a smooth transition.

Reserve Service

Once again, our Reserve Force has stepped up. The Class C contract was selected as the best means to employ Reserve personnel, allowing for employment on Op LASER or subsequent Force Generation activities. These activities could include individual courses, either as a student or instructor. Rest assured, if you signed a Class C contract, you have a Class C contract through to the end of August. Further information on Reserve pay benefits is available in the recently released CAFORGEN 059/20, Reserve Pay, Benefits in Relation to COVID-19, available on the CAF App.

We have, unfortunately, had to cancel our Indigenous Summer Programs for this year. These include Bold Eagle, Black Bear, Carcajou, Grey Wolf and Raven. I know our indigenous communities look forward to this annual summer training and, while they understand the decision, they are disappointed that members of their communities won't have the opportunity this year. We look forward to restarting each of these programs, given the right conditions, in the summer of 2021.

The Re-Start

Plans have been developed, and very soon direction will be issued to re-open our training system and adopt over time a routine force generation posture. The direction will contain some principles and conditions for us to live by as we re-open. For example we will not do this training if we do not have sufficient testing and PPE and, we will ensure that all involved will adopt proper protective measures such as physical distancing where it is possible/advisable to do so. The opening will be done at the speed we can, when it is safe to do so, or, if there are residual risks, only if safe procedures can be adopted. Keep in mind that many of you will not be able to adopt a business-as-usual posture due to disruptions in family care plans, which is entirely reasonable. Provincial restrictions, the availability of PPE, the current status of COVID-19 in your region, and many other factors will be taken into consideration as our Force Generators ramp things up again. We must be able to operate and train where COVID-19 still exists, but we must do so while protecting ourselves, our families and others. We continue to experience an extremely low rate of infection in the CAF, so the care you are taking is working. Thank you all.

I want to end by thanking all those contributing, in their special way, to the efforts to counter COVID-19 across Canada. To the material technicians, (MAT TECHs) whose sewing machines are employed for making non-surgical masks for the force, the dentistry staff manning the phones to support

COVID-19 help lines, to our teams helping to manage the warehousing of critical PPE, and to our teams now working around the clock at care facilities – you have my sincere thanks and admiration.

As talk turns to re-opening society and economies, the CAF must remain disciplined with the orders that we currently follow until further direction is provided. We will continue to stay home, stay healthy, and remain prepared to return to work in a responsible and deliberate manner.

Once again thank you for what you continue to do for Canada and for what you have done for our fallen comrades and their families. We will remember them.

Sincerely,

J.H. Vance
General