

# May 22: Letter from Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) regarding COVID-19

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**May 22, 2020 - Defence stories**

Dear Families and Members of the Canadian Armed Forces,

It has been another difficult week for the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and the nation.

## Op INSPIRATION

The Snowbirds Op INSPIRATION brought joy and hope to Canadians as they flew across our country. Sadly, as the Snowbirds began their departure from Kamloops, British Columbia, Snowbird 11 crashed, killing Captain Jennifer Casey, the team's Public Affairs Officer (PAO). The sad and tragic irony is that Captain Casey, as the team PAO, was very much responsible for the uplifting effect of Op INSPIRATION. I have spoken to Captain Casey's family offering condolences on behalf of all of us in the CAF family. Captain Casey will return to Halifax, to her final resting place this weekend while, in the coming days, a Celebration of Life will be held at 15 Wing Moose Jaw. I want to wish Captain Richard MacDougall, the skilled and courageous pilot of the aircraft, a full and quick recovery from his injuries, and our thoughts go to the Snowbirds team as they deal with challenging days ahead. May Jennifer rest in peace, and may the Snowbirds fly and perform again soon for her and for all of us.

## Op REASSURANCE

On Tuesday 19 May, 2020, a Tech Brief from Comd CJOC was provided to the public regarding Stalker 22 search and recovery efforts now underway with our Allies, most notably the United States Navy. Our primary focus is the search, recovery and repatriation of the remains of our fallen. The second is the recovery of the aircraft, with the view that this will help with the flight safety investigation and advance our understanding of what caused the accident. Over the coming days, and possibly weeks, we will update the families, you and the general public on the status of the search and recovery operation. We remain committed to doing everything we can to recover our lost CAF personnel and bring them home. HMCS FREDERICTON has re-

commenced operations as part of Op REASSURANCE and we are currently looking at ways to re-establish a Cyclone helicopter air detachment aboard the ship before her mission ends in July. More to follow.

## Op LASER

Incredible work is being done by our troops in long term care facilities (LTCF) in both Quebec and Ontario. With advice from our Surgeon General, they are applying all protocols to work to mitigate the hazards, but COVID-19 is persistent in these facilities and CAF personnel have been infected at an increasing rate. To recognize this uniquely hazardous environment, as previously mentioned, I have tasked my staff to pursue Hazard Allowance for those directly engaged inside the facilities. I will provide further information on this issue shortly.

For now, for further information on the CAF response to COVID-19, including Op LASER and the latest data for COVID-19 related positive CAF cases resulting from LTCF operations, please refer to the following CAF website which will be regularly updated:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/campaigns/covid-19-military-response.html>

Were it not for COVID-19, senior CAF leaders and I would be visiting you regularly in person to offer our condolences for recent tragedies, and to personally thank you for the superb work that you do. The COVID-19 travel restrictions and safety measures stop us from doing so, but please know that I, and the entire CAF leadership, look forward to the day we can freely circulate in Canada and overseas.

## CANFORGENs

The latest CANFORGEN 068/20 AMPLIFICATION TO CANFORGEN 045/20 CHANGES TO CAF PER FOR 2019/2020 DUE TO COVID 19 is available on the CAF App. Submission dates for PERs have been pushed to 30 June, 2020, with Fall selection boards being planned. Ensure you read the CANFORGEN as PERs must be processed in a timely fashion despite the challenges of COVID-19.

## Resumption of Training

The DM and I have issued direction to CAF and DND to begin the process of resuming individual and collective training. The Main Effort will be individual training through DP1 courses in both the Regular and Reserve Force. You can expect Warning Orders soon. On average we are at approximately D-30 for the staged, deliberate, conditions-based resumption of training at CFLRS, the Combat Training Centre, Division Training Centres, the Air Divisions and the Coasts. Expeditionary rotations and missions will recommence and those missions that have been reduced in strength to meet force protection demands will be gradually re-established to full strength.

Once again, thank you for following the protocols of both the CAF and your local communities as you work to stay healthy. You must continue to protect yourself and your family. I remind you that considerable leeway has been granted to customize moves and administration associated with postings to ensure that you can do your part to manage your health and safety and that of your loved ones while meeting your obligations. The same can be said for returning to the workplace – your personal situations will vary depending upon your ability to secure childcare and protect those who may be vulnerable. Keep your chain of command well informed and you will be well served. The COVID-19 environment is our new reality and we will continue to adapt as we serve and defend Canada. The resumption of business has started, ensure you are ready both mentally and physically.

J.H. Vance

General