

## **29 May 2020: Letter from the Chief of the Defence Staff regarding COVID-19**

Dear Families and Members of the Canadian Armed Forces,

As we approach the end of May, it is clear that you, the members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), are following public health advice and are staying relatively well protected from COVID-19 so far. We will be resuming training and routine operations in the weeks to come so it bears repeating that we will be doing so in an environment where COVID-19 remains a threat. Please continue to follow the guidelines that have ensured and will continue to ensure our safety.

### **Op LASER**

As you will know, deeply disturbing observations have been made and reported on correctly by CAF members deployed to Long Term Care Facilities (LTCF) in Ontario and Quebec. Those reports have been forwarded to both the federal and provincial governments. The troops and their leaders at all levels have performed superbly during this difficult operation. They not only stabilized the situation at the outset, addressing the problems as they came upon them, but reported up the chain of command and across to responsible officials in the respective LTCF and provincial governments, so as to meet legal and moral reporting standards. I have had many people reach out to tell me how proud they are of the CAF. I want to pass those thanks to you, and on behalf of all of us in the CAF and DND, you have made us very proud of your dedication and professionalism throughout this deployment. Keep it up!

As part of Operation LASER, and for those CAF members who continue to provide lifesaving assistance in LTCF in both Ontario and Quebec, I can tell you that the Minister of National Defence, in consultation with the Minister of Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC), has designated the tasks as Special Duty Operations (SDO). Identifying the tasks as SDO ensures that CAF members have the timeliest access to disability and pension programs. Today, and from when the operation started, you are covered by the SDO/Special Duty Area regulations, which have a direct relationship to VAC compensation and benefits. It includes all training directly related to the deployment, during mission leave, and until you are returned to your home unit.

### **Op REASSURANCE**

Operations continue with the search and recovery of Stalker 22. This week, CAF personnel, led by Cdr Rob Watt, working alongside the US Navy onboard EDT Hercules began scanning the depths of the Ionian Sea with a USN Remotely Operated Vehicle (REMORA III) some 220 nautical miles east of Catania, Sicily. The vehicle has located a piece of the fuselage and next of kin have been informed that remains have also been

found in the vicinity of the helicopter wreckage. Search and recovery efforts will continue and you will be kept updated on progress as will the families of the Fallen.

My thanks to the joint United States Navy Office of the Supervisor of Salvage, and the Captain and crew of the EDT Hercules. The attention and care they have demonstrated on this mission to recover our fallen is praiseworthy. To LCdr Michael Beautyman (USN), Assistant for Salvage, U.S. Navy Supervisor of Salvage and Diving, Mr. Evan Tanner, team lead for the Phoenix International Group, Mr. Marcin Fulek, Captain of the EDT Hercules and crew a grateful nation thanks you for this noble endeavour.

## **CANFORGENs**

This week saw the release of CANFORGEN 071/20, DIRECTION ON PROMOTIONS DURING APS 20 IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19, which is now available on the CAF App. The aim is to protect 2020 promotion lists, to the greatest extent possible, while operating under a COVID-19 environment. Operational standards and requirements for promotion will not change but policy changes will allow for flexibility to adapt to issues and situations created by and in response to COVID-19.

Also CANFORGEN 072/20, RELOCATION PLANNING IN RELATION TO COVID-19 has been released and is also available on the CAF App. All postings are unique given the various regional issues related to COVID-19. If you are posted this APS you need to read this CANFORGEN and work with your chain of command to support the planning of your move. I know that this is a stressful time for you and your families. Please be assured that your chain of command is there to support you, and that we all will work collectively to try to remove some of the uncertainties that you and your family may currently have. This is a team effort.

## **Resumption of Operations and Training**

The Deputy Minister and I held a virtual town hall on 27 May with CAF and DND senior leadership to discuss and answer questions relating to our Directive on Business Resumption. The main takeaway for all of us is that we will get back to our routine of force generation and operational readiness in a deliberate way that accounts for the many changes and restrictions we will have to manage carefully while the pandemic persists. Over the coming days and weeks you can expect Warning Orders and Orders from your chain of command with the details you need. Many things about training delivery may seem different for a while as we get the machine going again, but what has not changed is our core purpose to be ready to conduct operations in any domain, anytime, anywhere, to defend Canada and protect Canadians.

Given that my commanders must now get on with detailed planning and execution of operations, training and administration – and the important communications to you that will take place, this will be my last CDS Weekly letter to you for now. Should a situation

arise where direct communications are helpful I will write again. Until then, I know that 2020 has presented many challenges to you all. Your professionalism and dedication to service is inspiring. My confidence in Defence and in the Canadian Armed Forces has never been higher.

Sincerely,

J.H. Vance

General