Press Release

Release Nr: 2004-08

April 21, 2020

Fort Drum Public Affairs

Fort Drum leaders address travel ban, other COVID-19 topics during town hall

Fort Drum, NY - As the situation regarding the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic continues to evolve, Fort Drum senior leaders addressed questions from the community during the weekly virtual town hall April 21, livestreamed from Hays Hall.

Maj. Gen. Brian J. Mennes, 10th Mountain Division (LI) and Fort Drum commander, said that there have been no new cases of COVID-19 within the Fort Drum community since two medical personnel tested positive two weeks ago.

“We’ve taken on the COVID crisis and people are adapting,” Mennes said. “Measures are effective, but we also understand that we have to get back to a phased return.”

The command team addressed what has crept into the national conversation in recent days – after practicing self-quarantine and other preventative measures for more than a month now, when can people expect a gradual return to some of the old norms?

“We’re going to continue to stress our readiness and then work with the leadership to start bringing people back to normal activities,” Mennes said. “That could mean leaders doing PT (physical training) with their folks – not in formations – and more training opportunities within the social distancing construct.”

Col. Jeffery Lucas, Fort Drum garrison commander, said that currently all COVID-19 policies and restrictions placed on installation facilities remain in effect, but community members will be informed when any changes are forthcoming.

“As we look forward to slowly easing the restrictions we have associated with our prevention and mitigation response (to COVID-19), we will do that slowly and with constant analysis,” he said. “We should have an expectation that the changes we implement as we come out of our protective posture are going to be a little slower than the changes we implemented going in, and so I just ask for everyone’s continued patience with that.”

Mennes answered questions about the extension of the Defense Department’s stop-movement order through June. As service members and their families are asked to limit their movement in public spaces, the DoD is placing further holds on permanent-change-of-station (PCS) moves, training and temporary duty.

For those whose PCS move has been interrupted, the Fort Drum Legal Assistance Office can help. Soldiers are advised not to terminate a current lease or enter into a new lease at their new duty station. If either of those has already happened, Soldiers can call (315) 772-5261 to discuss their options with a legal assistance attorney.

The official DoD release and guidance can be found at www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2156918/update-to-travel-restrictions/.

Mennes said that Fort Drum Soldiers who are currently on temporary duty assignment for training or educational purposes will be allowed to return when they are finished. However, he emphasized that in every situation regarding travel it is advised that the Soldier communicates with the chain of command to determine how best to proceed. This also applies to family members who left post for the duration of their Soldier’s deployment and need to return.

Command Sgt. Maj. Mario Terenas, 10th Mountain Division (LI) senior enlisted leader, encouraged community members to continue to be vigilant in their actions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to correct others when they are not doing the right thing. This could be a simple reminder that the face mask should cover the nose and mouth, or ask people waiting in a line to maintain good physical distance between each other. Terenas said that people can do this without being confrontational, or they can report incidences through the chain of command.

“Make that, what we like to call in the Army, on-spot correction,” he said. “I think that, at the end of the day, we all know this is for not just our own safety but for the safety of the community.”

The command team responded to questions from the online forum about when students may return back to area schools and why transportation services are not allowed access onto post. Lucas said that taxis and services such as Uber and Lyft were restricted from entering Fort Drum as a prevention and mitigation measure, and that he is communicating with school administrators regularly but no decisions have been made to resume classes.

Lucas also said that parents should contact their school principal, board of education or superintendent with any urgent school-related issues. He also said community members can speak with the new Child and Youth Services’ school liaison officer, Wendy O’Sullivan, at (315) 772-3214 during regular business hours or email ena.w.osullivan.naf@mail.mil.

Mennes thanked the community for raising questions during the COVID-19 town hall, and he asked that they continue to do so.

“A lot of times, teams grow closer by overcoming adversity, and I’m encouraged by everything that I see here,” he said.

###

Media with inquiries should call Fort Drum Public Affairs, Julie Halpin, julie.a.halpin2.civ@mail.mil, 315-772-8286.