Press Release

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Fort Drum Public Affairs

Incoming garrison commander recalls connections to Fort Drum

FORT DRUM, N.Y.  – When Col. James J. Zacchino Jr. takes command of the garrison on Friday, he will have spent time at Fort Drum in every decade since the 1980s.

The post looks much different today from the time he first saw it in 1986, when his father served here as a noncommissioned officer with the 10th Supply and Transportation Battalion, 10th Mountain Division.

Fort Drum was still largely in a build phase, with dozens of new facilities, roads and homes in the works. Zacchino said that his family was among the first to move into a new housing area in Clayton.

“Obviously, the winters were the first thing that shocks you up front,” he said. “It was much different than anything we had experienced, but it was beautiful living in Clayton.”

The influx of Army families moving into the North Country caught people’s attention, and a local newspaper ran a half-page feature article with a picture of Zacchino.

“I was 13 years old, wearing a Marine Corps T-shirt that I loved,” he recalled. “It was me and my dad on the front lawn when a reporter stopped by one day to talk with us.”

Zacchino attended Thousand Islands High School from his freshman year until his junior year, and he said that soccer preoccupied a lot of his attention during that time.

“I remember I had fun in school,” he said. “Soccer was my big thing at Thousand Islands High School. I got here and went straight to playing soccer with them.”

Zacchino said he did not spend much time on post, only the occasional trip to the commissary or post exchange.

“It was small, and nothing compared to what we have here today,” he said. “That came later, closer to the end of our time here in 1989 when you saw the new PX, the new commissary, but nothing else around it.”

He would return to Fort Drum in the summer of 1997 as an ROTC cadet, where he participated in Cadet Troop Leader Training (CTLT) with the 10th Signal Battalion.

“That was very tactical-focused, but it was fun,” Zacchino said. “It was my first time in front of active-duty troops, shadowing a platoon leader and learning what they do.”

Fast-forward another decade and Zacchino was back at Fort Drum to serve as the chief of the logistics training and advising team with the 10th Sustainment Brigade. The post had expanded and modernized since his last visit, and Zacchino saw the community partnerships that were inconsequential to him as a child.

“You realize other things that you didn’t as a kid – the sense of community, the friendliness of neighbors and the connection Fort Drum has with other communities,” he said. “Those are the things I noticed and appreciated.”

However, within three months of his arrival, Zacchino would deploy as part of an advising team to train Iraqi security forces at Camp Taji, Iraq. Upon his return, he served as the support operations officer and executive officer of the 548th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 10th Sustainment Brigade, and he later deployed to Afghanistan as the deputy brigade support operations officer.

Despite the demanding operational tempo, Zacchino said that he enjoyed his time at Fort Drum.

“It was five years, with two deployments and a lot of field time,” he said. “My son was born in the Bronx while I was on deployment, but he grew up here. It was a nice time. Every single time, I have had positive experiences here, and that’s why we are excited to be back.”

Since arriving at Fort Drum a fourth time, Zacchino said he has been settling his family into the area, waiting for their household goods to arrive and all the things Army families do upon moving to a new duty station.

“I’ve also been going around post, meeting people, and getting my bearings again,” he said. “I’m excited for the opportunity to be here, and it means quite a bit coming back to a place I’ve been multiple times before. Fort Drum has a special place in my heart for both me and my family.”

Zacchino said that growing up in a military family and seeing his father serve in both the Marine Corps and Army inspired him to also serve his country.

His father, who retired from Fort Drum as a first sergeant in 1989, will attend the change of command ceremony.

“I wanted to be like him, and the military was the only thing I wanted to do,” he said. “No ifs, ands or buts about it, I was going to be a Soldier.”

Zacchino said that when he takes hold of the unit colors on Friday and assumes command of the Fort Drum garrison, he will be proud to lead a team with a stellar record of success.

“Fort Drum, as a U.S. Army garrison team, has an awesome reputation and is one of the best in the Army,” he said. “It’s a phenomenal workforce, and I look forward to being part of it as the garrison commander.”

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For further information regarding this release, contact Fort Drum Public Affairs at 315-772-9043 or email Katherine.E.Wright12.civ@mail.mil.

Cut lines for attached photos:

Photo 1: Col. James J. Zacchino Jr., who will assume command of the garrison on July 23, has a history at Fort Drum that goes back four decades. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

Photo 2:  Col. James J. Zacchino Jr. talks with a Soldier from the 91st Military Police Battalion on July 22 during the rehearsal for the change of command ceremony. Zacchino will assume command of the Fort Drum garrison during a ceremony at LeRay Mansion on July 23. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)