



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT
UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY
121 BLAKE ROAD
ANNAPOLIS MARYLAND 21402-1300

November 19, 2020

Dear Naval Academy Family,

I know each and every one of you has been anticipating the final news regarding the Thanksgiving holiday. I also understand the wait has been frustrating. The constant uncertainty that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented has been frustrating to me as well. I know our midshipmen are eager to see their families and loved ones and their families and loved ones are eager to see them.

We are truly in uncharted waters here, and my team and I have been carefully considering each decision throughout the pandemic with my #1 priority in mind: safeguarding the health and well-being of the Brigade, our faculty and staff here in Annapolis, and our extended Naval Academy family in the local area and across the nation. In order to do that, we have been basing every decision we make here on the COVID numbers. This includes the numbers here on the Yard and out in the surrounding community. We have been taking things week by week to ensure we maximize our chances to keep each and every person on the Yard safe while still accomplishing our mission. Our goal, which has remained constant since we started the long process of reforming the Brigade back in July, is to complete the sixteen week Fall semester here in Annapolis. The very deliberate process by which my team and I make decisions in the COVID environment prevents us from executing long-term planning with the certainty that we have grown accustomed to at the Naval Academy. We know this remains frustrating to all of you who have been eager to make plans for the upcoming holiday as you have been able to in previous years.

The fact of the matter is that COVID rates are the highest we have seen and they are on the rise across the country and within our local community in Annapolis and the state of Maryland. Per FEMA's daily community profile report, as of today, in Anne Arundel County where USNA is located, the COVID positivity rate over the last seven days is 8.8%, an increase of three percentage points since last week. Our case rate in the local area is 198 out of 100,000 people, a 32% increase from the week prior. This fall we've been successful at keeping COVID rates on the Yard relatively low, even as the Brigade has enjoyed some liberty out in town. Unfortunately, as we began to experience COVID fatigue we became a bit complacent in our adherence to effective COVID safety protocols. I have decided that the prevailing circumstances in the local area no longer make off-Yard liberty an acceptable risk. We are in an entirely different situation now than we were even just a couple weeks ago when we announced future plans for the Thanksgiving Holiday.

It is with a heavy heart that I have made the decision to cancel Thanksgiving off-Yard liberty for the Brigade. Believe me when I say, my 41 years in the Navy have taught me how precious liberty is for any sailor, especially during the holidays. I did not make this decision lightly, but rather after careful consideration of what the COVID numbers represent to us right now. I do not believe that we can execute Thanksgiving off-Yard liberty, and still ensure we have a healthy

Brigade to finish the fall semester and send off across the country for Winter break on December 13th. We must keep our focus on that end goal. As the Superintendent, as a parent, and as a citizen, it is important to me that we are not spreading COVID to your families and local communities around the nation when the Brigade returns home on December 13th.

Additionally, in order to safeguard the Brigade from the rising COVID rates in the community, I will be restricting access to USNA to mission-essential personnel only during this upcoming holiday weekend. Unfortunately, we cannot accept the risk of families and sponsors coming on the Yard at this time. I understand that many of you have bought tickets from around the country to fly to Annapolis in hopes of seeing your midshipmen. It is simply an unacceptable risk at this time to the Brigade and their ability to successfully finish the semester and execute holiday leave in a few short weeks. I implore each and every one of you to respect this decision, as well as the recent CDC recommendation against travel, and not attempt to come onto the Yard to see your midshipmen during the long Thanksgiving weekend. We will celebrate Thanksgiving here as a command — on both Thursday and Sunday we will have Thanksgiving-themed meals — just like the thousands of Sailors and Marines standing the watch around the world this holiday weekend.

I would like to thank each and every one of you for your understanding. As a parent of a naval officer myself, I know how precious time with your sons and daughters is to you. I look forward to sending the Brigade home healthy in a few weeks time to enjoy some well-earned relaxation at home with their loved ones this holiday season. In the meantime, I ask that each and every member of our Naval Academy family — midshipmen, faculty & staff, and our parents, sponsors, and loved ones — follow strict adherence to COVID protocols so that we can cross the finish line of the semester in just a few short weeks and accomplish the mission we set out on back in July.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sean S. Buck". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'S'.

S. S. BUCK
Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy
Superintendent