



# United States Army Criminal Investigation Command

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## Army CID's Defense Forensic Science Center on the frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic

QUANTICO, VA (Aug. 12, 2020) – In the middle of March as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the United States, the Army made mission adjustments to focus on protecting the force, posturing for global operational readiness, and supporting the national effort to fight the new novel coronavirus.

"U.S. Army researchers were critical during the SARS epidemic, the Zika virus and the Ebola outbreak as they helped develop antivirals and vaccines," said Ryan McCarthy, Secretary of the Army, in an April 1, U.S. Army press release. "They've done it before and they will do it again."

During this timeframe, a team from the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command's Defense Forensic Science Center's (DFSC) Forensic Exploitation Directorate (FXD) collectively identified the required skills, training and equipment needed to conduct COVID-19 testing.

"At the early onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we (DFSC FXD) understood the severity and global impact the virus would have," said Crystal Allen, chief, Forensic Exploitation Branch 2, FXD, DFSC. "We knew very quickly that given the organic skillset of the FXD examiners that we could assist the medical community with testing. Our support ultimately provided the Department of Defense with additional resources across the globe to support the ever increasing demand for COVID-19 testing."

Located on the Gillem Enclave in Forest Park, Georgia, the DFSC's mission is to provide full-service forensic and biometric support to Army and Department of Defense entities worldwide. This includes the subordinate units of U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Laboratory, FXD, Biometrics Operations Directorate, and the Office of Quality Initiatives and Training. The FXD houses the capability to deploy a scalable and modular forensic exploitation team to provide the joint force commander or combatant command with a deployable forensic capability.

Five months later, a team from FXD continues to support COVID-19 testing in support of military forces.

According to Allen, the initial planning team of seven individuals formed in mid-March and was tasked early on with concept development.

The team used their vast scientific and operational expertise to learn proper medical testing procedures and requirements in order to establish a way ahead to support the DoD.

Despite not having used the Panther Fusion, BioFire, or Gene Expert platforms before, the FXD examiners used their knowledge and skillsets in complex scientific instrumentation and sample handling to adapt, said Allen. These platforms utilize polymerase chain reaction (PCR) technology, much like the FXD examiners utilize to conduct forensic DNA testing.

“FXD's support to COVID processing improved the U.S. military's readiness and provided enhanced value to the U.S. government,” said Allen. “The FXD's support helped to identify service members testing positive within basic training formations, deploying units, mobilized National Guard units, Navy ships, and Marine Expeditionary Forces so commanders could isolate those infected personnel in order to preserve the readiness of the remainder of the Joint Forces.”

Since March, dozens of FXD Forensic DNA examiners, latent print examiners, and explosive/drug chemists have deployed to work in military medical treatment facilities at Fort Gordon, Georgia; and Camp Humphreys, Korea in support of U.S. Army Medical Command (USAMEDCOM). They have also deployed to Camp Ripley, Minnesota, in support of a mobile medical lab set up to handle COVID-19 specimen testing in remote locations.

Allen said, CID's FXD team transformed their current forensic instrumentation and software into a viral testing capability and also modified five mobile forensic laboratories to meet the needs of medical testing facilities for rapid deployment into austere locations.

The mobile forensic labs have aided in expedited testing and allowed military personnel to be tested without having to mail tests to another medical location.

The transformation from a forensic science capability into a medical testing capability required exhaustive research, planning, contract modifications and countless hours of coordination with the DFSC staff, CID staff, USAMEDCOM, numerous scientific vendors, the Center for Disease Control and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Allen stated.

The FXD has significantly impacted the fight during the COVID-19 pandemic with noticeable results by providing more than 8,100 hours of support and processed more than 47,530 DoD COVID-19 samples as of Aug. 11. In addition to the significant number of samples the FXD team was able to process, they were also able to provide their USAMEDCOM partners with novel testing concepts and efficient processing mechanisms based on their experience working in high OPTEMPO forensic laboratories.

The team has processed samples submitted from Basic Training formations at Fort Benning, Georgia; deploying units from Fort Campbell, Kentucky; mobilized National Guard units preparing for rotations at the Combat Training Centers; forward deployed military units along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in South Korea; and Marine Expeditionary Forces in Okinawa, Japan, to name a few.

“Our FXD Teams continue a high level of support to USAMEDCOM with COVID-19 Testing,” said COL Jeremy Willingham, executive director, DFSC, after processing 8,000 swabs in one week alone. “In one single day the FXD team accessioned, packaged, and shipped 2,820 specimens from

the USS America, USS Ronald Reagan, USS New Orleans, U.S. Naval Hospital in Okinawa, and Camp Humphreys.”

The primary mission for FXD is global forensic exploitation support. However, the forward leaning innovative thinking led to FXD truly supporting a full range of military operations, to include the global fight against this novel threat, said Allen.

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