The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

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Navajo Nation receives update from Fort Hood Army leadership on passing of Navajo soldiers as Congress launches investigation

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PHOTOS: US Army Private Carlton L. Chee (left) and Army Specialist Miguel D. Yazzie (right), both members of the Navajo Nation, were serving at Fort Hood at the time of their passing.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — In a teleconference held Tuesday between Speaker Seth Damon and Major General John B. Richardson IV, acting senior commander of the Fort Hood Army post, Navajo Nation leaders received the latest updates in an ongoing effort to investigate incidences at the military base, which include the deaths of Private Carlton L. Chee and Army Specialist Miguel D. Yazzie.

Chee, a member of the Navajo Nation, collapsed while taking part in a training exercise at Fort Hood on Aug. 28. His death was reported by the Army on Sept. 2.

Yazzie, also a member of the Navajo Nation, was reported to have passed away while serving at Fort Hood on Jul. 3.

"In our discussion with Maj. Gen. Richardson, the Navajo Nation has received the utmost assurance that the deaths of our two Navajo warriors will be investigated thoroughly," said Speaker Seth Damon. "Along with the Congressional investigation launched on Tuesday, the Navajo Nation continues to ask for each of our nation's leaders to join us in the call for clarity in the circumstances surrounding the deaths of our Navajo soldiers, as well as the 26 others reported at the Fort Hood Army post this year."

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Maj. Gen. Richardson was directed by General Michael Garrett on Wednesday to take over as acting senior commander of Fort Hood.

Maj. Gen. Richardson stated three investigations will be conducted by both the independent Criminal Investigation Division and the unit's investigators. He also stated an independent autopsy will be conducted and the results shared with Chee's next of kin.

Speaker Damon stressed the importance of maintaining transparency and in keeping the families of both Pvt. Chee and Army Spc. Yazzie updated. Chief of Staff Colonel Kelly Webster said he will make contact with the casualty assistance officers responsible for ensuring the next of kin is kept apprised of the developments of the investigations.

Maj. Gen. Richardson acknowledged the Navajo Nation's service rates to the Department of Defense as the highest per capita. Speaker Damon said, "As many as one in four of our graduates enters into one of the branches of the US military."

"I personally have my brother and two relatives that have served at Fort Hood," stated Speaker Damon, stressing the importance of maintaining the lines of communication between the families of Pvt. Chee and Army Spc. Yazzie, as well as Navajo leadership.

The investigation of Pvt. Yazzie's death is expected to conclude after a thorough autopsy is completed, said Maj. Gen. Richardson.

On Tuesday afternoon, a joint investigation by the House Armed Services Committee's Subcommittee on Military Personnel and the House Oversight Committee's Subcommittee on National Security was launched into the soldier deaths at Fort Hood, which were reported to have reached 28 this year after Pvt. Chee's passing.

"We appreciate our Congressional leaders, like Congressman Ben Ray Luján and Congresswoman Debra Haaland and others, for extending their condolences to the family of Private Chee and Army Specialist Yazzie and for reaching out to the members of the Navajo Nation Council," said Council Delegate Daniel E. Tso. "With the announcement by Congress of the investigation into these deaths, we join them in supporting a thorough and comprehensive accounting of the conditions surrounding the soldier deaths at Fort Hood. We offer our deepest condolences to the family of Private Chee and Army Specialist Yazzie, two of our honorable Navajo warriors."

Navajo leaders will continue sharing latest updates with the family of the fallen warriors.

Financial support for burial expenses for Pvt. Chee may be sent to the family online at: https://www.gofundme.com/f/7y4w9-pvtcarlton.

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