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PRESS RELEASE
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By Sgt. Marisa Lindsay

University of Alaska ROTC cadets, Alaska Guardsmen take on challenge

ANCHORAGE, Alaska – The University of Alaska Anchorage and University of Alaska Fairbanks Army Reserve Officer Training cadets have departed for Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, to compete in the two-day National Ranger Challenge competition that begins Feb. 27.

The 10-person team, which includes three Alaska Army National Guard Soldiers who are also enrolled in the UAA and UAF ROTC program, will be assessed physically and mentally through events that require critical-thinking skills, teamwork, leadership, endurance and combat physical fitness.

"There's definitely an advantage to having National Guardsmen on this team competing," said Sgt. Maj. Donald Ramey, one of the founders of the UAA ROTC program and operations sergeant major for the AKARNG. "They've been through basic training, they recognize what's required of them in working as a team to carry out an objective, and they know what's it's like to fight through pain and push forward."

However, the principal challenge they face is overcoming the lack of training they've been able to achieve as a team, as half of the cadets reside in Fairbanks and the others in Anchorage. Unit cohesion is imperative for the challenge, yet with such a large distance between the schools, the team has only been able to train with one another once this year.

"While every other team has been able to come together as a unit for their practices in order to strengthen their communication skills, it just hasn't been in the cards for us," said Spc. William Belcher, a parachute rigger for the 297th Rigger Detachment, AKARNG, and ROTC cadet at UAA. "This does put us at a disadvantage, nevertheless, it only makes us work that much harder and at our highest levels during every practice opportunity."

This is the first time in UA's Ranger Challenge history that a team has advanced to the national level, which was earned after topping nine other teams at the Northwest Regional Ranger Challenge competition at Camp Rilea, Oregon, last November.

The winner of the National Challenge will continue onto the international competition, "Sandhurst," which is hosted by the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, in April.

"We are incredibly excited to compete as a team and carry one another through the physical and mental gauntlets that the Ranger Challenge presents us," Belcher said. "As a team, we are solid and know that we can rely on the cadet to the left and right of us any day of the week, and that says so much."

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Photo Outline:

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University of Alaska's ROTC cadets conduct a sensitive equipment check and a map reconnaissance after the beach run event of the Ranger Challenge Competition before moving to the tactical urban movement event in Camp Rilea, Oregon. UA took first place out of ten teams in their division the 2014 Northwest Regional Ranger Challenge. Photo: Courtesy University of Alaska ROTC