



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 18, 2015

By: Sgt. Edward Eagerton

Alaska Air Guardsmen train up to ship out

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — What does a stay at home dad, a cheerleading instructor, a youth pastor, a truck driver and a corrections officer all have in common?

If your answer is that they are all members of the Alaska Air National Guard who are training to deploy in defense of their nation, you would be correct.

These community members are just a few of the 13 Airmen from the AKANG's 176th Security Forces Squadron who departed here March 14, to attend the Base Security Operations course in Fort Bliss, Texas.

Part of the 204th Ground Readiness Center, the BSO course is designed to prepare Airmen for a scheduled deployment in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Included among the many skills taught and refined at the course are classes such as land navigation, team movements, improvised-explosive-devices lanes, mounted and dismounted patrols, and airfield security.

Airman 1st Class Tasha Straughn, a security forces member of the 176th SFS, said this is her first deployment and that she is excited for the opportunity.

"I'm happy to be able to do my part," she said. "I feel like I'm going to gain a lot of experience from this deployment."

A cheerleading coach in the civilian world, Straughn is also seeking a degree in criminal justice. She said she feels this experience will help her achieve her goal of one day becoming a U.S. Marshal.

Before leaving for Texas, Straughn and other members of her unit completed their two-week annual training to prepare for the BSO course, as they transitioned from life outside the fence, to being the front-line guardians on the perimeter of wherever they are sent to defend.

Crawl. Walk. Run.

"It's a process," said Tech. Sgt. Peter Kanz, training noncommissioned officer for the 176th SFS. "These guys came in from their civilian jobs, and we took them through a lot of refresher courses to get ready to go to Texas. Annual training was like the crawling part. Down there, it'll be the walk to run, as they get ready for deployment."

It's all mind over matter, he said.

"We have to reorient their way of thinking," said Kanz. "We spent the two weeks of AT getting them to remember how to do the job so when we leave for Texas, it won't be unfamiliar. It can be difficult going from your civilian job, to being ready for a deployment, but these guys are picking it back up well."

Training for the job included weapons qualifications, battle drills, squad movements, and many online classes.

"We were doing a lot of train ups," said Staff Sgt. Brian Heinz, a security forces member of the 176th SFS. "We had a lot of computer based training that's required, but then we did other things, like in-country specific training, language guides for example. But for us, as security forces, weapons are one of the extremely important parts. We have to make sure our M4 (carbine) and M9 (handgun) qualifications are up to date."

For Heinz, this scheduled deployment will not be his first. Heinz had two combat deployments during his seven years in the Army as an airborne infantryman. After leaving the Army, he worked for the Anchorage Police Department before deciding he missed life in the military.

"You really don't realize what you lose until you get out," he said. "It's a community."

Heinz said he joined the Air National Guard as a security forces member, because he felt it was a good fit for his background in both combat arms and working as a police officer. He also felt that his previous experiences will help him to mentor those who have yet to deploy.

"I want to be there for my people to give them a sense of reassurance," Heinz said. "If we end up in a situation where bullets start flying or some other bad situation, I want them to know that they can get through it. At the end of the day, it's about looking out for each other."

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For photos of 176th Security Forces members training, please visit <https://www.flickr.com/photos/176wg/sets/72157651000322418/>