



**PRESS RELEASE
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By Sgt. Balinda O'Neal

Alaska National Guard

Alaska service members depart for peacekeeping exercise in Mongolia

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska – Approximately 80 service members from the Alaska National Guard and U.S. Army Alaska's 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, departed here aboard two Alaska Air National Guard C-130 Hercules aircraft bound for Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, yesterday.

The service members will join efforts with approximately 1,200 participants from across the Pacific region to participate in Khaan Quest, a peacekeeping operations focused, combined training event co-sponsored by the U.S. Army Pacific and U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Pacific, and hosted annually by the Mongolia Armed Forces.

"This exercise allows our National Guardsmen to get out of Alaska and train in a new environment where they can experience another culture," said Maj. Aaron Kelsey, tactical command post officer for AKARNG's 297th Battle Field Surveillance Brigade. "Having familiarity and learning perspectives of other cultures will help them adjust quicker in a deployed setting. In the end, I think all sides will better appreciate what each brings to the fight."

The exercise is designed to enhance international interoperability and military readiness, develop peacekeeping capabilities, and build military-to-military relations between the U.S., Mongolia and other international forces in the Pacific region.

"I think it's really beneficial, especially for junior enlisted Soldiers, to be emerged in and around other countries," said Capt. Pancho Gonzales, 3-21 Infantry Regiment, exercise platoon leader. "With the Army's change in mission and identity from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, I think peacekeeping operations is going to be the next significant focus."

This year Khaan Quest consists of a command post exercise and field training exercise. During these events, Mongolian, U.S. and multinational forces will work to enhance regional interoperability, and mission effectiveness, as well as develop common tactics, techniques and procedures.

“I think one of the best things for us to take away from this as a platoon is to improve our troop leading procedures and take the best of what other countries have to offer,” added Gonzales. “Hopefully, we can show them a few things that we do differently.”

Mongolian and U.S. armed forces, along with other regional partners, will also collaborate to conduct Engineering Civic Action Program projects, as well as Cooperative Health Engagement events in Ulaanbaatar, enhancing joint Mongolian and U.S. medical capabilities and providing outreach to underserved communities.

Gonzales explained that even being from foreign countries, all Soldiers share a communal bond.

“We have a lot in common and the more we are able to experience this, the easier it will be to work beside each other in the future,” explained Gonzales. “I really feel like as allied countries we are all brothers-in-arms.”

Partnered in 2003, Alaska and Mongolia have formed a bond sharing information through multiple exchanges and exercises.

“Khaan Quest is one way we continue to enhance the relationship between the U.S. and Mongolian militaries,” said Kelsey. “I’m hoping my troops appreciate the interaction with other countries and take their new skills and knowledge back home with them.”

In addition to U.S. and Mongolian military forces, personnel from 25 other nations are slated to observe or participate in various portions of the exercise, including Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, Canada, China, Czech, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, UK, and Vietnam.

This exercise marks the thirteenth year of this regionally significant training event and will run from June 20 to July 1 at the Mongolian Armed Forces Peace Support Center near Ulaanbaatar.

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Cutlines:

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Service members from the Alaska National Guard and U.S. Army Alaska’s 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, board an Alaska Air National Guard, C-130 Hercules on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson bound for Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, June 15. They will participate in Khaan Quest, a peacekeeping operations-focused, combined training event co-sponsored by the U.S. Army Pacific and U.S. Marine

Corps Forces, Pacific, and hosted annually by the Mongolia Armed Forces. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Balinda O'Neal)

150615-Z-CA180-014

Service members from the Alaska National Guard and U.S. Army Alaska's 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, board two Alaska Air National Guard, C-130 Hercules on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson bound for Mongolia to participate in exercise Khaan Quest, June 15. The exercise runs from June 20 to July 1 at the Mongolian Armed Forces Peace Support Center near Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Balinda O'Neal)

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