



**PRESS RELEASE  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Alaska National Guard**  
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By Senior Airman Francine St. Laurent

**It's no ordinary commute for some Alaska Air Guardsmen**

**EIELSON AIR FORCE BASE, Alaska** — On Friday afternoon, Senior Airman Dawn Gonzalez waits for two of her three kids to get home from school.

She's packed homework for the classes she's taking at University of Alaska's Matanuska-Susitna College and tied up loose ends on Thursday, taking military leave Friday from her full-time job as a case management support specialist at the Valley Native Primary Care Center. Her textbooks are nestled in next to her sage green boots.

When the kids hop off the bus, they pile into the car along with her husband and set off at 3:30 p.m. to make the hour-long drive from Wasilla to Anchorage.

"It's our time to spend together on those weekends," Gonzalez said.

From there she will catch a ride to her part-time job.

But her ride is a unique kind of carpool; it's a KC-17.

Gonzalez is a member of the 168th Air Refueling Wing on Eielson Air Force Base.

Every month she and 30 other Airmen in the 168th Air Refueling Wing, and seven Airmen in the 176th Wing make the 360-mile commute to their jobs in the Alaska National Guard.

Upon arrival at the Eielson temporary lodging facilities, Family Readiness program has dinner ready for commuters, a program which began in August. A group of volunteers spend about ten hours planning and preparing the meal, which is ready when the Airmen arrive.

But why choose to add a total of roughly 12 hours, give or take, depending on weather conditions — two hours waiting for the flight on Friday, the 45-minute flight to Eielson AFB, preparation and packing, and two nights away from your family — to the weekend?

"I prefer it up here, I just like my shop," Gonzalez said. "We have a good relationship, which is why I endure this whole commuting process."

Her team is the 168th vehicle maintenance shop.

And the time away is a chance to study for her math class, in pursuit of a bachelor's degree to become a pharmacist.

On Fridays, a 176th Wing C-17 or C-130 flies members of the 168th up to Fairbanks, picks up members of the 176th Wing and returns to Anchorage. On Sunday afternoon, the 168th flies those 30 members back to Anchorage, picks up 176th Airmen and heads home to Fairbanks.

"Like our Airmen from other parts of Alaska and the country, Airmen from Anchorage and the Mat-Su Valley bring strength of diverse mission sets, professionalism and a true desire to serve both state and nation," said Col. Torrence Saxe, 168th ARW commander. "They continually spread the word about the 168 ARW in our state's most populous region. I sincerely appreciate their efforts in bringing in additional folks to our wing."

This partnership is critical, Saxe said.

"We both receive training benefit and it's a true example of teamwork within the state," Saxe said. "The 168th and 176th working together epitomizes cooperation and coordination."

Staff Sgt. Rosendo Perez, 168th Security Forces Squadron team member, has been making this commute since 2012 when he transitioned from active duty service at Buckley Air Force Base in Colorado.

He makes the journey because people in the 168th ARW take care of each other, he said.

"We have a very strong commander and NCOs, and the wing is very supportive," Perez said. "You know leadership from top to bottom. You don't have to spend time figuring out how to take care of small things, like getting a new ID card."

Flying every month? It's a bonus, he said. He enjoys the ride.

For Master Sgt. Roderick Miranda, an electrician in the recently-formed 168th Civil Engineer Squadron, the commute is a newer routine.

He transferred from the 477th Fighter Group Prime BEEF mission.

It's difficult to be away from home for two nights, especially when you have small children, he said.

"Sparing one weekend a month is worth being here doing what you do," Miranda said.

He has been an electrician for roughly 10 years, a skill he developed in the Air Force Reserve and one that spilled over into his civilian job. Miranda often travels to remote villages to provide electrician services.

From across the state, members of the Air National Guard add time to their monthly commute to serve their state and support their team, and it continues to benefit both Airmen and their units.

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## PHOTOS

1. **Attached pdf** includes story and photos.
2. **DVIDS link** includes story and photos. (DVIDS is generally accessible from .mil computers)  
<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/183261/its-no-ordinary-drill-weekend-commute-some-alaska-guardsmen#.VI9Fkk3lupo>



**20151108-AF-MQ741-161**

Members of the 168th Air Refueling Wing board a KC-135 on Sunday Nov. 8, 2015 to return to Anchorage from Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Francine St. Laurent)



**20151106-AF-MQ741-014**

Airmen in the 168th Air Refueling Wing get cozy on a short 45-minute flight on a KC-130 from Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson to Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska on Nov. 6, 2015. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Francine St. Laurent)



**20151003-AF-MQ741-003**

Airmen in the 168th Air Refueling Wing bide time with a snooze, book or game during the short flight from Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson to Eielson Air Force Base on a 176th Wing KC-17 on Oct. 2, 2015. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Francine St. Laurent)