



**PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Apr. 22, 2016

By Sgt. Marisa Lindsay

Alaska National Guard

Release: 16-007

First Female Chaplain for the Alaska Army National Guard lives for God and country

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — 1st Lt. Brehan Heeren, a chaplain with the 297th Reconnaissance and Surveillance Squadron, Alaska Army National Guard, is breaking barriers. Not only is she the first person in her military family to have earned a commission, but as of April of last year, she is also the first female Soldier to serve in the Alaska Army National Guard as a chaplain.

Heeren is no stranger to military life. Her mom is a retired U.S. Army first sergeant. Her brother was the youngest to promote to the highest U.S. Air Force enlisted rank, chief master sergeant, and pinned at the age of 34. And when she enlisted, Heeren was the 13th person in her family to raise their right hand and swear to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies.

“Prior to commissioning, I knew that I was taking up a mantle of honor,” described Heeren, who commissioned into the Army Reserves under the Simultaneous Membership Program with ROTC at the University of North Alabama in 2007.

Heeren was originally assessed into the adjutant general branch for the Army, and followed that path for three years.

“I have been a life-long Christian, but up until this point, I never gave much thought about what God wanted me to do,” said Heeren, who referenced a prayer-filled spiritual-retreat weekend with friends during her junior year as her watershed moment.

Heeren immediately changed paths and embarked on her journey into the chaplain corps, one of the oldest and smallest branches of the Army. But it would mean leaving the reserves and continuing her service with the Alaska National Guard.

“In the fall of 2010, I had planned on getting married and moving to Alaska when I found out that the Reserves did not offer the Chaplain Candidate Program in Alaska,” said Heeren, whose husband was an Alaska-based active-duty Army chaplain. “Only the National Guard offered this option, so I switched to the Alaska Army National Guard in order to pursue my dream of becoming an Army chaplain.”

The National Guard Chaplain Candidate Program allows Army second lieutenants a training avenue to become an Army chaplain while pursuing a career in professional ministry.

“Chaplain Heeren came to us seeking to be a chaplain candidate in 2011,” explained Col. Richard Koch, the Alaska National Guard state command chaplain. “Since her enlistment later that year, she’s become the first female chaplain in the Alaska Army National Guard, which brings a much-needed perspective to our overall ministry and helps us be more representative of our total force population.”

Currently, more than 80 female chaplains within the Guard and Reserves serve alongside their male counterparts.

With the increased number of female Soldiers donning the religious insignia on their uniforms, diversity is strengthening the corps and truly representing the total force population.

“At first, I was concerned about joining because many of my female counterparts in other states had adverse experiences while becoming chaplains,” declared Heeren. “That hasn’t been my experience as I’ve enjoyed every minute of being able to travel the state, meeting our Soldiers, and being a part of the Alaska Army National Guard family.”

After serving for more than five years alongside her Alaska National Guard comrades, one of Heeren’s most memorable experiences was the day she officially pinned her cross insignia, identifying her federal recognition as a chaplain.

“My husband, mom and cousin were able to make it to my pinning ceremony, which was held in May 2015 at the Military Ball of the North,” explained Heeren. “Once the pinning was completed, the entire room erupted into cheering and applause, and I realized how much support I had from the Soldiers and community.”

The insignia that Heeren dons on her military dress uniform summarizes the duality of her ministry: “Pro Deo Et Patria,” which is the chaplain corps motto that translates from Latin to, “For God and Country.”

“I definitely feel as though I bring a different perspective and view on matters for the Soldiers based upon my own life experiences into my chaplaincy,” said Heeren, who turns to prayer and faith for her hard times and is determined to practice what she preaches.

For Heeren, a chaplain is someone who can lend a voice of encouragement, continue to counsel and support, regardless of time or location, and live out integrity.

“A great chaplain is someone whose ministry never ends; they are simply ministers of their faith who have become Soldiers,” Heeren expounds. “My biggest hope in this role is to care for Alaska National Guard Soldiers and their families and to assist in bringing hope.”

PHOTOS

1. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution photos. (accessible from .mil computers.)

<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/196291/first-female-chaplain-alaska-national-guard-lives-god-and-country#.VxqRakOUWUk>



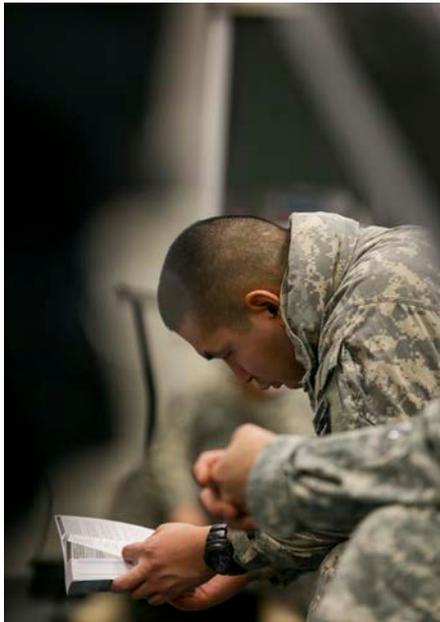
160115-Z-CA180-007

1st Lt. Brehan Heeren, a chaplain with 1-297th Reconnaissance and Surveillance Cavalry Squadron, is pulled on a snow sled by children in Tuluksak, Jan. 15. Alaska Guardsmen conducted arctic skills training, arctic airborne operations and defense to civil authorities missions to include Kuskowim 300 check point operations and stability tasks in the vicinity of Bethel, Jan. 13-17. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O’Neal Dresel)



160117-Z-CA180-017

1st Lt. Brehan Heeren, a chaplain with 1-297th Reconnaissance and Surveillance Cavalry Squadron, conducts a religious service for Guardsmen at the Alaska Army National Guard armory in Bethel, Jan. 17. More than 80 Guardsmen conducted training in western Alaska, Jan. 13-17. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel)



160117-Z-CA180-027

Alaska National Guardsmen attend a religious service at the Alaska Army National Guard armory in Bethel, Jan. 17. More than 80 Guardsmen conducted training in western Alaska, Jan. 13-17. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel)