



PRESS RELEASE

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By Staff Sgt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel

Alaska National Guard

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Service members unite to provide assistance to isolated village in Alaska

OLD HARBOR, Alaska — Alaska National Guardsmen from the 207th Engineer Utility Detachment teamed up with service members from across the Department of Defense to participate in an Innovative Readiness Training runway extension project here, April 17 – May 1, 2017.

Led by U.S. Marine Forces Reserve, this year's four-month project is part of a civil and joint military program to improve military readiness while simultaneously providing quality services to underserved communities throughout the United States. Participants include a mixture of active and reserve components from the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps and Navy.

In its fifth year, IRT Old Harbor's mission is to construct a 2,700-foot extension of the airport runway to expand the Kodiak Island community's economy. From firefighting and medical personnel to engineering and transportation of goods needed to sustain the camp, a variety of occupational specialties are needed to complete the project.

"Out of the eight Soldiers here, I have four heavy equipment operators, two mechanics, a cook and an electrician," said Sgt. 1st Class Seth Gordon, 207th EUD readiness noncommissioned officer, while describing the different types of services the AKNG is providing to the mission. "Our Soldiers look forward to the opportunity to come out here every year to complete training while making a difference for the local community."

Old Harbor, a small community on Kodiak Island, is highly dependent on the fishing industry. In order to support economic expansion, the Old Harbor Native Corporation, the City of Old Harbor and the Old Harbor Tribal Council have been working to establish infrastructure needed to start a fish processing operation in the community.

"The long-term plan is to put in a cannery and hydroelectric plant, and a longer runway will be needed to accommodate the larger aircraft," explained Gordon, a three-year veteran of the Old Harbor IRT mission. "It's a win-win situation; we get to travel to a remote location, operate out of a small camp much like a forward operating base and get training on equipment that is needed to complete this project."

The Alaska Guardsmen are familiar with heavy equipment that they operate and maintain in Anchorage like the D7 bulldozer and roller compactor, and have the opportunity to work with motorized scrapers, excavators and rock trucks, equipment they do not have.

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“We are getting trained on equipment we do not usually operate and can train other Soldiers in the unit how to use them so we are more versatile in any environment that we go to,” explained Gordon. “Our electrician is learning a lot about generators and powering the camps, and our cook is getting the opportunity to train for the first time since he completed his initial job training.”

The unique training environment of an IRT provides participants opportunities to share best practices between the different military services, which is similar to the experience of multi-service collaboration during many deployment scenarios.

Staff Sgt. Randy Graftema, a project coordinator for IRT Old Harbor who is with the 6th Engineer Support Battalion, Marine Forces Reserve, says that the best part of the training mission is getting everyone to work together as a team.

“We see a lot of military members that do not get to work with the other branches very much,” explained Graftema, who believes the cohesion is a very important part of training since service members are deployed in joint environments.

In addition to moving material, this year’s mission is also focusing on blasting, which requires a special skill set from quarry specialists.

“We have two blasts over on the west side [of the runway] and we will be blasting the north hill possibly too,” said Graftema, who explained that the blasting is dependent on the amount of material needed for the runway. “[The Arizona National Guard] is going to be doing quarry ops. They will be taking rock and crushing it down to a finer grade for the top of the runway and they will also be assisting with the drilling and blasting of the mountains.”

During a three-month tour to Old Harbor, the AZNG’s 259th Engineer Platoon is slated to provide approximately 90,000 tons of crushed material for the project.

Service members began this year’s IRT on April 3 and will continue rotating missions at varied lengths until August 8, moving a projected 150,000 cubic yards of material. Future projects include another expansion on the runway and the construction of a road to the proposed hydroelectric plant.

Additional Guardsmen from the 207th EUD are scheduled to return for another rotation June 12-26.

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PHOTOS:

1. **Attached pdf** includes story and a small selection of low-resolution photos for viewing on screen.
2. **Flickr link** includes an event album with the complete selection of full-resolution, free downloadable images. (May not be accessible from all military computers.)
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/alaskanationalguard/albums/72157681249072520>
3. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution, free downloadable images. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.) <http://dvidshub.net/r/lrdf79>
4. **DIVDS Video A-roll link.** Video B-roll links. A-roll: <http://dvidshub.net/r/nku9so>
B-roll: <http://dvidshub.net/r/gzvrji>; <http://dvidshub.net/r/94nfpa>; <http://dvidshub.net/r/yrqsw>

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Arizona Guardsman Spc. Aaron Tellez, a motor vehicle operator with the 259th Engineer Platoon, operates an excavator during a runway extension project at Innovative Readiness Training Old Harbor, Alaska, April 19, 2017. The project will extend the existing Old Harbor runway by 2,700 feet, which will allow larger aircraft to land in Old Harbor. IRT Old Harbor is part of a civil and joint military program to improve military readiness while simultaneously providing quality services to underserved communities throughout the United States. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel)



Alaska Guardsman Sgt. Jeffery Enderle, a horizontal equipment supervisor with the 207th Engineer Utility Detachment, operates a D7 dozer during a runway extension project at Innovative Readiness Training Old Harbor, Alaska, April 20, 2017. The project will extend the existing Old Harbor runway by 2,700 feet, which will allow larger aircraft to land in Old Harbor. IRT Old Harbor is part of a civil and joint military program to improve military readiness while simultaneously providing quality services to underserved communities throughout the United States. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel)



Alaska Guardsman Spc. Brodie Smith, a wheeled vehicle mechanic, 207th Engineer Utility Detachment, works on a vehicle during a runway extension project at Innovative Readiness Training Old Harbor, Alaska, April 19, 2017. The project will extend the existing Old Harbor runway by 2,700 feet, which will allow larger aircraft to land in Old Harbor. IRT Old Harbor is part of a civil and joint military program to improve military readiness while simultaneously providing quality services to underserved communities throughout the United States. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel)



Service members from across the Department of Defense participate in an Innovative Readiness Training runway extension project at Old Harbor, Alaska, April 20, 2017. In its fifth year, the U.S. Marine Forces Reserve led exercise is part of a civil and joint military program to improve military readiness while simultaneously provide quality services to underserved communities throughout the United States. Additional participants include the Alaska and Arizona National Guards, Air Force Reserve, Navy Reserve, and Coast Guard. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel)

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Students from Old Harbor School visit the Innovative Readiness Training site in Old Harbor, Alaska, April 20, 2017. The visit included a tour of the camp and worksite, along with rides in equipment being used to expand the existing runway. The U.S. Marine Forces led project is part of a civil and joint military program to improve military readiness while simultaneously providing quality services to underserved communities throughout the United States. Additional participants include the Alaska and Arizona National Guards, Air Force Reserve, Navy Reserve, and Coast Guard. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel)



Pfc. Amanda Schmidling, a horizontal construction engineer with the Arizona National Guard's 259th Engineer Platoon, drives local school students around during their visit to the Innovative Readiness Training runway extension project at Old Harbor, Alaska, April 20, 2017. The U.S. Marine Forces led project is part of a civil and joint military program to improve military readiness while simultaneously providing quality services to underserved communities throughout the United States. Additional participants include the Alaska and Arizona National Guards, Air Force Reserve, Navy Reserve, and Coast Guard. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel)