



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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By Sgt. Seth LaCount

## **Family Tradition: Alaskan Guardsman makes debut appearance in K-300**

**Bethel, Alaska** — His hands trembled with anticipation, soaked in a mixture of anxiety and excitement. The room was quiet as the mushers of the Kuskokwim 300 waited to pick a bib number which would determine their starting order. He knew he was ready, but the helm he was about to take up was still overwhelming. He had never run a team of dogs further than 75 miles, and dog sledding was a family tradition.

Staff Sgt. Thomas Carl, an Alaska Army National Guard infantryman with B Company, 1-297th Infantry Battalion, competed in his first Kuskokwim-300 dogsled race in Bethel, January 19-21, 2018. Carl is an Akiak native and the son in law of Michael Williams Sr, a village council member known statewide for his 16 appearances in the Iditarod and 29 in the K-300. This year, due to health concerns, Williams Sr. asked Carl to drive his team.

“It's a big jump for me,” said Carl, prior to the race. “I never thought I'd be running dogs until I moved to Akiak six years ago and started helping my family train them. But I respect all those guys and they respect me. There's very few that haven't been doing this a long time,” said Carl.

Carl first learned how to mush in a training sled behind his father in law and slowly worked his way into running a team of six. His first race was a local 25 mile sprint in Akiachak, followed by the 75 mile Akiak dash, where he placed second and wore the number 17. For his debut in the K-300 he chose the number 17 in honor of that second place finish.

Carl's brother in law Michael Williams Jr., who competed against him in the K-300 this year, started the process of training the dogs in September. In late November, Carl began to help train the dogs alongside him. In that first three months Carl would train the dogs for a few hours each day. Two weeks prior to the race he increased training time to upwards of 12 hour sessions .

This will be the third year in a row that Carl's unit has been supporting the K-300, assisting with race checkpoints and the resupply of mushers, making the race a B Co. affair.

“It's an awesome way to get visibility for the Guard in the local community,” said Capt. Vance Johnson, Commander of B Co. 297th INF. “It's great to see one of our guys compete.”

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With 11 dogs this year, Carl ran the longest course of his career in some of the most adverse conditions he has faced. Prior to the race start, Carl said his number one goal was to keep his dogs safe.

“Preventing injury was my main priority,” said Carl. “I wanted to keep a close eye on the lead dogs to make sure the other dogs didn't sway.”

After nearly 60 hours of race time, with very little sleep Carl finished the race the morning of the 22nd with all his dogs live and well. He had finished the biggest race of his life and held the torch of his family's pastime with pride.

“I really enjoyed this experience,” said Carl. “If someone offered me another chance to do this again, I definitely think I would.”

Carl is proud of both his 14 years of military service and Native Alaskan heritage, both significant parts of his life. Carl enlisted in the Marine Corps in the late 1990's and deployed during Operation Desert Storm, after four years in the corps he transitioned to the Alaska National Guard. He is married and has two daughters whom he stresses the importance of maintaining his native language and culture with.

“I don't speak English to my two daughters,” said Carl. “It's very sad to see a lot of children in my village losing their ability to speak the Yup'ik language.”

Carl's future plans include competing in the upcoming Akiak dash and pursuing his love for dog sledding. “There's no feeling that's close to running the dogs,” said Carl. “I love it.”

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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/72157690890462821>
3. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution photos. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.) <https://dvidshub.net/r/gprzql>



Staff Sgt. Thomas Carl, an infantryman assigned to Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment, chooses his bib number during the Kuskokwim 300 dogsled race ceremony at the Long House hotel in Bethel, Jan. 18, 2018. “I'm anxious, nervous and excited,” said Carl, representing the Alaskan National Guard in his first time at the race. “I respect all those guys and they respect me. There's very few that haven't been doing this a long time.” (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Seth LaCount/released)



Staff Sgt. Thomas Carl, an infantryman assigned to Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment, participates in the Kuskokwim 300 dogsled race in Bethel, Jan. 20, 2018.



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