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Alaska Air Guard Airmen return home from Southwest Asia deployment

EIELSON AIR FORCE BASE, Alaska – Fifteen members of the 168th Wing left Southwest Asia temperatures that hovered in the high 70s, and came home to interior Alaska temperatures in the high teens March 4. In spite of the cold temperatures, waiting for these Airmen were the open arms of warm, bundled up kids and spouses, friends and co-workers.

After spending anywhere from 60 to 120 days in Southwest Asia, these KC-135R Stratotanker crews and maintainers were happy to see familiar faces and places as they exited the aircraft here on Eielson. The Airmen of the 168th Wing returned home after deploying in support of Operation Freedom's Sentinel, where they provided support to U.S. and coalition forces throughout the Southwest Asia area of responsibility.

During their time overseas, the crews and maintainers completed approximately 82 flying missions over the skies of Afghanistan and Southwest Asia, and delivered more than 1.5 million pounds of fuel to coalition aircraft that included the F-16 Falcon, A-10 Thunderbolt, and B-52 Stratofortress.

The KC-135R Stratotanker is capable of carrying more than 83,000 pounds of cargo, and in addition to the refueling mission the unit was assigned to, the aircraft and its crews delivered passengers and cargo during the deployment.

Col. Torrence Saxe, commander of the 168th Wing, was one of the first people to greet the returning Airmen.

"I can't say it enough, how proud we are of the mission these folks accomplished while in theater," Saxe said. "They represent the best of who we are as a force, and who we are as Alaskan Airmen."

Most of these Airmen will have about two weeks of time off before coming back to work, time enough to get caught up on all that has happened since they left, time to get reacquainted with their families, and get caught up on hugs.

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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/168thwingakang/albums/72157693490825774>

3. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution photos. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.) <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/268515/alaska-air-guard-airmen-return-home-southwest-asia-deployment>



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One of the two KC-135R Stratotankers carrying Airmen of the 168th Wing, Alaska Air National Guard, is pulled into the 168th Maintenance Group's hangar on Eielson AFB, Alaska, March 4, 2018. Approximately 15 of the units' Airmen returned home from an extended deployment to Southwest Asia, and were greeted by family and friends who braved the below-freezing temperatures of Alaska's interior. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Paul Mann)



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Capt. Jeff Boesche, a pilot assigned to the 168th Operations Group, Alaska Air National Guard, receives a hug from his wife Sarah, moments after he stepped off of the plane at Eielson AFB, Alaska, March 4, 2018. Boesche was one of 15 Airmen who returned home from Southwest Asia, after spending months away from family and friends, supporting Operation Freedom's Sentinel in Southwest Asia. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Paul Mann)

