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Alaska Air National Guard's Civil Engineer Squadron deploys to four countries

176th CES combats terrorism around the globe

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — Last December, 45 Alaska Air Guardsmen assigned to the 176th Civil Engineer Squadron deployed to Kuwait, Niger, Qatar and United Arab Emirates.

"What makes this deployment unique is the size of the team that we sent," said Lt. Col Kass Larson, the commander of the 176th CES. "That's roughly half of our entire squadron, and it is a particularly complex deployment since we have teams at four locations and one team even forward deployed to a fifth location."

37 of the Guardsmen deployed to Niger, assigned to the 724th Expeditionary Air Base Squadron on Air Base 201, a 1.1-million square-foot air base completed in 2019. The Airmen specializing in emergency management, plumbing, heavy equipment operation and fire prevention performed missions on critical infrastructure and executed biological attack prevention in the region and helped build and maintain facilities, roads, and maintain electrical capabilities on the base.

The mission in Niger is part of Operation Juniper Shield, formerly known as Operation Enduring Freedom-Trans Sahara. The military operation is conducted by the United States and partner nations in the Sahara/Sahel region of Africa, consisting of counterterrorism efforts and policing of arms and drug trafficking across central Africa, according to the Department of Defense website.

The 176th CES Airmen who were deployed to the Middle East executed missions as part of Operation Inherent Resolve, a continued effort to work by, with and through regional partners to militarily defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, in order to enable whole-of-coalition governmental actions to increase stability in the region, according to the Department of Defense website.

In Kuwait, the Airmen kept the air-bridge to Iraq and other areas of importance operational by performing regular inspections and maintenance. In the United Arab Emirates, the Air Guard engineers ran 160 million dollars' worth of electrical powerplant construction. Lastly, from Qatar, the Airmen managed construction on military installations across Africa and the Middle East.

In early March, preventative measures against the COVID-19 pandemic surged, delaying initial deployment timelines. But it failed to slow the unit down.

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“The amazing flexibility of our Airmen, many of whom have civilian careers at home, enabled us to succeed even when COVID delayed return travel,” Larson said. “I have Airmen on 6-month tours who were deployed for over eight months. That extra deployment time impacts things at home; families, plans, careers, etc. But my engineers wouldn’t let the pandemic slow them down from accomplishing the mission.”

Six of the airmen have returned home thus far. The majority still remain across the deployment regions and will return home this month.

“I am very proud of my team,” Larson said. “They executed the largest 2020 AKANG deployment in our unit’s history and they did so without fanfare. They did it all with the can-do attitude that characterizes civil engineers and the confident professionalism of the Alaska Air National Guard.”

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PHOTOS

1. **Attached pdf** includes story and a small selection of low-resolution photos for viewing on screen.
2. **DVIDS link** to photos and story: <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/373626/alaska-air-national-guards-civil-engineer-squadron-deploys-four-countries-176th-ces-combats-terrorism-around-globe>



Alaska Air National Guard Fire Protection Specialists assigned to the 176th Civil Engineer Squadron in Niger, Africa during their 2020 deployment. (Alaska National Guard Courtesy Photo)



Alaska and South Carolina Air National Guardsmen assigned to the 176th and 169th Civil Engineer Squadrons pour a concrete pad to support new Air Force Research Labs and Antiterrorism and Force Protection capabilities in Niger, Africa. The squadron's wartime mission is to repair war damage to air bases, support force bed-down of Air Force units and weapons systems, operate and maintain air base facilities and utilities, provide crash rescue and fire suppression and identify unexploded ordnance. (Alaska National Guard Courtesy Photo)



Alaska Air National Guardsman Staff Sgt. Jill Prieto, a heavy equipment operator assigned to the 176th Civil Engineer Squadron prepares a worksite for a major drainage project during her deployment in Niger, Africa. The 176th CES deployed to Niger to maintain the nation's infrastructure and according to AFRICOM's website, the U.S. Air Force regularly conducts sustained security engagement and operations to promote air safety, security, and development in Africa. (Alaska National Guard Courtesy Photo)