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**Alaska National Guard**

*Department of Military  
and Veterans Affairs*

Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

020-091

**October 2, 2020**

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*Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs*

### **Impactful vision, extraordinary resolve**

The restructuring and transformation of the Alaska Guard's 207th Aviation Regiment

**JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska** — The renowned innovation strategist Max McKeown described adaptability as “the powerful difference between adapting to cope and adapting to win.” McKeown’s words highlight the necessity of intentional, proactive leadership. The winds of change can transform into progress in the hands of driven, equipped leaders.

The 1st Battalion, 207th Aviation Regiment of the Alaska Army National Guard has exemplified this ideal regarding adaptability, evidenced by the effort and intuition of the regiment’s command team and their Soldiers, during a transitional period of time in the unit’s history.

In 2014, the U.S. Army began an aviation restructuring initiative that would affect all National Guard aviation fleets. This historic reshaping was an attempt to upgrade capabilities, while cutting more than 12 billion dollars in spending over five years, according to the U.S. Capability Development and Integration Directorate.

Notably, the National Guard and Army Reserves transferred the majority of Boeing AH-64 Apache helicopters to active duty units, while receiving an influx of Sikorsky UH-60 Black Hawk and UH-72 Lakota helicopters. This initiative would have a prominent impact on the National Guard’s federal mission, and force Guard units to reevaluate structuring, manning, and training needs.

Col. Robert Kurtz assumed operative control over the future of AKARNG aviation when he became the State Army Aviation Officer in 2015, shortly after the restructuring initiative began. He was heavily recruited by the Alaska Guard’s highest leadership after leaving the National Guard Bureau, and played a pivotal role in securing additional air assets for the 207th AVN. He described the move as “seizing an opportunity, at an opportune time.”

The asset acquisition began with the arrival of two UH-72 Lakotas and six CH-47 Chinooks in the fall of 2018, while two HH-60M Black Hawk helicopters, utilized for medical evacuation, arrived in August this year. The procurement of the aircraft, initiated a force structure change, moving the unit from an air assault battalion, to a general support aviation battalion. This aligned the 207th AVN with the same structure as their active duty counterparts in the U.S. Army’s 1st Battalion, 52nd GSAB in Fairbanks, Alaska, allowing for the two units to pool their resources and train together for future mutual benefits.

One major benefit of restructuring, was that it gave the Alaska Army National Guard’s aviation unit new capabilities in heavy lift capacity, medical evacuation and care, and reconnaissance. Recent, pertinent

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examples include the Lakotas assisting local Drug Enforcement Administration probes or the recent transport of the iconic Stampede Trail “Magic Bus” near Healy, Alaska using the CH-47’s heavy lift capability. The bus extraction could not have been accomplished without it.

In addition to aircraft acquisition, the 207th has spent the last three years recruiting aviation Soldiers and sending current Soldiers to aviation training schools to prepare them for upcoming federal missions that will require deployment to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility.

Kurtz retired Sept. 30 after leaving a legacy of positively transforming the 207th AVN into what it is today with the help of his subordinate leaders and Soldiers. He handed the reigns to former battalion commander Lt. Col. Michelle Edwards, an aviator of 15 years.

“Under Colonel Kurtz, we went from great to greater,” Edwards said. “I will continue to train and grow to support our federal mission with the priority being on safety and efficiency. What we need now in aviation is stability. We’ve got the staff, we now need real-world training to prepare for upcoming deployments.”

Edwards also stressed the importance of continuity of leadership within the 207th. Her battalion commander, Lt. Col. Todd Miller has worked alongside her since they were lieutenants. They share a unified vision for the future of the Alaska Army National Guard’s aviators.

“It’s an outstanding opportunity to work alongside Soldiers that have been with me since the beginning,” Edwards said. “These aviators are leaders in the air and on the ground. On average, I think aviation has access to some of the brightest Soldiers in the military,” she said. “Aviation Soldiers are challenged to constantly develop and acquire a litany of skillsets. That’s the nature of our job.”

The 207th AVN’s transition is still in transition. The unit awaits the arrival of four additional UH-60M Black Hawks in 2021 and two more Lakotas by 2022. They also expect to acquire an advanced level maintenance company to support the CH-47’s sustainment.

Moving forward into 2021 and beyond, Edwards plans to reinforce the 207th’s commitment to stability and safety.

“Maintaining a climate and culture of safety is a big responsibility the state aviation officer,” Edwards said. “Ultimately, our success relies on our ability to do our jobs in a coordinated way that gets us all home safely.”

The 207th AVN’s progress is driven by the continued hard work of key leaders within the organization. The Soldiers who lay the groundwork for mission success will ensure that whatever future challenges lay ahead, they will be met by an adaptable force bent on winning the day.

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## PHOTOS

1. **Attached pdf** includes story and a small selection of low-resolution photos for viewing on screen.
2. **Story link:** <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/380174/impactful-vision-extraordinary-resolve-restructuring-and-transformation-alaska-guards-207th-aviation-regiment>



Alaska Army National Guard Col. Robert Kurtz recently stepped down as the State Army Aviation Officer for 1st Battalion, 207th Aviation Regiment upon retirement Sept. 30, 2020 at Bryant Army Airfield on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. Kurtz flew into the ceremony aboard a UH-72 Lakota helicopter and was welcomed with a water cannon salute, the first time an AKNG Lakota has been used for the aviation tradition. He served the Alaska Army National Guard for the last five years of his 35-year military career, and was responsible for transforming the unit during an important transitional period for Army aviators across the nation. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Seth LaCount/Released)



A U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook piloted by members of 1st Battalion, 207th Aviation Regiment, Alaska Army National Guard and 1st Battalion, 189th General Support Aviation Battalion, Montana Army National Guard, conduct a training flight at Bryant Army Airfield on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, May 7, 2019. Soldiers with the Alaska National Guard from the 1-207th conducted cross-country training flights during their final annual training as an air assault unit. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Lt. Benjamin Haulenbeek)



Alaska Army Guardsmen from Detachment 2, Golf Company, 2nd General Support Aviation Battalion, 104th Regiment, instruct U.S. Army Alaska scouts from Headquarters Troop, 1st Squadron (Airborne), 40th Cavalry Regiment, during a medical evacuation and hoist familiarization training at Bryant Army Airfield on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, Feb. 19, 2019. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 2nd Lt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel)