



For Immediate Release
By: Spc. Paizley Ramsey

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Alaska Army National Guard Soldier Salutes Guard's Past in Iditarod

CAMP DENALI, Alaska—For the first time, the Alaska Army National Guard is being represented in the 2009 Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race by an Alaska Army National Guardsman.

In an effort to celebrate and restore its ties to the Iditarod, the Guard selected Staff Sgt. Harry Alexie, Alaska Army National Guard, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1/297th Cavalry to run this year's race.

“We’re going back to our roots,” said Lt. Col. Joseph Lawendowski, 38th Troop Command, Recruiting and Retention commander. “The Guard was founded by the efforts of people like ‘Muktuk’ Marston, who recruited nearly 4,000 individuals using sled dogs as a means of transportation to remote villages to bolster the Alaska Territorial Guard during the World War II era. We’re getting back to basics, and Alexie represents all that this organization was founded on and how we started.”

The Alaska Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention leadership chose Alexie, 31, because he represents what every Guardsman should. With high moral character, tenacity, and perseverance in the face of adversity, Alexie also has roots firmly planted in the culture of Alaska, the Alaska Army National Guard and sled dog racing.

“Alexie was a perfect candidate for the Iditarod,” said Sgt. Maj. Clinton Brown, 38th Troop Command, Recruiting and Retention command sergeant major. “He has experience with this sport, and he has the physical and mental strength to be a real contender.”

Alexie, a senior human resources non-commissioned officer, began the more than 1,049-mile journey to Nome in the 37th Annual Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race at the ceremonial start of the race in Anchorage March 7. But before he left the starting line, the Kwethluk native racked up months of valuable training with one of the Last Great Race's best.

Since October 2008, Alexie trained with veteran musher and two-time Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race winner Lance Mackey at Mackey's comeback kennel outside of Fairbanks. Alexie said the training was highly motivating and he wishes to represent the Alaska Army National Guard with the highest degree of pride of service and professionalism.

“Training has been going great since I started working with Lance,” Alexie said. “The past few weeks have been pretty tough, and I’ve lost a lot of sleep, but no worse than basic training,” he joked. “It’s part of the training and conditioning for the trail; I’m just happy to be a part of this.”

Alexie’s apprenticeship under Mackey can be attributed to his desire to train with a champion, but also the pioneering efforts of Brown and Lawendowski, who wished to highlight the history and partnership between Alaska and its Army National Guard.

“We have a history with this sport because this is how we [the Alaska Army National Guard] started,” Lawendowski said. “Alexie will be following in the tracks of “Muktuk” Marston’s 1942 recruitment effort.”

According to Mackey, to compete in the Iditarod takes a great deal of mental strength and fortitude, and he has great confidence that Alexie will be able to successfully complete the race.

“I believe Harry has what it takes,” Mackey said. “I have the utmost confidence in his abilities, but in the end it’s up to him to make it to Nome.”

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CUTLINES: (Additional photos can be found at <http://www.dmva.alaska.gov/gallery.shtml>)

Alexie 1

Staff Sgt. Harry Alexie, Alaska Army National Guard, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1/297th Cavalry prepares his team to move to the starting line at the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race XXXVII in downtown Anchorage March 7. Alexie trained with famed Alaskan race champion Lance Mackey, and will be running 16 dogs from Mackey’s Comeback Kennel. Photo: Spc. Paizley Ramsey, 134th Public Affairs Detachment

Alexie 2

Staff Sgt. Harry Alexie, Alaska Army National Guard, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1/297th Cavalry stands with friend and mentor Lance Mackey, two time consecutive Iditarod winner, at the 37th annual Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race start in downtown Anchorage March, 7. Alexie will be running 16 dogs from Mackey’s Comeback Kennel. Photo: Spc. Paizley Ramsey, 134th Public Affairs Detachment

Alexie 3

Staff Sgt. Harry Alexie, Alaska Army National Guard, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1/297th Cavalry brings his team of dogs to the ceremonial starting line of the 37th annual Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race in downtown Anchorage March, 7. Photo: Spc. Paizley Ramsey, 134th Public Affairs Detachment

Alexie 5

Moments before Alexie's team is released at the ceremonial start of the 37th annual Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, one of his team lets fans and spectators know he's motivated to win and ready to go in downtown Anchorage March, 7. Photo: Spc. Paizley Ramsey, 134th Public Affairs Detachment.

Murkowski

Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski wishes Staff Sgt. Harry Alexie and his Alaska Army National Guard sled dog team a safe journey prior to the 2009 Iditarod Sled Dog Race ceremonial start in downtown Anchorage March 7. Photo: Spc. Margaret J. Moonin, 134th Public Affairs Detachment