



For Immediate Release

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### **Alaska Army National Guard Aviators Fly Vice President around Kosovo**

*Alaska unit provided primary means of transportation for vice president during two-day visit*

**CAMP BONDSTEEL, Kosovo** – During the month of May, the Northern Exposure aircrews of Task Force Arctic Eagle, also known as A Company, 1/207<sup>th</sup> Aviation, Alaska Army National Guard, were given a rare opportunity. They were tasked to fly the vice president of the United States, Joseph Biden, in their UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters during his trip to Kosovo as part of a larger trip throughout the Balkans.

Currently deployed to Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, the Guard members of 1/207<sup>th</sup> Aviation are known for accomplishing a variety of missions with minimal planning time and making it look easy. This mission was no different. Transporting the vice president, his security detail, press and staff around the country required six of the company's eight aircraft.

“There was a lot of coordination between the Secret Service and our flight lead and air mission commander,” said 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Nathan Cornilles, 1-207<sup>th</sup> Aviation from Eagle River. “That clarified the small details of the mission and gave the crews a clear understanding.”

On May 21, all of the aircraft launched to Slatina Airport in Pristina to meet Air Force Two. The Alaska Army Guardsmen had placed the A Company patch, featuring a polar bear drawing by Alaskan cartoonist Chad Carpenter, on the vice president's seat onboard the Black Hawk. Vice President Biden later remarked at Camp Bondsteel, “I've got to admit I have never seen a patch quite like this.”

From there, the crews transported Vice President Biden to the NATO Kosovo Forces Headquarters in Film City, Pristina, where he spoke to representatives of Kosovo's government. Afterward, the vice president was flown to the western part of Kosovo to Camp Sparta where he visited the Decani Monastery. The flight then proceeded to Camp Bondsteel where Vice President Biden gave an address to the troops and spent the night.

All the while, A Company, 1/207<sup>th</sup> Aviation, Alaska Army National Guard members Chief Warrant Officer Two Frank Bithos of Nome, Chief Warrant Officer Three Pam French of Wasilla, Sgt. Jeff Rogers of Anchorage, and Spc. Brian Felts of Eagle River flew the security over-watch aircraft and spent most of their time flying ahead of the formation and sweeping the routes for the Secret Service.

The next morning, the crews transported the group back to Slatina Airport where the vice president gave a thumbs-up to the crews before boarding Air Force Two to continue his trip.

All in all, supporting the vice president of the United States was a wonderful opportunity for Soldiers from the Alaska Army National Guard.

“Everyone in the task force put forth a tremendous effort to prepare for the mission,” said Lt. Col. Jeff Roach, commander, 1/207<sup>th</sup> Aviation, Alaska Army National Guard. “The vice president was in the capable hands of some of America’s best aircrews.”

The Alaska unit has been deployed since December 2008. They are providing aviation support with UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters to U.S. forces and battalion includes eight Blackhawk helicopters and 140 soldiers from Fairbanks, Anchorage, Bethel, Nome and Juneau.

One hundred forty Alaska Army National Guard members from 1/207<sup>th</sup> Aviation have been deployed since December 2008. They are on a one-year peacekeeping and peace enforcement mission to Kosovo and have been providing aviation support with UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters to U.S. forces and Coalition forces.

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**High resolution photos and cutlines can be found on the Department of Military & Veterans Affairs website at: <http://dmva.alaska.gov/content/galleries/kosovo/default.htm>**