



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**North American Aerospace Defense Command mission**

**EIELSON AIR FORCE BASE, Alaska** — Representatives of organizations supporting the 168th Air Refueling Wing's North American Aerospace Defense Command mission, Operation Noble Eagle, met on Eielson Air Force Base February 24 and 25 to devise a roadmap to fund and support the mission.

Last year, Pacific Air Forces assumed funding of the alert mission, which was previously funded by Air Mobility Command and National Guard Bureau. The discussions determined how the transition will occur.

Representatives from AMC, on behalf of U.S. Transportation Command, PACAF, on behalf of United States Pacific Command, NGB and NORAD attended.

NORAD is an organization of the United States and Canada that provides aerospace warning and aerospace control for North America, according to its website.

The 168th ARW alert mission was launched in 1986 with the establishment of the 176th Detachment 1 to support national defense with air refueling capabilities. Following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, the alert mission was incorporated in Operation Noble Eagle. Under the Alaska NORAD Region, it now supports NORAD missions and Joint Chiefs of Staff-directed reconnaissance sorties.

These missions have increased roughly 400 percent in the last year alone, said Lt. Col. Buck Smith, 168th Air Refueling Squadron commander.

With more missions comes the need for steady support.

Airmen must be available at all times to prepare, launch and recover aircraft, said Col. Marvin Ee, 168th Maintenance Group commander.

Holding the meetings at the 168th ARW allowed the representatives to see the environment, to identify what is and isn't available and to determine what additional support might be needed, Ee said.

All parties were participating in video teleconferences for about six months, without making much progress, Ee said. The nature of teleconferences limits input and conversation.

"It was like taking two steps forward, three steps back," Ee said. "One product we developed for manpower was on its twelfth iteration."

But face-to-face around a table, people can break into work groups and find solutions, Ee said.

The 168th Operations Group and 168th Maintenance Group split into groups to come up with different options to support TRANSCOM and PACOM with available resources in the future.

"It allows our planning to be predictable so we wouldn't have to jump through hoops every time we would have to respond," Ee said. "There's now a plan in place that defines how we respond and where we get our resources."

Under the proposal, PACAF would provide manpower authorization, or active duty pay, personnel and aircraft in addition to what is already available to the Wing, Ee said. AMC could also provide personnel and aircraft as needed. Specific resources directly funded for Alaska NORAD Region would enable on-call availability year-round.

For the 168th Operations Group, PACAF would fund aircrew and support personnel to meet mission requirements, Smith said.

Processes for manning the mission while 168th ARW Airmen are deployed will need to be worked out in the future, Smith said.

In the past, other Air National Guard air refueling wing Airmen volunteered to support the mission. However, PACAF will try to first meet the need with Airmen from the 168th Air Refueling Wing, then the 18th Wing at Kadena Air Base and the 15th Wing and 154th Wing at Hickam Air Force Base.

The change will only affect who supports the mission, not how it is completed, Smith said.

"Usually you have Guard units that have volunteers willing to do this mission and motivated to experience the mission in the Alaska environment," Smith said.

The 168th ARW will have to work hard to maintain working relationships with those units and volunteers.

The discussions also resulted in a template for how base services prepare.

Base support includes billeting, communications and vehicles for individuals supporting the alert mission, Ee said. This establishes a plan as to which services need to be provided during any responses, ensuring Airmen are supported while they serve.

"It provided a roadmap for us to be prepared to respond in a standardized manner for future events," Ee said.

The location of the 168th ARW makes it critical, Ee said.

"We provide the only air refueling capability in the region," Ee said. "That's what makes us so important and why we can't fail here."

While most Air National Guard wings focus on training, the 168th ARW often performs more than other similar units, he said.

"By being part of the 168th ARW, in air refueling or space warning, you're supporting real world defense of our nation, 24-7," Ee said. "That's what's so cool about being part of this wing."

This roadmap outlines courses of action, guaranteeing 168th ARW Airmen can respond when they are needed.

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