



**PRESS RELEASE**  
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**Knowledge is power for two Alaska Military Youth Academy graduates**

**JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska** – The Alaska Military Youth Academy celebrated more than 20 years of service to the State of Alaska during the graduation of 154 cadets of Class 2015-2 from its ChalleNGe program Friday, Aug. 28.

The 10 a.m. graduation ceremony was held on the main floor of the Egan Civic and Convention Center in the heart of downtown Anchorage. The ceremony featured Alaska Gov. Bill Walker as the keynote speaker and video messages from members of the Alaska congressional delegation.

Amongst the graduates were cadets Adrienne Carter, 16, from Anchorage, and Freedom Byard, 16, from Wasilla, both of whom said they have excelled more than they could ever have expected within the 22-week residential phase at the AMYA ChalleNGe program. It's during this program that cadets focus on academic excellence, leadership and followership, physical fitness, life coping skills, responsible citizenship, vocational training and service to the community.

"You know, I knew that it would be an adventure, but I thought that the academy would be so much different from what it actually was," explained Carter, who was raised in a military family where she was homeschooled and experienced the many challenges associated with military moves. She had only lived in Alaska for a few weeks when she left home for AMYA.

"It was so much harder than what I'd expected, but at the same time, incredibly rewarding because I was able to overcome those obstacles," Carter continued. "Here I am today, graduating from AMYA with a 3.75 GPA, and with having finished second overall in my physical training."

Byard, who has wanted to join the military since she was old enough to voice an opinion about her future, felt very similarly to Carter regarding her AMYA expectations prior to arriving.

"I felt like it would be a huge adventure and truly didn't understand what I was getting into," said Byard, who has earned AMYA's Ironwoman Award for outstanding physical fitness. "Here, at AMYA, I've learned to push myself harder than I could ever imagine – physically and academically – and have learned what it feels like when you don't give up."

Overall, the AMYA cadets provided more than 1,200 hours of community service, 23 cadets earned their high school diploma, 52 cadets earned their GED, and overall, this class' grade point average increased by 1.47.

"I'm walking away from the academy with discipline, respect for myself, and I feel like I can do anything ... I feel powerful," Carter said. "So if you're on the fence about whether or not AMYA is a good idea for

you or your kids? Come on! You don't know what you're missing out on!"

Now that they've graduated, Carter, Byard and their fellow cadets will take part in the yearlong post-residential phase where graduates return to their communities to put into practice the life skills principles they received and continue their education, enter the workplace, or enter the military. The goal of this phase is for graduates to sustain and build on the gains made during the residential phase while serving as a productive member of society.

As far as Carter's and Byard's futures, Carter, who was awarded the Aero Femme scholarship, is looking forward to a life of academia while Byard is looking to speak with a U.S. Marine Corps recruiter and is excited about the prospect of protecting the United States.

This class of 154 cadets will be joining the 4,486 previous graduates since 1994.

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The Alaska Military Youth Academy color guard team presents the colors while the National Anthem plays during AMYA's graduation ceremony, held at the Egan Civic Center in downtown Anchorage, Aug 28. The ceremony featured Alaska Gov. Bill Walker as the keynote speaker for the 154 graduating cadets. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Marisa Lindsay)



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Alaska Military Youth Academy cadet Freedom Byard (right) waits patiently for AMYA's graduation ceremony to begin, which was held at the Egan Civic Center in downtown Anchorage, Aug. 28. The ceremony featured Alaska Gov. Bill Walker as the keynote speaker for the 154 graduating cadets. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Marisa Lindsay)



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Alaska Military Youth Academy cadets ceremoniously toss their berets in the air at the closing of their graduation, which was held at the Egan Civic Center in downtown Anchorage, Aug. 28. The ceremony featured Alaska Gov. Bill Walker as the keynote speaker for the 154 graduating cadets. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Marisa Lindsay)



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A cadet with the Alaska Military Youth Academy walks across the stage to receive her diploma during their 2015 graduation ceremony, which was held at the Egan Civic Center in downtown Anchorage, Aug. 28. The ceremony featured Alaska Gov. Bill Walker as the keynote speaker and distinguished guest, Brig. Gen. (Alaska) Laurie Hummel, the Alaska National Guard's adjutant general, for the 154 graduating cadets. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Marisa Lindsay)

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