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By Staff Sgt. Edward Eagerton

Air Guard Civil Engineers return from six-month deployment to Middle East

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska —Members of the Alaska Air National Guard’s 176th Civil Engineer Squadron returned to Alaska from a six-month deployment to the Middle East in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Jan. 13.

Approximately 25 Guardsmen deployed with the 176th CES to support U.S. Central Command with minor construction projects in their area of operations, according to Lt. Col. Jack Evans, commander of the 176th CES.

The 176th CES combined with 16 other units from the active duty, Reserves and the Air National Guard to form the 577th Expeditionary Prime Beef Squadron, based out of Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar. Evans served as the commander of collective unit while deployed.

“Fifty-nine percent of us were Guardsmen, 24 percent Reservists, and 13 percent active duty,” he said. According to Evans, the expeditionary civil engineer unit completed approximately \$6 million in projects in eight different countries in the region, including Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Afghanistan.

“This deployment was so much different than normal for a CES squadron,” he said. “Normally we’d be tasked to just perform maintenance at one airfield. This time we were all over the place, and doing all construction. Our guys were very busy. And you know, as engineers, that’s what we like – to build things and make a difference.”

Senior Airman Amado Cordero, a heating, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigeration specialist, was one of the 176th CES members on this deployment. Like many Guardsmen, Cordero works full-time in the civilian workforce and performs his part-time Air National Guard career one weekend per month and two weeks per year.

“I think the deployment went really well,” said Cordero. “I did a lot of work, it wasn’t really in my career field, but it’s about supporting the mission and doing what was needed down there.”

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“On the civilian side, I do construction,” he said. “That’s why HVAC works well for me, because I do a little bit of everything. I do plumbing, insulation, heavy-equipment operation, and structural and electrical work. This is all pretty familiar to me.”

Cordero said that what he most appreciated about this deployment, his second, were the connections he made with other service members.

“The highlight for me was the bonds you make with the people you meet there,” he explained. “You get to know them and get to learn about their lives and experiences. Then you become great friends, and they pass on their experiences to you. For instance, I met an individual who was from the Puerto Rico Guard who was in HVAC outside the military, and some of the things he knows, he passed on to me, so I have a better understanding of some things in my career field that I wasn’t as strong at before.”

Now that he is back, Cordero said he hopes to pursue a full-time job with the Air National Guard, and hopes to put on his sergeant’s stripes. He said he thinks this deployment helped him learn new mentorship skills, a priority of non-commissioned officers.

“This deployment was a little different this time, but a lot of it was the same,” he said. “Having that prior experience helped me to pass on some of that knowledge to other Airmen who were on their first deployment.”

Echoed by his commander, Cordero felt the deployment was a successful one.

“Overall, I think my unit did really well,” he said. “Our unit was leading this, and we heard nothing but good things about the job we did.”

"I really appreciate the great job everyone did," added Evans. "Everyone had great attitudes and were really engaged. I'm very proud of our guys."

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PHOTOS

1. **Attached pdf** includes story and photos.
2. **DVIDS link** includes story and photos. (add link here)