



**PRESS RELEASE
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168th Air Refueling Wing redesignation widens umbrella of responsibility

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska – The 168th Air Refueling Wing was redesignated as the 168th Wing in a ceremony at the Operations Group Theater on Eielson Air Force Base, Feb. 3.

The redesignation indicates and properly recognizes the 168th Wing’s two missions: the early ballistic missile warning system mission at Clear Air Force Station, and the KC-135 Stratotanker aerial refueling mission at Eielson AFB.

“In 2006, the 213th Space Warning Squadron stood up and was assigned to our operations group,” said Col. Torrence Saxe, acting commander of the 168th Wing, while presiding over the ceremony. “This squadron is charged with missile warning and space surveillance, and a part of today and this redesignation is recognizing this relationship.”

In 1986, the northern-most Air National Guard unit was activated as the 168th Air Refueling Squadron. With their unique arctic refueling capabilities, their importance to Alaska and the federal mission continued to increase. As their operational mission grew, so did their umbrella of responsibility and the necessity for subordinate support units. The 168th officially became an air refueling wing in 2002.

The 168th ARW further expanded their role in 2006 by undertaking the 213th Space Warning Squadron.

“Our wing has had quite the history,” said Saxe. “We have gone from flying bombers, to fighters, to a couple versions of the tanker, refueling and now expanding that to the space and warning mission.”

Saxe recognizes the importance and value that every Airman brings to the wing, and he chose the redesignation ceremony as an opportunity to thank them.

The missions will change from time to time as the organization grows, he said. “What has been the continuing thread through all of that? ... It’s the people, it’s the Airmen like you.”

Currently, 535 part-time and full-time Alaska Air Guardsmen comprise the “Guardians of the Last Frontier.”

The 168th Wing is the only Arctic region refueling unit for all of Pacific Air Forces (PACAF). Nine KC-135R refueling tanker aircraft deliver approximately 18 thousand pounds of fuel to active duty and Reserve component aircraft annually. Maintenance and aircrews generate and fly on average 657 sorties annually.

The 213th Space Warning Squadron at Clear AFS, 80 miles southwest of Fairbanks, provides early warning of intercontinental ballistic missiles and submarine-launched ballistic missiles to the Missile Correlation Center of North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). They also provide space surveillance data on orbiting objects to NORAD's Space Control Center. Alaska Air Guard personnel operate PAVE PAWS, which scans the Arctic and Pacific regions for ICBMs and satellites.

In his closing remarks, Saxe thanked members of the 168th Wing for their hard work and continued efforts to meet the important and challenging missions of the wing.

Saxe has been acting commander since last November, and his assumption of command ceremony is scheduled for Feb. 20 at the Eielson AFB Theater.

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PHOTOS



168th Wing Command Chief Master Sgt. Phillip Hunt, unfurls the new 168th Wing flag during a redesignation ceremony at the Operations Group Theater on Eielson Air Force Base, Feb. 3, 2016. The redesignation indicates and properly recognizes the 168th Wing's two missions: the early ballistic missile warning system mission at Clear Air Force Station, and the KC-135 Stratotanker aerial refueling mission at Eielson AFB. (U.S. Air National Guard photo courtesy of Master Sgt. Cornelius Mingo/released)



F-22 Raptors from the 525th Fighter Squadron, based at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, hook up to An Alaska Air National Guard KC-135 Stratotanker, from the 168th Air Refueling Wing, to conduct in-air refueling over the Joint Pacific Alaska Range Complex during their fighter/bomber exercises. The JPARC consists of 65,000 square miles of airspace used for military training in Alaska, also providing opportunities for multinational training. (U.S. Air National Guard Photo by Capt. Bernie Kale/released)