



**PRESS RELEASE
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Alaska National Guard
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By Sgt. David Bedard

Alaska National Guard marks historic landmark in downtown Anchorage

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — The Alaska Army National Guard hosted what was most likely their first-ever community event off base when they deactivated the 297th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade and activated the 297th Regional Support Group during an Aug. 6 ceremony at the Delaney Park Strip located in downtown Anchorage.

Additionally, Alaska Gov. Bill Walker signed the new Alaska Code of Military Justice into law, and the Alaska State Defense Force hosted a change-of-command ceremony.

The 297th BFSB deactivation and transition to the 297th RSG is a small piece of the Army's changing force structure designed to meet the nation's changing security requirements with a smaller military.

"Over time, the Guard in Alaska has undergone a number of force-structure conversions, which were driven by the changing of the political landscape and modernization of the United States Army," said Col. Joseph Streff, commander of the Alaska Army National Guard and reviewing officer of the ceremony. "The ceremony you are witnessing today is yet another example of positive change, which converts our force structure from a legacy unit to an organization, which will be relevant to the Army and fully capable of conducting operations in support of our state and federal missions."

The activation of the 297th RSG and its scheduled inclusion of the 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment, provide new opportunities to enhance security partnerships in the Asia-Pacific and respond domestically in Alaska.

The changing force structure provides new, relevant ways for the Alaska Army National Guard to respond to Alaskans during times of need.

Col. Lee Knowles, 297th BFSB commander, ceremonially relinquished command and deactivated the unit when he cased the unit colors with assistance from the brigade command sergeant major, Command Sgt. Maj. John Drew. The unit will officially transition to the 297th RSG Sept. 1.

Knowles thanked his command for the effort they gave in transitioning the brigade, which included more than 13,000 supply transactions at 18 different locations across the state.

"You took on the daunting task of deactivation, adding that big rock to a very heavy rucksack and bearing the load without slowing your pace or voicing a complaint," Knowles said.

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The colonel said, though the unit was deactivating, its legacy would live on in its Soldiers as they integrate in to the new unit.

“Soldiers give a unit its identity,” Knowles explained. “The shared burdens and hardships most will never understand create a distinct camaraderie and impart character and soul to our formations.

“For eight years, you gave the BFSB life and made it more than just a unit,” he said to the Soldiers in formation. “You are what makes soldiering special and the connections to our units so meaningful.”

Lt. Col. Peter Mondelli ceremonially took command of the newly formed 297th RSG when he uncased the unit colors with Drew, who transitioned with the new element. Most recently, Mondelli commanded 1st Squadron, 297th Reconnaissance and Surveillance Squadron, which will transition to an infantry battalion as part of the force restructure.

“We will have many challenges that we will face together,” Mondelli said of his unit’s future. “We truly live in interesting times, and we will be ready when our great State of Alaska and our nation calls us.”

The Alaska Code of Military Justice helps the Alaska National Guard shape constructive policies and positive actions for the future, and it is a critical step for building and maintaining the trust and confidence of Alaskans in their National Guard. The ACMJ helps define legal, ethical and moral guidelines for the state’s military force.

“It is a huge step forward in our ongoing quest to improve operational readiness in the Alaska National Guard,” said Brig. Gen. Laurie Hummel, the adjutant general of the Alaska National Guard. “With this new Alaska Code of Military Justice, we will strengthen good order and discipline that is so critical to every military organization.”

Brig. Gen. (Alaska) Roger Holl relinquished command of the Alaska State Defense Force in a change-of-command ceremony to Col. (Alaska) John James.

The ASDF, established in state statute, exists to provide a military force to assist Alaskans during times of emergency. The ASDF supports and expands community resilience across the state with support for incident response, communications, shelter and medical requirements.

ASDF is comprised of volunteers, many who are military veterans and retirees who are driven to protect the state and its citizens at a very low cost.

Following the formal portions of the event, the Alaska Army National Guard hosted a number of events designed to reach out to the Alaska community, including an infantry squad maneuver demonstration, a bounce house for children, and a barbecue lunch.

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PHOTOS and VIDEO:

1. **Flickr links** includes an event album with the complete selection of full-resolution, free downloadable images. (Flickr is not generally accessible from .mil computers.)

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/alaskanationalguard/sets/72157672045713786>

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/alaskanationalguard/albums/72157671291567391>

2. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution, free downloadable images. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.)

<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/206352/alaska-national-guard-marks-historic-landmark-downtown-anchorage>

3. **DVIDS link** includes a short video of highlights from the event

<https://www.dvidshub.net/video/478463/b-roll-alaska-national-guard-marks-historic-landmarks-downtown-anchorage>

4. **Facebook link** also includes short video of highlights from the event

<https://www.facebook.com/AlaskaNationalGuard/videos/10154402919461796/>



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Col. Lee Knowles, right, 297th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade commander, cases the 297th BFSB unit colors with assistance from his brigade command sergeant major, Command Sgt. Maj. John Drew, during a ceremonial deactivation of the 297th BFSB and activation of the 297th Regional Support Group at the Delaney Park Strip located in downtown Anchorage, Aug. 6, 2016. The 297th RSG will officially transition Sept. 1. (U.S. Army national Guard photo by Spc. Mike Risinger)



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Lt. Col. Peter Mondelli, incoming commander of the 297th Regional Support Group, and 297th RSG Command Sgt. Maj. John Drew, uncase the 297th RSG colors, while reviewing officer Col. Joseph Streff, commander of the Alaska Army National Guard, presides Aug. 6, 2016, at the Delaney Park Strip. The casing signified the 297th RSG's activation, which officially takes place Sept. 1. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. David Bedard)

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160806-Z-JS600-123

Alaska Gov. Bill Walker signs House Bill 126, the Alaska Code of Military Justice, into law during a ceremony at the Delaney Park Strip located in downtown Anchorage, Aug. 6, 2016. The bill is a combined effort by many legislators and it amends, updates, and virtually replaces the territorial code that hasn't been touched since 1955. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Mike Risinger)



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Alaska Army National Guardsmen participate in a ceremonial deactivation of the 297th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade and activation of the 297th Regional Support Group at the Delaney Park Strip located in downtown Anchorage, August 6, 2016. The 297th RSG will officially transition Sept. 1. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel)