



## **PRESS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Arizona Guardsmen train in Alaska, gain real-world experience**

**OLD HARBOR, Alaska** — 30 Arizona National Guardsmen from the 259th Engineer Platoon alongside service members from across the Department of Defense are participating in an Innovative Readiness Training exercise here, April 17 – August 5, 2017.

More than 2,500 miles from home, these Guardsmen are supporting IRT Old Harbor's mission to construct a 2,700-foot extension of the airport runway to expand the community's economy.

"From seeing the bald eagles flying by to being surrounded by beautiful mountains, it's an amazing opportunity," said 1st Lt. Kevin Sartor, platoon leader for the 259th Engineer Platoon, surrounded by jagged, steep mountains that rise up at the end of a picturesque bay. "The Soldiers are excited to be here operating in Alaska."

Wildlife viewing is only a small part of the experience for the Guardsmen during their three-month tour to the small isolated community, nestled on the southeast side of Kodiak Island. The platoon comprised of 12N, horizontal construction engineers, and 12G, quarrying specialists, is slated to provide approximately 90,000 tons of crushed material via drilling, blasting and crushing operations for the project.

"Any time we can operate our equipment and hone our skills as operators, it benefits the entire state [of Arizona]," explained Sgt. Orlando Avila, a site manager with 259th Engineer Platoon, who has been a construction engineer for six years. "I've been in the Army for thirteen years and this is my first opportunity do something like this. We are operating with other branches of service in a new environment and providing assistance to a community."

Led by U.S. Marine Forces Reserve with participants from every branch of service, the IRT project is part of a civil and joint military program to improve military readiness while simultaneously providing quality services to underserved communities throughout the United States.

"It is awesome that we can all come together to complete this project and show that we are one fight, one force," said Spc. Daven Dumas, also with the 259th Engineer Platoon who enlisted as a horizontal construction engineer out of high school. "Being here for 105 days allows us to get into the nitty gritty of our jobs and build camaraderie with fellow service members."

In addition to building camaraderie and job skills, Sartor hopes the training will help the Soldiers become more resilient.

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“This isn’t a deployed overseas, Afghanistan type environment, but it is still a mobilization. Service members are living in austere conditions, out of tent and duffle bag,” explained Sartor. “I hope they take forward in their careers the confidence to say that I can go and do any mission anywhere.”

“There is hardship on the Soldier and family back home, but at the same time it is building resilience and Soldier readiness,” said Dumas. “If Arizona needs to call on us, we will be ready for it.”

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#### PHOTOS:

1. **Attached pdf** includes story and a small selection of low-resolution photos for viewing on screen.

2. **Flickr link** includes an event album with the complete selection of full-resolution, free downloadable images. (May not be accessible from all military computers.)

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/alaskanationalguard/albums/72157681249072520>

3. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution, free downloadable images. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.) <http://dvidshub.net/r/wbpcz>

4. **DIVDS Video A-roll link.** Video B-roll links. A-roll: <http://dvidshub.net/r/fzifum>;

<http://dvidshub.net/r/nku9so>

B-roll: <http://dvidshub.net/r/gzvrij>; <http://dvidshub.net/r/94nfpa>; <http://dvidshub.net/r/yrgxsw>



Arizona Guardsman Spc. Joseph Charles, a motor vehicle operator with the 259th Engineer Platoon, operates heavy equipment during a runway extension project at Innovative Readiness Training Old Harbor, Alaska, April 19, 2017. The project will extend the existing Old Harbor runway by 2,700 feet, which will allow larger aircraft to land in Old Harbor. IRT Old Harbor is part of a civil and joint military program to improve military readiness while simultaneously providing quality services to underserved communities throughout the United States. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O’Neal Dresel)



Arizona Guardsman Spc. Aaron Tellez, a motor vehicle operator with the 259th Engineer Platoon, operates an excavator during a runway extension project at Innovative Readiness Training Old Harbor, Alaska, April 19, 2017. The project will extend the existing Old Harbor runway by 2,700 feet, which will allow larger aircraft to land in Old Harbor. IRT Old Harbor is part of a civil and joint military program to improve military readiness while simultaneously providing quality services to underserved communities throughout the United States. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda O’Neal Dresel)