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By Sgt. 1st Class Balinda O'Neal Dresel

Air Guardsman returns home to western Alaska for retirement celebration

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska – In an isolated village nestled in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Region of Alaska and only accessible by boat or plane, Air National Guard Master Sgt. Ella Doak was honored for her military service during a Nov. 9 retirement ceremony at the Kipnuk School.

Closing out a military career that spanned over 24 years of service, Doak chose to host the ceremony more than 600-miles southwest of Fairbanks where she served as a member of the 168th Wing at Eielson Air Force Base.

“Quyana tailuci,” said Doak in Yupik, the region’s primary language, as she thanked the crowded room for coming. “I am very proud to have my hometown members – people I grew up with – witness this special occasion. It is truly amazing that we get to grow up in a tight-knit community with extended relatives and family.”

Alaska Army Guard Col. Wayne Don, deputy chief of staff for operations, presided over the ceremony and presented Doak with a U.S. Air Force Meritorious Service Medal, certificate of appreciation for service in the Armed Forces of the United States signed by President Donald Trump, and a certificate of retirement.

“Today is a very special day and personal and professional milestone for Ella, all of her family and for Kipnuk,” said Don, who said he believed this might have been the first time a retirement ceremony was hosted here.

“One of the greatest honors I have ever had is to preside over a retirement ceremony – a celebration of a full career in uniform,” said Don. “It’s a celebration of Ella’s commitment, her sacrifice and patriotism – having successfully and faithfully served over 24 years of dedicated service to the United States and Alaska.”

Before the ceremony in Kipnuk, Doak had never met Don. Commonalities were found in calling Western-Alaska home, as Don was raised in the small village of Mekoryuk on Nunivak Island, and their service to their great state and nation.

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“I thought it was important that I honor her request being from the same region and the symbolism of the both of us being in a ceremony significant to her,” said Don. “Today is a celebration of all of her achievements and accomplishments on behalf of our country, great state and to Kipnuk.”

Doak’s inspiration to join the military centered around her father, James Mesak, who served as medic in the National Guard and a wanderlust.

“His stories of seeing tall buildings and riding in trains plagued my interest to see and experience more,” said Doak, whose first duty station with the U.S. Air Force brought her back to her home state serving with the 962nd Airborne Air Control Squadron at Elmendorf Air Force Base. “With that unit I was able to travel to places I hadn’t ever dreamed of going – places like Thailand, Japan and Panama.”

“I encourage all young people present today to venture out and see what our great big world has to offer,” said Doak.

Doak was transferred to Tinker Air Force Base, Oklahoma, where she served with the 552nd Air Control Wing before receiving orders back to Alaska. While serving with the 354th Communications Squadron at Eielson Air Force Base, Doak transitioned into the Alaska Air National Guard where she finished her career.

Command Chief Master Sgt. James Wolverton, 168th Wing command chief, presented Doak with a traditional Alaskan gold pan engraved with her dates of service.

“It has been a pleasure serving with you and having you spend your last years of service with the 168th Wing,” said Wolverton to Doak. “The men and women of the 168th will miss Master Sgt. Doak, and want her to know she will always be a valued member of our wing.”

Doak will effectively retire as a U.S. Air Force master sergeant on January 1, 2019.

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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/72157703604922145>

3. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution photos. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.) <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/300040/air-guardsman-returns-home-western-alaska-retirement-celebration>

-Photos, next page-



The Mesak sisters sing the National Anthem the retirement ceremony of Master Sgt. Ella Doak, also with the 168th Wing, in Kipnuk, Alaska, Nov. 9, 2018. Doak chose to have the ceremony in her hometown after more than 24 years of dedicated service to the state and nation. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Balinda O'Neal Dresel)



Alaska Army Guard Col. Wayne Don, left, deputy chief of staff for operations, presents Alaska Air Guard Master Sgt. Ella Doak, 168th Wing, with a certificate of appreciation for service in the Armed Forces of the United States signed by President Donald Trump during her retirement ceremony in Kipnuk, Alaska, on Nov. 9, 2018. Doak chose to have the ceremony in her hometown after more than 24 years of dedicated service to the state and nation. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Balinda O'Neal Dresel)



Alaska Air Guard Command Chief Master Sgt. James Wolverton, 168th Wing command chief, presents AKANG Master Sgt. Ella Doak, also with the 168th Wing, with a traditional Alaskan gold pan engraved with her dates of service during her retirement ceremony in Kipnuk, Alaska, Nov. 9, 2018. Doak chose to have the ceremony in her hometown after more than 24 years of dedicated service to the state and nation. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Balinda O'Neal Dresel)



Villagers gather around an Alaska Army National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter in Kipnuk, Alaska, Nov. 9, 2018. The Bethel-based crew flew members of the AKARNG's Recruiting & Retention Battalion and officiants for a retirement ceremony for Alaska Air Guard Master Sgt. Ella Doak's retirement ceremony. Doak chose to have the ceremony in her hometown after more than 24 years of dedicated service to the state and nation. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Balinda O'Neal Dresel)