

Brig. Gen. Torrence Saxe

Commissioner & Adjutant General

www.DMVA.Alaska.Gov



Alaska National Guard

*Department of Military
and Veterans Affairs*

Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 6, 2019

By Sgt. David Bedard

134th Public Affairs Detachment

Alaska Army National Guardsmen set to deploy to Kosovo

Infantry battalion caps off intensive year of training

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — Soldiers and families of 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment, Alaska Army National Guard, marked the unit's coming deployment to Kosovo during a May 5, 2019, deployment ceremony at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska.

According to NATO's website, the alliance "has been leading a peace-support operation in Kosovo since June 1999 in support of wider international efforts to build peace and stability in the area."

Alaska Army National Guard Col. Joel Gilbert, 38th Troop Command commander, said the effort also supports the United States' National Security Strategy. Specifically, he said the U.S. presence in Kosovo advances American prosperity, preserves peace through strength, and enhances American influence.

"When you think about why our brothers and sisters are going over to Kosovo, why they are participating in that," Gilbert said. "It's to help ensure that you don't have the strong doing what they want, and the weak suffering as they must."

Alaska Army National Guard Lt. Col. Samuel Scott, 1-297th Infantry battalion commander, said the unit has trained intensively since receiving the mission to support KFOR last September. The battalion knew beforehand they were deploying overseas and were already training with that in mind.

"Look out across this formation of Soldiers," Scott said. "You are seeing the product of an intensive yearlong train-up making this the most prepared unit this organization has ever sent overseas."

Most recently, the unit carried out capstone training during two weeks of annual training, which included Wyoming Army National Guard Soldiers who traveled to Alaska to complete the battalion.

Soldiers maneuvered at JBER's Baumeister Range urban training complex where they encountered simulated Kosovo nationals who presented a range of scenarios included

unexploded ordnance and serious medical conditions that required assessment by unit combat medics and subsequent evacuation.

In another scenario, Soldiers donned riot-control gear and put weeks of training to the test in the face of a simulated unruly crowd determined to break their nearly impenetrable wall of plexiglass shields.

Scott said the unit has a long journey ahead of them, including mobilization at Fort Bliss, Texas, before they ship out to Europe.

“This past year, we all have given up more nights and weeks to train than any period before,” he said. “We will move to cross an entire continent, cross an ocean to the Old World, to a destination on the far side of a second continent – a journey of more than 8,000 miles.

“It will be our home for nearly the next year – a year without a day off, every waking moment on duty, armed in uniform, nearly a year of privation, hardship, nonstop work away from everything we value and everyone we care about,” Scott continued.

The commander said Soldiers made and continue to make the decision to serve.

“This is a combat arms battalion – this is the Infantry,” he said. “They have made the choice for the same reasons they chose this profession: not because it was easy, because it was safe or convenient – because it's none of those things, but because it must be done.”

Scott acknowledged how the tough and realistic training coupled with the deployment add up to a great sacrifice for Soldiers and their families.

“Every service member here is the best of who we are,” he said. “It's heartbreaking to watch your Soldier leave for a year.

“But if they didn't make choice, if they avoided this call to duty, they would not be the person you married,” Scott continued. “They would not be the son or the daughter that you raised.

“So this is not a somber occasion,” he said in conclusion. “We are here to celebrate their choice to be here now and to recognize that we are blessed to share in the lives of these men and women who have the self-discipline and the strength of character to place duty first.”

###

Media Contact: Sgt. David Bedard, (907) 687-2378, david.bedard.1@us.af.mil

PHOTOS

1. **See below** for a small selection of low-resolution photos.
2. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution photos. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.) <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/321016/alaska-army-national-guardsmen-set-deploy-kosovo>



Alaska Army National Guard Command Sgt. Maj. Ryan Weimer, 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment, command sergeant major, cases the battalion colors during rehearsal for the May 5, 2019, ceremony at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, marking the unit's upcoming deployment to Kosovo. The infantry battalion will conduct peacekeeping operations in support of NATO's Kosovo Force. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. David Bedard)

Alaska Army National Guard Sgt. Paul Flaks, a military policeman with the 297th Military Police Company, evaluates Soldiers of C Company, 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment, during riot-control training May 4, 2019, at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska. Soldiers of the battalion are set to deploy to Kosovo in support of NATO peacekeeping operations there. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. David Bedard/Released)



Army National Guard Soldiers of C Company, 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment, train in riot-control operations May 4, 2019, at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska. Soldiers of the battalion are set to deploy to Kosovo in support of NATO peacekeeping operations there. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. David Bedard/Released)