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Alaska National Guard

*Department of Military
and Veterans Affairs*

Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

020-058

June 23, 2020

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Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

Alaska Air National Guard's Security Forces return home from deployment

Airmen execute air base defense in Afghanistan for Operation Freedom Sentinel

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — Ten Alaska Air National Guardsmen assigned to the 176th Security Forces Squadron returned home from Kandahar, Afghanistan shortly after midnight this morning, at Ted Stevens' Anchorage International Airport.

A total of 12 Air Guardsmen deployed to Kandahar to support Operation Freedom Sentinel, a NATO-led continuation of the Global War on Terrorism. The unit's primary mission was airbase defense. Two of the 12 airmen arrived safely back in Alaska two weeks prior.

"Being back, it hasn't really sunk in yet, but I'm thankful to be home," said Master Sgt. Gary Keller, team leader for the 176th SFS deployed personnel.

The Air Guard security force officers began their journey at Ft. Bliss, Texas last October. There, they underwent sustainment training, or "tier" training, a four-tiered enterprise-wide policy, process and construct that provides training programs designed to prepare Airmen for expeditionary missions outside the confines of the traditional airbase environment. The training allowed the Airmen to gain additional competence and confidence in combat skills that they don't often implement in their normal duties.

The deployment was set to last six months, but due to COVID-19 pandemic precautions, the Airmen were extended an additional two. With a month and a half remaining on the deployment, a no movement order was initiated, that prompted a delay in returning home.

While in Afghanistan for eight months, the Airmen withstood and reacted to multiple rocket barrages, one of which triggered an airfield clearing on the Kandahar Army Airfield, where the unit was stationed. The unit successfully executed the clearing while suffering no casualties or extenuating injuries.

"In our line of work, if nothing escalates, we've had a good day out there," said Maj. James Truesdell, the commander of the 176th SFS, who assisted the unit administratively stateside. "Our goal is to mitigate security breaches and acts of aggression against our NATO forces."

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PHOTOS

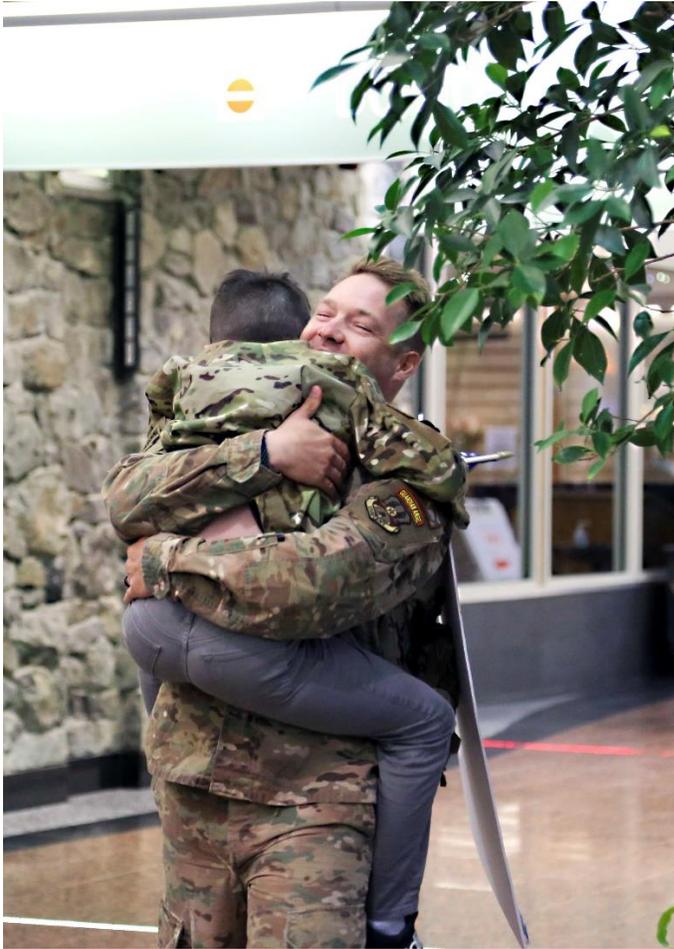
1. **Attached pdf** includes story and a small selection of low-resolution photos for viewing on screen.
2. **Flickr link** includes an event album with the complete selection of full-resolution, free downloadable images. (May not be accessible from all military computers.)

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/alaskanationalguard/albums/72157714834952362>

2. **DVIDS link** includes story, video and selected full-resolution photos. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.) www.dvidshub.net/news/372679/alaska-air-guard-security-forces-return-afghanistan-deployment



Alaska Air National Guardsmen assigned to the 176th Security Forces Squadron, walk through Ted Stevens-Anchorage International Airport upon returning from an 8-month deployment in Kandahar, Afghanistan, June 23, 2020. The unit executed air base defense in support of Operation Freedom Sentinel, a NATO-led continuation of the Global War on Terrorism. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Lt. Col. Candis Olmstead/Released)



Tech Sgt. Severin Stalmarck , an Airman with the 176th Security Forces Squadron, embraces his son at Ted Stevens-Anchorage International Airport upon his return from Kandahar, Afghanistan on June 22, 2020. Twelve AKNG Airmen deployed in support of Operation Freedom Sentinel, a NATO-led continuation of the Global War on Terrorism. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Lt. Col. Candis Olmstead/Released)



Airman 1st Class Kevin Waters an Alaska Air Guardsman with the 176th Security Forces Squadron shares a loving moment with his partner at Ted Stevens-Anchorage International Airport upon his return from Kandahar, Afghanistan on June 22, 2020. Twelve AKNG Airmen deployed in support of Operation Freedom Sentinel, a NATO-led continuation of the Global War on Terrorism. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Lt. Col. Candis Olmstead/Released)



Master Sgt. Bryce Weight, an Alaska Air Guardsman with the 176th Security Forces Squadron, holds his daughter with her welcome home sign in hand, at Ted Stevens-Anchorage International Airport upon his return from Kandahar, Afghanistan on June 22, 2020. Twelve AKNG Airmen deployed in support of Operation Freedom Sentinel, a NATO-led continuation of the Global War on Terrorism. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Lt. Col. Candis Olmstead/Released)



Master Sgt. Gary Keller, an Alaska Air Guardsman with the 176th Security Forces Squadron secures his luggage at Ted Stevens-Anchorage International Airport upon his return from Kandahar, Afghanistan on June 22, 2020. Twelve AKNG Airmen deployed in support of Operation Freedom Sentinel, a NATO-led continuation of the Global War on Terrorism. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Lt. Col. Candis Olmstead/Released)