

National Guard: Wisconsin Air Guard unit to embark on Inherent Resolve deployment

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VOLK FIELD, Wis. — Gov. Tony Evers and senior Wisconsin Air National Guard officials joined families and friends at Volk Field Combat Readiness Training Center for a formal sendoff ceremony for the 128th Air Control Squadron March 29.

Approximately 90 members of the squadron will deploy for six months in support of Operation Inherent Resolve and the Combined Defense of the Arabian Peninsula, providing air surveillance, aircraft tracking and overall command and control of coalition tactical aircraft operations. The deploying Airmen will form into separate detachments serving throughout Southwest Asia and the Middle East, attached to the 727th Expeditionary Air Control Squadron — call sign “Kingpin” — with a contingent of operations section personnel stationed at Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina.

“As a key part of Kingpin, you will be decentralized into several detachments,” said Command Chief Master Sgt. Meredith Conn, the Wisconsin Air National Guard’s senior enlisted leader. “This will be challenging, but we are confident in your abilities to be agile and adaptable to deploy anytime, anywhere for any mission.

“You haven’t just worked for months to be ready, you’ve been preparing for this since you joined the Wisconsin Air National Guard,” Conn said. “Your leadership knows you are prepared for this day.”

Lt. Col. James Behn, 128th Air Control Squadron commander, agreed.

“Around me you will find some of the best trained, most professional and dedicated

men and women the nation has to offer,” Behn said during the ceremony. “Today our nation has called upon us again, and we will deliver.”

This will mark the unit’s seventh deployment since Sept. 11, 2001. It will be the third deployment for Maj. Dan Barr, cyber operations and maintenance director from Baraboo, Wisconsin, since he joined the Wisconsin Air National Guard in 2009. He expects to learn a lot on this deployment.

“We’re going to do a mission that’s really been in action for 20 years,” Barr said. “Now it’s just an evolution of the last 20 years.”

This will be the fourth deployment for Capt. Emmett Yule of Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, the deputy director of cyber operations and maintenance for the 128th Air Control Squadron. It will be his third as a Wisconsin Air National Guard member.

“I’m excited for the crew I’m deploying with, and I think it should be a good experience,” Yule said. “I’m looking forward to the next six months.”

“We will miss your expertise during Northern Lightning and the many ways you are engaged here at Team Volk and our community,” said Col. Matthew Eakins, Volk Field commander. “But we know this deployment is why you serve our great nation.”

Eakins said that in his three months in command at Volk Field, he has been impressed with the professionalism and commitment members of the 128th Air Control Squadron have displayed.

“I know that when you arrive, you’ll equally impress your new leadership with your can-do approach, and that you’ll continue to perform for the duration of your deployment,” Eakins said. “It’s ingrained in your character, the only way you know how. Be safe, lead from the front, and take care of each other. We need each of you back here in six months to share your valuable lessons learned as we continue to develop this great organization.”

Lt. Col. Cyndi Bergman will serve as the deployed operations director for the deployed Airmen. Because the unit will be dispersed across the region, there will be no traditional unit commander for the deployment.

Brig. Gen. David May, Wisconsin’s deputy adjutant general for Air, reminded the deploying Airmen that their unit has experienced a number of changes over the

years.

“Your first post-9/11 deployment was in a field in northern Illinois, and today you deploy with great agility in a distributed manner never seen before,” May said. “Technology continues to leap forward, and is the main reason you’re now deploying as part of Kingpin in so many places. You’ve kept faith, adapted and thrived, further increasing the benefit that you bring to the fight.

“The 128th ACS is a strong and cohesive unit with an uncommon level of esprit de corps and capability,” May continued. “Developments in technology will take their course, but the quality and proficiency of our Airmen is a strategic advantage for our nation that each of you deliver.”

Behn and Conn encouraged the deploying Airmen to take advantage of resources available to them to maintain their resiliency over the next six months.

“Be proud, be professional, never struggle alone and always be there for each other,” Behn said.

Conn implored the Airmen to reach out to each other and to their first sergeant.

“1st Sgt. Tim Rodwell is a seasoned and experienced first sergeant, and he is your first line of defense when you feel challenged and your resiliency is down,” Conn said. “Your ‘shirt’” — an Air Force term for the first sergeant — “is your consummate Wingman. His number one job is to keep you engaged in the fight.”

Rodwell has previously served as a first sergeant for maintenance, headquarters and operations at the 128th Air Refueling Wing in Milwaukee. This will be his first deployment with the 128th Air Control Squadron, and he looks forward to getting to know the Airmen.

“Part of being first sergeant is to know your people, benefit them, be there in their time of need and provide them with every possible resource they could possibly need,” he explained.

Gov. Evers acknowledged that the day was likely bittersweet for many, as excitement for the deployment mixed with the reality of leaving family and the comforts of home.

“We’re proud to call you a Citizen Airman in our Wisconsin National Guard, and on

behalf of the entire state of Wisconsin, I want to tell you how grateful I am for your service both to our state and to our nation,” Evers said.

The governor noted that members of the deploying group were part of the Wisconsin National Guard’s efforts over the past two years to support Wisconsin’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, staff polling places for elections, and provide security during civil unrest.

“It’s now time for a new mission in the Middle East, where you will be performing air operations in support of Operation Inherent Resolve and the Combined Defense of the Arabian Peninsula,” Evers said. “You represent the very best the state has to offer. The skills each of you brings to this mission are unmatched. It’s safe to say the Air Force is getting an exceptional group of Airmen, and I know you will do Wisconsin proud.”

Evers took time to recognize the civilian employers of the deploying Airmen, and to thank the families.

“This is a team effort,” Evers said. “It takes a lot of effort from families, communities and employers to make the National Guard successful.”

May agreed.

“We can’t thank you enough for standing watch on the home front during this deployment,” he said.

Behn said he was honored to stand before the deploying unit.

“I’m a proud commander, and I’m among some of the very best Airmen in the world,” Behn said. “I ask that you go forth and give your best, as you always do.”