

WI Dept. of Military Affairs: Wisconsin Air Guard unit returns from six-month deployment

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Maj. Gen. Paul Knapp and senior Wisconsin Air National Guard leaders joined families and friends Oct. 25 in welcoming home nearly 90 Airmen from the 128th Air Control Squadron (ACS) back from a deployment supporting Operation Inherent Resolve and the Combined Defense of the Arabian Peninsula.

The deployed Airmen — approximately half of the entire Volk Field-based unit — provided air surveillance, aircraft tracking and overall command and control of tactical coalition aircraft operations throughout the Middle East for the 727th Expeditionary Air Control Squadron, also known as Kingpin. About one-third of the deployed Airmen served at Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina, with the remainder serving in detachments across the Middle East.

“This deployment looked different for every person in this room,” Lt. Col. Cynthianna Bergman, the 128th ACS deployment commander, said during the welcome home ceremony. “For some of us, this was the last. For some of you, this was your first. Some were stationed stateside. Some were stationed at remote locations. For me, this is my third and final deployment, but for my husband, it was his first — and boy, was his learning curve steep.”

Staff Sgt. Dylan Smith of La Crosse, Wisconsin, was one of the unit’s Airmen who deployed to Shaw Air Force Base. He said his duties as an air surveillance technician were not that different from what he would do at Volk Field. Even so, the requirements of the mission provided opportunities to gain new experiences.

“It was non-stop learning every single day,” Smith said. “Week to week it was

different. Every single week you walked in and new things were going on.”

Bergman spoke to the importance of competence and proficiency on this deployment.

“You learned how important it is to provide accurate data and to not guess,” she said. “You cannot be off. You also learned to find the answers for yourself. There were times you needed to dig into reference documents to find the answer — no one else but you. It was all right that you didn’t have the answers right away, but it did require research and that persistence certainly paid off.”

Chief Master Sgt. Meredith Conn, the Wisconsin Air National Guard’s senior enlisted leader, said that she and other Wisconsin Air National Guard leaders were confident that the 128th ACS would be agile and adaptable as it supported Kingpin in multiple locations.

“As per usual with this squadron, supporting the complex role of Kingpin, your accomplishments far surpassed the highest expectations of your leaders here at home,” Conn said. “When I read over a list of your achievements, I saw examples of partnership, innovation, quick response and multiple accomplishments exemplifying our Air Force core value of excellence.”

Maj. Shonn Breton, 128th ACS commander, remained in Wisconsin with the remainder of the squadron. But he echoed Conn’s statements regarding the returning Airmen.

“Your hard work and determination has not and will not go unnoticed,” he said.

Col. Matthew Eakins reminded the returning Airmen of what he asked them to do while deployed — be safe, lead from the front, and take care of each other.

“And you did just that,” Eakins said. “You arrived and delivered in Brewtown fashion” — “Brewtown” is the callsign for the 128th ACS, which was stationed in Milwaukee from its founding in 1948 to 1991 — “outpacing the expectations of your leadership and leaving things better than you found them. Although we missed you while you were gone, [the U.S. Central Command] needed the best command and control possible, which is what you delivered.”

Eakins thanked the returning Airmen for their commitment, and looked forward to integrating what they learned to make home station operations “more relevant than

ever.”

Brig. Gen. David May, Wisconsin’s deputy adjutant general for Air, said he heard directly from the deployed Airmen’s active duty leadership about their accomplishments.

“We were not surprised by what we heard — after all, your reputation precedes you,” May said. “After eight deployments since 9/11, the Air Force knows what to expect of the 128th Air Control Squadron.

“And now, more than ever, they needed what you brought to the table,” May continued. “Maturity, flexibility, adaptiveness, and an innovative spirit combined with a great depth of experience — enabling you to fix problems and issues that affected units which deployed before you, truly showcasing the strength of the Guard and your embodiment of the Air Force missions to fly, fight and win.”

May said the returning Airmen demonstrated the best capabilities of the Citizen Airman.

“From Lt. Col. Bergman down to the lowest-ranking Airman, you showed that everyone has a role as a leader,” May said. “Across your vastly dispersed footprint, you maintained effective communication. The ability to operate in a decentralized manner as empowered and trusted Airmen is a strategic strength and a strategic advantage that the United States has in all of you.”

Maj. Gen. Paul Knapp, Wisconsin’s adjutant general, said that the 727th Expeditionary Air Control Squadron needed every skillset the returning Airmen possessed. He praised their accomplishments, which included addition digital sensors, improving radio communications, and getting a construction project back on track.

“Your workspace was enormous,” Knapp said. “You had to provide surveillance for more than 12,300 aircraft in a 1.1 million square mile region of airspace. Your achievements are remarkable.

“All of you brought great value to the organizations you supported,” Knapp continued. “We knew the quality of Airmen we were sending, and I know that Kingpin already misses each and every one of you. But I’m also quite sure that your families and friends are glad to have you home, safe and sound.”

Bergman said she hoped the hard lessons they learned and the collaboration they developed can be applied moving forward.

“We’re home now,” Bergman said. “We’re no longer Kingpin — we’re Brewtown. I’m very proud to be Brewtown.”