

Dept. of Military Affairs: 128th Air Refueling Wing airmen return from Indo-Pacific deployment

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Over 100 Airmen along with three KC-135 aircraft from the 128th Air Refueling Wing assigned to the 506th Expeditionary Air Refueling Squadron as part of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam returned home after a nearly three-month deployment to the pacific island.

In the early morning hours of March 5, two KC-135 aircraft arrived home with almost 80 Airmen, while the remaining 40 Airmen arrived two days later on the third and final jet that had been delayed due to needed maintenance.

As Airmen disembarked the aircraft, family and friends waited patiently just outside the hangers. First to greet the Airmen were Maj. Gen. Paul Knapp, Wisconsin's adjutant general, and Brig. Gen. David May, Wisconsin deputy adjutant general for Air, along with wing leadership.

After a brief welcome home and congratulations the Airmen unloaded their gear, stacked it on a K loader, and headed over to the hangar to greet their families and begin the in-processing function.

"While Guam is certainly a beautiful place and I enjoyed much of my time there, it's still time away from your family," said MSgt Chad Crull. "My kids missed me and seeing their faces and the emotions they're going through really becomes a reality in that first reunion."

The 128 ARW Airmen were tasked with missions all over the Pacific area of responsibility. Accomplishing 59 sorties, flying over 361 hours, offloading 1,640,900

pounds of fuel to 59 receivers made up of 8 different airframes, and moving 328 personnel throughout the region.

“It is an absolute honor to serve as the vice wing commander to these Airmen,” said Col. Charles Merkel, 128th Air Refueling vice wing commander. “The dedication to mission execution and commitment to excellence from our Airmen cannot be matched. I sincerely want to thank them and their families for the sacrifices that they’ve made, and will continue to show my gratitude in any way possible.”

While the 506th Expeditionary Air Refueling Group is a permanent resident of the U.S. Air Force’s 36th Operations Group, it is staffed by Air National Guard members from air refueling units across the country. The 506th depends on Air National Guard KC-135 Stratotankers to work alongside active-duty and Air Force Reserve aircraft to provide the aerial refueling and airlift capabilities that support critical U.S. Indo-Pacific Command missions.

“I’m most proud of the fact that the AGE (aerospace ground equipment) Shop was recognized as the top performing maintenance shop for the trip,” said Senior Master Sgt. Ryan Branz, AGE production supervisor. “The guys work tirelessly to repair a fleet of neglected and aging equipment in a highly corrosive environment, they definitely left it better than they found it.”