

TROOPERS TAKE DUTY TO DISTANT LANDS

AWT pilot flies missions in Iraq

BY BETH IPSEN, PIO

For a year, King Salmon-based Alaska Wildlife Trooper **Sgt. Justin Lindell** wore a different uniform and flew a distinctive aircraft over unusual terrain while deployed to Iraq with the Alaska Army National Guard.

Lindell, who's been a trooper since 2001, has been in the Army both on active duty and the Army National Guard since 1992. He has been in Army aviation the entire time and has flown the OH-58 Kiawas, UH-1 and UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters in many different units ranging from Air Calvary to Air Assault.

Until April, Chief Warrant Officer Three Lindell served as a UH-60 Pilot-In-Command/Air Mission Commander with B Co., 2-147 Air Assault Helicopter Battalion based out of Balad, Iraq and attached to the Army's 12th Combat Aviation Brigade out of Germany. The unit is a combination of National Guard aviation units from Minnesota, Washington, Hawaii, and elements from other states including Alaska, Oregon and Nevada.

Lindell flew all over Iraq hauling troops and spent most of his time in the Baghdad area. He was activated in April 2007 and was not scheduled to be return until August. However, his deployment was curtailed by two months so he could attend UH-60 Instructor Pilot School at Fort Rucker, Ala. He returned



Alaska Wildlife Trooper and Army National Guard pilot Justin Lindell, in front on the right, and his crew display the American flag they flew on a mission in Iraq.

to Alaska and was back on the job Aug. 15 flying hunting patrols in King Salmon.

"It's nice to be home and I hope I don't ever have to leave Alaska again," he said after his return.

Lindell's normal unit in the Alaska Army National Guard is A Co., 1-207th Aviation, based out of Bethel. However, he was the only pilot from Alaska deployed with his unit in Iraq.

"I was one of the only pilots from my unit in Alaska that had not been deployed during the last rotations and so my number was up when this one came around," he explained via e-mail while still deployed to Iraq.

While in Iraq, Lindell flew the American flag and the Alaska State Trooper flag on a flight.

"I asked Shelley Cubbedge at the Kodiak Post to get me a trooper flag as I wanted to fly a mission and present an American

(Lindell, continued on page 2)



A U.S. Army UH-60 Blackhawk flies over Iraq during a mission.

Troopers serve together in Qatar

BY BETH IPSEN, PIO

Alaska State Trooper **Larry Erickson** and Alaska Wildlife Trooper **John Cyr** both returned in February from a deployment with the Alaska Air National Guard in Qatar with accolades for a job well done.

The pair was attached to the 8th Expeditionary Air Mobility Squadron at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar from October 2007 until January 2008.

During the 4-1/2 month deployment, Cyr was awarded Senior Non-Commissioned Officer of the Quarter in October of 2007 while he was the NCO in charge of the busiest air passenger terminal in the U.S. Central Command. The technical sergeant was instrumental in the airlift of over 60,000 troops and 4,500 tons of equipment in just under 90 days, eliminating 210 ground convoys and thereby keeping 9,600 American troops out of harms way, according to his award. Cyr estimates he was instrumental in airlifting a total of

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Palmer Alaska Wildlife Trooper John Cyr and Soldotna Sgt. Larry Erickson look happy on their flight en route to Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar for the beginning of their deployment.

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flag and a trooper flag to the Trooper Museum on behalf of my family, the Alaska Guard and the troopers I work with everyday,” Lindell wrote.

He got more than he expected. He received a box from the museum with hats, shirts, patches, pins and many other memorabilia along with a trooper flag.

On Oct. 11, 2007, he flew the flags in a UH-60 Blackhawk on a mission over Iraq while he was acting as pilot in command that day. Both flags were displayed in the front window of the helicopter and accompanied the crew on the combat mission while they flew troops into a remote outpost south of Baghdad.

The mission lasted about seven hours.

“It was a long, hot day,” Lindell said.

Once the mission was finished, he had a picture taken of his crew that flew with him that day. He also had a certificate made to present to the museum. **AWT Director Col. Gary Folger** presented both flags to the museum on Lindell’s behalf along with the picture and the certificate.

During his deployment, Lindell flew hundreds of hours in Iraq and looked forward to going back to work for the troopers because “hunters and fishermen don’t usually shoot at me everyday when I fly over,” he joked.

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81,000 troops during his deployment. He was also in charge of the largest duty section in the 8th EAMS. His section of 18 airmen broke records for the amount of equipment and people transported during the deployment.

“My guys worked very hard.” Cyr said. “The troops that we put on the plane allowed troops to come home.”

Cyr was also one of seven people in the 8th EAMS to receive a medal – the Air Force Commendation Medal – for his efforts in Qatar.

Meanwhile, Erickson received the Air Transporter Airman of the year for 2007 the entire U.S. Air Force. The award earned him a trip to Reno, Nevada in April, two months after he returned from his deployment. Erickson, who was promoted to staff sergeant in January 2008, received the Airman of the Year for his unit in Alaska – the 176th Logistic Readiness Squadron.

Cyr and Erickson worked at the aerial port loading and unloading aircraft with cargo, explosives, ammunition and personnel. Cyr worked in the bags section loading troops on aircraft and Erickson worked in the ramp section, loading the cargo and munitions onto aircraft.

The deployment was the first with the Alaska Air National Guard for Erickson, but not his first in military service. Erickson deployed for Operation Just Cause invasion of Panama in 1989 while he was a Marine. Erickson was a bomb dog handler in the military police. He’s also been a dog handler with AST in the past.

“This deployment gave me an understanding of the



A birds-eye view of Baghdad from a UH-60 Blackhawk.

“I am proud to be here and honored to serve my country, but I am looking forward to going back to work and flying the R-44 out in King Salmon again,” he said while still deployed. “As far as the danger goes, we routinely get shot at and yes, some of our birds do come back with bullet holes and other battle damage. I have been lucky in that all of the times I got shot at, they missed.” ■



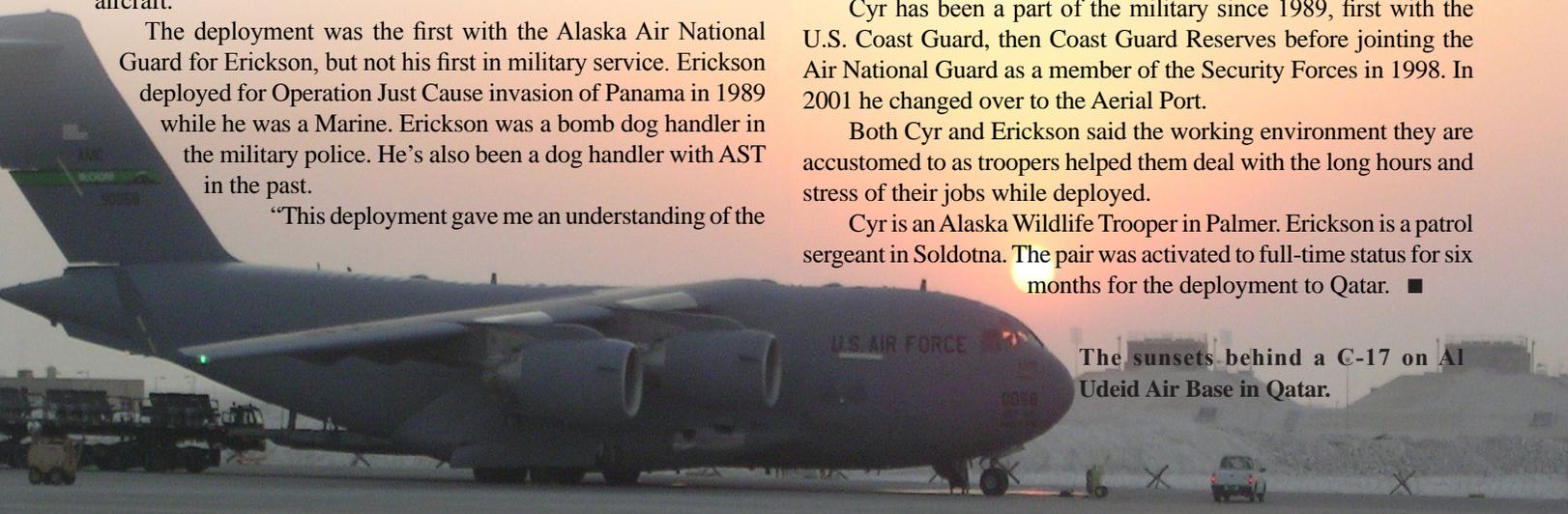
Larry Erickson hard at work loading a C-17 aircraft while deployed to Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar

‘big picture’ of what our military and country is going through and how stretched to the limit our military is right now,” Erickson said. “(Air National Guard) makes up a large part of the deployed force in the Middle East.”

Cyr has been a part of the military since 1989, first with the U.S. Coast Guard, then Coast Guard Reserves before joining the Air National Guard as a member of the Security Forces in 1998. In 2001 he changed over to the Aerial Port.

Both Cyr and Erickson said the working environment they are accustomed to as troopers helped them deal with the long hours and stress of their jobs while deployed.

Cyr is an Alaska Wildlife Trooper in Palmer. Erickson is a patrol sergeant in Soldotna. The pair was activated to full-time status for six months for the deployment to Qatar. ■



The sunsets behind a C-17 on Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar.