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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

SD Army National Guardsman fights fires in Afghanistan

By Lt.j.g. Cheryl Collins
ISAF Regional Command North

CAMP MARMAL, Afghanistan – The call comes in. Sgt. Max Stoltenburg has five minutes to suit up as a firefighter and get to the scene. There is a hazmat spill near a construction zone. However, this is not a call coming from Sturgis, S.D. It's in Camp Marmal, Afghanistan. Stoltenburg and his fellow firefighters from the South Dakota Army National Guard's 451st Engineering Detachment Firefighting Team are the fire protection force for U.S. assets at the NATO base in northern Afghanistan.

Camp Marmal is now home to Stoltenburg and six other soldiers from the 451st EDFT who arrived in October as part of a yearlong deployment. This is the first time the Aberdeen, S.D., native has deployed to Afghanistan in his nine-year career in the National Guard.

Afghanistan is a far cry from putting out blazes in the Black Hills, but no matter where he serves, fighting fires is what Stoltenburg loves to do.

“It's something I've always wanted to do as a kid. I know you hear that a lot. It's more about wanting to protect your community that you live in and do something for them,” Stoltenburg proudly stated.

Before deploying to Afghanistan, Stoltenburg worked for Aberdeen Fire Rescue as a deputy fire marshal. It's a job he started last April before deploying and will continue when he returns. Now his role is lead firefighter and assistant fire chief. He's proving to be a valuable member of the 451st EDFT.

“His knowledge on the fire ground and pre-fire planning has been a huge help for us at Camp Marmal,” said Fire Chief Sgt. 1st Class Austin Hagen. “Most leadership skills come from experience on the fire ground. Knowing what to do in different situations and having the ability to think outside the box is the key to successful firefighting, both of which Sgt. Stoltenburg does well.”

The 451st firefighters not only provide fire protection for U.S. assets on base, they are vital to Camp Marmal's German fire department. They stand by to assist in unlikely cases of structural fires, airfield accidents or mass casualty events.

Preparing to assist in fire safety at a moment's notice is what Stoltenburg and his fellow firefighters train for, but imparting that knowledge to soldiers of the Afghan National Army is something new and rewarding for him.

"We're teaching them about how to use their bunker gear or their protective equipment properly, how to use their air cylinders, how to use tools and how to get to aircraft," he said. "It feels good that while we're over here, we're leaving our footprint on another fire department."

The call is over once the team cleans up a small spill at the construction zone. It's all in a day's work in Afghanistan. Stoltenburg and his team get back in the truck and head back to their fire station, which is a large tent. It is home to Stoltenburg and his fellow South Dakotan firefighters who stand ready for the next call.

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PHOTOS: High-resolution photos for this release are available upon request or at: www.flickr.com/southdakotationalguard



120109-N-FB085-011: Sgt. Max Stoltenburg, lead firefighter from the South Dakota Army National Guard's 451st Engineering Detachment Firefighting Team, arrives on the scene of a small hazmat spill at Camp Marmal Jan. 9. The 451st EDFT works as a part of the International Security Assistance Force in northern Afghanistan. ISAF Regional Command North supports Afghan National Security Forces in close coordination and collaboration in providing security and disrupting insurgent activities in order to protect the Afghan population. (Photo by Lt.j.g. Cheryl Collins)(RELEASED)



120109-N-FB085-018: Firefighters from the South Dakota Army National Guard's 451st Engineering Detachment Firefighting Team shovel up a small hazmat spill at Camp Marmal Jan. 9. The 451st EDFT works as a part of the International Security Assistance Force in northern Afghanistan. ISAF Regional Command North supports Afghan National Security Forces in close coordination and collaboration in providing security and disrupting insurgent activities in order to protect the Afghan population. (Photo by Lt.j.g. Cheryl Collins)(RELEASED)



120109-N-FB085-036: Sgt. Max Stoltenburg, lead firefighter from the South Dakota Army National Guard's 451st Engineering Detachment Firefighting Team, stands in front of a firetruck at Camp Marmal Jan. 9. The 451st EDFT works as a part of the International Security Assistance Force in northern Afghanistan. ISAF Regional Command North supports Afghan National Security Forces in close coordination and collaboration in providing security and disrupting insurgent activities in order to protect the Afghan population. (Photo by Lt.j.g. Cheryl Collins)(RELEASED)



120109-N-FB085-003: Firefighters from the South Dakota Army National Guard's 451st Engineering Detachment Firefighting Team make final preparations while in route to a hazmat spill call at Camp Marmal Jan. 9. The 451st EDFT works as a part of the International Security Assistance Force in northern Afghanistan. ISAF Regional Command North supports Afghan National Security Forces in close coordination and collaboration in providing security and disrupting insurgent activities in order to protect the Afghan population. (Photo by Lt.j.g. Cheryl Collins)(RELEASED)

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