

Elmendorf to be base for aircraft

Elmendorf Air Force Base will serve as the forward deployment base for the U.S. Navy's new E-6 strategic communications aircraft operating in the Pacific, U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens announced recently.

The E-6 is a modified Boeing 707 jet that provides communications between the Poseidon and Trident submarines and the National Command Center. The Navy plans to purchase 15 E-6 aircraft, with as many as eight to be designated for use in the Pacific.

The E-6 jets will be home-based in Oklahoma with AWACS aircraft, but will continuously operate over the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. As the forward deployment base, Elmendorf Air Force Base will serve as the rest and refueling site for aircraft operating in the North Pacific.

"The E-6 program is a top priority of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for improving strategic communications," Steven said. "The selection of Elmendorf Air Force Base as the forward location for the E-6 is another indication of the growing strategic role our state plays in the nation's defense."

Stevens said the decision is significant because it marks the first time in many years the Navy has expanded its Alaska operations beyond Adak. He said he hopes this will be the first in a series of decisions to increase the Navy's presence in the state.

Everett Pyatt, assistant secretary of the Navy, informed Stevens that all of the new E-6 aircraft are scheduled to be in operation by the end of 1990.

Eventually, their activities in Alaska could lead to the addition of about 200 people at Elmendorf Air Force Base.