



**PRESS RELEASE  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
July 2, 2015**

**Alaska National Guard**  
Release: 15-065

By Lt. Col. Candis Olmstead

**Alaska Army National Guard Black Hawk crews heading into day 20 fighting Alaska Fires**

**JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska** — Alaska Army National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters and aircrews from the 1st Battalion, 207th Aviation Regiment, continue to conduct water bucket drops in support of wildfire suppression efforts in Alaska this week.

“We’ve flown more than 132 hours, dropped over 1,100 buckets of water, and dispensed nearly 900,000 gallons since we began supporting the effort on June 14,” said Lt. Col. Robert Kurtz, the Alaska Army National Guard state aviation officer.

After fighting several fires in the Matanuska Valley and on the Kenai Peninsula, the 1-207 AVN was reassigned on June 22 to support firefighting efforts for the Tetlin Fire near Tok, and fires near Northway, Tanacross and Chena Hot Springs.

“The aircraft and aircrews are basing out of Ft. Wainwright in Fairbanks and refueling there and at the Tok airport, depending on which fire they are on,” Kurtz said.

Crews remain on stand-by at Ft. Wainwright now, and will continue to provide support as needed.

“With the fire ban and fireworks suspension lifted, there is a heightened concern with the holiday weekend approaching, that we are readily available if we need to respond to a tasking,” said Kurtz.

1-207th AVN accepted their first mission to support wildfire suppression efforts on June 14 to fight Willow’s Sockeye Fire. The fire that began that day is now 98 percent contained, and has burned 7,220 acres according to today’s State Emergency Operations Center situation report.

The Black Hawks and aircrew were transferred from the Sockeye effort June 17 and tasked to perform operations on the Kenai Peninsula after several spot fires began due to lightning strikes the prior evening.

The Alaska Army National Guard has 19 Black Hawks that are shared among aviation units in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Bethel, Nome and Juneau. They began water bucket missions to fight fires in the Interior Region with Anchorage and Fairbanks crews, and then added Bethel crews to the rotation.

“We swap crews out once they’ve worked three consecutive days, and we swap aircraft out as needed for unscheduled or routine maintenance,” Kurtz said.

Per their agreement with the Alaska Division of Forestry, the National Guard provides stand-by availability seven days a week for a 12-hour work day, when there is a current request for assistance.

Throughout the firefighting mission, the 1-207 AVN continued to provide multiple daily round-trip transportation support for a federal personnel recovery mission for [a crash in 1952 on Colony Glacier](#). They also provided a medevac for a local U.S. Army Soldier who received minor injuries during a training exercise.

Providing domestic emergency response is part of the National Guard's dual state and federal mission.

"It's important to help the state of Alaska and its citizens," said Kurtz. "It is why many Soldiers join the Guard, and they look forward to opportunities to use their training and skills to serve and protect others."

###

### **Cutline for attached photo**

(See below for links to additional full-res photos)

#### **150604-A-DL550-167**

Army Sgt. Philip Peter looks out from a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter after dropping water from a bambi bucket to support firefighting efforts near Tok, Alaska, June 26, 2015. Peter is a crew chief assigned to the Alaska National Guard's 1st Battalion, 207th Aviation Regiment. U.S. Army photo by Sherman Hogue

Descriptions of each photo can be found by double-clicking the photo in Flickr, or they appear with the image in DVIDS.

#### **For event Flickr album of full-resolution, free downloadable images, please visit:**

June 26 <https://www.flickr.com/photos/alaskanationalguard/sets/72157655310513636>

June 17 <https://www.flickr.com/photos/alaskanationalguard/sets/72157654670624975>

#### **DVIDS photos (may be able to view from .mil computers)**

June 26 <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/2036318/alaska-national-guard-fights-alaska-wildfires#.VZXITE3JCpo>

June 17 <http://dvidshub.net/r/xyuk4l>

#### **For b-roll video, please visit:**

June 26 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tbr9lgoMMcc&feature=youtu.be>

June 17 <https://www.dvidshub.net/video/410509/alaska-army-national-guard-black-hawk-crews-help-fight-alaska-fires#.VYN2kk3JCpo>