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**Alaska National Guard**  
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By Staff Sgt. Dayton Will

**Alaska Army Guard aviators support Operation Arctic Care, get critical training**

**Kodiak, Alaska** — Pilots and support personnel from the Alaska Army National Guard’s aviation battalions had the opportunity to operate in a unique environment in support of Operation Arctic Care 2017, a two-week Department of Defense innovative readiness training program that began here March 28.

This year’s Air Force Reserve-led, multi-service event coordinated with Kodiak Area Native Association and local civil authorities provided no-cost medical, dental, optometry, and veterinary services to communities across Kodiak Island. The program simultaneously allowed annual training requirements to be met, providing Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen the opportunity to perform medical care in austere conditions – crucial training for service members who could potentially be deployed anywhere in the world.

“It’s great being able to do a real-world mission at home,” said Sgt. Heidi Williams, a flight operations sergeant with 1st Battalion, 207th Aviation Regiment, who was excited about the opportunity to serve the community. “Alaskans helping Alaskans; it’s why I joined the Guard.”

The Alaska Army National Guard sent three UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters, totaling 53.6 flight hours, to transport medical personnel and equipment to villages around Kodiak Island. The helicopters were operated and supported by 21 personnel including pilots, flight crews, mechanics, flight operations staff, and one flight medic. The villages supported include Akhiok, Karluk, Larsen Bay, Old Harbor, Ouzinkie and Port Lions.

Arctic Care 2017 also served as the first consolidated annual training for the Alaska Army National Guard’s new aeromedical evacuation unit, Detachment 2, Golf Company, 2nd General Support Aviation Battalion, 104th Regiment.

According to Sgt. Shelbi Bergmann, a flight operations sergeant with Golf Company, missions such as Arctic Care are essential to ensure that pilots and flight crews have the opportunity to fly the number of hours to maintain currency.

“They love flying here, because of the varied terrain and maritime weather,” explained Bergmann. “It provides a challenge that they don’t get flying where they’re used to in Anchorage.”

The aviation Soldiers also trained with United States Coast Guard helicopter flight crews outside of Arctic Care operations.

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“We are a brand new medical unit, so we need to develop standard operating procedures on how to conduct hoist ops,” said Sgt. Mikana Halloran, a flight medic also with Golf Company, who was thrilled to have the opportunity to train on hoist operations with the Coast Guard. “This is a great opportunity to learn from people who have years of real-world experience.”

The Alaska National Guard helicopters flew 229 nautical miles to return to Bryant Army Air Field on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska on April 8, 2017. Before leaving, Sgt. Sean Pritchard, a helicopter mechanic with Golf Company, joked that, “we’ll all be relieved when we hit the mainland. We’re not used to flying over open water like that.”

Arctic Care has enriched U.S. military training and provided citizens in rural communities across Alaska with free care every year since 1995.

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**PHOTOS:**

1. **Attached PDF** includes story and a small selection of low-resolution photos for viewing on screen.
2. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution photos. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.) <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/230786/alaska-army-guard-aviators-support-operation-arctic-care-get-critical-training>



Sgt. Sean Pritchard, a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter mechanic with Detachment 2, Golf Company, 2-104th General Support Aviation Battalion, observes the terrain during a training flight in Kodiak, Alaska, in April. Alaska Army National Guard aviators were in Kodiak to support Arctic Care 2017, a multi-service health care training exercise supporting communities in rural Alaska. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Dayton Will)

**More photos, next page**



Sgt. Sean Pritchard, a helicopter mechanic with Detachment 2, Golf Company, 2-104th General Support Aviation Battalion, leaves a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter to attend a mission debrief in Kodiak, Alaska, in April. Alaska Army National Guard Aviation Soldiers were in Kodiak to provide transportation for medical personnel in support of Arctic Care 2017. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Dayton Will)



Alaska National Guard Sgt. Mikana Halloran, a flight medic with Detachment 2, Golf Company, 2-104th General Support Aviation Battalion, records flight data on a training flight in Kodiak, Alaska, in April 2017. Gulf Company is the Alaska Army National Guard's new medical evacuation unit. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Dayton Will)



Alaska Army National Guard Aviation Soldiers pose for a photograph in front of a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter in April. Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 207<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment, and 2-104th General Support Aviation Battalion, were in Kodiak supporting Arctic Care 2017, a multi-service health care training exercise supporting communities in rural Alaska. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Dayton Will)