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Alaska Guardsmen gain lethality with arctic survival, new M17 pistol training in the Arctic

Story by U.S. Army National Guard Sgt. Christopher A. Garibay, 139th MPAD

EIELSON AIR FORCE BASE – Soldiers with the 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment, based in Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson took part in arctic survival, helicopter-hoisting exercises, movement-to-contact and weapon familiarization training in support of Arctic Eagle 2020 at Eielson Air Force Base, Feb. 20 through March 2.

The unit used UH-60 Black Hawks to hoist gear and move Soldiers from forward operating bases to more remote arctic locations to engage in small unit infantry tactics. The exercise is meant to test and validate field skills, gear capabilities, remote communications, transportation capabilities and best practices for survival in an arctic environment.

The 1-297th INF BN began the field portion of the exercise Feb. 25 by establishing a tactical operations center at Winter Camp Forward Operating Base in the Yukon Training Area, which involved setting up a 10-person tent equipped with a heater and generator. Over the next two days, the unit set up their sleeping quarters at Winter Camp, practiced movement to contact and conducted various cold weather training.

“Out here in the Arctic, the greatest enemy is the weather,” said Army 1st Lt. Eric Gorman, company commander of Delta Company, 1-297 INF BN based in Fairbanks, Alaska. “The most important part of the Alaska National Guard is to be able to operate in an arctic environment in order to defend the homeland.”

The training is meant to validate the equipment and to give Soldiers the confidence they need to endure harsh weather conditions.

“Our piece of Arctic Eagle is acquiring arctic skills; to survive and thrive in some of the roughest weather there is,” said Army Sgt. 1st Class Matt Romine of Huntington, West Virginia, with Bravo Company, 1-297 INF BN based in Wasilla, Alaska. “We wanted to make sure our guys gained confidence in their equipment and trust each other. The temperature is always a challenge in -30 degree weather.”

Romine said there was training leading up to the exercise that helped them overcome the challenges the arctic temperatures posed.

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For Alaska Guardsmen, this was the first time Soldiers in the state used the weapon system they will be issued for future deployment operations.

“It’s important for us to be proficient with our weapon systems, including the new M17 service pistol,” said Gorman. “This is a big part of our marksmanship program and close quarters combat, and it was important for us to get familiar with this new weapon system.”

The SIG Sauer M17 weapon system is the newest service pistol for the U.S. Army and has made its way to Guard units across the country. There were key differences in the M17 versus the previous service pistol, including safety features in the weapon system itself.

“There’s a lot of safety features built into the weapon, so it’s important for our guys to get used to drawing the weapon, getting a site picture, firing and then holstering the weapon again,” said Army Staff Sgt. Sean Davis of Anchorage, with B. Co., 1-297 INF BN. “The new trigger on these is much lighter; and there’s less recoil, so it’s important for guys to gain some muscle memory on the new weapon system.”

Davis said the weapon system performed well in the arctic climate.

“It’s below zero, and there wasn’t a single weapon that jammed,” said Davis. “Being an MP [Military Policeman] for 10 years, for being as cold as it is, the weapon performed excellent.”

The various training exercises allowed for mentorship of younger Soldiers to prepare them for future operations.

“To me this is another opportunity to train younger Soldiers and NCOs [noncommissioned officers] to pass on the knowledge I’ve acquired over the years,” said Romine. “I’m having a blast.”

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For more information contact the Media Operations Center via phone (907) 459-8761 or e-mail arcticeaglemoc@gmail.com.

PHOTOS

1. Flickr link includes an Exercise Arctic Eagle album with the complete selection of full-resolution, free downloadable images (May not be accessible from all military computers).

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/alaskanationalguard/>

2. DVIDS link to press release (Primary for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers)

<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/364332/alaska-guardsmen-gain-lethality-with-arctic-survival-new-m17-pistol-training-arctic>

3. DVIDS link to all selected full-resolution photos of Arctic Eagle 2020. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers) <https://www.dvidshub.net/feature/ArcticEagle2020>

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Staff Sgt. Sean E. Davis, a member of 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment, based in Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, tests out the new SIG Sauer M17 Army service pistol March 1, in the Yukon Training Area on Eielson Air Force Base as part of exercise Arctic Eagle 2020. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Kyle Odum, 139th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)