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PRESS RELEASE

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New Hampshire's 12th Civil Support Team trains in frigid Alaskan weather

Story by U.S. Army Spc. Kierra Harris

BETHEL, Alaska - U.S. Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Sara McPherson, the decontamination NCO and acting noncommissioned officer in charge with the 12th Civil Support Team (CST) out of New Hampshire, set up a sick call for local native Alaskans to seek medical treatment in Bethel, Alaska, on Feb. 29, during exercise Arctic Eagle 2020.

The CST exercise scheduled to take place in Bethel Feb. 29 through March 1 was cancelled because of near-whiteout conditions. However, even in inclement weather, Staff Sgt. McPherson and the, approximately, 29 other Alaska National Guard, Alaska State Defense Force, and 12 CST personnel continued their domestic operations mission to support the people of Bethel.

"We had to adjust fire due to inclement weather," McPherson said. "A lot of our berms [decontamination equipment] were extremely icy. We had to gameplan in our head 'It's super slippery, how do we mitigate that for safety.'"

Undeterred by the weather, the CST conducted critical site surveys of the armory, port, water treatment facility, and grocery store. Traveling throughout the town of Bethel in a Small Unit Support Vehicle provided the opportunity to successfully test their cold-weather, decontamination and communications equipment and long-range communications equipment in subzero temperatures. The team also helped the armory manager perform maintenance on his Humvee after it was damaged plowing snow.

"We didn't get to do the key leader meeting," McPherson said. "But we weren't miserable. The commander got us pizza, we watched a movie together. It wasn't awful, we're still going to do cold weather training outside. We're still building the comradery and our bond "

Alaskan weather can be unpredictable. Winter temperatures can rapidly drop below -40 degrees. In Bethel it is not uncommon for a blizzard to blow through unexpectedly causing the town to become isolated and logistics challenging.

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To boost morale, Alaskan State Defense Force Col. John James took personnel on a tour of the local area in a SUSV. The town of Bethel has no roads leading in or out. Individuals have to either fly or arrive by boat. In the winter, when boating becomes impossible and the river freezes over, locals and the military personnel utilize the frozen waters as a sort of improvised highway.

Training alongside AKNG and ASDF personnel provided McPherson and the rest of 12 CST an incredible opportunity to test new equipment, refine sick-call and decontamination procedures, while developing invaluable relationships.

“We’re trying to utilize as much time as we can here while we’re in Alaska,” Lt. Col. Brian Ferdandes, 12th CST commander, says. “This is an opportunity that many people don’t get. Even if they get a chance to go to Alaska, they’re on a cruise ship or coming on vacation, so doing true arctic training in Alaska with native Alaskans is a once in a lifetime chance.”

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For more information contact Alaska National Guard Joint Force Headquarters at (907) 428-6031 or mvpublicaffairs@alaska.gov.

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/364501/new-hampshires-12th-civil-support-team-trains-frigid-arctic-weather>

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>



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Sara McPherson, the decontamination NCO for the 12th Civil Support Team out of New Hampshire, stands in whiteout conditions during a tour of critical infrastructure near Bethel, Alaska, as part of exercise Arctic Eagle 2020. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Ian Withrow)

--more photos, next page--



Alaska State Defense Force Col. John “Jimmy Joe” James leads Soldiers and airmen from Alaska, New Hampshire and Illinois on a tour of critical sites during near-whiteout conditions in Bethel, Alaska, Feb. 29 as part of exercise Arctic Eagle 2020. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Ian Withrow)



The harbor in Bethel, Alaska, stands frozen during a blizzard, Feb. 29, 2020. The harbor is one of several critical sites, vital to the survival of the local populace, that is monitored by Alaska State Defense Forces and members of the Illinois, New Hampshire and Alaska National Guards during exercise Arctic Eagle 2020. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Ian Withrow)