

**Maj. Gen. Torrence Saxe**

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**Alaska National Guard**

*Department of Military  
and Veterans Affairs*

Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

**STATE OF ALASKA**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**March 20, 2020**

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**PRESS RELEASE**

020-022

## **Alaska Army Guard helps rescue Iditarod mushers after hitting seawater overflow**

**JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska** — Aircrew with the Alaska Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 207th Aviation transported three Iditarod mushers after they and their sled dog teams went through flood waters along the Iditarod Trail this morning, about 25 miles outside of Nome.

The Alaska Rescue Coordination Center received a distress signal from a personal locator beacon and contacted the Army National Guard to request support from Nome personnel.

"We received coordinates at about 9:45 this morning, and were in the air with two Nome firefighter EMTs and two dog handlers at 10:15," said Chief Warrant Officer 3 Josh Claeys, pilot in command of the UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter that performed the search and rescue mission.

Southblowing winds had persisted overnight and pushed seawater up onto the Iditarod Trail, and the mushers weren't aware that it was under water, according to Claeys. It was dark at the time, he said, and the mushers went through the water.

A Nome search and rescue ground team of about 10 personnel were also en route to the scene via snow machines when the National Guard Black Hawk flew past them.

"We flew over the Nome SAR team about five miles out, and when we arrived, two other were already there with the mushers, who had been able to extricate themselves from the water," said Claeys.

Claeys landed the helicopter about 200 yards clear of the overflow waters. After the emergency medical technicians provided brief on-site triage, the ground SAR team shuttled the three mushers to the Black Hawk via snow machine.

"They were inside of sleeping bags," said Claeys of the three mushers. "The medics got them on oxygen and warmed up inside, and the dog handlers and some of Nome rescue stayed with the dogs and had plans to get them back to Nome," which Claeys said was about 30 miles along the trail.

Claeys said it was one of the smoothest and quickest rescues he had been part of.

"Our Nome facility commander, 1st Lt. Jared Scheler, had just met with the Norton Sound Regional Hospital aeromed last week to prepare coordination for potential SAR missions like this," said Claeys. "Today, the paperwork was in place, the EMTs were ready to go, and the [dog] handlers showed up in minutes; and when you're wet and freezing, minutes matter."

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The patients were flown to the National Guard Nome Army Aviation Operating Facility and arrived at 11:15 a.m. Two ambulances awaited their arrival and transported them to NSRH.

The Alaska Army National Guard was awarded three saves for this mission.

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1. **Attached pdf** includes story and a small selection of low-resolution photos for viewing on screen.

### Photos

An Alaska Army National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter aircrew performed a search and rescue mission for three Iditarod mushers about 25 miles east of Nome, March 20, 2020. The mushers and their dogs went through Bering Sea flood waters on the race trail and were wet and freezing. The aircrew transported two firefighter emergency medical technicians and Iditarod dog handlers to assist. The mushers were flown to Nome and transported to a local hospital. A local search and rescue team helped race dog handlers care for the sled team and returned them to Nome. (Courtesy photos)

