

Maj. Gen. Torrence Saxe

Commissioner & Adjutant General

www.DMVA.Alaska.Gov



Alaska National Guard

*Department of Military
and Veterans Affairs*

Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

020-049

May 19, 2019

By David Bedard

176th Wing Public Affairs

Wings and blades of hope

Air Guard, Air Force salute Alaska's COVID-19 responders and essential workers

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — In the case of the HH-60 Pave Hawk and HC-130J Combat King II combat search and rescue aircraft, the first "H" stands for "help."

Both machines and crews, of the Alaska Air National Guard's 210th and 212th rescue squadrons respectively, provide that help by training every day for their combat mission of going behind enemy lines and inserting pararescuemen (PJs) to rescue downed pilots and other isolated allied troops.

At home station, the crews partner with PJs of the 212th Rescue Squadron to provide civil search and rescue statewide.

It was only appropriate then that the 176th Wing Airmen of the three rescue squadrons went a little out of their way May 13 to fly low and slow over Eagle River, Palmer and Wasilla near JBER.

Later, aircraft from U.S. Air Force and Air National Guard units in Alaska honored frontline COVID-19 responders and essential workers with flights over 23 communities in the state May 15.

The Salute to Alaska flyovers, allowed as part of an approved training mission, are part of the Air Force Salutes initiative designed to show appreciation to the heroes around the world battling the pandemic, and to lift morale in communities across America.

Participating JBER aircraft during the week included the C-17 Globemaster III, F-22 Raptor, HC-130 and HH-60. Participating Eielson Air Force Base aircraft were the F-16 Fighting Falcon, F-35 Lightning II, and KC-135 Stratotanker.

The flyovers were a collaborative salute to healthcare workers, first responders, and other essential personnel to showcase solidarity with all of Alaska during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the May 13 sortie, both aircraft went their separate ways to carry out unique training profiles before meeting again to accomplish the community flyover.

Alaska Air National Guard Lt. Col. Jeremy Groat, 210th RQS commander, said he wanted to expose Maj. Ryan Wiese to Alaska airspace.

An experienced command pilot who just came from the elite U.S. Air Force Weapons School at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, Groat said Wiese nonetheless needed to build familiarity with Alaska's unique weather and terrain.

To accomplish their goal, Groat guided the Pave Hawk to the ascending and plunging Chugach Mountains, still covered in snow and ice from last winter. The cement gray helicopter appeared like a mosquito against the backdrop of a refrigerator as the crew expertly navigated the folds and contours of the terrain.

"We wanted to get Major Wiese out to the mountainous and snow-covered glacier fields east of JBER," Groat said. "We completed glacier landings and complex hovers."

Miles away, Capt. Christopher Brunner, 211th RQS rescue pilot, and his crew were focused on a completely different set of tasks.

Beginning over JBER's Malemute Drop Zone, the HC-130's loadmasters kicked out container delivery systems, which safely delivered supplies and equipment under the canopy of parachutes.

The pilots then pulled on the yoke, bringing the aircraft to 10,000 feet. In the whisper-thin air, PJs stepped into the summery void, falling thousands of feet before pulling their parachute releases, precisely gliding to a simulated isolated survivor.

Finally, the two aircraft rendezvoused across the frigid, restless ocean water at Mount Susitna, where they would undertake a synchronized waltz at altitude when the HC-130's refueling boom delivered fuel midair to the thirsty whirlybird.

The airborne duo speared east and north on their route to show the Alaska Air National Guard's colors to communities slowly emerging from lockdown.

Though they soared above migrating geese and nesting eagles, they said they still felt a connection to the community.

"I saw some people waving; some people taking pictures," Brunner recalled. "I ended up getting some pictures sent to me directly saying how cool it was."

"It was a good way to show the community as a whole that this is the piece we can do to show solidarity and our support of the community at large as well as first responders and hospital workers," Groat said.

While they were tracking along the goodwill route, Brunner said he could hear approving chatter from pilots passing through the area.

"From the sky to the ground, it seemed like there were a lot of excited people," he said. "I thought it was awesome. It's good to go out there and show the military still has a presence in Alaska. We're here to assist in any way we can, including defending our country."

###

Media Contact: David Bedard, 552-3962, david.bedard.1@usaf.mil

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.) www.dvidshub.net/news/370268/wings-and-blades-hope

3. **DVIDS B-Roll link** includes full-resolution b-roll. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.) <https://www.dvidshub.net/video/753138/alaska-air-national-guard-aircraft-176th-wing-iber-honored-frontline-responders-and-essential-workers-with-flyover>



Alaska Air National Guard Loadmasters aboard a HC-130J Combat King II observe an HH-60 Pave Hawk as it prepares for an aerial refueling. The 176th Wing conducted the first of the flyovers for Alaska. The Salute to Alaska flyovers were an approved training mission and part of the Air Force Salutes initiative designed to show appreciation to the heroes around the world battling the pandemic, and to lift morale in communities across America. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Victoria Granado/Released)