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—ALASKA NATIONAL GUARD NEWS—

1. Brower takes command of 38th Troop Command

DVIDS by Capt. David Bedard/Aug. 2

Lt. Col. Tim Brower took command of the Alaska Army National Guard's 38th Troop Command during an Aug. 2 change-of-command ceremony here.

Brower succeeded Col. Joel Gilbert who had served as the 38th TC commander since September 2018.

The 38th TC comprises 1st Battalion, 207th Aviation Regiment; 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment; 49th Missile Defense Battalion; and 103rd Civil Support Team.

Brower, a career military intelligence officer, is a 1998 graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, and most recently served in a deployed position as director, CJ7 Force Management Division for Special Operations Joint Task Force-Afghanistan/NATO Special Operation Component Command-Afghanistan.

Previously, Brower commanded the 49th MDB at Fort Greely.

"The Brower family is so thankful to be back in Alaska," Brower said. "We have so many friends here, and it feels like a reunion after we departed Fort Greely over three years ago."

Brig. Gen. Charles Knowles, commander, Alaska Army National Guard, presided over the ceremony. He said Brower inherits a capable, combat-ready unit.

“The 38th team has done a great job setting the conditions for continued success,” he said. “You are receiving a learning organization staffed by professionals who are committed to our people and mission ... Your Soldiers know their units inside and out. They have an abundance of experience and relevant perspective they will gladly share.”

Gilbert, who is set to retire after more than 27 years of service, reflected on commanding the diverse capabilities of the 38th TC.

“I have had the amazing opportunity to work with infantry, aviation, air defense artillery, military police and civil support soldiers,” he said. “The theme that has remained constant across all the branches is the professionalism, dedication and desire to serve our state and country.”

Knowles commended Gilbert on the 38th TC’s accomplishments during the past two years.

“All of the 38th units have benefited from your hard work and leadership,” Knowles said. “The infantry battalion successfully deployed to Kosovo and returned. The aviation battalion (took) great strides as it continues a major reorganization, and you took on the added task of caring for the 103rd Civil Support Team while the 297th Regional Support Group is deployed to Poland.”

Brower spoke about his vision for the unit.

“The National Guard’s motto 'Always ready, always there' speaks to our role — our opportunity in these uncertain times when we will be called upon for both state and federal missions,” he said. “We must be ready to perform our duty for Alaska and for our country. We will do so honorably by living the Army Values and treating one another with dignity and respect.”

Link: <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/375195/brower-takes-command-38th-troop-command>

2. Alaska Air National Guard rescues hiker on Pioneer Peak

National Guard Bureau by Maj. Elizabeth Mangini/July 30

Responding to a request for assistance last night from the Alaska State Troopers, the Alaska Air National Guard's 176th Wing rescued an injured hiker.

Airmen with the Alaska Air National Guard's 210th and 212th rescue squadrons rescued the distressed hiker who was stranded on Pioneer Peak. This mountain rises over six thousand feet from its base near Knik River flats, about 35 miles north of Anchorage.

An HH-60 Pave Hawk helicopter launched from Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. Aboard the aircraft were two pararescuemen (PJs), highly trained personnel specializing in evacuating individuals, even in the most challenging conditions.

Alaska Air National Guard Capt. Daniel Dickman at the Alaska Rescue Coordination Center knew exactly what to do to enable a quick response.

"After a quick plot of the location, we knew the 210th and 212th would be our first option due to the location and challenging terrain," said Dickman. "The hiker was in cell phone range and was able to call the Alaska State Troopers for help."

According to Dickman, cell phone coverage is not usually an option due to the remoteness of the terrain and limits of cell phone range.

Outdoor enthusiasts have turned to use two-way communication devices with global positioning system (GPS) trackers. In this situation, the individual was able to pull the coordinates from their cell phone and pass them to the Alaska State Troopers.

"The hiker's ability to pull his grid coordinates from his cell phone significantly sped up the rescue process, as the area was heavily vegetated and could have resulted in much lengthier search time," said Dickman.

The hiker suffered injuries after slipping down a ravine and was unable to walk. He was rescued at approximately 2000-foot elevation on the north side of the mountain, about a mile south of the Old Glenn Hwy.

According to Dickman, the individual was hoisted using a rescue strop—a harness used with helicopter operations—due to dense vegetation.

The survivor was transported and released to Mat-Su Regional Medical Center for care. The crew returned to base in just over an hour.

The Alaska Rescue Coordination Center would like to remind Alaskans, who traverse the wilderness with only cell phones, to be familiar with how to find coordinates within their phones.

The AKRCC operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is manned by highly skilled and trained Alaska Air National Guard members.

For this mission, the 210th and 212th rescue squadrons, and the AKRCC were awarded one save.

Link: <https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article/2294033/alaska-air-national-guard-rescues-hiker-on-pioneerpeak/#:~:text=JOINT%20BASE%20ELMENDORF%20RICHARDSON%2C%20Alaska,Wing%20rescued%20an%20injured%20hiker.>

3. Soldiers stationed in Poland share experiences with local scouts

Army.mil by 2nd Lt. Balinda Dresel/July 29

U.S. Army Soldiers from the Alaska National Guard's 297th Regional Support Group and U.S. Army Reserve's 266th Ordinance Company, out of Puerto Rico, and Bravo Company, 418th Civil Affairs Battalion, out of Missouri, spent the afternoon engaging with Polish scouts at Camp Watra near Osieczów, Poland, July 17, 2020.

The Soldiers learned about the history and values of the Polish scouting organization while sharing their units' mission and high-mobility multipurpose wheeled and medium tactical vehicles that are assigned to nearby Forward Operating Site Świętoszów.

Sgt. 1st Class Dayton Will, deputy for the mayor cell at FOS Świętoszów and member of the 297th RSG, which manages base operations for hundreds of U.S. Soldiers stationed in Poland, said that despite the

units having very different day-to-day missions the leaders from each recognize the value of building positive relationships.

“The U.S. Soldiers are excited to be able to be back in the local communities,” said Will. “The outdoor setting allowed for safe interaction – this is especially important as we continue to follow aggressive prevention and mitigation measures to reduce the transmission of the COVID-19 disease.”

Radosław Kalamarz, chief of the camp and 10-year veteran of the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association or ZHP, said that the scouts were delighted by the meeting and happy the U.S. Soldiers found time to visit their camp.

“The organization aims to prepare young people to be responsible and active citizens,” said Kalamarz. “From learning to make a fire and orienteering to history of the scouts, the activities build character and independence.”

“I personally felt very overwhelmed by the determination and commitment they had of teaching these young boys and girls the importance of serving their country as well as learning to respect, defend, and cherish where they’re from,” said Spc. Glissette Fox, an ammunition specialist with the 266th OD Co. “It’s admirable to see how these children are very earnest and excited to continue learning every survival skill there is.”

The ZHP is one of the largest scouting organizations in Poland with over 100,000 members. The scouts at Camp Watra train between one and three weeks in the summer and winter.

“We were invited back to the camp during their winter training,” said Will, a graduate of the Army’s Cold Weather Leader’s Course at Black Rapids Training Site, Alaska. “I hope to see how the scouts do things in winter conditions and see if I can learn anything from them and also share my knowledge.”

Fox said that the event reminded her of the reasons she joined the Army, which were to fight for what is right, defend those in need, and make a huge impact not only on people, but the world.

“Having that enthusiasm, dedication, morals, and determination, will not only make them become more knowledgeable, but also stronger,” said Fox. “Observing how chuffed they were and having the privilege of being part of that happiness fills me with complete joy. The smile on those faces made my day – It was a genuinely pleasant experience that I would repeat again.”

Link:[https://www.army.mil/article/237676/soldiers_stationed_in_poland_share_experiences_with_loca
l_scouts](https://www.army.mil/article/237676/soldiers_stationed_in_poland_share_experiences_with_local_scouts)

4. Alaska Air Guard rescues distressed hiker at Mount Williwaw

National Guard Bureau by Capt. David Bedard/July 28

The Alaska Air National Guard rescued a distressed hiker July 26 at Mount Williwaw east of Anchorage.

Alaska National Guard Master Sgt. Andre Marron, Alaska Rescue Coordination Center controller, said the stranded hiker could not safely ascend or descend and used his mobile phone to contact authorities who contacted the AKRCC. The Alaska State Troopers asked for assistance with a hoist-capable helicopter.

The AK RCC coordinated the departure of two pararescuemen (PJs) of the 212th Rescue Squadron aboard an HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopter of the 210th Rescue Squadron. The HH-60 crew quickly located the hiker at 5,000 feet above sea level and hoisted the PJ team 30 feet to package the distressed hiker and extract him from the mountain.

The hiker was transported to Alaska Regional Hospital in Anchorage and released to the Alaska State Troopers there.

“The hiker knew exactly who to contact to get help,” said Alaska Air National Guard Capt. Daniel Warren, combat rescue officer and AKRCC senior controller. “This rescue effort demonstrates the continuing success of the Alaska Rescue Coordination Center’s community outreach and the synergistic relationship between the Alaska State Troopers and the Alaska Air National Guard.”

The AK RCC, 210th RQS and 212th RQS were each awarded one save for this mission.

Link: <https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article/2290278/alaska-air-guard-rescues-distressed-hiker-at-mount-williwaw/>

5. Army National Guardsmen airlift memorial from Nome to Kiwalik: Soldiers honor deceased Vietnam War, Native Alaskan veteran

DVIDS by Sgt. Seth LaCount/July 22

Alaska Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to 1st Battalion, 207th Aviation Regiment and several other units, transported the headstone and cross of retired Command Sgt. Maj. and Vietnam War veteran Thomas Sherman from Nome to Kiwalik via a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter, July 14.

The Sherman family has a rich history of service in the National Guard and the U.S. military, with several immediate and extended family members who are veterans.

Thomas Sherman was an aviation mechanic and crew chief in the U.S. Army after being drafted during the Vietnam War in the mid-1960s. He performed maintenance on the American Bell UH-1 Huey helicopter that predates the UH-60 Black Hawk. He re-enlisted with the Guard 20 years after he left the active duty Army and served in the Alaska Army National Guard in Nome until he retired.

Staff Sgt. Cory Reed, an infantryman with Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment and Military Funeral Honors lead for the AKNG, requested aviation support on behalf of the family in late June. The Alaska National Guard authorized the flight and transportation of Sherman’s veteran headstone during a scheduled training mission.

“Headstones are provided by the federal government at no cost to honorably discharged veterans,” said Verdie Bowen, director of the Alaska Office of Veterans Affairs. “There was no commercial service to get one to Kiwalik through the postal service, so it was sent to Nome and then transported after request for assistance and coordination through the National Guard.”

The Sherman family owns the burial allotment in Kiwalik, where their deceased family members rest. They hope to return there in the future, to spread Sherman’s ashes over the land where his memorial now stands.

“It was an honor to be part of this mission,” said 1st Lt. Jared Scheler, a pilot who flew the mission and commander of the Nome Army Aviation Facility. “It feels great to give back to a family who has given so much, with a long and pronounced history in the military.”

Nome Guardsmen Spc. Donald Lincoln and Staff Sgt. Chris Thomas volunteered for the memorial detail and were responsible for loading, securing and unloading the headstone and cross from the helicopter.

In a memorial service for Sherman in Kiwalik, Reed and Thomas unfurled and presented the flag to Sherman’s nephew, retired 1st Sgt. Stacey Greene, while Lincoln played the bugle call “Taps.”

“I grew up less than 40 miles from Kiwalik in Deering and I’ve spent a lot of time with the Sherman family,” Lincoln said. “I am very thankful and appreciative of them and it’s great to be able to lend a hand in their time of need.”

Greene served in the Alaska Army National Guard for 21 years before retiring as a first sergeant assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company of the 297th Infantry Support Battalion in Nome. He deployed to Kuwait in 2006 and served under Sherman at the beginning of his enlisted career.

Link: <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/374408/army-national-guardsmen-airlift-memorial-nome-kiwalik-soldiers-honor-deceased-vietnam-war-native-alaskan-veteran>

—ALASKA NEWS OF INTEREST—

6. State reports 59 new COVID-19 cases; Alaska now has nearly 3,000 active cases

Anchorage Daily News by Morgan Krakow/Aug. 6

Alaska saw 59 new cases of COVID-19 Wednesday, as active cases reached close to 3,000. The majority of the cases were among Anchorage residents.

Alaska didn’t report any new deaths from the virus. In total, the deaths of 25 Alaskans have been tied to COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic.

New data Wednesday showed 32 people with COVID-19 were in Alaska’s hospitals, while six others had symptoms of the illness and were also hospitalized, according to the state’s health department.

Read more: <https://www.adn.com/alaska-news/2020/08/05/state-reports-59-new-covid-19-cases-alaska-now-has-nearly-3000-active-cases/>

7. Air Force officer cycling in Interior Alaska struck and killed by vehicle

Anchorage Daily News by Tess Williams/Aug. 4

A squadron commander cycling Saturday on the Steese Highway northeast of Fairbanks was struck by a vehicle and killed, according to officials.

Maj. Michael “Cal” Gentry, 37, died after being struck near Central. He was the 354th Contracting Squadron commander at the base near North Pole and had served in the Air Force since 2007.

Gentry and two other airmen were on a cycling trip from Fairbanks to Circle when Gentry and 39-year-old Jay Butler were struck by a truck at around 6 a.m. near Mile 125 of the Steese Highway, according to a statement from the troopers. The area is roughly 3 miles west of Central.

The driver was part of the cycling group, troopers said. The three men had alternated between cycling and driving the support vehicle, a 2015 Dodge Ram truck. Investigators said the driver inadvertently struck the cyclists while following them.

“Our entire team is heartbroken at the loss of Cal Gentry to this tragic accident,” said Col. Shawn Anger, 354th Fighter Wing commander. “He loved anything and everything outdoors and there is at least a little solace knowing Cal died doing something he loved.”

Troopers said the driver’s name will not be released until the investigation is complete.

Link: <https://www.adn.com/alaska-news/fairbanks/2020/08/03/air-force-officer-cycling-in-interior-alaska-struck-and-killed-by-vehicle/>

—NATION/NATIONAL GUARD NEWS OF INTEREST—

8. Coronavirus mission for most National Guard troops is extended through Christmas

Stars and Stripes by Steve Beynon/Aug. 4

WASHINGTON — Nearly 25,000 National Guard troops serving on coronavirus missions throughout the country have had their deployments extended through Christmas, the White House announced Tuesday.

But the federal government will only pay for 75% of each deployment, according to a White House memo issued Monday. Only Texas and Florida will receive full federal funding. The White House did not respond Tuesday to a request for comment about increased funding for those two states, though Texas and Florida have been hit hard by the virus in recent weeks.

Almost every governor and National Guard leaders lobbied Trump’s administration to keep Guard troops on federal Title 32 status, which provides federal funds to pay for troops to complete missions approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency while troops remain under the control of the governors. The status provides Guard troops with additional federal benefits and pay not afforded them on state status, such as education and health care benefits, a housing allowance, and benefits associated with retirement.

The deadline for the deployments to end was Aug. 21, but is now extended to Dec. 31 for 49 states and territories. The long-term extension comes amid a U.S. death toll from the pandemic surpassing 155,000 and nearly two dozen states seeing a spike in infections, according to Johns Hopkins University data.

As of Monday morning, more than 24,900 Air and Army National Guard members were deployed in 50 states, three territories, and the District of Columbia to support civilian agencies with coronavirus missions, according to the National Guard Bureau. At the height of deployment levels in May, nearly 50,000 troops were activated for missions that included sorting and delivering medical supplies, cleaning high-traffic public spaces, food distribution, and assisting nursing homes with testing, cleaning, and caring for patients.

When the coronavirus first hit the United States in March, the National Guard was called up to help mitigate the spread and the secondary effects of the virus through state missions such as operating testing sites, assisting food banks, and manning call centers for health concerns and unemployment offices. As the pandemic escalated, Trump authorized the use of federal funds for the troops, but through state-by-state memos instead of a blanket approval.

“Since [the coronavirus] was first discovered in our state, the Michigan National Guard has been a crucial part of our emergency response, from conducting testing and screening, distributing personal protective equipment, and assisting at food banks across the state,” Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer said in a statement.

However, the Trump administration is only covering 75% of the costs of keeping troops deployed. “While I am grateful for the extension, the president’s decision to federally fund Guard activities at only 75% leaves states across the country with an additional cost when we’re already facing severe holes in our state budgets,” Whitmer said.

The National Governors Association on Monday urged Trump not to delay and act on requests across the country to keep troops deployed and providing coronavirus relief.

“While we appreciate the administration’s support over the past few months, short-term extensions and last-minute authorizations are adversely impacting and disrupting state plans and operations,” the association said.

The Guard’s coronavirus mission is the most ambitious domestic use of citizen soldiers for a noncombat mission, with most units throughout the country operating in some capacity since early March. Now governors are saying in addition to combating the virus, federal Title 32 status could better equip states to prepare for hurricane season, which sometimes requires deploying troops for relief.

“With natural disaster season on the horizon, we believe the consistency of Title 32 specifically for coronavirus-related missions will help to provide states and territories with flexibility for easier transitions to supporting local disaster-related crises,” according to the letter to the president signed by governors.

In a news conference last week, Trump said large portions of the country are free of the coronavirus. No state has rid itself of the virus, according to Johns Hopkins University. At least 20 states are experiencing an upward trend in new cases, according to the university’s data.

“We’re seeing improvements across major metro areas, and most hotspots, you can look at large portions of our country, it’s corona-free,” Trump said. “But we are watching very carefully California, Arizona, Texas and most of Florida, it’s starting to head down in the right direction. And I think you’ll see it rapidly head down very soon.”

In early June, the Guard’s deployments for coronavirus missions and racial justice protests increased the number of troops on the ground to a peak of 75,000 soldiers and airmen. It marked the largest domestic use of the Guard outside of a war scenario. In addition to coronavirus and protests missions, there are an additional 2,400 Guard troops along the U.S.-Mexico border and more than 28,000 deployed overseas, according to the National Guard Bureau.

The states and territories receiving federal funding for 75% of the cost for Guard troops to remain deployed through Dec. 31 are Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and the territories of Guam, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Link: <https://www.stripes.com/news/us/coronavirus-mission-for-most-national-guard-troops-is-extended-through-christmas-1.640029>

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