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By David Bedard

176th Wing Public Affairs

Alaska Air National Guard Airmen rescue possible stroke victim at Stoney River Lodge

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — Alaska Air National Guardsmen of the 176th Wing medically evacuated a possible stroke victim Feb. 20 at Stoney River Lodge 200 miles west of Anchorage, about 30 miles east of the village of Sleetmute.

Alaska Air National Guard Lt. Col. Keenan Zerkel, Alaska Rescue Coordination Center director, said the Alaska State Troopers requested assistance from the AKRCC after civilian medical evacuation agency asked for assistance owing to their helicopter range limitations.

Maj. Kevin Kelly, AKRCC senior controller, assessed the situation and requested assets from the 176th Wing who launched a 210th Rescue Squadron HH-60G Pave Hawk search and rescue helicopter carrying two pararescuemen (PJs) from 212th Rescue Squadron as well as a 211th Rescue Squadron HC-130J Combat King II. All members of 210th, 211th and 212th RQS are highly trained in SAR operations, medical treatment and frequently partner with state authorities and civilian medevac companies to respond throughout Alaska.

The HH-60 departed Anchorage and flew directly to the lodge, so the PJs could assess and stabilize the patient before transporting back to Anchorage in the helicopter. Meanwhile, the HC-130 departed approximately two hours later to conduct air-to-air refueling with the helicopter on the return. This unique capability of the rescue aircraft extends the range of the helicopters to carry out rescue operations across the vast state without the normal limitations of fuel.

The Pave Hawk crew then transported the patient to Providence Alaska Medical Center and released him to medical personnel.

Zerkel emphasized the network of civilian, state and military capabilities to medically evacuate critically ill patients to overcome the distances involved in Alaska.

"This medevac illustrates the seamless relationship between the Troopers, civilian medical evacuation agencies, the RCC and the 176th Wing," he said. "It makes for better outcomes to patients throughout our state."

For this rescue, 210th RQS, 211th, 212th RQS and AKRCC were awarded one save.

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