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—ALASKA NATIONAL GUARD NEWS—

1. Iditarod musher Zirkle suffers concussion, injuries in fall

AP by Mark Thiessen/March 9

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — Veteran musher Aliy Zirkle's last Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race ended not with her first championship but with a medical rescue flight to Anchorage, suffering from a concussion and other injuries to her upper torso, officials said Tuesday.

Zirkle, a fan favorite, sustained multiple injuries after suffering a fall while coming into the checkpoint in Rohn on Monday evening, Alaska Air National Guard Senior Master Sgt. Evan Budd said in a statement. The statement did not name Zirkle, but Lt. Col. Candis Olmstead, a spokeswoman for the Alaska National Guard, confirmed to The Associated Press that Zirkle was the musher rescued.

A volunteer at the checkpoint about 135 miles (217 kilometers) northwest of Anchorage informed race marshal Mark Nordman of her injuries. Nordman arranged for a rescue, and the Alaska Air National Guard dispatched a Pave Hawk helicopter to the checkpoint.

Zirkle, 50, was flown to an Anchorage hospital, where she was treated and released for a concussion and "orthopedic injuries" to her upper torso, according to a statement from the Iditarod. Officials said to their knowledge she did not have any broken bones, but they did not respond to follow-up questions from the AP about the nature of the fall or how it happened,

Zirkle was resting with family in Anchorage with plans to travel the 380 miles (612 kilometers) north to their home in Two Rivers, Alaska, when able, the Iditarod said.

The 14 dogs with her in Rohn are uninjured and being cared for by volunteers. They will be flown to Anchorage on the first available flight, and then driven to Two Rivers.

The Rohn checkpoint is about 188 miles (303 kilometers) into this year's 860-mile (1384-kilometer) race, shortened from the usual 1,000-mile (1,609-kilometer) distance because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Zirkle and her husband, musher Allen Moore, own SP Kennel in Two Rivers, Alaska, near Fairbanks.

Zirkle announced on her kennel's website last month that this would be her last race, noting that the Iditarod has been physically and mentally challenging.

"I know that in the not so distant future, I will not be able to give it my 100%. So, I am retiring before I have to retire," she wrote.

She told the AP in 2017 that she suffered panic attacks and sought counseling after a man on a snowmobile attacked her and musher Jeff King in separate incidents in 2016 near the checkpoint in Nulato, Alaska. One of King's dogs was killed.

"Over the course of almost two hours, one man, by using his snowmachine, made prolonged, aggressive and what I believe to be deliberate threats to me and my team," Zirkle said in a statement just days after the attack. Snowmachines are what Alaskans call snowmobiles.

"I was terrified. Had it not been for my defensive reactions, we could have been maimed or killed," she said at the time.

Zirkle has never won the Iditarod, but endeared herself to fans with three straight second-place finishes from 2012-2014. Since then, she's had four other top 10 finishes. Last year, she placed 18th.

This year's race started Sunday with 46 mushers, and Zirkle and one other musher have withdrawn.

The Iditarod normally goes from the Anchorage area to Nome. But because of the pandemic, mushers are traveling in a loop from Willow, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) north of Anchorage, to the ghost town of Iditarod, and then back to Willow for the finish. To avoid spreading COVID-19, mushers are breezing through most rural Alaska villages that serve as checkpoints, and they are instead resting in tent camps outside towns.

Ryan Redington, grandson of the race's co-founder Joe Redington Sr., was leading the Iditarod Tuesday morning, the first musher to arrive at the checkpoint in the village of Nikolai.

News story picked up by 55 sources: https://www.gjsentinel.com/sports/professional/itarod-musher-zirkle-suffers-concussion-injuries-in-fall/article_bb648541-adff-5aa5-a6cd-108f3b162b24.html
https://www.saratogian.com/sports/national/itarod-musher-zirkle-suffers-concussion-injuries-in-fall/article_52ada202-f165-5a2f-962c-b317b613b506.html
<https://www.concordmonitor.com/Iditarod-musher-Zirkle-suffers-concussion-injuries-in-fall-39318172>
<https://www.msn.com/en-nz/sport/cycling/top-woman-in-itarod-forced-out-after-concussion-and-other-injuries/ar-BB1erggU>

2. Alaska Army National Guard Aviation Company mobilization

U.S. Indo-Pacific Command by Sgt. Michael Risinger/March 9

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska -- Approximately 60 Alaska National Guard Soldiers are mobilizing from here to Fort Hood, Texas, March 7. Eight weeks of training will be conducted in preparation for a nine-month deployment in support of Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve.

The UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter pilots, crew chiefs and support personnel from Alpha Company and the associated detachments of the 1-168th General Support Aviation Battalion will perform flying operations in the U.S. Central Command Area of Operations. At their deployed location, the Alaskan aviators will support the mission of Operation Inherent Resolve, operating in conjunction with partner forces to defeat ISIS and increase regional stability, which has been ongoing since 2014.

Training at Fort Hood will include a combination of pre-mobilization tasks, UH-60 aerial gunnery and flight training, and a maintenance and brigade level validation exercise.

Soldiers will face hardship that goes above and beyond a regular deployment.

"Together we face the challenges of COVID and an ever-changing training environment for an equally dynamic deployment environment," said Capt. Melissa Eury, A Company commander.

Upon arrival to Fort Hood, Soldiers will be reunited with four UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters which were delivered ahead of the personnel. Additionally, the unit is bringing aviation support equipment and parts, and heavy expanded mobility tactical trucks used for fueling.

"The Soldiers of Alpha Company have completed all of the pre-mobilization training in preparation of their onward movement," said Lt. Col. Todd Miller, 207th Aviation commander, "they have made sacrifices but have remained dedicated to being fully prepared for this mission."

Link: <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2530786/alaska-army-national-guard-aviation-company-mobilization/>

Broadcast story by KTUU:

<https://mms.tveyes.com/mediaview/?U3RhdlGlbj0xMTI5NSZTdGFydERhdGVUaW1IPTAzJTJGMDgIMkYyMDIxJTlwMjEIM0E1NyUzQTQ1JkVvZXRhdGVUaW1IPTAzJTJGMDgIMkYyMDIxJTlwMjEIM0EwNyUzQTQ1JlBsYXlTdGFydFJlZDZV4PSU1Q2JhbGFza2EIMjBuYXRpb25hbCUyMGd1YXJkTVdYiZQbGF5U3RhcnRSZWdleFByZXJvbGw9MTUmRHVvYXRpb249Mjk5NDIyJlBhcnRuZXJJRD03MzEzJkV4cGlyYXRpb249MDMIMkYyMiUyRjIwMjEIMjAwMSUzQTA0JTlBMjUmSGlnaGxpZ2h0UmVnZXg9JTVdYmFsYXNrYSUyMG5hdGlvbmFsJTlwZ3VhcmQlNUNiJk1vZEVkaXRvckVvYWJsZT10cnVlJk1vZEVkaXRvckRlc3RpbmF0aW9ucz00JnNpZ25hdHVyZT03ODY4NzgzZTRjOWNkMmMwNjlxYjU2NGVmZjczN2I1Yg==>

3. 330th Military Police Company heads to Alaska

Aerotech News/March 7

U.S. Army 1st Sgt. Martin Rivera addresses family members during a departure ceremony for Soldiers of California Army National Guard's 330th Military Police Company, 143rd Military Police Battalion, 49th Military Police Brigade, Feb. 25, 2021, at the California National Guard Armory in Ontario, Calif. The Soldiers are mobilizing to support security efforts led by the 100th Missile Defense Brigade and 49th Missile Defense Battalion at the missile defense site at Fort Greely, Alaska.

Link: <https://www.aerotechnews.com/blog/2021/03/07/330th-military-police-company-heads-to-alaska/>

4. Alaska National Guardsmen return from deployment to Poland

DVIDS by Edward Eagerton/March 5

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — Approximately 80 Alaska Army National Guardsmen from the 297th Regional Support Group returned here Thursday night after a nine-month deployment to Poland in support of Operation Atlantic Resolve.

U.S. Army Europe and Africa has led the Department of Defense's Atlantic Resolve land efforts by rotating U.S.-based units to Europe since 2014. There are approximately 6,000 regionally allocated Soldiers participating in nine-month Atlantic Resolve rotations at any given time.

There are four types of U.S. Army Atlantic Resolve rotations – armored, aviation, sustainment task force and division headquarters. Rotational units conduct bilateral, joint and multinational training events across more than a dozen countries. Atlantic Resolve is funded by the European Deterrence Initiative, which enables the U.S. to enhance deterrence, increase readiness and support NATO.

“Our mission was to provide base support operations for thousands of Soldiers from the rotational army forces in Poland,” said Col. Matthew Schell, commander of the 297th Regional Support Group.

The Alaska Guard's mission entailed the coordination or management of base security, dining facilities, living quarters, showers, laundry, latrines, gyms, and recreation spaces at 11 forward operating sites through host nation agreement and contracted services, he explained.

1st Lt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel, Forward Operating Site Swietoszow mayor, 297th Regional Support Group, was appointed as the mayor for one of the 11 forward operating sites, and she explained that each of the sites had their own unique challenges.

“Some sites are a tent city that are less dependent on the host nation for operations,” explained O'Neal Dresel. “FOS Swietoszow is a key logistical hub that is located on a Polish armed forces installation, and the majority of our tasks were coordinated with the 10th Armored Cavalry Brigade. My team worked hand-in-hand with their civil-military cooperation or S-5 section.”

O'Neal Dresel said that one of the highlights of her deployment was meeting Gen. James C. McConville, the chief of staff of the Army, and explaining their role of providing basic life-sustaining needs to the rotational forces at Swietoszow.

“My team not only provided food, water and lodging,” she said, “but also helped monitor large-scale projects and oversaw contract services for laundry, gym, and morale, welfare, and recreation operations. We basically ran a hotel for troops coming from all over central and eastern Europe. My team worked hard to ensure the best care for Soldiers stationed at and coming in and out of the FOS.”

Amidst the deployment, the COVID-19 pandemic was in full effect across the world, and Schell explained that his unit rose to the occasion.

“Maintaining all base operations functions across Poland during a pandemic was a huge accomplishment,” said Schell. “We anticipated the challenge of establishing COVID-19 mitigation and response measures in Poland. We worked with our supporting medical company to establish testing protocols and procedures.”

According to Schell, the officers in charge of each location prepared for isolation of Soldiers diagnosed with the disease and the quarantine of their close contacts. Each location's plan accounted for medical monitoring, food, laundry, and hygiene for all affected personnel.

"Despite the strain on resources," he added, "the 297th RSG showed outstanding patience and agility in responding to the pandemic without interruption of any services that our Soldiers rely on."

Schell said that the 297th RSG has been a part of the Alaska National Guard for only five years, and that this mobilization was the unit's first, and served as a benefit not only to the Guard's federal mission, but also to their state mission.

"Our time in Poland represents valuable experience that didn't exist in Alaska until we took this challenge," he said. "The 297th RSG is now better prepared to respond to state emergencies or federal deployments."

In fact, their efforts were so well received, they helped extend the mission of Atlantic Resolve to neighboring countries.

"Not only did we help plan the support of Defender 2021 exercises in the Balkan countries of Bulgaria, Greece, and Romania," Schell said, "we also expanded the base support operations mission by initiating support of Atlantic Resolve sites in Lithuania and Latvia based on our success in Poland."

Schell said this was a good opportunity for company grade officers to learn from.

"We had people in 11 different sites," he said. "This experience was good for these officers by empowering them to make decisions, and the way we adapted to things like COVID-19 was super, and it was a great experience to be given that level of autonomy and trust. They performed well, and I was proud of our Soldiers' professionalism and cooperation with our allies in solving problems every day."

Link: <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/390733/alaska-national-guardsmen-return-deployment-poland>

5. Alaska Air National Guard unites 176th Wing squadrons under new brand

Press Release Distribution/March 5

ANCHORAGE, Alaska - March 5, 2021 - PRLog -- The Alaska Air National Guard is uniting the diverse mission sets of the 176th Wing under a new brand known as the Arctic Guardians. They are an elite force of more than 1,500 highly trained and professional airmen stationed at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER) in Anchorage.

The Arctic Guardians stand behind the motto, "Defend, Lift, Save, Serve," and the vision, "Arctic Experts: Right Effects, Right Place, Right Time."

The new brand encompasses the 144th Airlift Squadron, 210th Rescue Squadron, 211th Rescue Squadron, 212th Rescue Squadron, and the 176th Air Defense Squadron, as well as the 11th Rescue Coordination Center and the 176th Force Support Flight/Military Personnel Section. "Defend, Lift, Save, Serve" incorporates the specialist combat, strategic airlift, and search and rescue capabilities of each team while honoring their individual histories and shared legacy.

"We are the arctic experts, dedicated to the safety and defense of the residents of Alaska and the citizens of the United States," said BG Anthony Stratton, Commander of the Arctic Guardians. "We stand sentry for a region that is becoming increasingly important to our allies and adversaries alike as the polar ice melts and opens up sea lanes to commercial and military activity."

The 176th Wing was founded in 1952 by Col Lars Johnson, who started with a pioneering team of 11 enlisted airmen and five officers, including himself. It is now a powerful team of teams.

"We stand on the strong shoulders of those Arctic Guardians who came before us and who built the unit brick-by-brick from a squadron smaller than the flight to the busiest wing in the Air National Guard," said Lt Col Matthew Kirby, the organization's new executive officer.

"The first time I saw the new logo I was amazed by how beautifully it pulled together the rich heritage of the 176th Wing while simultaneously capturing our culture. It includes all our mission sets, and everyone it takes to accomplish these mission sets. I also love how it reflects the Arctic, which is such a critical domain for our state and nation," he continued.

This re-brand comes with a fresh logo that unites the Arctic Guardians with rich symbolism. It features a radial engine that represents the 211th Rescue Squadron, wings shaped like stator blades representing the 144th Airlift Squadron, and strutted skis representing the 210th Rescue Squadron. The circle around the center resembles a radar screen, representing the 176th Air Defense Squadron, while the four stars surrounding Polaris represent the Wing's four groups.

The Arctic Guardians are standing ready to protect the north from the threats of tomorrow.

Link: <https://www.prlog.org/12860703-alaska-air-national-guard-unites-176th-wing-squadrons-under-new-brand.html>

—ALASKA NEWS OF INTEREST—

6. Alaska becomes 1st state to open vaccinations to everyone over 16

ABC news by Mark Osborne/March 9

Alaska is the first state to allow COVID-19 vaccines to any adult who wants one.

"Effective immediately, Alaska will become the 1st state in the nation to allow anyone over the age of 16 to get the COVID-19 vaccine," Gov. Mike Dunleavy said in a post on Twitter Tuesday evening. "This marks a significant step forward in our efforts to put the virus behind us."

You must be either living or working in Alaska to be eligible.

The vaccine will be available to anyone over 16, which is the lowest age authorized by the Food and Drug Administration for use of the Pfizer vaccine. The Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines are available to anyone over 18.

Most states are still requiring specific qualifications for the vaccine, such as seniors, essential workers or those with underlying conditions.

"Nearly one year ago the first positive COVID-19 case arrived in Alaska. Today, our state – because of the undaunted efforts of Alaskans – is leading the nation in vaccinations efforts," Dunleavy added.

On March 3, Dunleavy had opened up vaccines to anyone 55 and older as well as essential workers -- such as teachers, agriculture workers, first responders and the media -- and those with underlying conditions.

Alaska has been allocated 288,000 doses with 170,993 people having received at least one shot and 119,631 completely vaccinated, according to the Department of Health and Human Services.

The state has given the most total doses per 100,000 people in the country, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. With 41,376 doled out, it is one of just two states over 40,000 doses given per 100,000 people -- along with New Mexico.

Alaska, with just shy of 60,000 confirmed cases, ranks 46th-most in the U.S. -- behind only Wyoming, Maine, Hawaii and Vermont in fewest cases, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. Alaska has recorded 291 deaths total, with 38 since Feb. 1. Only Vermont has recorded fewer deaths. The majority of cases and deaths have come in Anchorage.

Link: <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/alaska-1st-state-open-vaccinations-16/story?id=76355027>

—NATION/NATIONAL GUARD NEWS OF INTEREST—

7. Pentagon extends National Guard presence at the Capitol

NPR by Chloe Weiner/March 9

The Pentagon has approved a request to continue National Guard support at the U.S. Capitol through May 23, 2021. About 2,300 troops will remain at the Capitol, which is about half the number currently deployed, the Department of Defense said Tuesday evening.

The National Guard personnel were expected to leave the Capitol on March 12 after remaining there since the deadly Jan. 6 insurrection attempt. But U.S. Capitol Police last week requested a 60-day extension following intelligence that showed a possible security threat from an identified militia group. That threat led the House of Representatives to cancel its March 4 session, though no attack occurred. The U.S. Capitol Police said in a statement it is "extremely grateful" for the Defense Department's partnership in protecting Congress.

The National Guard has been sharply criticized for its handling of the Jan. 6 riots and, in particular, a delayed response that left troops standing by for hours before being authorized to intervene.

The D.C. National Guard's commanding general testified last week that the Department of Defense took more than three hours to approve a "frantic request" for support from USCP.

A review of the attack led by retired Lt. Gen. Russel Honoré recommended that Congress overhaul its security system, suggesting the addition of hundreds of additional police officers and the creation of a rapid response force that could be mobilized quickly for emergencies.

The 13-page report also suggested the installation of a new mobile fencing system at the Capitol and the formation of a new federal agency that would coordinate law enforcement in the Washington, D.C. area.

The Department of Defense said in a statement Tuesday that it would work with USCP to "incrementally reduce the National Guard footprint as conditions allow" during the extended period.

"We thank the National Guard for its support throughout this mission, as well as for its significant efforts across the nation in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic," the statement said.

Link: <https://www.npr.org/2021/03/09/975479113/pentagon-extends-national-guard-presence-at-the-capitol>

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