



For Immediate Release
By: Spc. Margaret J. Moonin

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Alaska Army National Guardsmen Assist with Arctic Care ***Aviators battle weather conditions to transport doctors and supplies to villages***

BETHEL, Alaska—A thick, wet blanket of snow covers the rotors of three Alaska Army National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, as winter storm clouds move in, threatening to compromise the day's mission of Operation Arctic Care 2009.

As part of Operation Arctic Care 2009, the Alaska Army National Guard's 1/207th Aviation Soldiers have been tasked with transporting teams of military health care professionals, supplies and equipment to remote villages in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta from March 6-18. The annual joint forces medical readiness training exercise is designed to simulate military and civilian joint medical outreach operations in times of crisis, conflict or disaster.

Poised outside the Alaska Army National Guard hanger in Bethel, the pilots once again re-evaluate the day's mission. With quickly changing weather, Guard aviators discuss any possible shift in plans with U.S. Navy Capt. Patty Reisdorfer, Operation Arctic Care 2009 lead planner.

"The weather has been our biggest hurdle but even that has made this mission a success," said Capt. Todd Miller, B Company, 1/207th Aviation company commander. "With the weather forcing our crews to move things around, my pilots and crew chiefs have had to think on their feet to get the job done and meet the needs of Arctic Care."

More than 200 active-duty, Guard and Reserve personnel from the Army, Alaska Army National Guard, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and uniformed officers with the U.S. Public Health Service have come together in conjunction with the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation to provide no-cost health care, health care education and veterinary services to residents of 11 remote and under-served Alaska Native villages throughout the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta area.

The villages taking part in this year's Arctic Care are Alakanuk, Atmauthluak, Chevak, Hooper Bay, Kalskag, Kwethluk, Kwigillingok, Mountain Village, Newtok, Quinhagak and Toksook Bay. Because of the remoteness of their locations, some of these villages regularly face extreme and challenging weather conditions.

“We have a good crew of people out here doing their darndest to do the right thing and get these doctors and supplies into these villages as safe and timely as possible under adverse snow storms in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta,” said Sgt. 1st Class James Morris, B Company, 1/207th Aviation platoon sergeant.

Morris, who is also a standardization instructor for UH-60 Black Hawk crew chiefs, has been working with crew chiefs and mechanics to accommodate the last-minute schedule changes by quickly moving personnel, equipment and supplies from one Black Hawk to another.

“The amount of cargo our Black Hawks can carry in one trip is more than double what a civilian helicopter can carry,” Morris said. “Our crews are doing an amazing job of moving the cargo on and off the aircraft and helping to ensure this mission is a success. The communication skills and the handling of difficult weather conditions in a safely maintained field environment will help us in the future with evasive maneuvers in war time environments.”

According to Warrant Officer Nyles Harrison, B Company, 1/207th Aviation, UH-60 Black Hawk instructor, pilot and instrument flight examiner, the most important thing that Soldiers are learning from their involvement in Operation Arctic Care 2009 is crew coordination.

“Our crews need to be able to communicate with each other on the best possible solution to any problems they may face while flying,” Harrison said. “They have had to rethink and problem solve because of short-notice missions and weather conditions, making crew coordination essential to the smooth execution of each mission.

Though the crews of 1/207th Aviation have faced many obstacles during Operation Arctic Care 2009, they have faced each with tenacity and team work, helping them to successfully complete their missions.

“All the credit for any success we have had goes to our all of our crews,” Morris said. “They work their hearts out to make sure this mission is a success and everything is running smoothly.”

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Photos and cutlines can be found at <http://www.dmva.alaska.gov/gallery.shtml>