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## **Alaska Army Guard Mechanics Ensure Operation Arctic Care Success**

### ***Guard Soldiers dedicated to keeping Black Hawks on schedule***

**BETHEL, Alaska**—Less than one week after Alaska Army National Guard Soldiers with the 1-207th Aviation arrived in Bethel, they were in full-swing, keeping five UH-60 Black Hawks running smoothly in support of Operation Arctic Care 2009.

Operation Arctic Care is an annual joint force medical readiness training exercise designed to simulate military and civilian joint medical outreach operations in times of crisis, conflict or disaster while providing no-cost veterinary and medical services to local residents.

Facing extreme and challenging conditions, pilots and crew chiefs show up at the Alaska Army National Guard Armory in Bethel at 7 a.m. to begin transporting supplies, personnel and equipment to one of 11 remote villages, while mechanics and crew chiefs-in-training arrive in the afternoon to work late into the night completing required maintenance and repairs to Black Hawks.

With a damaged rotary blade in need of repair on one Black Hawk and a worn-out filter in another, the crew chiefs and mechanics are learning first-hand how to deal with multiple obstacles at once and how to be successful in stressful situations. Skills that will help them prepare for real world scenarios.

“One of the great things they will get the chance to do is change a rotary blade,” said Capt. Todd Miller, company commander of B Company, 1-207th Aviation. “In my seven years of flying I have only seen it done twice. So the crew that is getting to work on that is going to get an experience that they would normally never see as a traditional Guard Soldier.”

Safety is paramount in the military, so each of the five Black Hawks receive in-depth inspections, maintenance and repairs to prepare it for the next day missions.

“You don’t get this much time over a drill weekend or this kind of real-world experience to prepare new Soldiers for future deployments and real world missions,” said Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Robert Nunnally, 1-207th Aviation, platoon sergeant. “This is an excellent experience for everyone involved.”

Every Black Hawk is inspected daily, every 10 hours, every 14 days, every 40 hours, and every 120 hours, with each inspection more detailed and in-depth than the previous.

“The crew has the opportunity to get some unique training that they might not have had the chance to receive if they hadn’t been participating in Arctic Care,” Nunnally said. “Because of the increased amount of flying time during Arctic Care, the exercise has given many of the new Soldiers the opportunity to do some of the more in-depth inspections that they don’t normally get to.”

With every flight the helicopter runs the potential of something going wrong, so it’s the maintenance crew’s job to go over the entire aircraft to find any debris, cracks, damages, oil leaks and normal wear and tear prior to the pilots going up again.

“Our Mission is to safely transport teams and supplies to villages in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta,” said Miller. “Safety is my main priority because if just one aircraft goes down, the mission has failed. The Soldiers working on the maintenance of these Black Hawks work extremely hard to ensure that safety.”

During Operation Arctic Care, the Soldiers of the 1-207th Aviation are working diligently and skillfully to ensure the safe and successful transportation of more than 200 uniformed service members, supplies, and equipment between Bethel and 11 villages; Alakanuk, Atmauthluak, Chevak, Hooper Bay, Kalskag, Kwethluk, Kwigillingok, Mountain Village, Newtok, Quinhagak and Toksook Bay.

“One of the biggest pieces of this mission is not just the pilots and the crew chiefs but it’s the maintenance crew,” Miller said. “They are getting some of the best training possible while they are here and putting everything they have into the success of this mission.”