



For Immediate Release  
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April 1, 2009

## **Army Guard Aviators Rescue Snowmachiners near Bethel**

*After several days of searching Guard finds two Pilot Station men lost in snow storm*

**CAMP DENALI, Alaska** – The Alaska Army National Guard’s 207th Aviation out of Bethel successfully recovered two lost snowmachiners 43-miles southwest of Bethel near Tuntuliak, Tuesday.

The two men were traveling on snowmachines from Pilot Station to Bethel when they got lost in a snow storm and veered off course. Alaska State Troopers began organizing a search for the missing snowmachiners on Sunday, however due to difficult weather conditions and limited resources, AST called the 11th Rescue Coordination Center at 10:15 a.m. on Monday to ask for assistance.

“Because the reduced visibility, caused by dense clouds and blowing snow, created difficulty with flying the Alaska State Trooper’s fixed wing aircraft, they needed the assistance of the Army Guard out of Bethel to put more eyes in the sky,” said 1st Lt. Peter Pagni, an Alaska Army National Guard pilot.

At approximately noon the RCC dispatched a UH-60 Black Hawk out of Bethel to assist in the search and rescue of the two snowmachiners.

After hours of searching, between Pilot Station and Bethel, 207th aviators suspended their search until the next morning.

At 11:23 a.m., Tuesday, the 207th Aviation launched again and located the two men over 6 miles from Tuntuliak after a commercial aircraft reported seeing two people walking through the tundra approximately 43-miles southwest of Bethel.

“They were way west of where they should have been, dehydrated and fatigued,” Pagni said. “Some how, they just skipped right over Bethel and several other villages during the storm.”

The Army Guard Soldiers loaded the two men onto the Black Hawk and transported them back to Bethel where they were released uninjured to Alaska State Troopers.

Every year hundreds of rural Alaskan travel from remote villages into central hubs, by way of snowmachines, four-wheelers, boats, and aircraft. It is such a common occurrence that most don’t

think about the hazards they face when taking a quick 20-40 mile trip over some of Alaska's most extreme terrains.

“Many of the travelers from the rural communities do not make specific mapped out travel plans. This can make searching for an overdue traveler very difficult for everyone involved,” Pagni said. “Most times they do not have a set departure time or arrival time and take several different routes or detours to get to their destinations.”

Alaska National Guard Soldiers and Airmen rescue hundreds of residents and visitors to this state every year, who venture out into the Last Frontier unprepared for the dangerous terrain and unforgiving weather.

“We don't mind going out there and rescuing people. We are proud to do it. Search and rescue is the best part of our job because we get to keep people safe,” Pagni said. “I just wish there was more public education on the proper procedures everyone should take before traveling in the Alaska countryside.”