

# The Alaska Guardsman

A publication by the 134th Public Affairs Detachment  
for the Alaska Army National Guard

## Guard Mechanics Ensure Operation Arctic Care Success *Guard Soldiers dedicated to keeping Black Hawks on schedule*

Story by: Spc. Margaret J. Moonin  
134th Public Affairs Detachment

**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

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Photo by: Spc. Margaret J. Moonin, 134th Public Affairs Detachment

**Ice Break:** Soldiers with the Alaska Army National Guard 1-207th Aviation pick away at a large lip of ice that formed at the base of the Alaska National Guard Black Hawk Hanger door in Bethel due to a winter storm that hit the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta at the start of Operation Arctic Care 2009. The Soldiers worked diligently to remove the ice in order to prevent possible damage to the UH-60 Black Hawks while taxiing in and out of the hanger.

# Guard Women Run, Walk to Raise Funds to Fight Cancer

## Staff Reports

*134th Public Affairs Detachment*

Registration is now open for this year's Alaska Run for Women, and an Alaska Guardsman is rallying women throughout the state to participate.

Pfc. Michelle Brown of the 134th Public Affairs Detachment has organized the Pretty in Pink team to get women of the Alaska Army National Guard involved in Alaska's premier women's running event scheduled for June 13 in Anchorage.

The annual event raises money for breast cancer research, support, detection and awareness programs.

"Joining this team is an opportunity for women in the Alaska National Guard to sup-

port this cause, while also building camaraderie and promoting physical fitness," Brown said.

Brown says the team is open to other women besides Soldiers; any potential Guard recruit, as well as friends and family can join the team.

Events include a 1 mile run/walk and 5 mile timed and untimed run. Although women are walking and running, men are encouraged to contribute as volunteers, cheerleaders or donors.

There is more to the Alaska Run for Women than competitive running – women gather from across the city, state and beyond to run, walk, laugh and reflect, supporting and encouraging one another as well as those who are battling or have survived breast cancer.

All of the donations collected go directly to support breast cancer programs; 70 percent of the funds raised stays in Alaska and the remaining 30 percent is sent to a national foundation for breast cancer research. Since the Run's inception in 1992, more than \$2 million has been raised.

To participate, register online by May 15 at [www.akrffw.org](http://www.akrffw.org) and be sure to indicate the official team name, "Pretty in Pink - AK Army Guard/PenAir" in the appropriate spot.

After registering, contact Brown at [michelleb@penair.com](mailto:michelleb@penair.com) or (907)830-3727 with your T-shirt size (S,M,L, or XL) for your free Army National Guard Pretty in Pink Team shirt, courtesy of the G-RAP program.

Background courtesy of [www.akrffw.org](http://www.akrffw.org)

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## Alaska Army National Guard Command Priorities

1. Recruiting and **Retention**
2. Officers Evaluation Reports and Non-Commissioned Officer Evaluation Reports
3. Command Logistics Review Team Expanded (CLRT-X)
4. 38th Troop Command / 297th BFSB Transformation Operational Order Timelines
5. Personnel Management

# Mackey Protégé Finishes Iditarod, Places 37<sup>th</sup> in Iditarod XXXVII

By: Spc. Paizley Ramsey, 134<sup>th</sup>  
Public Affairs Detachment

**CAMP DENALI, Alaska**—Alaska Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Harry Alexie crossed the burlled arch in Nome on March 21 at 4:40 a.m. to finish the 2009 Iditarod with 10 of his 16 dogs.

Alexie finished the more than 1,100-mile long race in 12 days, 14 hours and 40 seconds, putting him in 37<sup>th</sup> place out of 52 finishers. He won the ExxonMobil 37<sup>th</sup> Iditarod Award in which the oil company presented an Iditarod gold coin valued at \$2,500 to Alexie for being the 37<sup>th</sup> musher to arrive in Nome.

“We are absolutely pleased with Staff Sgt. Alexie’s performance in the Iditarod,” said Lt. Col. Joseph Lawendowski, Alaska Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention commander. “For anyone to finish a race with a team of dogs requiring constant care in extreme weather for more than 1,000 miles it’s an awesome accomplishment. His final standing exceeded our expectations.”

As a rookie Iditarod sled dog racer, Alexie is elated about his completion of Iditarod XXXVII and considers the experience a personal victory.

“To me it was a once in a lifetime experience, and I’m proud to say that I finished,” Alexie said. “Anything I start I must finish is what I tell myself. I found along the way a determination and a willpower that I didn’t know I had.”

“The Last Great Race on Earth” is a test of endurance, personal courage and mental



Photos by: Brandon Oursler, National Guard Strength Readiness Support Center

**Soldier and Musher:** Staff Sergeant Harry Alexie is the first Alaska Army National Guardsman to run and finish the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race. Alexie finished in 37<sup>th</sup> place, winning the ExxonMobil 37<sup>th</sup> Iditarod Award in which the oil company presented Alexie with an Iditarod gold coin valued at \$2,500.

acuity, and it did not go without its struggles for Alexie, who often found himself pushing the boundaries of his own limits.

“It was tough,” Alexie said. “We started in mild temperatures, but once we hit the Yukon River we started facing head winds from the north for about 130 miles. At that point, I felt like turning around, but I knew I was representing the Alaska Army National Guard and myself, and if I quit, all the training would mean nothing.”

Alexie trained with now three-time consecutive Iditarod winner Lance Mackey, who won this year’s race and finished on March 18 at 11:38 a.m., to prepare for the epic race.

“The training definitely helped Alexie,” Lawendowski said. “But, this guy’s got a lot of heart, and I think his determination and effort is what pulled him through.”



**Guard Dog:** This member of the Staff Sergeant Harry Alexie Alaska Army National Guard team howls into the Alaska wilderness while taking a break along the 2009 Iditarod Sled Dog Race Trail.

# Army Guard Aviators Rescue Snowmachiners near Bethel

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

Story by Spc. Margaret J. Moonin  
134th Public Affairs Detachment

**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

*See Rescue, Page 6*

## And the 2009 Soldier of the Year is...



Photo by: Pfc. Michelle D. Brown, 134th Public Affairs Detachment

**Warriors:** Alaska Army National Guard Soldiers from left: Staff Sgt. Duane Ostrowski, 49th Missile Defense Battalion; Spc. James Bates, 49th Missile Defense Battalion; Pvt. 1st. Class Justin Sekerak, 1/297th Cavalry Scouts; and Pvt. Salvadore Sutton, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop stand in formation during an awards ceremony held at the Alaska National Guard Armory April 19 as they await the results from the annual Non-Commissioned Officer/Soldier of the Year competition. Ostrowski was named NCO of the Year and Sekerak was named Soldier of the Year. Bates and Sutton were recognized for their dedication to the event. The four soldiers participated in a rigorous competition that tested their general army knowledge, physical fitness, marksmanship, land navigation, warrior skills and combat water survival skills. Later this spring Ostrowski and Sekerak are slated to compete against other soldiers from the northwest region in a similar NCO/Soldier of the Year competition. "The Soldiers I competed against were top-notch," said Sekerak. "I look forward to competing next year and getting more soldiers involved. Scouts out. Hooah!"

## MECHANICS, *from page 1*

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



Photos by: Spc. Margaret J. Moonin, 134th Public Affairs Detachment

**Tire Repair:** Pvt. Gilberto Soto-Mayor, 1-207th Aviation mechanic, works on the rear wheel of a UH-60 Black Hawk under the guidance of Sergeants First Class James Morris and Robert Nunnally, both 1-207th Aviation, platoon sergeants, during Operation Arctic Care 2009.

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



**Busted Blade:** Pfc. John Vogel, 1-207th Aviation, UH-60 Black Hawk crew chief inspects a rotor blade for damage prior to installation at Alaska Army National Guard Hanger in Bethel. Vogel is one of the many Soldiers with the 1-207th Aviation participating in Operation Arctic Care 2009, a Joint Forces medical readiness and logistics training initiative focused on providing health care and educational activities to 11 remote and underserved Alaska Native communities throughout the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta.

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.”

## RESCUE, *from page 4*

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.”



**Who:** Service members who served or have current orders to serve in Iraq, Afghanistan or Kuwait are eligible to participate.

**What:** 3rd Annual Armed Services Combat Fishing Tournament in Seward

**Where:** Seward, Alaska

**When:** May 21, 2009

To get a seat on a boat and participate, service members need to call 552-9622 and give the following information:

- Where they served
- Two contact phone numbers
- Rank
- Branch of service
- First and last name

Notification calls will be made on May 1st. This is a first-come, first-serve event that provides a charter fishing trip for free for the day. As of April 20th there were only approximately 80 seats left!! Any questions and for the most up-to-date information please call 552-9622 directly. Also, if you have deployed, but not to one of the locations above, please call 552-9622 and talk to the event organizers directly. They may decide to make exceptions.