



**PRESS RELEASE
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May 19, 2015

By Sgt. Balinda O'Neal

Alaska National Guard

Alaska Army National Guard supports "Operation Rock and a Hard Place"

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska – Members of the Alaska National Guard teamed up with Alaskan Command, U.S. Army Alaska and other federal and state entities to support Operation Rock and a Hard Place in Homer, Alaska, March 19-22.

Operation Rock and a Hard Place is a defense support of civil authorities exercise managed by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services. The exercise scenario consisted of state and federal resources responding to the community of Homer and the Kenai Peninsula Borough following a significant landslide that damaged Homer's South Peninsula Hospital.

The mass casualty-causing scenario required the rapid medical response of the state's DHSS emergency response capabilities and the movement of patients from the damaged hospital to the Central Peninsula Hospital in Soldotna, Alaska.

"The training missions consisted of air movement of DHSS equipment and employees to and from Homer and air command and control over the exercise," said Capt. Kate Merriam, commander of B Company, 1st Battalion, 207th Aviation Regiment. "Defense support of civil authorities is a mission essential task list task for B Company, so partnering with DHSS for realistic training was mutually beneficial."

A mission essential task list is an end-state list of battle-focused tasks that a unit must accomplish in combat. It is used in training to prepare a unit for combat.

The AKARNG, along with U.S. Army Alaska provided defense support to civil authorities through patient movement with UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters. Department of Defense support for domestic emergencies, law enforcement support and other domestic activities can be requested by civil authorities; DSCA's primary purpose is to save lives, alleviate suffering and protect property.

"What's really important about this exercise is that in any type of event, no one entity can bridge the gap; they can't do it on their own," said Andy Jones, DHSS's health emergency response operations

manager. “We had to work together to actually make it happen and when you bring all your resources together in a nice coordinated fashion you are going to have a really good operation.”

In addition to collaboration between local and state responders, the exercise improved interoperability and an element of the federal Alaska disaster response playbook, specifically, the patient movement courses of action on the Kenai Peninsula.

“We have never done full-scale patient movement operations at a local level like this,” Jones said. “This is also the first time we have ever deployed what we call a type one incident management team, a very large scaled team of about 30-plus people.”

The South Peninsula Hospital worked with the local jurisdiction, the Kenai Peninsula Borough and the State of Alaska to request the state health and medical incident management team. DHSS partnered with several other agencies to include the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, Alaska State Defense Force, Homer Volunteer Fire Department and numerous volunteers.

“I’ve never seen so much community in play,” Jones said. “We provided training six months in advance and everyone is doing this on their own dime and training hours. That really shows a want and need to play in this exercise.”

“We do this [disaster operations] twice a year to include Alaska Shield every two years,” explained Jones. “The more participation in play, the better we will be at responding. I’m already looking forward to the next exercise.”

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Cutlines:

150321-Z-CA180-102

Members of the Alaska National Guard supported Operation Rock and a Hard Place in Homer March 19-22. The defense support of civil authorities exercise was managed by the Department of Health and Social Services and partnered with several agencies to include the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, Alaska State Defense Force, South Peninsula Hospital, Homer Volunteer Fire Department and numerous volunteers. Training missions consisted of movement of DHSS equipment to and from Homer, air command and control over the exercise site, and movement of simulated emergency medical equipment and personnel. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Balinda O'Neal)

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