



## **PRESS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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By Tech. Sgt. JosephJ Prouse, 129th Rescue Wing

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### **Air Guard pararescuemen hunker down in Miami in preparation for rescue**

**HURLBURT FIELD, Fla.**— Taking a proactive approach to supporting the aftermath of Hurricane Irma, the 129th Rescue Wing from Moffett Air National Guard Base, Calif., combined with other search and rescue units, preemptively staged personnel, equipment and aircraft at Hurlburt Air Field, Air Force Base before the storm made land fall on Florida.

To get even further ahead of the rescue efforts the crews and Guardian Angel (GA) pararescue teams loaded two 129th Rescue Wing MC-130P Combat Shadow aircraft and flew deeper into Irma's projected devastation pathway.

"The first mission to support this disaster is happening before the storm has a chance to disrupt our transportation capabilities," said Col Fredrick Foote, commander, 129th Operations Group.

Two GA teams from the Alaska Air National Guard, 212th Rescue Squadron are prepositioning themselves and staging equipment 20 miles out side of Miami in a safety bunker rated for a Category 5 Hurricane.

"This gives us an immediate capability once the storm passes to begin ground and water search and rescue operations," said Maj Jay Cossello, commander of a personnel recovery task force. "For two reasons, we will be geographically closer as soon as the storm passes and if we try to drive in after the weather clears the roads, it will be jammed with everyone trying to return to there homes."

It's not just able-bodied pararescuemen being dropped off. The search and rescue units deploy with an entire MC-130 aircraft full of rescue equipment, tactical vehicles, and boats, along with enough food, water, and fuel to sustain the members for five days without a resupply.

"Fortunately we have re-supply chains already in place so we can continue to provide rescue efforts until they are no longer required," said Cossello.

The 121st Rescue Squadron average more than 55 saves a year, which is more than one a week and they do it even in the middle of an Alaskan winter. The unit specializes in harsh weather, and is familiar with hurricanes such as Rita and the most recent, Harvey. This kind of forward positioning puts highly trained assets on the ground, prepared and ready to support.

"We have a lot of long range imaging capabilities, but putting people on the ground makes for an increase in the damage assessment to be able to bring in more recovery personnel and equipment," said Cossello. He also went on to give advice to anyone stranded. "If the cell phones are still up then call the hotlines and we will be in communication with all the coordinating authorities. If that's not the case and you can't call, get yourself visible to the open sky and we can find you."

The Alaska and California Air National Guard search and rescue units working together is summed up in combining their mottos "always ready always there, that others may live."

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#### PHOTOS

1. **Attached pdf** includes story and a small selection of low-resolution photos for viewing on screen.
2. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution photos. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.) <https://dvidshub.net/r/I5uf54>
3. **DVIDS link** for additional photos <https://dvidshub.net/r/e48ndt>



Coast Guard and Air Force personnel remove supplies and gear from an Air Force HC-130 aircraft at Coast Guard Air Station Miami in Opalocka, Fla., Sept. 9, 2017. Air Force Pararescuemen from the 212th Rescue Squadron prepare to respond alongside federal, state and local first responders in the rescue efforts for people in distress as Hurricane Irma passes through south Florida. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Mark Barney.)



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