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Alaska Guardsmen conduct cold weather training in Wasilla

Wasilla, Alaska — Alaska is normally known for its bitter cold weather which Soldiers in the Alaska Army National Guard train to operate in. Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 297th Regional Support Group, enjoyed unusually warmer weather in which to complete their cold weather training at the Alcantra Armory here Jan. 17-20, 2018.

Soldiers completed training on small unit support vehicles, Humvees, arctic ten-man tent, creating an improvised shelter and proper use of the seven layer clothing system.

“Arctic training is one of the focuses of the Alaska National Guard,” said Capt. Jamie Odom, HHC commander. “These skills can help in an emergency situation.”

Soldiers in the Alaska Army National Guard live and play in the mountains that surround them. These cold weather skills are not only a military requirement for the Arctic Warrior to have; it can help them survive in an emergency while interacting with their great state.

Upon arrival, HHC immediately proceeded to set up tents needed for braving the elements. These tent come with a military tent heater stove, that when properly set up and watched by a fireguard, can keep Soldiers warm through a bitter cold night.

Sgt. 1st Class Jacob Lingnau, operations non-commissioned officer in charge, taught a class on assembling the stove that goes in the tent. Bleeding fuel lines, setting up chimneys and actually starting a fire in a stove is not something everyone is comfortable with. If the stove is not set up correctly or properly vented, it can be detrimental to training. All sections set up their tents and stoves without issue after receiving training.

The extreme cold weather system is a seven layers system that is designed to keep Soldiers warm and dry through all weather conditions. Knowing how to properly wear it is important. There is a saying that it is better to have more layers on than not enough. With this set up Soldiers can add layers and subtract depending on their needs to ensure they stay warm.

“It was a great refresher training to work with Soldiers in regards to preventative maintenance checks and services and participate in drivers training,” said Spc. Dana Haddox, a wheeled vehicle mechanic.

The SUSV is one of the ways Solders can be mobile in an arctic environment. It is meant to go across all terrain features found in Alaska. The proper completion of preventative maintenance checks and

services can help to ensure a vehicle is operational. Soldiers were taught how to drive this vehicle on a trail behind the armory with a seasoned instructor next to them.

“We in the Alaska National Guard operate in austere and harsh environment,” said Maj. Luke Bushatz, operations officer. “Knowing how to build an improvised shelter is a key Soldiers task that can save lives.”

Improvised shelters can be many things, a snow cave, an igloo, a shelter made out of a poncho. It is a shelter that is made up of the things that you have on hand. Bushatz taught Soldiers how to dig out a snow cave with a snow saw and shovel. Knowing how to properly dig out a snow cave can save a life in the arctic. Depth, with and angle depends on what you need the snow cave for. If you are only using it at night, it might only need to be as deep as you are tall. If you plan to use it more than once digging it in further may be necessary. There are a few things to consider when building a snow cave, does the sun hit the snow all day or which way is the wind blowing and finally what kind of snow are you digging into. When using a snow cave for more than one day, it is important to always check structural integrity prior to going to settling in.

“There is a lot about improvised shelters that I did not know,” said Haddock. “I know this information will be useful in the future, in case of an emergency.”

On the second night there, some Soldiers took the opportunity to sleep outside in their own improvised shelters. 2nd Lt. Zachary Huckstep, supply and services officer, took the opportunity to make an improvised igloo to sleep in from the snow he found at the end of the building. Other Soldiers bedded down in just their sleep system in a small stand of trees, and a small shallow depression in the ground to keep them out of the wind.

“Having everyone here, and pitching in with all of the training helped our unit bond and it increased our esprit de corps,” said Odom. “Due to mission requirements the HHC does not always have the opportunity to have everyone drill at the same time.”

“We live in an arctic environment, we need to not just be able to service and stay warm, we need to be able to fight and win,” said Odom.

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PHOTOS

1. **Attached pdf** includes story and a small selection of low-resolution photos for viewing on screen.
2. **Flickr link** includes an event album with the complete selection of full-resolution, free downloadable images. (May not be accessible from all military computers.)
3. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution photos. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.)