



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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By Spc. Michael Risinger

## **Donnelly Training Area used as cold-weather eyrie for Arctic Eagle 2018**

**FORT GREELY, Alaska** — Approximately 600 Guardsmen from the United States and Canada participated in training at the Donnelly Training Area as part of Exercise Arctic Eagle 2018, from Feb. 25 to March 8.

The training allowed participants to exercise in cold weather and high latitude environments, conduct arctic skills training, live fire exercises, situational training exercises, and build international partnerships.

“With the increasing interest in the arctic domain, we have to be ready to be able to maneuver in any kind of weather,” said Brig. Gen. Joseph Streff, commander of the Alaska Army National Guard. “This is our opportunity to use this event for our arctic skills training and make sure that our equipment works, that our Soldiers are trained and that we have the capacity to meet both our state and federal missions.”

Participants were Guardsmen from Alaska, Wyoming, Vermont, Colorado, and Army Reservists from Canada.

The exercise commenced with three days of arctic skills training, which consisted of classroom instruction on proper usage of seven-layer winter gear and cold weather injury prevention.

“I think the biggest surprise for our guys is the cold weather system,” said Capt. Christopher Beyrle, commander of the Colorado National Guard’s 220th Military Police Company. “We’ve had the seven layer system. We’ve never had to utilize it in cold weather; a lot of wet weather and moderately cold but nothing like we’ve seen here,” he said. “If you ask any of the Soldiers they will say that they are very impressed and very pleased at how well it holds up, especially with the negative 40-degree temperatures that we’ve seen at DTA.”

Each squad was issued an Ahkio Group, a sled with an arctic 10-man tent and other squad cold-weather supplies, to sleep in and utilize throughout the exercise. The sleds have a harness system so that a single squad member can pull it behind them.

“A regular military unit should be able to set up an arctic 10-man tent within five minutes. If we set up in the prairies where it is negative 40 to 50 there you really have 10 to 15 minutes before frostbite sets in,” said Pvt. Ajai Chhina, an infantryman with the Canadian Royal West Minister Regiment. “We try and be proactive. If you’re not proactive, you’re frozen.”

Even with previous training, groups found it difficult to set up the tents when the temperatures were below freezing. The ground beneath the tents were frozen to more than three feet deep.

Alaska Army Guardsmen with B Company, 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment, started building ground around the tent stakes instead of driving the tent stakes into the ground. First a mixture of gravel, larger rocks, and snow were build up around the tent stake. Water was then poured over the mixture and left to freeze. These make-shift mounds proved more than adequate to secure the tents.

“We're taking what the army teaches us in our cold weather leader courses but also the Western Alaska guys are teaching us tips and tricks that we've never known before,” said 1st Sgt. Russell Throckmorton, first sergeant of B Co., 1-297th Inf.

Each tent has a stove to keep it warm, as well as a smaller squad-sized cooking stove, which was mostly used to heat water. Hot water was used in water bottles to keep them from freezing, to help secure tent stakes to the ground, and to re-hydrate food in the cold-weather MREs.

Cold-weather MREs are capable of being eaten even when frozen. Due to the large amount of calories spent keeping a body warm in the arctic, the cold-weather MREs also include more calories than a traditional MRE.

“They have really good sides. Its nice to get some warm food, especially after being out in the cold all day,” said Pfc. Collin Johanknecht, an infantryman with the B Co., 1-297th Inf. “There's some nice things about them that you won't find in the regular MREs but at the same time you miss some of the main meals from the standard MREs.”

Soldiers were also trained on proper usage of snow machines and Small Unit Support Vehicles. SUSVs are track vehicles capable of speeds up to 33 miles per hour. While they were mainly used for troop transportation and warmth, a SUSV was used to pull a bus up a snow covered hill.

“What we've been focused on is not just surviving in the arctic but actually thriving. We've been really focused on maintaining a battle rhythm by keeping our guys fed and keeping them warm,” said Throckmorton. “Any of these Soldiers are tough enough to cold bag it for a night or cold bag it for a week but what we're learning is sustainability by being able to cook our own food and stay warm at night. It makes us better, stronger, and faster Soldiers.”

Soldiers performed dry and live-fire training and training with blank rounds. Routine maneuvers require different energy levels when wearing arctic gear. Vehicles and weapons have adverse reactions in extreme cold-weather.

“Our mechanics, as well versed as they are at repairing our trucks, they've never had to operate or perform maintenance in these types of conditions,” said Beyrle. “They are learning a lot.”

Realistic training in cold weather conditions challenges participants to test field-craft skills, remote communications capability, and validate arctic transportation capabilities.

“There is a lot of great enthusiasm with the Soldiers and I certainly appreciate that because when it gets cold and windy, things can get a little arduous and difficult,” said Streff. “I've seen where everyone's pulling together and having fun. All in all, I think its a good training event.”

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## **PHOTOS and VIDEO**

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.)

<https://www.dvidshub.net/image/4181742/canadian-response-force-joins-arctic-eagle-2018>

<https://www.dvidshub.net/image/4183062/snow-water-arctic-eagle-2018>

4. **DVIDS links** to video.

<https://dvidshub.net/r/aslfma>

<https://dvidshub.net/r/awlo5i>

<https://dvidshub.net/r/cczej7>



**180301-Z-JS600-1073**

Soldiers of the Canadian Royal West Minister Regiment review response to contact tactics during Arctic Eagle 2018 at the Donnelly Training Area outside of Fort Greely, Alaska March 1, 2018. The goals of Arctic Eagle 2018 are for participating forces to operate in a joint, interagency, intergovernmental and multinational environment; assess ability to conduct sustained operations in arctic conditions, and integrate new and emerging capabilities. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Risinger/Released)



**180302-Z-JS600-1236**

Alaska National Guardsman Staff Sgt. James Bruce, of B Co., 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment prepares to heat snow over a squad cooking heater while other snow melts over the 10-man squad tent heater during Arctic Eagle 2018 at the Donnelly Training Area outside of Fort Greely, Alaska, March 2, 2018. Heated water is used for drinking water, in cold-weather MREs, and to hold tent stakes in place by mixing with other materials and allowing them to freeze in place. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Risinger /Released)



**180228-Z-JS600-1081**

Guardsmen of the 220th Military Police Company out of Colorado engage in convoy movements in Small Unit Support Vehicles and Humvees during Arctic Eagle 2018 at the Donnelly Training Area outside of Fort Greely, Alaska Feb. 28, 2018. Realistic training in cold weather conditions challenge participants to test field-craft skills, remote communications capability, and validate arctic transportation capabilities. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Risinger/Released)