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## **Alaska National Guardsmen support Arctic Ocean Ice Exercise**

**JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska** — To most people – even Alaskans who are accustomed to the cold – the North Pole might as well be the surface of the moon in terms of its remoteness and hostility to the prospects of human survival.

Whereas the South Pole is located over the bedrock of the Antarctic continental land mass, the North Pole is an unmoored collection of perpetually shifting ice sheets covering the inky depths of the Arctic Ocean. The only thing that is permanent there is the frigid air.

When the cargo ramp of the 211th Rescue Squadron HC-130J Combat King II opened, the full force of the North Pole cold spilled into the aircraft's interior hold.

Alaska Air National Guard Maj. Brock Roden, a combat rescue officer with the 212th Rescue Squadron, stood up under the burden of a survival rucksack rigged between his legs. His face was wrapped tightly in a thermal mask to ward off flash frostbite.

When the call was given to jump, Roden and his stick of Guardian Angels waddled like penguin parachutists toward the edge of the ramp and stepped into the minus 28-degree Fahrenheit air. After he verified he was descending under a fully deployed parachute canopy, Roden scanned the landscape below to ensure he wouldn't touch down in open water or a craggy convergence of overlapping sea ice.

Once he landed, Roden's primary mission began: linking up with Arctic Sustainment Package equipment at the U.S. Navy's Ice Camp Skate in an effort to survive and thrive in some of the most foreboding environmental conditions on the planet.

More than 50 Alaska National Guardsmen supported the Navy's Ice Exercise several hundred miles north of the Alaska coastline February and March 2018. The training was linked to the Alaska National Guard's Arctic Eagle 2018, a statewide exercise involving national, state and local agencies designed to provide opportunities for participants to conduct sustained operations in Arctic conditions.

The Alaska Air National Guard's 176th Wing supported preparation for the exercise with airdrop missions by partnering with U.S. Marine Corps riggers from 1st Air Delivery Platoon, Landing Support

Company, Combat Logistics Regiment 17, 1st Marine Logistics Group, to palletize U.S. Navy equipment and conduct air drop operations via a 249th Airlift Squadron C-17 Globemaster III aircraft on to the Beaufort Sea.

The Arctic Sustainment Package is a rapidly deployable air-droppable package, including Guardian Angels, that can provide shelter, heat, transportation, fuel and food for 28 people for up to six and a half days in extreme Arctic conditions.

“This was the first time the Arctic Sustainment Package has been dropped from our new HC-130J after receiving four new models last year,” said Alaska Air National Guard Lt. Col. Eric Budd, 211th RQS commander. “The ASP has been dropped out of a C-17 before, but it was finally nice to drop it out of our aircraft.”

The package was a key piece of the exercise for Airmen of the 212th RQS as well.

“The PJ training objective is to exercise and validate use of the Arctic Sustainment Package in a remote, austere Arctic environment such as the icepack of the Arctic Ocean,” Roden said.

The officer said his team verified seemingly small things such as using camp stoves with liquid fuel versus white gas. Little things can become critically important in the Arctic, and having an operating stove can mean the difference between enjoying a hot meal or trying to eat a frozen entree.

Because PJs are skilled medics, Roden said they also trained in maintaining intravenous infusion bags and monitoring the health of the 28 people at the camp.

Ice Camp Skate is named after the attack submarine USS Skate, which was the first submarine to break through the ice March 17, 1959.

Submarines that participated in the exercise were the Seawolf-class fast-attack submarine USS Connecticut (SSN 22) from Bangor, Washington; the Los Angeles-class fast attack submarine USS Hartford (SSN 768) from Groton, Connecticut; and the Royal Navy's Trafalgar-class HMS Trenchant.

“The first [training] objective is conduct Arctic readiness of our submarine force,” said U.S. Navy Rear Adm. James Pitts, commander of the Undersea Warfighting Development Center, San Diego. “A subset of that objective is we're going to test some of our newest exercise torpedoes and verify they react in the real environment here the way we expect them to react in modeling and simulation.”

Pitts explained why the Navy invites Department of Defense partners like the pararescuemen to Ice Camp Skate.

“We open the ice base camp to other DoD or academic partners to do exercises or testing they would like to accomplish, taking advantage of an ice camp floating on an ice floe in the Beaufort Sea,” the admiral said.

Fighting through snowstorms and low visibility, a 210th Rescue Squadron HH-60 Pave Hawk combat search and rescue helicopter managed to deploy from Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson to the Deadhorse Aviation Center located on Alaska's north coast.

“The Pave Hawk is a search-and-rescue asset so our piece of the puzzle is long-range SAR, extending our range using in-flight refueling and working around the weather,” said Alaska Air National Guard Capt. Chris McKnight, a Pave Hawk pilot with the 210th RQS.

Understanding his crew would be traveling deeper into the Arctic over water, McKnight closely inspected every corner of his slate-gray whirlybird. For good luck, the aviator kissed the number “26471” emblazoned on the nose of his aircraft, the numerals providing unique identification – or tail number – for his helicopter.

Because he would be traveling over water, McKnight laboriously squeezed into his skin-tight dry suit, his head emerging suddenly like the last dollop of gel from an exhausted tube of toothpaste.

“The greatest challenge, first and foremost, is the weather,” McKnight explained. “Temperatures can be extreme so we dress for the weather. When it's extremely cold, even the cabin heater doesn't keep up so it gets cold in the helicopter.”

Though the Pave Hawk is limited in range relative to the expanse of Alaska and the Arctic Ocean, its ace in the hole is the refueling boom extending like a totem pole from the nose of the aircraft. Extensive route planning accounts for how many times and where the HH-60s link up with HC-130Js for refueling. Underwing tanks on the Combat Kings deploy refueling booms, granting the helicopters free range of the mission area.

“One of the unique pieces of being a rescue crew member is the breadth and diversity of the missions that we can and are called upon to execute,” said Senior Master Sgt. Martin Bellerive, 211th RQS A-Flight chief. “We don't just deliver cargo. We don't just refuel helicopters. We don't just airdrop. We don't just transport patients. We do all of that. When you're stood up for alert, you could get called anytime to execute any one or a combination of those missions.”

McKnight said limited visibility and discerning a definable horizon can be critical mission factors. Sugary white-blowing snow moving over the background of a white landscape makes seeing a mountainous mass difficult. Tailwinds and headwinds further alter the calculations for the fuel plan.

“Fighting the weather takes more gas and more mental brain bytes, so being prepared and setting yourself up for success with a fuel plan and a plan to deviate are a good basis for success,” McKnight said.

When the HH-60 arrived at the camp, Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Heath Chesnut and Sgt. Austin Makowski were waiting where they had rigged Arctic Sustainment Package dunnage for sling load. Leaning on their pathfinder training, the Soldiers bundled the dunnage in a basket tethered to a sling. Taking preplanned weight limitations and center of balance into account, Chesnut and Makowski braved the frigid rotor wash of the Pave Hawk to manually affix the sling load to a hook on the bottom of the helicopter.

On the return trip, the HH-60 carried out a dry run of aerial refueling with the HC-130J. Because the weight and drag slowed the HH-60, both aircrews validated the ability to refuel under the unique circumstances.

A day later, the HH-60 returned to extract a small tracked all-terrain vehicle that provided the transportation aspect of the Arctic Sustainment Package.

McKnight said he has worked with the Navy in the past, practicing deck landings on disembarked ships to ensure joint interoperability. He said he relishes any opportunity to work with his maritime partners.

“Realizing that the Arctic is an ocean, the Navy is the prime player,” McKnight said. “Any integration we can do enhances our capabilities.”

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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.)

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/alaskanationalguard/albums/72157688557395080>

3. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution photos. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.) <https://dvidshub.net/r/xvb926>

4. **DVIDS video link** includes b-roll.

C-17 air drop mission: <https://dvidshub.net/r/llbrb9>

C-130 air drop mission: <https://dvidshub.net/r/65pmih>



A containerized delivery system platform containing Arctic Sustainment Package equipment is dropped March 5, 2018, near Ice Camp Skate in support of Ice Exercise 2018. The platform was dropped by an Alaska Air National Guard HC-130J Combat King II from the 211th Rescue Squadron. ICEX 2018 is a five-week exercise that allows the Navy to assess its operational readiness in the Arctic, increase experience in the region, advance understanding of the Arctic environment, and continue to develop relationships with other services, allies and partner organizations. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Airman 1st Class Kelly Willett)



Alaska Air National Guardsmen with the 212th Rescue Squadron parachute from a 211th RSQ HC-130J Combat King II aircraft on to the frozen Beaufort Sea several hundred miles north of the Alaskan coastline March 5, 2018. This is the first time the Arctic Sustainment Package, an air droppable package accompanied by rescue personnel that can provide shelter, heat, transportation, fuel, and food for 28 individuals for up to six and half days in extreme arctic conditions, has been dropped from the units new HC-130J Combat King II after receiving four new models last year. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda Dresel)

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Alaska Air National Guard Master Sgt. Corey Ercolani, a special missions aviation specialist with the 210th Rescue Squadron, carries out preflight checks March 7, 2018, of a 210th RQS HH-60 Pave Hawk helicopter at Deadhorse Aviation Center. The Pave Hawk flew to Ice Camp Skate at the North Pole to evacuate elements of the Arctic Sustainment Package. ICEX is a five-week exercise that allows the U.S. Navy to assess its operational readiness in the Arctic, increase experience in the region, advance understanding of the Arctic environment, and continue to develop relationships with other services, allies and partner organizations. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. David Bedard)



Guardian Angels of the 212th Rescue Squadron set up a cooking stove March 5, 2018, while in support of Ice Exercise 2018 somewhere over the Arctic Ocean. The rescue personnel validated equipment and training in the harsh Arctic conditions. ICEX 2018 is a five-week exercise that allows the Navy to assess its operational readiness in the Arctic, increase experience in the region, advance understanding of the Arctic environment, and continue to develop relationships with other services, allies and partner organizations. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Airman 1st Class Kelly Willett)



Alaska Air National Guard Master Sgt. Corey Ercolani, a special missions aviation specialist with the 210th Rescue Squadron, squeezes into a dry suite March 7, 2018, at Deadhorse Aviation Center. Ercolani flew on a 210th RQS HH-60 Pave Hawk helicopter to Ice Camp Skate at the North Pole to evacuate elements of the Arctic Sustainment Package. ICEX is a five-week exercise that allows the U.S. Navy to assess its operational readiness in the Arctic, increase experience in the region, advance understanding of the Arctic environment, and continue to develop relationships with other services, allies and partner organizations. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. David Bedard)



A 210th Rescue Squadron HH-60G Pave Hawk transports cargo in support of Ice Exercise (ICEX) 2018. ICEX 2018 is a five-week exercise that allows the Navy to assess its operational readiness in the Arctic, increase experience in the region, advance understanding of the Arctic environment, and continue to develop relationships with other services, allies and partner organizations. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Airman 1st Class Kelly Willett)



Alaska Guardsmen from the 176th Wing's 210th Rescue Squadron conduct aerial refueling of an HH-60 Pave Hawk helicopter via a 211th RSQ HC-130J Combat King II aircraft several hundred miles north of the Alaskan coastline March 7, 2018. This training is linked to the Alaska National Guard's Arctic Eagle 2018 and U.S. Navy's Ice Exercise. A number of Department of Defense exercises afford participating forces the opportunity to operate in a joint environment while assessing the ability to conduct sustained operations in arctic conditions including Arctic Eagle 2018, Alaskan Command's Exercise Arctic Edge, the U.S. Army's Arctic Pegasus, and the U.S. Navy's ICEX. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda Dresel)



Alaska Air Guard Staff Sgt. Tyler Hoskins, a loadmaster with the 211th Rescue Squadron, watches the sunset from the tail of an HC-130J Combat King II aircraft behind a U.S. Army Alaska CH-47 Chinook helicopter in Deadhorse, Alaska, March 7, 2018. More than 50 Air and Army National Guardsmen conducted training several hundred miles north of the Alaskan coastline on the frozen Beaufort Sea. This training is linked to the Alaska National Guard's Arctic Eagle 2018 and U.S. Navy's Ice Exercise. A number of Department of Defense exercises afford participating forces the opportunity to operate in a joint environment while assessing the ability to conduct sustained operations in arctic conditions including Arctic Eagle 2018, Alaskan Command's Exercise Arctic Edge, the U.S. Army's Arctic Pegasus, and the U.S. Navy's ICEX. ICEX 2018 is a five-week exercise that allows the U.S. Navy to assess its operational readiness in the Arctic, increase experience in the region, advance understanding of the Arctic environment, and continue to develop relationships with other services, allies and partner organizations. The exercises occur in February and March 2018, and dates for each exercise varies. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Balinda Dresel)