



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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By Maj. Joseph Simms, 927th Air Refueling Wing

## **Reservists provide medical care for underserved regions of Alaska through Arctic Care 2018**

**KOTZEBUE, Alaska** — A joint and multinational contingent of Reservists kicked off Arctic Care 2018, an Innovative Readiness Training Exercise based out of Kotzebue, Alaska, April 16.

Reservists of all branches of the Armed Forces, along with the Alaska National Guard and Canadian military, will provide medical, dental, optometry and veterinary care for 12 villages in the Manillaq Service Area through April 24.

In addition to providing medical care for underserved communities in the region, this IRT will provide participants an opportunity to conduct mission and logistical training to maintain currency needed to support future contingency or humanitarian operations.

To serve the 12 villages of Northwest Alaska, medical professionals in all four specialties boarded Alaska Army National Guard HH-60 Blackhawk helicopters and flew to a village ranging in population from 350-1000 where they would work out of the local clinic. During their time in each village many Citizen Airmen may treat some Alaskans that have not seen a medical provider in years.

“We flew into a remote village, 83 miles above the Arctic Circle, named Kevalina, where there typically is no provider throughout the year,” said Major Vashun Rodriguez, a flight surgeon assigned to the 927th Aeromedical Staging Squadron, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. “If a resident here has an issue, they would need to be flown out to the nearest medical facility where they are evaluated, and if the need further treatment, they would need another trip to Anchorage or a larger facility.”

According to Paul Hansen, Hospital Administrator for the Manillaq Association, the transportation costs and manpower are major factors contributing to the health issues facing the citizens of this region.

“The Manillaq Association oversees a region that covers an area about the size of Illinois and access to care is a serious issue,” Hansen said. “There are no roads that connect these communities. The primary means of travel between the villages is by light aircraft or boat in the summer months, and snow machine in the winter, so transportation is very expensive which prevents many citizens from getting proper care.”

“The goal is for each community to provide village-based services, but we do not have the manpower,” he continued.

Serving remote areas such as the Northwest Arctic Borough is the hallmark of IRT exercises. It not only provides a service to U.S. citizens, it enhances the capabilities of our military medical professionals and provides an opportunity to positively impact someone’s life, according to optometrist Captain Roxanne Buffano.

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“Our first day here I had the pleasure of examining a 14-year-old boy who had never worn glasses before and it was incredible to see his eyes light up when I showed him how much better his vision could be with glasses,” said Buffano, 927th Aerospace Medicine Squadron, MacDill AFB, Florida. “Hopefully these children will remember us and the service we are able to provide for them and their community. Then one day they might be able to follow in our footsteps and provide care to their own villages and the surrounding communities.”

IRT exercises in this region, and specifically Arctic Care, continue to build on the long-standing tradition of U.S. Armed Forces addressing the underserved community health and civic needs of the Northwest Arctic Borough.

Both Buffano and Rodriguez are veterans of past IRT exercises, and plan to continue serving remote areas of the U.S. whenever the opportunity arises.

“A child cannot develop and reach their full potential if their world is blurry or they have to live with a correctible medical condition,” Buffano said. “This is why I continue to participate in these missions so I can continue to improve the quality of life for others with limited access to care. “

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## PHOTOS

1. **Attached Word document** 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/72157693940226891>
3. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution photos. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.) <https://dvidshub.net/r/hbm4he>
4. **DVIDS video link** includes b-roll. <https://dvidshub.net/r/92xui9>; <https://dvidshub.net/r/t87kwo>



Lt. Cmdr. Jeffrey Politz (left), an oral surgeon with the 4th Dental Battalion, Marietta, Georgia, assigned to exercise Arctic Care 2018, checks the teeth of an Alaska Army National Guardsman from 1st Battalion, 207th Aviation Regiment, during an exam April 17, 2018, at the Maniilaq Health Center in Kotzebue, Alaska. Military personnel accomplished critical mission training to maintain currency needed to support future contingency and humanitarian operations. (U.S. Air Force photo by 1st Lt. Rashard Coaxum)

More photos, next page



Col. Clifford Zdanowics (right), a dentist with the 512th Aerospace Medicine Squadron at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware, assigned to exercise Arctic Care 2018, checks the teeth of an Alaska Army National Guardsmen from 1st Battalion, 207th Aviation Regiment, during an exam April 17, 2018, at the Maniilaq Health Center in Kotzebue, Alaska. Military personnel accomplished critical mission training to maintain currency needed to support future contingency and humanitarian operations. (U.S. Air Force photo illustration by 1st Lt. Rashard Coaxum)



Major Sue Diaz, 110th Medical Group, Michigan Air National Guard connects with a young patient April 18, 2018, at the Kivalina Clinic, Kivalina, Alaska, while deployed in support of Arctic Care 2018. Sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense Reserve Affairs, Innovative Readiness Training exercises such as Arctic Care demonstrate the clinical and logistical ability of the United States military while providing medical care to underserved regions of the U.S. Alaska National Guardsmen from the 168th and 176th Medical Groups and 1st Battalion, 207<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment are participating in the (U.S. Air Force photo by Maj. Joe Simms)