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By Spc. Michael Risinger, 134th Public Affairs Detachment

Emmonak welcomes Santa to town

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska – The Alaska National Guard and the Salvation Army united to take Operation Santa Claus to the village of Emmonak Nov. 1.

An HC-130J Combat King II aircraft from the 211th Rescue Squadron was used as replacement transportation for Santa and Mrs. Claus while their sleigh received upgrades for the upcoming holiday season.

“Operation Santa brings holiday cheer and joy to remote villages throughout the state of Alaska,” said A2nd Lt. Marisa Lindsay, an Alaska Army National Guard member and elf volunteer.

Operation Santa Claus began in 1956 after spring floods and later a drought created hardships for St. Mary’s Mission. To ensure that children received gifts, the National Guard flew them in, along with supplies that had been donated by the community.

Now in its 62nd year, Operation Santa has visited hundreds of villages and included tens of thousands of Alaskan children and adults.

The festivities took place in a decorated gym at Emmonak School. Handmade signs and decorations welcomed volunteers, students, and community members. Only one day prior, the same gym was decorated for Halloween.

Governor Bill Walker, Adjutant General Maj. Gen. Laurie Hummel, and Emmonak Mayor Wilbur Hootch greeted the crowd and gave remarks prior to the arrival of the honored guests, Mr. and Mrs. Claus.

Santa and Mrs. Claus were drawn to the gym by the crowd singing a joyous rendition of Jingle Bells.

The school staff and volunteers guided newborns through 18-year-olds through a variety of stations.

Students each received a new backpack, stocking stuffers, and had a photo taken with Santa while they shared their wish list with him.

“Kids enjoyed ice cream sundaes, we provided snacks, fresh fruit, and coffee for the adults,” said Jenni Ragland, with the Salvation Army and also committee chair for Operation Santa Claus.

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Kids were able to pick out age appropriate books to put in their backpacks.

“We brought books because we want to encourage literacy and give kids a chance to love reading,” said Ragland.

Community members joined the live music and sang Silent Night in Yupik.

“Emmonak has been a wonderful host to us National Guard members today,” said Lindsay. “Everyone was excited to see Santa and were so grateful and enthusiastic.”

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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/72157701597291441>

2. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution photos. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.) <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/298742/emmonak-welcomes-santa-town>



Mr. and Mrs. Claus, traveling with Operation Santa Claus, deplane an HC-130J Combat King II aircraft from the Alaska Air National Guard, after landing in Emmonak, Alaska, on Nov. 1, 2018. Operation Santa Claus is an Alaska National Guard annual community outreach program that provides Christmas gifts, books, backpacks filled with school supplies, fresh fruit, and sundaes to youngsters in rural communities. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Risinger/Released)



Alaska Governor Bill Walker and First Lady Donna Walker greet community members in Emmonak during Operation Santa Claus, on Nov. 1, 2018. Operation Santa Claus is an Alaska National Guard annual community outreach program that provides Christmas gifts, books, backpacks filled with school supplies, fresh fruit, and sundaes to youngsters in rural communities. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Risinger/Released)

More photos, next page



Alaska Air National Guard Staff Sgt. Vanessa Peterson hands out snacks to children in Emmonak during Operation Santa Claus on Nov. 1, 2018. Operation Santa Claus is an Alaska National Guard annual community outreach program that provides Christmas gifts, books, backpacks filled with school supplies, fresh fruit, and sundaes to youngsters in rural communities. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Risinger/Released)



Maj. Gen Laurie Hummel, Alaska National Guard adjutant general, passes out sundaes to children in Emmonak during Operation Santa Claus on Nov. 1, 2018. Operation Santa Claus is an Alaska National Guard annual community outreach program that provides Christmas gifts, books, backpacks filled with school supplies, fresh fruit, and sundaes to youngsters in rural communities. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Risinger/Released)



Alaska Army Guard Sgt. Maj. James Nyquist passes out fresh fruit to children in Emmonak during Operation Santa Claus on Nov. 1, 2018. Operation Santa Claus is an Alaska National Guard annual community outreach program that provides Christmas gifts, books, backpacks filled with school supplies, fresh fruit, and sundaes to youngsters in rural communities. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Risinger/Released)



The children of Emmonak, Alaska, visit with Mr. and Mrs. Claus during Operation Santa Claus on Nov. 1, 2018. Operation Santa Claus is an Alaska National Guard annual community outreach program that provides Christmas gifts, books, backpacks filled with school supplies, fresh fruit, and sundaes to youngsters in rural communities. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Michael Risinger/Released)