

MEDIA UPDATE: Feb 5

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—ALASKA NATIONAL GUARD IN THE NEWS—

- 1. Four kids disappeared in an Alaska blizzard. They were found alive, 18 miles from home**

The Washington Post/Feb. 4

The plan was for the four kids to set out Sunday from the Alaskan village of Nunam Iqua for a short snowmobile ride.

The kids — Christopher Johnson, 14, Frank Johnson, 8, Ethan Camille, 7, and Trey Camille, 2 — ventured out into the snow.

They were due back home by 1 p.m. They never showed.

More than 27 hours later, after an extensive search effort that included the Alaska State Troopers, Army National Guard, the U.S. Coast Guard, Emmonak Search and Rescue and numerous other local search parties, the children were found alive — 18 miles from home.

A helicopter airlifted the children to Bethel, Alaska, where they were treated for severe hypothermia, authorities said. One child was admitted to Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corp. Hospital for further care. Two children were released, and a fourth was taken to Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage, according to officials. "I never would have thought that he would make it," Alphonso Thomas, father of 2-year-old Trey, told TV station KTUU. "... Tough kids, all of them."

A woman went missing for six days. Rescuers found her inside an SUV buried in snow — alive.

Search efforts were complicated by blizzard conditions near the small southwestern village. When the weather started to worsen Sunday afternoon, someone jumped on a snowmobile to search for the children, reported TV station KTUU. They had no luck.

By 6:30 p.m., Alaska State Troopers had been called in to help with the search and rescue effort. They scoured the area on the ground and from the air, but blizzard conditions hindered visibility. By 2 a.m., search teams stopped looking and vowed to start again later that Monday morning.

“It’s hard for me to think right now,” Karen Camille, the mother of three of the boys, told KTUU. “My mind is going crazy.”

At about 4:25 p.m. Monday, the children were located 18 miles south of Nunam Iqua. A member of the Emmonak Search and Rescue told KTUU that they had managed to find a shelter there.

More: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/02/04/alaska-blizzard-missing-children/>

<https://www.alaskapublic.org/2020/02/05/rescuers-found-lost-nunam-iqua-children-in-a-hole-in-the-snow-huddled-around-the-youngest-child/>

<https://www.insider.com/four-children-who-lost-during-blizzard-in-alaska-found-alive-2020-2>

2. Alaska Rmy National Guard recruiter earns meritorious Service Medal

American Military News/Feb. 4

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — Alaska Army National Guard Sgt. 1st Class Kimberly Houser received a Meritorious Service Medal during the Director’s Strength Maintenance and Awards Ceremony in San Antonio, Texas, Jan. 15. Each state and territory had one Soldier recognized for their performances in recruiting and retention.

The award recognizes superior strength maintenance skills in all functions of recruiting and retention.

Houser recruited 17 Soldiers into the Alaska Army National Guard and retained 12 currently serving Soldiers. She achieved 124 percent of her assigned recruiting mission and 130 percent of her assigned retention mission, making her the only recruiter to overdrive in both enlisted accessions and retention. She is responsible for increasing the Department of Defense market share by 14 percent in her assigned recruiting area.

“She outperformed all other recruiting and retention noncommissioned officers within the Alaska Army National Guard,” said Lt. Col. Donna Johnson, commander of the Alaska Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Battalion.

Houser conducted numerous retention interviews with local Soldiers and personally conducted 12 extensions. She also expanded her influence to other units and individuals, which assisted in the extension of many other Soldiers who chose to continue serving in the organization.

More: <https://americanmilitarynews.com/ai/alaska-army-national-guard-recruiter-earns-meritorious-service-medal/>

3. NORAD identified Russian Blackjack bombers entering Canadian Air Defense Identification Zone

Defense Blog/Feb. 1

North American Aerospace Defense Command announced on Friday that was positively identified two Russian Tu-160 Blackjack strategic bombers entering the Canadian Air Defense Identification Zone on Jan. 31, 2020.

“The Russian aircraft remained in international airspace and did not enter United States or Canadian sovereign airspace,” the NORAD message states.

NORAD is a binational command focused on the defense of both the U.S. and Canada, the response to potential aerospace threats does not distinguish between the two nations, and draws on forces from both countries.

“Our adversaries continue to flex their long-range weapons systems and engage in increasingly aggressive efforts, to include the approaches to the United States and Canada,” said Gen. O’Shaughnessy, NORAD Commander. “NORAD is driven by a single unyielding priority: defending the U.S. and Canada, our homelands, from attack.”

NORAD employs a layered defense network of radars, satellites, and fighter aircraft to identify aircraft and determine the appropriate response. The identification and monitoring of aircraft entering a US or Canadian ADIZ demonstrates how NORAD executes its aerospace warning and aerospace control missions for the United States and Canada.

More: <https://defence-blog.com/news/norad-identified-russian-blackjack-bombers-entering-canadian-air-defense-identification-zone.html>

<https://www.norad.mil/Newsroom/Press-Releases/Article/1741730/norad-identified-russian-aircraft-entering-canadian-air-defense-identification/>

<https://www.airlive.net/norad-identified-russian-bombers-entering-canadian-air-defense-identification-zone-on-friday/>

4. Guard Refortifying in Nome

Knom Radio Mission/Jan. 30

“WHEN I WAS FOUR YEARS OLD, WE WERE LIVING IN OUR CABIN NINE MILES UP THE RIVER FROM WHITE MOUNTAIN AND WE HAD A MASSIVE FLOOD, IN 1985. A HU-1 (Huey) helicopter came out and extracted us from our campsite because we were flooded. We had to spend a few hours on a piece of ice up there on the bank, to stay afloat until the Army Guard came and rescued us, then brought us back to White Mountain.”

That’s Technical Sergeant Blassi G. Shoogukwruk. Born in Nome, he spent many of his younger days in the village of White Mountain. He told KNOM listeners that his childhood experience on the Fish River inspired him to join the Alaska National Guard (AKNG).

Like many Western Alaskans, Shoogukwruk has several family members who have served in the Guard. His grandfather, who built that family cabin near White Mountain, was a member of the Alaska Territorial Guard.

“My paternal grandfather and my great uncle were down in the Aleutians fighting during World War 2. My maternal grandfather was guarding the coast out in Gambell. My mom was actually part of the first cadre of female Alaska guardsmen in rural Alaska. She was part of a pilot program that they did in the early 1970s,” he said.

After originally joining up with a search and rescue unit, Shoogukwruk is now a C-17 crew chief in the 176th Wing’s Aircraft Maintenance Squadron.

The guard is currently recruiting guardsmen and women in several rural hubs around Alaska. Major General Torrence Saxe says the guard’s historical presence in Nome and its operational armory and aviation facilities makes Nome a sensible regional base.

Shoogukwruk says he has a sense of pride for continuing on his family’s military heritage, and he hopes more Alaska Natives will join him in donning a uniform to become part of the state’s National Guard.

More: <https://www.knom.org/wp/blog/2020/01/30/guard-refortifying-in-nome/>
<https://www.newsbreak.com/news/000kWYYi/guard-refortifying-in-nome>

5. National Guard commander aims to revive service tradition with new hires in rural Alaska

Alaska Public Media/Dec. 27

NOME – Maj. Gen. Torrence Saxe, head of the Alaska National Guard, is on a mission to hire new Guard members in Nome and other rural communities.

The Guard has history in the gold rush city. With an operational armory and aviation facility in town, Saxe says it makes sense to have more Guard members here.

“I would just ask for the community support in getting the word out that we do have openings,” he said on a recent visit. “We want to hire local. We want them to drill local, and they would only have to drill back in Anchorage a few times a year. The focus really is on Nome.”

To illustrate the Guard’s connection to rural hubs, Saxe brought with him service members who are from the Norton Sound region.

Tech Sgt. Blassi G. Shoogukwruk was born in Nome and spent many of his younger days in White Mountain. He says an experience he had as a child on the Fish River inspired his Guard career.

“When I was 4 years old, we were living in our cabin nine miles up the river from White Mountain and we had a massive flood, in 1985,” he recalled. “A HU-1 (Huey) helicopter came out and extracted us from our campsite because we were flooded. We had to spend a few hours on a piece of ice up there on the bank, to stay afloat until the Army Guard came and rescued us, then brought us back to White Mountain.”

Shoogukwruk says he originally joined a Guard rescue unit to reciprocate what he and his family had been given. He is now a C-17 crew chief in the 176th Wing’s Aircraft Maintenance Squadron.

Like many Western Alaskans, Shoogukwruk has several family members who have served in the Guard. The cabin where Shoogukwruk was rescued as a child was built by a grandfather who was a member of the Alaska Territorial Guard.

“My paternal grandfather and my great uncle were down in the Aleutians fighting during World War II. My maternal grandfather was guarding the coast out in Gambell,” he said. “My mom was actually part of the first cadre of female Alaska guardsmen in rural Alaska. She was part of a pilot program that they did in the early 1970s.”

Shoogukwruk says he has a sense of pride for continuing on his family’s military heritage, and he hopes more Alaska Natives will join him in putting on a uniform to become part of the National Guard.

According to Major General Saxe, he’s looking for 12 to 15 members to be part of the Guard’s rural operations in each of the six hubs, which includes Nome, Kotzebue, and Galena. All of the slots are funded. The Guard just needs Western Alaskans to fill them.

More: <https://www.alaskapublic.org/2019/12/27/national-guard-commander-aims-to-revive-service-tradition-with-new-hires-in-rural-alaska/>

6. 421 Lives: NOAA Satellites helped save a Record Number of People in 2019...

NOAA/Jan. 31

NOAA’s polar-orbiting and geostationary satellites are part of the global Search and Rescue Satellite Aided Tracking System, or COSPAS-SARSAT offsite link, which uses a network of U.S. and international spacecraft to detect and locate distress signals from emergency beacons aboard aircraft, boats and from handheld Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs) anywhere in the world.

Of the 421 U.S. rescues last year, 306 were water rescues, 38 were from aviation incidents and 77 were from events on land, where PLBs were used. Florida had the most SARSAT rescues with more than 100, followed by Alaska with more than 50. The previous rescue record of 353 (total) was set in 2007.

When a NOAA satellite pinpoints the location of a distress signal in the U.S., the information is relayed to the SARSAT Mission Control Center at NOAA’s Satellite Operations Facility in Suitland, Maryland. From there, the

information is sent quickly to Rescue Coordination Centers, operated either by the U.S. Air Force for land rescues, or the U.S. Coast Guard for water rescues. NOAA also supports rescues globally by relaying distress signal information to international SARTSAT partners.

“Each person rescued underscores the success of nearly 40 years of teamwork with the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Air Force, NASA and our international partners,” said Steve Volz, Ph.D., assistant NOAA administrator for its Satellite and Information Service.

In one harrowing case last year, the impact of the crash of a small aircraft near Skwentna, Alaska, activated the emergency beacon onboard. The Alaska Rescue Coordination Center relayed the distress location to the Alaska Air National Guard responders, who pulled the two passengers from the wreckage and they received medical treatment at an area hospital.

In another rescue, six people were saved from a sinking boat 20 miles east of Sunny Isles, Florida. The U.S. Coast Guard received the emergency beacon alert and directed an emergency response boat to the scene.

Since its start in 1982, COSPAS-SARTSAT has been credited with supporting more than 48,000 rescues worldwide, including nearly more than 9,000 in the United States and its surrounding waters.

By law, beacon owners are required to register their devices online with NOAA. The registration information helps provide better and faster assistance to people in distress, and can guard against false alarms. It may also provide information about the location of the emergency and what type of help may be needed.

More: https://www.wdrb.com/weather/wdrb-weather-blog/lives-noaa-satellites-helped-save-a-record-number-of-people/article_73b6aba2-4493-11ea-828c-2363f7cfe460.html

7. Alaska Military Youth Academy to graduate 156 cadets

JFHQ-PAO/Feb. 22

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska – The Alaska Military Youth Academy will celebrate the 51st class of students and more than 25 years of service to the State of Alaska as Class 2019-1 graduates 156 cadets from its ChalleNge program on Friday, February 22nd.

The 10 a.m. graduation ceremony will be held in the Tikahtnu Ballroom at the Dena’ina Civic and Convention Center in downtown Anchorage. The ceremony will feature Alaska Governor Michael J. Dunleavy as the keynote speaker. US Senator Lisa Murkowski will also be in attendance and will briefly address the cadets.

During their 22-week Residential Phase at the AMYA ChalleNge program, the corps of cadets focused on academic excellence, leadership and followership, physical fitness, life coping skills, responsible citizenship, vocational training and service to the community. Class of 2019-1 provided more than 7,681 hours of community service; 85 cadets earned their high school credentials; others earned 7.5 transferrable credits each. 32 cadets completed Everfi Radius Financial Literacy and 156 students completed the EverFi Radius S.T.E.M. curriculum through a grant with the AT & T Foundation.

The 156 cadets set to graduate from the Alaska Military Youth Academy will join the more than 5,500 previous graduates since 1994.

The Cadet-to-Work (pre-apprenticeship) Program engaged selected cadets in multi-faceted vocational training courses through grants from President of the United States’ Job Driven Training Initiative and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Title I Youth Program. Under these federally funded grants from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower and Reserve Affairs)(Reserve Integration) and the U.S. Department of Labor and passed through the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, cadets were provided the following opportunities: 102 were trained in construction (including carpentry, electrical, and laborers, ironworking and welding), culinary arts and health care services. Sixteen cadets enrolled in Small Engine Repair with seven receiving National EETC certification; 19 received training in Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (Drones) which culminated in completion of the FAA Safety Course and 156 were certified in Community Emergency

Responder Training (CERT) and will be a resource to their local Emergency Response Teams should the need arise. Cadets will have the opportunity to emerge from the pre-apprenticeship program with hands-on training, certifications and connections to potential entry-level jobs or apprenticeship programs.

In addition, all cadets take part in the yearlong Post-Residential phase where graduates return to their communities to put into practice the life skills principles they received and continue their education (high school, college or vocational schools), enter the workplace, or enter the military. The goal of this phase is for graduates to sustain and build on the gains made during the residential phase while serving as a productive member of society.

The Alaska Military Youth Academy continues to fulfill its mission: "To help intervene in and reclaim the lives of youth and produce program graduates with the values, skills, education and self-discipline necessary to succeed as adults."

More: <https://www.echoak.com/2019/02/alaska-military-youth-academy-to-graduate-156-cadets/>

<https://www.jber.jb.mil/News/News-Releases/News-Releases-Display/Article/1450375/alaska-military-youth-academy-to-graduate-146-cadets/>

— NATIONAL GUARD NEWS —

8. Total-force aviators take flight during Sentry Aloha 20-1

Dayton Daily News/Jan. 31

JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM, Hawaii – More than 1,000 personnel from the U.S. Air Force's active, national guard and reserve components participated in the decade's first Sentry Aloha exercise Jan. 8-22 at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.

The air-to-air combat exercise, designated as Sentry Aloha 20-1, is hosted by the Hawaii Air National Guard and designed to train Airmen from around the country in a joint and interoperable venue on a large scale. By incorporating more than 35 aircraft, the participating units demonstrated their abilities to equip, launch, engage, refuel and monitor warfighters within the training airspace.

California Air National Guard F-15 Eagles, assigned to the 194th Fighter Squadron, teamed up with the local 'Hawaiian Raptors,' a total-force unit comprised of the Hawaii ANG's 199th FS and active duty's 19th FS, in a series of training sorties. Together, they practiced combat scenarios against this iteration's 'aggressors,' the F-16 Fighting Falcons from the 18th Aggressor Squadron based out of Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska.

"When you put Eagles and Raptors together in air-to-air combat, we basically build on each other's strength," said Lt. Col. Pete Weidner, 144th Fighter Wing alert commander, "and it's more than one plus one equaling two – it's more like one plus one equals five." The 128th Air Refueling Wing's KC-135 Stratotankers from General Mitchell Air National Guard Base, Wisconsin, also provided a pivotal warfighting role. Tanker aircraft provided in-air refueling to all three fighter jets. As pilots performed battle tactics, command information was channeled through an E-3 Sentry, which monitored aircraft activity within the battlespace. The airborne warning and control aircraft is operated by aircrew from the 960th and 970th Airborne Air Control Squadrons, from Tinker Air Force Base, Oklahoma. Flying squadrons rely on mass-training opportunities such as Sentry Aloha to test and improve warfighting skills with partnered units to ensure air superiority in any possible conflict. Mission planners consider every possible variable when designing exercise details to include transportation, logistics, maintenance, weather, scheduling, health requirements, fighter capabilities and more.

"Sentry Aloha provides a unique opportunity for 'fourth-gen' units to operate in '5th gen' fighter aircraft integration with the F-22 Raptors," said Lt. Col. Matthew Ohman, Sentry Aloha exercise director. "Fighter integration in dissimilar air combat, simply put, is when they operate together and are on the same team, they achieve better results than alone." While the primary goal of Sentry Aloha is to develop proficiencies of fighter pilots, the professional development of Airmen of every level is necessary for the exercise to become a complete success. Airman 1st Class Nate Johnsen, a 128th ARW maintainer, discovered how the exercise environment provides more experience than just his drill weekends. "I'm a traditional guardsman back home," Johnsen said. "So

being out here in a deployment situation is more interesting because you have one or two (Stratotankers) going out every day.” With a seemingly endless body of water surrounding Hawaii, JB Pearl Harbor-Hickam has been deemed an optimal training location due to its unique geography and expansive base resources. “The location has perfect weather for flying, in excess of 300 days a year,” Weidner said. “You get great training.”

More: <https://www.daytondailynews.com/news/local/total-force-aviators-take-flight-during-sentry-aloha/IP8eveC7WhLu1i1FPkKsHP/>

— DOD NEWS HIGHLIGHTS/LOCAL/NATIONAL/WORLD NEWS —

9. Drills over Hawaii preview Alaska’s future as a mecca for fighter jets

ADN/Feb. 2

JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM, Hawaii — In April, Eielson Air Force Base near Fairbanks will receive its first three F-35A Lightning IIs. By the end of next year, the 354th Fighter Wing there will be flying 54 of the advanced stealth fighters in two squadrons.

If you want to know how that’s going to change Alaskan skies, you needed only look upward in Hawaii this week.

“A good snapshot is what I flew this morning,” said Col. Benjamin Bishop, the 354th’s commander, during an interview Thursday at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.

Bishop led a group of four F-16s, joined by four other F-16s and four F-22s, posing as enemy adversaries in an Aloha Sentry training drill. The opposing “good guys” were F-22s from the Hawaii Air National Guard and F-35s from Luke Air Force Base, Ariz.

“That’s going to be daily operations at Eielson Air Force Base once F-35s are there,” Bishop said. “We’re going to be training regularly, habitually, with F-22s. Our F-16 squadron is going to remain there as the two F-35 squadrons come in.”

He now returns to Eielson, where \$500 million of infrastructure improvements are underway to make way for the F-35s and about 1,300 additional airmen and their families set to arrive by the end of next year. That’s almost double the 750 airmen who were stationed there when the Air Force announced its decision in April 2016 that Eielson would host the service’s first operational overseas F-35As.

“We don’t see any problems delivering the aircraft and operating the aircraft because of infrastructure,” Bishop said.

The combination of two squadrons of F-22 fighters based at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage and the full fleet of F-35As will make Alaska home to more fifth-generation fighters than anywhere else in the world, top Air Force officials have said.

Viewed from atop the globe, Alaska is “in the center of every major theater in the northern hemisphere,” Bishop said.

From Eielson, the F-35 — with tanker support — can in one sortie cover most of the area under the U.S. European and Indo-Pacific commands, he said.

And the Arctic itself is of growing strategic interest to the United States as climate change melts away ice and exposes once difficult to reach natural resources, resulting in greater competition among nations to control the realm.

The Defense Department’s Arctic strategy issued last year declared that American armed forces “must be able to quickly identify threats in the Arctic, respond promptly and effectively to those threats, and shape the security environment to mitigate the prospect of those threats in the future.”

The F-35s are essential in achieving that goal.

“As the northern most fighter wing in the Department of Defense, the 354th has the unique ability to operate in the Arctic and become familiar with what it takes to operate in the Arctic,” Bishop said. “Being able to project air power from there is an exciting opportunity.”

Bishop will witness the next step in April as Eielson’s 356th Fighter Squadron welcomes its first F-35s into the fold. His two-year command is up this summer, however, so he won’t be on hand at year’s end when the squadron’s full complement is expected to be in place.

More: <https://www.adn.com/alaska-news/military/2020/02/02/drills-over-hawaii-preview-alaskas-future-as-a-mecca-for-fighter-jets/>

10. Flight evacuating U.S. citizens from Wuhan, China to refuel in Anchorage

KTUU/Jan. 27

ANCHORAGE (KTUU) - More than 200 passengers, all U.S. citizens, are expected to land at Ted Stevens International Airport’s North Terminal to refuel after leaving Wuhan City, China.

The North Terminal is not open to the public. As of Monday at 6:30 p.m. there is no confirmed time that they plane will be landing.

The U.S. Department of State and U.S. Department of Health and Social Services is working to bring back U.S. citizens living in the city, including U.S. Consulate staff and families.

The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services says the passengers are leaving the city following the ongoing outbreak of a novel coronavirus. The timing of the flight was listed solely as "this week" in a release from the department.

DHSS says there are no cases in Alaska of the novel coronavirus or patients under investigation.

As of Jan. 26, 2020, the World Health Organization is reporting 2,014 cases and 56 deaths associated with the outbreak.

“Given Alaska’s proximity to Asia, we have been asked to assist our federal partners in this effort to facilitate travel out of China back to the United States to bring these U.S. citizens home,” said Governor Mike Dunleavy in a press release. “The State of Alaska, in combination with our local, federal and Tribal partners have been working closely to ensure the health and safety of all Alaskans while assisting with this request.”

Health officials say before leaving, all passengers and flight crew will go through health screenings by Chinese health officials and U.S. health officials.

If someone is seen with signs or symptoms of the coronavirus, they will not be allowed to board the aircraft. “We are thankful to our local, Tribal and federal partners for their strong coordination in this effort to help these U.S. citizens return home during this rapidly progressing outbreak,” said DHSS Commissioner Adam Crum in a release.

Alaska Chief Medical Officer with DHSS, Anne Zink, announced the latest in how state health officials are trying to keep the virus from spreading in Alaska Monday morning.

She said they've been working closely with state epidemiologists, Ted Steven's Airport management, the CDC, and local hospitals in Anchorage and Mat-Su, to prepare for the incoming flight.

Jim Szczesniak, Ted Stevens Airport Manager, said they are currently preparing for the flight to arrive in the north terminal, which is completely separate from the rest of the airport and has its own ventilation system.

"If you're coming to catch a domestic flight you should just do it like you normally do," he said.

Szczesniak said this is a routine procedure at the airport, and CDC workers will be present to facilitate any other quarantine measures.

Part of the preparations at hospitals like Providence Alaska Medical Center are looking into how much space they have to quarantine any potential cases that could arrive on the charter flight.

At Providence infection prevention manager, Rebecca Hamel said they have 30 'negative pressure' rooms for potential cases, as well as a nine-bed unit that can operate the same way.

The negative pressure rooms are patient rooms equipped to keep germs out. Hamel said they have seals and sophisticated ventilation systems that separate the air from the room and filter out all the germs outside. This keeps any potentially airborne coronavirus germs and the like out of the rest of the hospital.

The rooms are also fit with an extra room where doctors and nurses can put on protective clothing, including hoods with oxygen pumps that keep airborne particles away from the health care providers. The room has a separate door to the hallway and to the patient's room that works much like an air-lock in sci fi movies according to patient care technician, Olin Heribal.

Chief Medical Officer at Providence, Michael Bernstein said this type of precaution and treatment is not uncommon at the hospital at all. Employees regularly go through training with the equipment and procedures they could be asked to do if someone on that plane has coronavirus. He acknowledges that there is not a cure for coronavirus at this time, but feels they could get someone to get through the virus with their immune system.

"The illness that we've seen so far with this virus is really no different than a very severe case of influenza and a number of other respiratory viruses" he said, "so they're all things that we have experience dealing with and it's great to have the warning ahead of time like we do with this plane that will be arriving."

More: <https://www.ktuu.com/content/news/flight-evacuating-us-citizens-wuhan-china-to-refuel-in-anchorage-567330491.html>

11. DOD: 34 Troops Suffered Traumatic Brain Injuries in Al-Asad Attack

Air Force Magazine/Jan. 24

The Pentagon now says 34 service members sustained brain injuries in the Jan. 7 Iranian ballistic missile attack on al-Asad AB, Iraq. The Defense Department has launched a review of how it tracks and reports injuries.

Of the 34 service members who sustained injuries in the attack, 17 were evacuated to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany for additional care and nine of those troops were taken back to the US—to either Walter Reed National Military Medical Center or their home bases for continued, outpatient care. Eight troops remain in Germany. One other service member was taken to Kuwait for care and has returned to duty, Pentagon spokesman Jonathan Hoffman said during a Jan. 24 briefing.

Sixteen service members at al-Asad were diagnosed with concussions and remained at the base. They also have returned to duty, Hoffman said.

President Donald Trump on Jan. 22 downplayed the injuries, saying "I heard that they had headaches, and a couple of other things. ... I can report, it is not very serious."

But the number of injuries is significantly higher than the department's original reporting, which initially claimed zero injuries and then later updated that to only a handful of TBIs.

Hoffman said the increase stems from the nature of the immediate response to the attack, with the priority being on identifiable, physical injuries, and the length of time it takes for TBI symptoms to develop.

The department is not identifying the units or service branches involved, Hoffman said.

In response to the attack and ensuing confusion, Defense Secretary Mark Esper directed Matt Donovan, who is performing the duties of the under secretary of defense for personnel and readiness—to conduct a review alongside the Joint Staff on how the Pentagon tracks and reports injuries in incidents such as the Jan. 7 attack.

“The goal is to be as transparent and accurate as possible, and provide the American people and service members the best information,” Hoffman said.

More: <https://www.airforcemag.com/dod-34-troops-suffered-traumatic-brain-injuries-in-al-asad-attack/>

12. US troops were injured in Iran missile attack despite Pentagon initially saying there were no casualties

KTVA/Jan. 17

(CNN) Several US service members were injured during last week's Iranian missile attack on Al-Asad airbase in Iraq despite the Pentagon initially saying that no casualties were suffered.

"While no U.S. service members were killed in the Jan. 8 Iranian attack on Al Asad Air base, several were treated for concussion symptoms from the blast and are still being assessed," the US-led military coalition fighting ISIS in Iraq and Syria said in a statement Thursday.

"Out of an abundance of caution, service members were transported from Al Asad Air Base, Iraq to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany for follow-on screening. When deemed fit for duty, the service members are expected to return to Iraq following screening," the statement added.

Concussions are not always apparent immediately after they've been suffered, but the disclosure indicates that the impact of the attack was more serious than initial assessments indicated. The attack, launched in retaliation for the US airstrikes that had killed Iranian Gen. Qasem Soleimani, significantly ratcheted up tensions between Iran and the US, though the prospect of further military confrontation appears to have abated for now.

A US military official told CNN that 11 service members had been injured in the attack, which was first reported by Defense One. Following the attack, the Pentagon had initially said that no casualties had resulted from the 16 missiles fired by Iran. The US military defines a casualty as either an injury or fatality involving personnel.

Asked about the apparent discrepancy, a Defense official told CNN, "That was the commander's assessment at the time. Symptoms emerged days after the fact, and they were treated out of an abundance of caution."

After this story published, Capt. Bill Urban -- the spokesperson for US Central Command, which oversees troops in the Middle East -- said the military had learned after the attack that 11 individuals were injured -- eight were transported to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany and three were sent to Camp Arifjan in Kuwait for "follow-on screening."

"As a standard procedure, all personnel in the vicinity of a blast are screened for traumatic brain injury, and if deemed appropriate are transported to a higher level of care," Urban said in a statement. "All soldiers in the immediate blast area were screened and assessed per standard procedure, according to the Defense Department. ... When deemed fit for duty, the service members are expected to return to Iraq following screening."

A US military spokesman in Baghdad explained to CNN's Arwa Damon that the service members were medevaced to Kuwait and Germany because those facilities had the necessary equipment to diagnose the brain injuries.

Official US reports about the attack have shifted since it occurred.

Last week, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper had said the initial assessment found only damage to property.

"The current (Battle Damage Assessment) is, if you will, again, we can get you details, things like tentage, taxiways, the parking lot, a damaged helicopter, things like that; nothing that I would describe as major, at least as I note at this point in time. So that's the state of -- of the attack at this point as we know it. Most importantly, no casualties, no friendly casualties, whether they are US, coalition, contractor, etc.," Esper said.

US officials also have offered differing accounts of what they see as the motivations behind Iran's attack. Vice President Mike Pence said last week that the administration believes the strikes "were intended to kill Americans," and Army Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said he believed that the attacks "were intended to cause structural damage, destroy vehicles and equipment and aircraft, and to kill personnel."

But a growing belief emerged among administration officials last week that Iran had deliberately missed areas populated by Americans. Multiple administration officials told CNN that Iran could have directed its missiles to areas populated by Americans, but intentionally did not. And those officials said Iran may have chosen to send a message rather than take action significant enough to provoke a substantial US military response, a possible signal the Trump administration was looking for a rationale to calm the tensions.

Iraq did receive a warning that the strike was coming and was able to take "necessary precautions," according to a statement from Iraq's Prime Minister Adil Abdul Mahdi. A US defense official said that Iraq, in turn, warned the United States.

However, Pentagon officials have said they received no such warnings from the Iraqis but that the US was able to detect the attack in enough time to alert US forces on the ground.

More: <https://www.ktva.com/story/41578733/us-troops-were-injured-in-iran-missile-attack-despite-pentagon-initially-saying-there-were-no-casualties>

VIDEO: <https://www.cnn.com/2020/01/16/politics/service-members-injured-iran-strike/index.html>

**If you find Alaska National Guard news that was not included, please forward the link so it may be added to the next update.*

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