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**Alaska National Guard**  
*Department of Military  
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STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

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## **Alaska Air National Guard refuels HC-130J Combat King II at 20,000 feet**

Story by U.S. Army National Guard Sgt. Ian Withrow, 139th MPAD

**EIELSON AFB, Alaska** — Pilots crowded around a long, wooden table inside a briefing room early on the morning of Feb. 27 to receive their mission. The day's tasks: a series of touch-and-go landings followed by mid-air refueling.

The KC-135 Stratotanker crews prepared to board would meet up with an HC-130J Combat King II in the air over Fairbanks, Alaska, to pass fuel, which would allow the C-130 to push further north as part of Arctic Eagle 20, a joint, multinational, arctic exercise being conducted across Alaska and hosted by the Alaska National Guard.

This act, known colloquially as "random air refueling," is just one skill that these highly trained experts keep in constant practice, alongside other technical maneuvers. In theory, the action is a simple one. The KC-135 is equipped with a long, remote controlled boom that enables it to move fuel from its tanks to those of a properly-equipped friendly aircraft. The C-130 simply pulls up behind and below, and maneuvers itself into position, where the boom links with a port above the cockpit.

"We'll be at 20,000 feet over the Fairbanks VOR [local navigational area], and we'll meet up with them [the C-130]," said Capt. Julie Keeney, an Alaska National Guardsman and pilot with the 168th Air Wing.

The reality, however, is that the aircraft are a combined 230 feet long, and each is moving in excess of 240 miles per hour. Careful piloting and constant radio communication allows the two aircraft to act as one in the hands of the operators.

Ultimately, the lynchpin of a refueling operation is the boom operator, an airman who lies prone in a special cradle and directs the movement of both aircraft as well as the boom itself. Air Force Tech. Sgt. William Sartin is one such operator, an Alaska National Guardsman of 10 years, who has been stationed out of Eielson since 2013.

"Instead of sitting in an office, and just sitting at a desk, I get to go fly every day and refuel airplanes at high speed," Sartin said. "It's pretty awesome."

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The refueling mission was a small but vital piece of the larger exercise, and one of many such pieces that together allow a massive, multinational effort to be successful.

The difficulty inherent in performing such aerial feats seems nothing short of a miracle, but for these professionals, it's just another day at work.

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For more information contact the Media Operations Center via phone (907) 459-8761 or e-mail [arcticeaglemoc@gmail.com](mailto:arcticeaglemoc@gmail.com).

### PHOTOS

**1. Flickr link** includes an Exercise Arctic Eagle 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/>

**2. DVIDS link** to press release (Primary for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers)

<https://www.dvidshub.net/video/741591/kc-135-arctic-eagle>

**3. DVIDS link** to all selected full-resolution photos of Arctic Eagle 2020. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers) <https://www.dvidshub.net/feature/ArcticEagle2020>



The 168th Wing briefs each other about the day's flight and timeline on Feb. 27 during Arctic Eagle 2020. The 168th briefings such as these help units sync together to go over safety precautions as well as keep their communications tight to better complete the mission. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Kierra Harris)



Tech. Sgt. William Sartin, a boom operator with the 168th Wing, Alaska National Guard, operates a boom while refueling the HC-130J Combat King II aircraft mid-air on Feb. 27 during exercise Arctic Eagle 2020 for training purposes. Arctic Eagle is a training exercise that allows participants to cross train with other branches and agencies. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Kierra Harris)

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An HC-130J Combat King II aircraft flies beneath a KC-135 Stratotanker aircraft for refueling conducted by the Alaska National Guard 168th Wing on Feb. 27 during exercise Arctic Eagle 2020. The 168th Wing Refueling Group is the only Arctic region air-refueling unit in the United States. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Kierra Harris)