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On Call and Always Ready: The Alaska Naval Militia

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — On March 24, 1989, a man-made disaster shocked the 49th state.

The Exxon Valdez oil tanker had run aground, spilling more than 10.8 million gallons of crude oil into Prince William Sound. More than 1,300 miles of coastline were slicked with the greasy substance affecting all manner of wildlife.

The ramifications would be felt for decades, but state officials rapidly mobilized a cleanup force with federal and private aid. To assemble the response required, the state needed skilled and disciplined manpower. It was for this reason that officials took the historic step of putting Alaska's Naval Militia on state active duty orders for the first time.

The Alaska Naval Militia was initially established in 1984 and comprises dedicated service members prepared to do their duty for country and state. In accordance with state law, all members of the Alaska Naval Militia are Reserve component service members of the United States Navy or Marine Corps.

Cmdr. Jennifer Avery, commanding officer of the Alaska Naval Militia, said she sees the advantage this can provide.

"What's so important is that every member is trained up and ready to go," she said. "The National Guard doesn't have to spend money or time to train us. When the state needs us, we're ready to deploy."

Using well-trained Sailors and Marines for the state has been a valuable aspect of the Naval Militia since its inception. Retired Lt. Cmdr. David Allen took the oath a year after its formation and has firsthand knowledge on the difference a Naval Militia can make.

"The Sailors and Marines bring a lot of experience and capabilities for the governor to use in directly supporting the people of Alaska," he said. "They're a valid part of the response community that is very efficient and effective. The Naval Militia brings a lot of high-value personnel at a low cost to the state."

Chief Electronics Technician Travis Morris, a Naval Militia member for more than ten years, recalls his experience during the Swan Lake fires last year.

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“I had no idea just how much we would be utilized,” he said. “The very first day I was placed in charge ... I ensured everybody was conducting their relief duties in a safe and responsible manner.”

Morris said he believes working with state forces in reducing the fire’s damage showed the type of contribution the Naval Militia is capable of.

“I would say that we definitely have an impact on the success of an operation,” Morris said. “I think the fact that Alaska has a Naval Militia to turn to is a strength, especially when it comes to emergency response.”

With more than 30 years of experience, Allen has seen opportunities to deploy come in various forms, from forest fires, floods, and avalanches to community aid.

“It’s always an interesting experience,” he said. “The response is a state-wide, complex operation.”

Avery, Allen and Morris said they take pride in the Naval Militia’s ability to combine federal and state service.

“We’re Alaskans just like the public,” Avery said. “We desire to help in the state’s time of need.”

In 2020, the Alaska Naval Militia are called to action in response to the COVID-19 epidemic. As the public heeds Gov. Mike Dunleavy’s hunker-down order, Sailors and Marines of the naval militia join the National Guard in serving the very communities they call home.

“When the governor calls during a state of emergency, we’re ready,” Avery said. “The Alaska Naval Militia is willing to be put to work, wear our uniforms, be the professional service member and help our state and community.”

Chief Quartermaster Michael Dixon, who swore into the Naval Militia in 2012, supervises a unit of Sailors, bringing a variety of qualifications and certifications to the table.

“As Sailors, we have a lot of professional and in-rate knowledge,” the chief said. “From medical to security, we can pass on that knowledge and share with similar jobs in other branches of the military.”

Collaborating and working in tandem, the different branches can function more effectively in handling a state emergency as a joint force. Being part of the Alaska Naval Militia provides Sailors and Marines with the chance to directly contribute to their communities as military service members.

“I’m very happy to be taking the responsibility to serve not only my nation but my state,” Morris said. “Being a Naval Militia member, you have a very unique opportunity to serve both at the same time.

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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/72157713741264467>

3. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution photos. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.) <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/367392/call-and-always-ready-alaska-naval-militia>



Sailors on State Active Duty Orders for the Alaska Naval Militia pose for a group photo in the National Guard Armory at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, April 14, 2020. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist Victoria Granado/Released)



Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Victoria Granado, a member of the Alaska Naval Militia, edits video footage she took as public affairs coverage of COVID-19 response efforts from the Alaska National Guard, Alaska State Defense Force and the Alaska Naval Militia at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, April 14, 2020. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Grace Nechanicky/Released)