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Alaska National Guard

*Department of Military
and Veterans Affairs*

Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

020-029

Apr. 15, 2020

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Proactive Posture and Partnership

The formation of Joint Force Alaska and its continuous effort to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska —President James Buchanan told 19th century Americans that “the test of leadership is not to put greatness into humanity, but to elicit it, for the greatness is already there.”

More than a month has passed since President Donald Trump issued a national emergency declaration for the COVID-19 pandemic. Though Alaska remains a state with one of the lowest contraction rates and death tolls in the nation, Alaska National Guard leadership, in a joint effort with the rest of the organized militia, have built on their preemptive measures to mitigate the potential harm done by the virus, acting in the spirit of Buchanan’s vision of how leadership is exemplified.

In early March, the Homeland Security Division of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs under the authority of Gov. Mike Dunleavy activated the State Emergency Operations Center to establish a network of available resources for partner agencies and the Alaska community.

The SEOC then initiated a unified command structure between the Department of Health and Social Services, Department of Public Safety and DMVA to ensure a swift, effective COVID-19 response and to augment potentially overwhelmed municipalities.

In support of DHSS and DPS, Joint Task Force Alaska was born. It was an historical undertaking that brought the entire organized militia together. This included the Army and Air National Guard, the Alaska State Defense Force, and the Alaska Naval Militia. It would soon highlight what competent leaders are capable of inspiring.

“I can’t help but be aware of the fact that we stand, once again, on the stage of history,” said Alaska Army National Guard Capt. James Tollefson, an operations plans officer with the JTF-AK. “Everything we do, every decision we make, is an act of history making. The COVID crisis will subside eventually and be followed by landmark reforms and legislation, just like [Hurricane] Katrina, the Enron collapse, the Great

Recession, and 9/11 were. Each of us engaged in this response will have played a small but essential part of that historical drama.”

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In state emergencies like this pandemic, the National Guard is called upon as a last resort to fulfill missions when other state, private and non-profit resources are unavailable or unable to meet requests directly related to an emergency or disaster. Mission assignments are validated, prioritized and requested by the SEOC.

The organized militia has the equipment, facilities, personnel, training and experience to meet logistical, transportation and safety requirements for the state upon request.

“The Guard is unique in that it has this state role and the ability to respond on behalf of our fellow Alaskans in their darkest hour,” Tollefson said. “It motivates me to know that while people are ‘hunkering down,’ we’re actively preparing to go forth and take care of our communities.”

Daily, Tollefson and the JTF-AK leadership have been hard at work redesigning the response force’s battle rhythm. A battle rhythm is the deliberate daily cycle of command, staff and unit activities intended to synchronize current and future operations.

“We’ve engaged in a lot of crucial relationship building with our brothers and sisters in the organized militia,” Tollefson said. “It will make a huge difference if this response ramps up and we’ve done a lot of internal process refinement to ensure that we’re ready to go when the time comes.”

Thus far, the AKNG and the rest of the organized militia under the leadership of JTF-AK have met the challenges set before them, Tollefson said. While the future of the COVID-19 pandemic is uncertain, Alaskans everywhere can rest assured that the Guardsmen, Alaska State Defensemen, and Naval Militiamen who live and work in local communities throughout Alaska, will be there to protect their neighbors in their time of need

“Our people are ready,” he said. “They’re volunteering at the Bean’s Café kitchen. ASDF and ANM service members are screening passengers at airports. We’re unloading, repackaging, and helping to send out supplies at the Department of Health and Social Services warehouse.

“Quietly, inexhaustibly, behind-the-scenes we are there, working and planning to keep Alaskans safe,” the captain continued. “And if the need arises, there will be many hundreds more who follow where these first few have led the way.”

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Photos + Video links below

1. **Attached pdf** includes story and a small selection of low-resolution photos for viewing on screen.
2. **Flickr Link:** <https://www.flickr.com/photos/alaskanationalguard/albums/72157713741264467>
3. **Story link:** <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/367766/proactive-posture-and-partnership-formation-joint-task-force-alaska-and-its-preparation-help-tackle-covid-19>
4. **Feature Video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v89EH8uYpMc&feature=youtu.be>
5. **B-Roll video:** <https://www.dvidshub.net/video/748560/alaska-national-guard-helps-beans-cafe-distribut-food-homeless>



Alaska Army National Guard Soldiers assigned to the AKARNG Recruiting and Retention Battalion volunteer at Bean's Cafe in Anchorage in an effort to feed thousands of local Alaskans amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Apr. 8, 2020. The prepackaged meals are distributed to Alaskans in the Anchorage area who are sheltering at local Sullivan and Boeke arenas. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Seth LaCount/Released)



Alaska Army National Guard Sgt. Dylan Granza fills sack lunches at Bean's Cafe in Anchorage, which will be distributed to thousands of Alaskans sheltering at Sullivan and Boeke arenas due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Apr. 8, 2020. Due to a shortage in volunteers amid the pandemic, these AKARNG Soldiers have rallied to help the local communities meet their needs. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Seth LaCount/Released)



Alaska Army National Guard mechanic Sgt. Kekoa Maclovesramirez unloads food distributed by the Food Bank of Alaska at Bean's Cafe in Anchorage, Apr. 8, 2020. "Im proud to serve my community in its time of need," Maclovesramirez said. "This pandemic has taken a toll on the state I love, and any little bit i can do to relieve that, is satisfying." (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Seth LaCount/Released)