

U.S. Army Teams Perform Unique Wilderness Mission on Mount McKinley, High Altitude Rescue Teams in Alaska Partner with National Park Service

(NAPSA)—Using the jagged mountains of the Alaska Range as obstacle courses and glaciers as landing pads, the U.S. Army's High Altitude Rescue Team (HART) is performing a unique wilderness mission. Partnered with the National Park Service, the team annually spends three weeks in and around the more than six million acres of Denali National Park and Preserve, training four-person Chinook helicopter pilots and crews amid dramatic scenery and dynamic weather patterns.

Nicknamed the "Sugar Bears," these crews also play a vital role in mountaineering safety, establishing high (14,200 ft.) and low (7,200 ft.) base camps for climbers and remaining on standby during peak climbing season to evacuate stranded explorers in the harshest conditions.

"When you actually get called up to this mission, you know it's the real thing," says U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer Wade Boynton, Chief Instructor, High Altitude Rescue Team. "There could be somebody whose life literally depends on you—that's a good feeling at the end of the day. There might be somebody walking around who might not otherwise be here if it wasn't for us."

Through the partnership, the Army aviation team—Company B, 4th Battalion, 123rd Aviation Regiment, based at Fort Wainwright,



Alaska—prepares for their war-time mission to provide heavy-lift helicopter support anywhere in the world. Maneuvering the massive Chinook helicopters along the peaks and ridges of Denali National Park and Preserve is no easy task for these Soldiers assigned to serve and train in the mountains. Each helicopter weighs 23,000 pounds without cargo, measures 51 feet long by 19 feet tall and travels at speeds up to 200 miles per hour.

"The mountain will change hourly," says Army Lt. Col. Randy Rotte, Commander of 4th Battalion, 123rd Aviation Regiment. "It might be a beautiful day, you might be fighting the sun and the warmth, and a few hours later you could be hunkered down in an ice cave, riding out a pretty bad storm."

Remaining cognizant of their training mission and the environmental demands they face, the team's annual rescue assistance to the National Park Service also helps prepare pilots and crews for

survival situations they may face during war. The team inserts nearly 20,000 lbs. of essential provisions such as oxygen, medical supplies, fuel and food during the climbing season. Tents and building materials are also transported for shelters used by Park Service rangers and volunteers.

About 1,300 thrill-seekers register each year to conquer Mount McKinley, the highest point in North America. At 20,320 ft., attempting to reach the top can overwhelm even the most seasoned mountaineers.

"It's a very demanding place for us to be and that's why I like to do it," says Chief Warrant Officer and Chinook Pilot Jeffery Gladden.

Since 1971, the Sugar Bears have hauled hundreds of thousands of troops and tons of cargo in support of training operations and community support missions. Whether rescuing stranded climbers in Denali, hauling 1,000-gallon water buckets to fight forest fires, performing emergency airlifts of native Alaskans in the face of rising floodwaters or delivering holiday gifts to remote orphans, these courageous pilots and crews remain prepared to provide air support and perform high altitude rescues under any condition.

To learn more about U.S. Army aviation, visit www.goarmy.com or www.wainwright.army.mil.