



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 11, 2021

21-20

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Tennessee National Guard aircrew rescues stranded hiker

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. – A Tennessee Army National Guard medical flight crew responded to an emergency air evacuation mission after a victim suffered from difficulty breathing while hiking in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park area, May 9.

Shortly before 7 a.m., the Tennessee Military Department and Tennessee Emergency Management Agency were notified of a hiker in distress near the Tri Corner Knob Shelter along the Appalachian Trail. Requiring immediate medical care and unable to be transported by ground, the Tennessee National Guard was alerted for a helicopter rescue.

A UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter from Detachment 1, Company C, 1-171st Aviation Regiment based in Knoxville assembled in under an hour and launched to the incident site, arriving at the Tri Corner Knob Shelter at approximately 9 a.m.

The flight crew consisted of Chief Warrant Officer 2 Daniel Backus, Pilot in Command, Capt. Philip Draper, Pilot, Staff Sgt. Joseph Hough, Crew Chief, Spc. Joshua Culotta, Crew Chief, and Sgt. 1st Class Giovanni DeZuani, Flight Paramedic.

Once the rescue aircraft arrived on scene, the flight crew began hoist operations. With the aircraft unable to land due to terrain, Culotta lowered DeZuani to the patient via rescue hoist where he performed a quick medical assessment, initial first aid, and ensured that the patient was stable enough for hoisting. Once complete, DeZuani and the patient were lifted safely into the helicopter, which departed for the University of Tennessee Medical Center in Knoxville. The entire hoisting operation took 12 minutes to complete.

While onboard, the aircrew continued medical aid to the patient during the 20-minute flight to the hospital.

“The rescue mission went off flawlessly,” said Col. Jay Deason, the State Army Aviation Officer. “Once we were notified of the mission, the flight crew immediately jumped into action. They are a well-trained and experienced crew that are true professionals at what they do.”

This is the second search and rescue mission by the Tennessee National Guard this year.

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Spc. Joshua Culotta begins hoist operations and lowers Sgt. 1st Class Giovanni DeZuani to a patient at the Tri Corner Knob Shelter on the Appalachian Trail, May 9. (Courtesy photo from the Tennessee National Guard)



A Tennessee Army National Guard medical flight crew responded to an emergency air evacuation mission after a hiker has difficulty breathing while on the Appalachian Trail, May 9. The flight crew successfully transported the patient to the University of Tennessee Medical Center in Knoxville. (Courtesy Photo from the Tennessee National Guard)

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