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Tennessee National Guard rescues two hikers in National Park

LOUISVILLE, Tenn. – During the afternoon and evening of May 31, flight crews from the Tennessee Army National Guard, based at Joint Base McGhee-Tyson, performed two air evacuation missions for hikers suffering from medical emergencies in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Shortly after 2 p.m., eastern time, the Tennessee National Guard and the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency were notified of a hiker suffering from respiratory distress in the park and in need of medical assistance and rapid transport to a nearby hospital. The hiker was in a remote area, near Mount LeConte Lodge, southeast of Gatlinburg.

Once TEMA was notified of the possible mission, the Tennessee National Guardsmen assigned to the 1-230th Assault Helicopter Battalion, in Knoxville, assembled a flight crew, readied a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter for flight, and prepared to rescue the hiker. Fifteen minutes after the mission was approved, the aircraft departed Joint Base McGhee-Tyson and flew directly to Mount Leconte Lodge.

The Tennessee Army National Guard flight crew consisted of two pilots, Maj. Hulon Holmes and Chief Warrant Officer 3 Luke Hargrove, the crew chief, Sgt. Daniel Bandy, and two flight paramedics, Sgt. 1st Class Nolan Ogle and Giovanni DeZuani.

Fourteen minutes after launching, the aircraft arrived at the lodge and the crew quickly located the hiker and park rangers with the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, who were rendering first aid.

Shortly after 4 p.m., the aircraft crew chief, Daniel Bandy, lowered Nolan Ogle and Giovanni DeZuani, the flight paramedics, to the ground by hoist to do a quick medical assessment and prepare the hiker for transport. After a few minutes rendering aid, the hiker was hoisted into the Blackhawk helicopter hovering above. Ogle, DuZuani, and the patient's wife were also hoisted into the aircraft where they continued giving aid to the patient. Once everyone was safely on board, the aircraft flew to the University of Tennessee Medical Center in Knoxville.

At approximately 4:30 p.m., the aircraft landed at UT Medical Center where medical personnel rushed the patient into the emergency room. Once the patient was safely in the care of medical professionals, the aircraft returned to Louisville and landed just before 5 p.m.



Just over two hours later, at approximately 7:30 p.m., the Tennessee National Guard received another notification of a hiker in possible cardiac distress near the Great Smoky Mountains National Park along the Alum Cave Trails. The mission was quickly approved through TEMA and the crew began preflight procedures.

Around 8:15 p.m., the aircraft departed Joint Base McGhee-Tyson and flew directly to the Alum Cave Trail area, which is also southeast of Gatlinburg.

The Tennessee Army National Guard flight crew consisted of two pilots, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Brian Spotts and Chief Warrant Officer 3 Michael Brasfield, two crew chiefs, Staff Sgt. Ryan McKnight and Sgt. Daniel Bandy, and two flight paramedics, Sgt. 1st Class Nolan Ogle and Giovanni DeZuani.

Fifteen minutes after launching, the aircraft arrived along the trail where the crew radioed park rangers who were rendering aid to the hiker. The rangers then initiated smoke canisters to identify their location to the aircraft, which flew to an area very close to the site where they could safely hoist to.

Shortly before 8:45 p.m., the aircraft crew chief, Ryan McKnight, lowered Nolan Ogle, the flight paramedic, to the ground by hoist where he met with the park rangers, did a medical assessment of the patient, and then prepared the hiker to be hoisted. After a few short minutes on the ground, Ogle and the hiker was hoisted together into the Blackhawk helicopter hovering above where he continued aid along with the other paramedic and crew chief. Once the patient and paramedic were safely on board, the aircraft flew to the University of Tennessee Medical Center in Knoxville.

At approximately 9:10 p.m., the aircraft landed at UT Medical Center where medical personnel received the hiker and rushed the patient into the emergency room. The entire rescue mission took less than an hour.

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Tennessee Army National Guard Blackhawk helicopter crew chief, Sgt. Daniel Bandy, lowers flight paramedic, Sgt. 1st Class Nolan Ogle, to the ground by hoist to begin rescuing a hiker in respiratory distress in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, at Mount LeConte Lodge, in the late afternoon of May 31. (submitted photo)



Tennessee Army National Guard Blackhawk helicopter crew chief, Sgt. Daniel Bandy, hoists flight paramedic, Sgt. 1st Class Giovanni DeZuani, into the aircraft after rescuing a hiker in respiratory distress in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, at Mount LeConte Lodge, in the late afternoon of May 31. (submitted photo)

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