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Tennessee Guardsmen rescue hiker in Great Smoky Mountains National Park

LOUISVILLE, Tenn. – On the early morning of Tuesday, September 10, a flight crew from the Tennessee Army National Guard, based at Joint Base McGhee-Tyson, rescued an injured hiker in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Shortly after 3 a.m., eastern time, the Tennessee National Guard and the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency were notified of an injured hiker needing rapid transport to a nearby hospital. The hiker was in a remote area, near Bullhead Trail, south of Gatlinburg, close to the North Carolina border.

Once TEMA was notified of the possible mission, the Tennessee National Guardsmen assigned to Task Force Smokey assembled a flight crew and readied a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter for flight. After the mission was approved, the aircraft departed Joint Base McGhee-Tyson at approximately 4:50 a.m., flying directly to Bullhead Trail to rescue the hiker.

The Tennessee Army National Guard flight crew consisted of two pilots, Capt. Brandon Rodriguez and Chief Warrant Officer 3 Luke Hargrove, the crew chief, Staff Sgt. Ernest Harlan, and flight paramedic Sgt. 1st Class John Sharbel.

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

Shortly before 5:15 a.m., the aircraft crew chief, Ernest Harlan, lowered John Sharbel, the flight paramedic, 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 and Sharbel were then hoisted into the Blackhawk helicopter hovering above where first aid was continued. Once everyone was safely on board, the aircraft flew to the University of Tennessee Medical Center in Knoxville.

At approximately 5:45 a.m., the aircraft landed at the 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 6:15 a.m.

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