



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Tennessee National Guard rescues hiker on Appalachian Trail

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. – A medical flight crew from the Tennessee Army National Guard performed an emergency air evacuation mission for a hiker in medical distress along the Appalachian Trail, April 5.

Shortly after midnight, the Tennessee Military Department and Tennessee Emergency Management Agency were notified of a 27-year-old hiker needing rescue from the Great Smoky Mountain National Park. The hiker was in a remote area near the Silers Bald Shelter along the border of North Carolina and Tennessee.

TEMA approved the mission and Tennessee National Guardsmen, assigned to the 1-230th Assault Helicopter Battalion, in Knoxville, assembled a flight crew, prepared a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter, and launched to rescue the hiker. The aircrew left shortly after 2:00 a.m. local time and arrived near the Silers Bald Shelter 30 minutes later. The crew began searching in the darkness for the victim as park rangers from the Great Smoky Mountain National Park radioed location coordinates to the aircraft and marked the pick-up site with a fire and strobe light.

Unfortunately, the aircraft encountered thick cloud cover and the darkness made finding the victim difficult. With visibility greatly hindered, the aircraft shifted locations, lowered their search altitude, and continued searching while receiving directions for the park rangers on the ground via radio. After a few more minutes, the strobe light and fire set by the rangers were seen and the rescue commenced.

Just before 3 a.m., the aircraft crew chief lowered a flight paramedic to the ground by hoist to do a quick medical assessment and prepare the hiker for transport. After a few short minutes on the ground, the hiker and flight medic were then hoisted into the Blackhawk helicopter hovering above where additional aid was rendered to the patient. The aircraft then flew to the University of Tennessee Medical Center in Knoxville.

At approximately 3:30 a.m., the aircraft landed at UT Medical Center where medical personnel received the patient. The entire rescue mission took less than an hour and a half.

The Tennessee Army National Guard flight crew consisted of two pilots, Capt. Hulon Holmes and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Harold Ridings, crew chief Sgt. Gabriel Weston, and two flight paramedics, Sgt. 1st Class Giovanni DeZuani and Sgt. 1st Class Tracy Banta.

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A Tennessee Army National Guard Blackhawk helicopter locates the fire and strobe light signals set by park rangers with the Great Smoky Mountain National Park during the rescue of a hiker near the Silers Bald Shelter along the Appalachian Trail in the early morning of April 5. (Submitted photo)



Tennessee Army National Guard Blackhawk helicopter crew chief, Sgt. Gabriel Weston, locates a hiker in distress and prepares the aircraft hoist to begin rescuing the hiker in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, near the Silers Bald Shelter, along the Appalachian Trail, in the early morning of April 5. (Submitted photo)

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