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Tennessee National Guard rescues hiker in National Park

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. – During the night of September 2, a medical flight crew from the Tennessee Army National Guard performed an emergency air evacuation mission for a hiker suffering a severe illness in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Shortly after 9:30 p.m., eastern time, the Tennessee National Guard and the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency were notified of a sick hiker needing medical assistance and evacuation to a nearby hospital. The hiker was in a remote area of the park, just west of Mount LeConte.

A little more than an hour after being notified, 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 Tennessee Army National Guard flight crew consisted of two pilots, Capt. Brandon Rodriguez and 1st Lt. Justin Hyler, a crew chief, Staff Sgt. Joseph Hough, and a flight paramedic, Sgt. 1st Class Giovanni DeZuani.

The aircrew departed around 11:00 p.m., from McGhee-Tyson Air National Guard Base and arrived at the rescue site 15 minutes later. The crew quickly located the hiker and the park rangers from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, who were rendering first aid.

Shortly after 11:20 p.m., the aircraft crew chief, Hough, lowered DeZuani, the flight paramedic, to the ground by hoist to perform a quick medical assessment and prepare the hiker for transport. After a few short minutes rendering aid, the hiker was connected to a rescue strop and hoisted into the Blackhawk helicopter hovering above. DeZuani was also hoisted into the aircraft where he continued giving aid to the patient. The entire rescue took less than 15 minutes. Once everyone was onboard, the aircraft flew to the University of Tennessee Medical Center in Knoxville.

At approximately 11:45 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 and a half.

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Tennessee National Guard crew chief, Staff Sgt. Joseph Hough, lowers the flight paramedic, Sgt. 1st Class Giovanni DeZuani, to a clearing near a sick hiker during a rescue at the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, September 2. (Submitted photo)

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