



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jan. 3, 2023

23-01

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Tennessee National Guard rescues hikers on Appalachian Trail

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. – A medical flight crew from the Tennessee National Guard conducted an emergency air evacuation mission after two hikers became stranded on the Appalachian Trail, Dec. 31, 2022.

Shortly after 5:15 a.m. on New Year's Eve, the Tennessee Military Department and Tennessee Emergency Management Agency were notified of two hikers needing assistance in the Sampson Mountain Wilderness Area, south of Johnson City, Tenn. The hikers were stranded in the darkness of night and surrounded by cliffs and drop offs in the area. Greene County Sheriff's Office were first to receive the call however, they could not access the hikers, prompting the request for air support.

TEMA approved the mission and Tennessee National Guardsmen, assigned to 1-230th Assault Helicopter Battalion, in Knoxville, began preparing a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter. The crew left shortly after 8:00 a.m. local time and located the hikers at 8:45 a.m. Staff Sgt. Sharbel lead the on-ground hoist mission. Both hikers were lifted into the aircraft shortly after 9:00 a.m. The paramedics rendered aid during the short flight to Johnson City Medical Center, where the patients were transferred to medical personnel at the hospital at 9:16 a.m.

The flight crew consisted of two pilots, 1st Lt. Samuel Gibson and Chief Warrant Officer 3 Andrew Redley, crew chief Staff Sgt. Ryan McKnight, and two flight paramedics, Sgt. 1st Class Giovanni DeZuani and Staff Sgt. John Sharbel.

The hikers recovered from minor injuries before being released.

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Staff Sgt. Ryan McKnight lowers Staff Sgt. John Sharbel during a recovery mission on the Appalachian Trail, Dec. 31, 2022. Local authorities requested help from the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency and the Tennessee National Guard to rescue two stranded hikers the morning of New Year's Eve. The two hikers were airlifted to Johnson City Medical Center where they recovered from minor injuries before being released. (Submitted photo)



Staff Sgt. Ryan McKnight pulls a patient onboard a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter during a recovery mission on the Appalachian Trail, Dec. 31, 2022. Local authorities requested help from the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency and the Tennessee National Guard to rescue two stranded hikers the morning of New Year's Eve. The two hikers were airlifted to Johnson City Medical Center where they recovered from minor injuries before being released. (Submitted photo)

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