

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NM National Guard helicopter crew airlifts injured hiker

SANTE FE, N.M. – The New Mexico National Guard received a request late in the late evening of Jan. 6, 2024, from New Mexico Search and Rescue coordinators. Three people (two men and one woman) on the La Luz trail about 5-6 miles from the base of the mountain were lost and were ill-equipped for the dangerous winter conditions. Ground Search and Rescue Teams from multiple agencies hiked to their location and determined that the female was unable to walk and required a hoist rescue. A UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter crew of five (call sign LOBO 82) from the New Mexico Army National Guard's Santa Fe-based Golf Company, 1st Battalion, 168th Aviation Regiment, accepted the mission in the early morning of Jan. 7. Golf Company is a medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) unit which can provide critical care transport. The crewmembers reported to their unit, prepared the aircraft, and lifted off at first light to attempt the rescue.

Simultaneously, the New Mexico State Police launched their aircraft Able 7 to attempt a hoist rescue in daylight conditions but was unable to fly at a low enough level due to high winds. Instead, they flew to a higher altitude and assisted in the communication between the incident commander on the ground and the New Mexico National Guard Black Hawk crew. The National Guard crew was able to lower a medic via hoist to the ground where he packaged the patient in a warming bag and then into a skid basket to hoist her into the helicopter for transport to the University of New Mexico Hospital.

Both medics on this mission were Critical Care Flight paramedics and began life-saving measures on the ground and during transport. Additionally, the hoist operator has years of experience and certifications to be qualified to operate the hoist with patients aboard. The pilots, one of whom (Edens) is a Firefighter/Paramedic with Albuquerque Fire and Rescue and the other (Anderson) is a full-time pilot with the New Mexico National Guard, are both extremely familiar with the area and this type of rescue – experience which is invaluable in these difficult circumstances.

The New Mexico National Guard (and its active-duty counterparts, when available) are the only organizations with the proper aircraft and training to conduct hoist operations above 10,000-foot elevation and to conduct Night Vision Goggle (NVG) hoist operations in darkness.

The New Mexico National Guard crewmembers for this mission are as follows.

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Dominic Anderson (Pilot in Command)

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Mark Edens (Pilot)

Staff Sgt. Kevin Butler (Critical Care Paramedic)

Sgt. Connor Verploegh (Critical Care Paramedic)

Sgt. Robert Garcia (Crew Chief and Hoist Operator)

