



Missouri Guard Adds Hoist Capability to Black Hawks

Equipment and training will be used for extractions during appropriate state or national emergencies.

By Matthew J. Wilson

Missouri National Guard



Photo by Chief Warrant Officer 3 Steven Haley

Staff Sgt. Chuck Call, of Company C, 1st Battalion, 106th Assault Helicopter Battalion of Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., hangs from a UH-60 Black Hawk hoist during training in Springfield, Mo. The Missouri National Guard recently acquired the hoist capability and training that will be used.

THE Missouri National Guard now has the capability and training to provide hoist extractions with some of its UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters.

Soldiers from Company C, 1st Battalion, 106th Assault Helicopter Battalion of Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., and the 1107th Theater Aviation Sustainment Maintenance Group, of Springfield, Mo., trained using hoists in Springfield.

The key to a successful extraction is teamwork, said Maj. Josh Hudgens, a pilot with Joint Forces Headquarters, Missouri.

"It needs a seamless flow of crew coordination between all crew members, especially the crew chiefs in the back," Hudgens said.

The hoists can be used to extract up to 600 pounds of personnel or cargo per lift into a Black Hawk during appropriate state or national emergencies. Possible uses are lifting stranded people off of cars and rooftops during floods or failed river crossings, as well as pulling injured or stranded hikers out of difficult terrain, like a ledge on the side of a bluff.

The state has two hoist units and a number of aircraft modified to accept the hoist installation. One hoist will stay in Springfield at the depot, while another will be housed at the Sen. Kit Bond Army Aviation Facility on post.

Two other pilots - Chief Warrant Officer 3 Steven Haley, of the 1-106th, and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Race Baker, of

Company A, 1107th – and three crew chiefs – Sgt. 1st Class John Paul Lewis, of the 1-106th, Staff Sgt. Chuck Call, of the 1-106th, and Staff Sgt. Daryl Kelley, of Company A, 1107th – participated in the training.

The training consisted of a day in classroom and two days of field exercises. The pilots' job consists of maintaining the Black Hawk in a hover over the target area. To achieve success, pilots work with crew chiefs, who give them direction to get the hoist line, which can extend up to 250 feet, over the target.

"The crew chief has to be able to verbalize everything," Kelley said. "The pilots are flying blind and working off verbal commands from whoever is in the back operating the hoist. If the crew chief can't communicate, the mission is not going to happen – that's what it boils down to."

Pilots and crew chiefs have to deal with wind, drift, rotor wash from the helicopter, shadows and a lack of landmarks in the sky for the pilots to drop the hoist line, Kelley said. It is considered a success when the hoist settles within 5 feet of the target.

"It's like dropping a penny in a bucket from 150 feet in the air out of a moving aircraft," Kelley said. "The longer you drop the hoist, it gets a lot more difficult to control as far as getting it on target. You are communicating all of your movements to the pilot so they can position the aircraft properly. You kind of have to be like the ESPN sports announcer in the back, so the pilots can be aware of what's going on. The windier it gets, the more difficult that becomes."

The key to executing is simply to practice, says Kelley, who was a hoist crew chief in the Marines.

"There is no replacement for proficiency and repetition, he said. "It's definitely a challenge and not something that you learn quickly. It takes lots of practice."

Crew chiefs not only operate the hoist, but one will sit in an extraction seat, usually one known as a jungle penetrator, at the end of the hoist line to descend to the target area. The jungle penetrator looks like a boat anchor with three seats that fold down. There also are other specialized extraction seats for different situations.

In a situation like Hurricane Katrina

where 20 to 30 people were stranded on one roof top, Call said a hoist crew could extract about two people each descent, fill the helicopter with about 11 passengers, drop them off in a safe area, and then return to recover the rest.

Having the hoist capability will be extremely valuable in disaster situations, Call said. He recalled how in the Missouri floods of 1993, several members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers were on a levee when it broke, which left them stranded and holding on to tree branches in rushing water.

Being the first Missouri Guardsmen to be able to save lives and help citizens with this new capability is a source of modest satisfaction for Hudgens and his fellow Soldiers.

"It's just what we do," he said. "That's our job and that's what we're here for. We are all very proud of what we do. We're just excited to be a part of any future missions that come up."

"It's very exciting and we train as safely as we can. We know the risks involved. We're all professional and we're confident we can do it."



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