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Coast Guard faces steep learning curve in the Arctic
by Nicole Klauss / Kodiak Daily Mirror

Cover from "Operation Arctic Shield 2012" courtesy John Young.

BARROW, Alaska - The Coast Guard has officially launched aviation operations here, the northernmost city in the United States. In a place where whale bones are scattered in front yards, pipelines run aboveground, and trash cans are spray-painted with positive messages like "kids are our future," the Coast Guard is something new. For years, the 4,200 people of Barrow sailed the Arctic without the Coast Guard. The North Slope Borough search and rescue team took care of its own people, and the Coast Guard was called only in extreme cases. Times have changed. Barrow is surrounded by open tundra and the Arctic Ocean. As sea ice continues to disappear, the city will begin to experience increasing boat traffic, both from companies planning to drill for oil and travelers looking for a shortcut from the Atlantic to the Pacific. That is why the Coast Guard sent an aviation team more than 900 miles from its home in Kodiak to Barrow: It

needs to be prepared if something goes wrong. *Arctic Shield 2012* is the result of that preparation. The Coast Guard has sent outreach teams into the North Slope for several years, but this is its biggest deployment yet and the first that will allow it to provide around-the-clock search and rescue. The Coast Guard sent two MH-60 Jayhawk helicopters with support teams to Barrow to reduce response time to incidents in the Chukchi and Beaufort seas. They arrived in Barrow two weeks ago. From July to October, the Coast Guard will have the two teams working out of a small rented hangar at Wiley Post-Will Rogers Memorial Airport. The Coast Guard's first official day of search and rescue operations was Monday, the same day a new team arrived. "We just started to bring people up for (search and rescue missions)," Lt. Randall Black told the Kodiak Daily Mirror. Black is one of the pilots making the 900-mile commute to Barrow this summer, bringing parts, fuel and people from Air Station Kodiak. The Coast Guardsmen are stationed at the Barrow location for two to three weeks at a time, then replaced by a new group. Operating out of Barrow is difficult, even for pilots used to Kodiak's ferocious conditions. Barrow combines flat tundra, strong winds and low cloud cover, which makes flying difficult. "There's a learning curve," Lt. Tim Williams said. "It's a new area." Logistically, the Coast Guard has to make sure it has the right equipment and supplies in advance. Anything not on hand has to be flown from Kodiak, causing delays. "We're maximizing what we have," Williams said. "If a helicopter

needs a part it takes at least three hours to get here."

One of these helos carried the cover shown in column one.

The Coast Guard has also been working to minimize the impact it has on residents. Barrow has few places for temporary workers to stay, and limited facilities for people who don't live year-round. Adding 26 people and two hungry helicopters to the town might otherwise put an added burden things like grocery stores. "There is a lot of subsistence here," Williams said. "We don't want to interfere with that so we take operations outside of the town." The team has done some community outreach over the last few weeks to help Barrow residents understand why the Coast Guard is working there. An open house last week gave residents the opportunity to Coast Guardsmen and the North Slope Borough rescue team, then look over their aircraft and equipment. Coast Guard Lt. Vincent Jansen also gave a briefing during a North Slope Borough assembly meeting to discuss the Coast Guard's planned aviation operations around the area.

San Pedro pictorial cancels
Returns from the San Pedro post office for the two *USS Iowa* pictorials were so bad, most were returned for a refund of the ruined postage. Replacement covers are there, so I am keeping my fingers crossed that the second batch fares better then the first.