

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Kentucky Air National Guard Complete Demanding Exercise on St. Croix

Emerald Warrior 25.2 brought Kentucky Air National Guard special tactics Airmen to STX, where they performed parachute landings, medical evacuations, and reconnaissance missions in coordination with U.S. & USVI agencies, local partners, and support teams.

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A Kentucky Air National Guard special tactics Airman jumps into Henry E. Rohlsen Airport, St. Croix, during Emerald Warrior 25.2 operations. By. Kentucky National Guard Public Affairs Office.

CHRISTIANSTED, USVI — A squadron of special tactics Airmen from the Kentucky Air National Guard wrapped up a five-day training mission on August 30, testing their ability to operate in maritime conditions under simulated enemy threats. See pictures of the training [here](#).

The troops — combat controllers, pararescuemen, and special reconnaissance specialists — conducted land, sea, and air missions from St. Croix as part of Emerald Warrior 25.2, a large-scale Air Force Special Operations Command exercise staged in multiple locations. The event was planned and executed by the Louisville-based 123rd Airlift Wing.

According to the exercise planner, the Airmen parachuted into contested territory, managed airfield operations, controlled aircraft, carried out reconnaissance, responded to search-and-rescue scenarios, and oversaw notional medical evacuations. “Our Airmen exercised their unique skillsets...on a very tight timeline,” the officer said.

The Caribbean setting offered realistic challenges. “Operations in the Caribbean simulate many of the geographical features our forces may encounter when deployed around the globe,” the planner explained. “Having to overcome the kinds of challenges presented here will make us a more lethal and effective force the next time we conduct littoral operations anywhere in the world.”

Complex Missions Across Air, Land, and Sea

The exercise began August 26 when six Airmen parachuted three miles offshore into the Caribbean Sea with an inflatable boat from a C-130J Super Hercules. Eleven more combat controllers and pararescuemen jumped into Henry E. Rohlsen Airport from the same aircraft, quickly clearing runways, securing the perimeter, and implementing air traffic control to enable further landings.

In another scenario, Airmen traveled 75 nautical miles by boat to conduct reconnaissance and targeting operations against simulated enemy forces on a nearby island. Other drills tested search-and-rescue operations and medical care in austere environments, including a 32-hour mission where pararescuemen located life-raft survivors after a simulated crash, parachuted into the ocean with boats, administered medical care, and coordinated helicopter hoist evacuations.

“This was a particularly demanding scenario designed to test both the rescue capabilities and the survival skills of our Airmen on the open ocean,” the planner said.

Additional training included helicopter infiltration and exfiltration from UH-60 Black Hawks provided by the Mississippi Army National Guard’s 185th Aviation Brigade, as well as a mass-casualty drill requiring Airmen to triage victims of a simulated industrial accident, provide battlefield care, and coordinate evacuations from the Virgin Islands Air National Guard Station.

Partnerships and Support

The operation required extensive coordination with the U.S. Coast Guard, the Virgin Islands Governor’s Office, Police Department, Air National Guard, Henry E. Rohlsen Airport, local marinas, and businesses. Combat mission support teams provided critical

roles including communications, diving support, parachute rigging, vehicle maintenance, and logistics.

“An exercise of this scope, which has been in the planning stage for over a year, would not have been successful without the combined efforts of everyone involved, from our combat support troops to the governor’s office to local citizens who were so supportive of our efforts to ensure our nation’s security,” the planner said.

Elite Capabilities and Humanitarian History

Kentucky’s special tactics Airmen are among the most highly trained military operators in the world, with expertise in austere airfield operations, reconnaissance, tactical weather forecasting, trauma care, and personnel recovery. They are trained to deploy by land, sea, or air into contested environments for both combat and humanitarian missions.

The unit has a long history of humanitarian response. Members directed aid flights after Haiti’s devastating 2010 earthquake, oversaw evacuations following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and played key roles in rescue and air traffic operations after Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria in 2017.