

# A Rescue at Sharatin Mountain

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Photos Courtesy: Kodiak Post

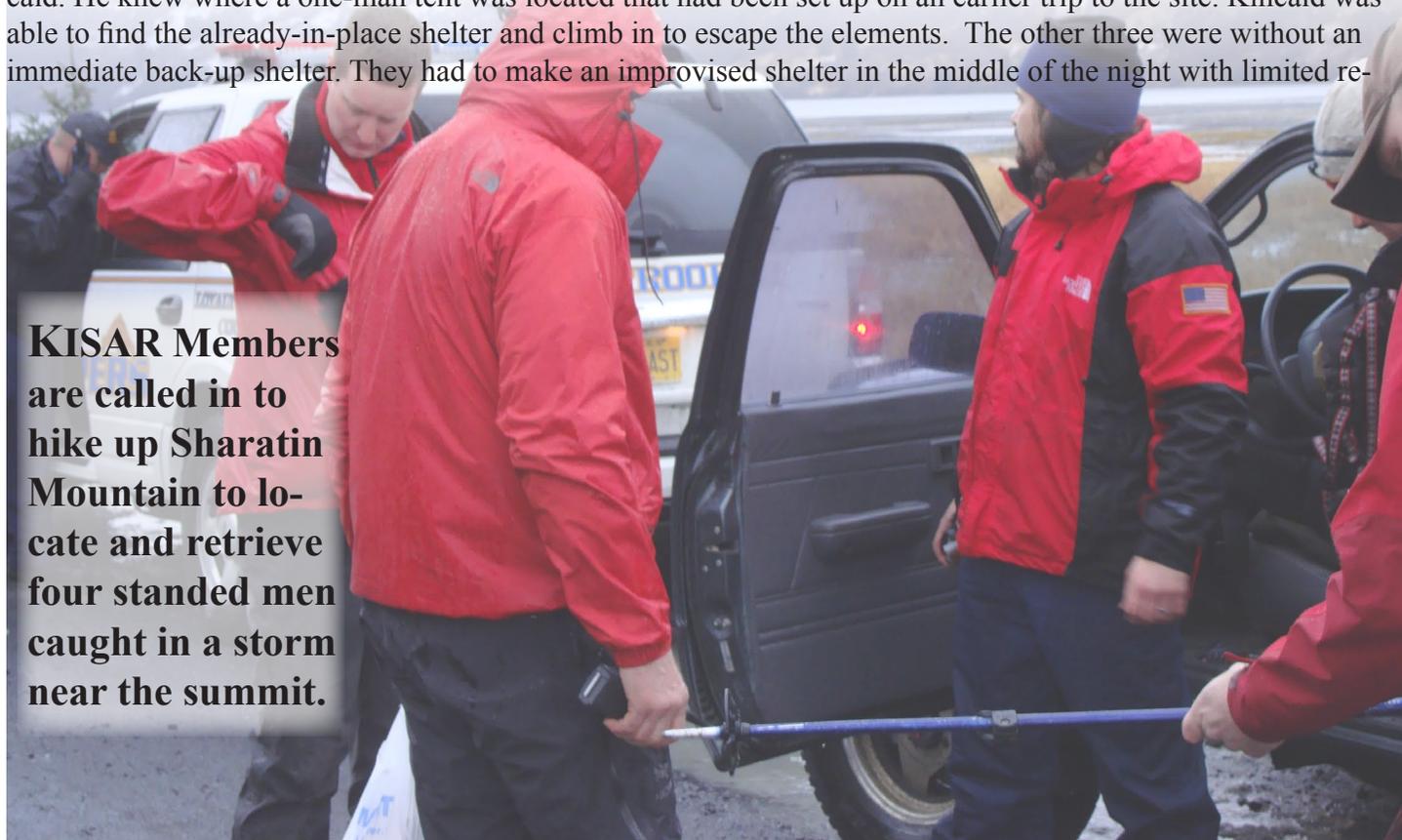
In the early morning hours of December 8, 2008 four men near the summit of Sharatin Mountain found themselves in the middle of a severe winter storm. The wind carried away crucial survival gear leaving them cold, wet and in need of help.

The United States Coast Guard (USCG) received the initial call for help. The call was transferred to the Alaska State Troopers' post in Kodiak. Both the USCG and the Alaska State Troopers immediately geared up for a long and difficult rescue that had a potentially dismal outcome. The men, identified as 46 year old Brian Kincaid of Palmer, 36 year old Lawrence Movius of Kodiak, 49 year old Daniel Davis, and 49 year old George Garcia of Kodiak, were up at a construction site to build the foundation for a relay tower. They were dropped off the day before by a local air service. Once at the work site, they began setting up camp. The bad weather moved in much quicker than they had counted on.

"It wasn't one thing, but a multitude of little things that led these men into their situation up top Sharatin," Alaska State Trooper Sgt. Mo Hughes said.

At the top of Sharatin Mountain, wind speeds were surpassing 50 knots and snow was blowing causing visibility to be exceedingly poor.

When the shelter blew away the crews became separated in the blinding snow. This was a repeat trip for Kincaid. He knew where a one-man tent was located that had been set up on an earlier trip to the site. Kincaid was able to find the already-in-place shelter and climb in to escape the elements. The other three were without an immediate back-up shelter. They had to make an improvised shelter in the middle of the night with limited re-



**KISAR Members are called in to hike up Sharatin Mountain to locate and retrieve four stranded men caught in a storm near the summit.**

sources. Eventually they constructed a snowcave and a windblock, but by the time they climbed into the cave they were cold and wet.

Kincaid was able to contact troopers via a satellite phone while the others communicated with the USCG by VHF radio. Kincaid was hunkered down and, believing he was safe for the time being, didn't want to risk venturing out on his own.

Garcia, Davis and Movius told the Coast Guard they were cold and wet and were unsure how to traverse down the mountain in the blinding snow. They further stated they lost some valuable winter clothing when the tent was blown away and, due to being wet, they were not dressed to descend in adverse weather. The three men also had limited experience in mountaineering. The small group made the decision to wait to be rescued.

Due to the severity of the storm and the reported condition of the men, a rescue was immediately in the works. The USCG helo could not safely respond to pick the men up off the top of Sharatin due to the weather conditions.

Sgt. Mo Hughes, Trp. Dennis Dupras and Trp. Robert Casey, from the Kodiak Post drove out the road to begin setting up a staging area. Sgt. Paul Fussey stayed at post to assist with relaying communications. The Kodiak Island Search and Rescue Group (KISAR) was contacted and requested to participate in the mission. Thomas Schmalix, Hal Long, Joel Pomerinke and Kerry Felton geared up and headed out to the staging area to get a briefing before beginning their ascent of Sharatin.

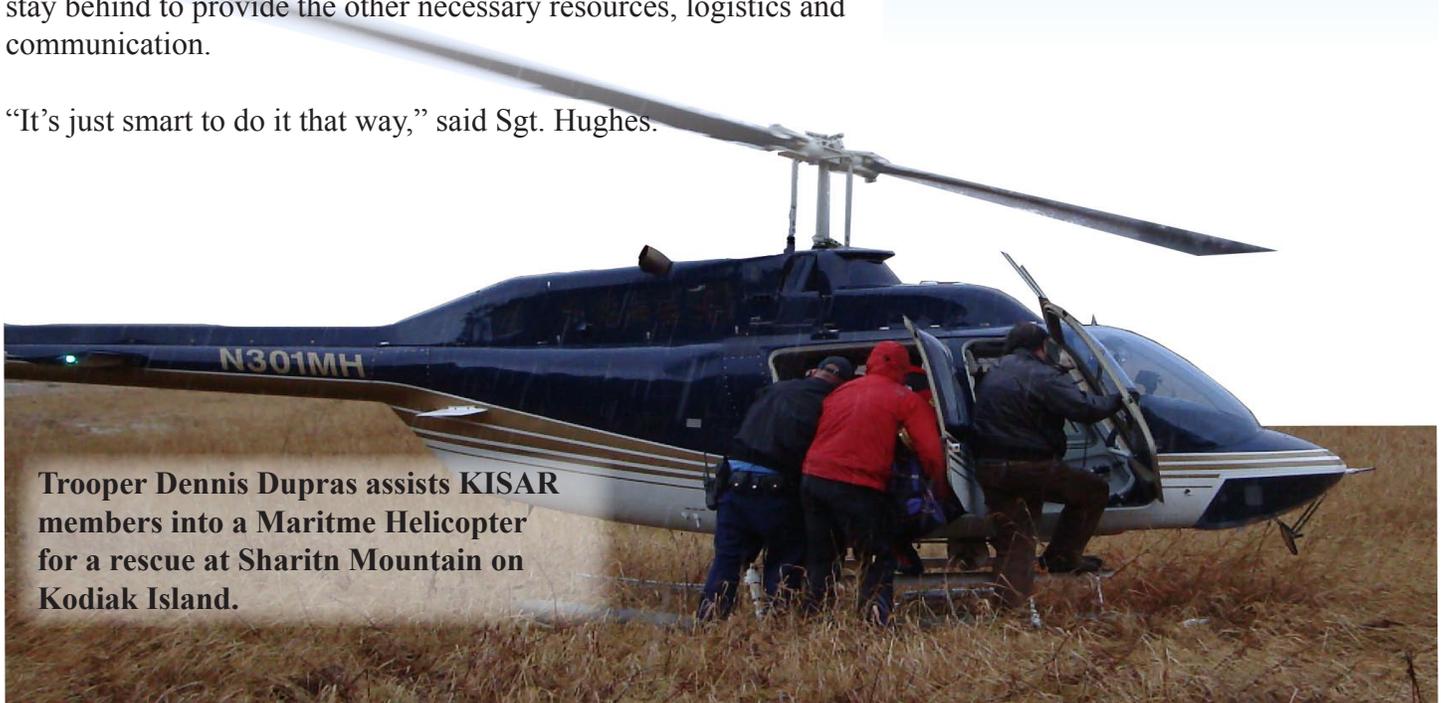
Sgt. Hughes says AST sends the people who have the experience and the proper gear to perform the actual rescue while troopers stay behind to provide the other necessary resources, logistics and communication.

"It's just smart to do it that way," said Sgt. Hughes.



**The communications vehicle was staged at the ski chalet at mile 5.6 Anton Larsen Rd. Troopers used it to aid in relaying communications between the victims and the rescue crews. The Chalet is at the top of the pass. Troopers and Medics were staged down the Anton Larsen Road.**

**Due to the rugged terrain and the poor weather conditions, Troopers needed multiple staging points to guarantee a reliable relay of communications between SAR managers, rescuers and the victims.**



**Trooper Dennis Dupras assists KISAR members into a Maritime Helicopter for a rescue at Sharitin Mountain on Kodiak Island.**

After reviewing the various options, troopers determined the weather would continue to prevent air assets from reaching the top of Sharatin, but the ceiling was high enough to get the KISAR group at least part way up. A Maritime helicopter, piloted by Tom Walters was in the area. Walters volunteered to transport the rescuers up as high as he could safely go. The Maritime helicopter was able to deposit KISAR, with warm clothing for the four men, safely near the 1400 ft mark.

On a good day, the climb up Sharatin, starting at the trailhead, takes roughly two and a half hours. On this day, the hike starting midway up the mountain took the four skilled KISAR men just under three hours. Finding the stranded individuals at the top took KISAR another half hour in the blinding snow. The trail up Sharatin is well marked for the majority of the time, near the summit the trail dissipates and branches off in several directions. However, with the blowing snow, snow on the ground and windy conditions the group depended on GPS, compass and maps to navigate. KISAR made contact with all four men at about 6:23 in the evening. By 7 o'clock, they had all four men geared up and ready to head down the mountain.

Garias, Movius, Davis and Kincaid were cold, fatigued, and had difficulty descending the mountain. The lower terrain of Sharatin, which KISAR skipped on the ascent, was proving difficult to navigate for the group. The thick brush and partial snowcover along lakes and steep ravines added both distance and time to the hike out. In addition to the terrain, there were not enough snowshoes for all the victims and rescuers making it even more of a slow and tedious process for all the men in the party.

The rough terrain of the mountain made it impossible for troopers to maintain constant contact with the rescue party. The communication blackouts didn't sit well with troopers. "The silence is nerve racking, especially when it drags on. Just not knowing can be so frustrating," said Sgt. Hughes. At one point communications were down for at least an hour.

At 4 o'clock in the morning on the 9th, the four KISAR members and the four victims made it back off of Sharatin Mountain to the trailhead near the head of Anton Larsen Bay.

"They were just glad to get off the mountain," said Sgt. Hughes.

Medics on scene checked out the victims as well as KISAR members for hypothermia. One KISAR member reportedly twisted his knee coming down the mountain, but otherwise all eight were fine. They were cleared by the medics and released from the scene.

This search and rescue is just one of 687 occurring in 2008.

**The day after the rescue, severe winter weather still plagued the mountain.**

