Fire Amid the Ice: How Paratroopers of the 11th Airborne Division Train in Alaska

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Alaska – Against a backdrop of mounting geopolitical tension in the Far North, the **11ª Divisione Aviotrasportata dell'Esercito degli Stati Uniti** has successfully completed a major battalion-level exercise in Alaska. The operation tested the ability of U.S. airborne forces to deliver coordinated and effective fire support under extreme weather conditions, simulating a high-intensity combat scenario in the Arctic environment.
The exercise involved **more than 400 paratroopers** and the firing of **more than 600 artillery rounds** at the *Donnelly Training Area*, near Delta Junction.

A test of survival and mobility at -18°C

The operation involved the **2° Battaglione del 377° Reggimento d'Artiglieria da Campagna Paracadutisti**, which deployed 350 miles north from *Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson* with around 100 tactical vehicles for a 16-day training cycle.
Weather conditions severely tested personnel and equipment, with temperatures falling as low as **-18 °C**, wind gusts of up to **64 km/h** and snow accumulations between **30 and 46 centimeters**.
Rather than focusing solely on basic gunnery qualifications, the exercise assessed the ability of artillery batteries to operate in a dispersed, highly dynamic manner to evade enemy counterbattery fire, reconnaissance drones, and opposing-force raids.

The key weapons: M119A3 and M777A2

The assessment was based on the U.S. Army's *Artillery Table XVIII* framework, combining fire direction, communications, and tactical movement into a single integrated scenario. The two main weapon systems employed offer specific advantages and challenges in the polar environment:

- **M119A3 light howitzer (105 mm):** At a remarkably low weight of about 2.1 tons, it can reach a range of 14 km (up to 19.5 km with rocket-assisted projectiles). Its light weight enables helicopter transport and airdrop, making it ideal for rapidly emplacing batteries in the snow. Its digital fire-control systems are designed to operate at temperatures down to -43 °C.
- **M777A2 medium howitzer (155 mm):** Built largely from titanium, it provides an extended range of up to 24 km with conventional ammunition and substantially greater firepower. However, Arctic conditions complicate its employment: fully frozen ground hinders emplacement and stabilization of the weapon, while deep snow restricts the movement of towing vehicles.

The “Shoot and Scoot” tactic: firing and repositioning

The real challenge for the American paratroopers – known as the **"Arctic Angels"** – was **tactical survival**. Faced with the threat of counterbattery radars and drone attacks, artillery pieces cannot remain static after firing.
Soldiers had to repeatedly displace the howitzers, move through deep snow, reposition, and be ready to resume firing in the shortest possible time, overcoming the significant logistical constraints imposed by transport and ammunition resupply in polar climates.

Future outlook: Toward the 2027 Artillery Command

The results gathered during these three weeks of testing will serve as the basis for establishing the new **Division Artillery (DIVARTY)**, which is scheduled to be established in **2027**.

This new command structure will enable the 11ª Divisione Aviotrasportata to better oversee training, coordinate support units, and integrate indirect fires across long distances, ensuring U.S. operational readiness amid growing strategic competition for control of the Arctic.

News link: https://www.armyrecognition.com/news/army-news/2026/u-s-army-paratroopers-fire-600-artillery-rounds-in-alaska-to-prepare-for-high-intensity-arctic-war