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Field Service Engineers Serve Far Afield in Remote Alaska

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Engineers Jeff Ogden and Kelly Cobos of the Optical Field Services team on their adventurous assignment to remote Eskimo villages scattered across the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta of southwestern Alaska.



See more photos of Jeff Ogden's and Kelly Cobos' "business trip" to Alaska in this [slide show](#).

It was 8 o'clock on a February morning in Bethel, Alaska. Out on the horizon, across the frozen tundra, a crescent moon still hung low in the darkness, with neither a tree nor a hill to obstruct it. Two Cisco field service engineers stood outside the offices of UUI-Unicom, a telecommunications provider, waiting for the customer to show up and put them to work.

The windchill conditions had brought the mercury down to a searing minus-47 degrees Fahrenheit, and as the engineers sucked in the bitterly cold air, it felt as if any moisture lurking in their nasal passages was freezing up. They made sure that the extreme-weather gear they had brought with them from the U.S. "lower 48" covered every inch of skin possible, because any exposed area would tingle and ache.

The engineers, Jeff Ogden and Kelly Cobos, part of the Optical Field Services team within U.S./Canada TAC, had accepted an adventurous assignment. They were there to service a far-flung collection of remote Eskimo villages scattered across the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta of southwestern Alaska with no roads between them. These villages, all part of the same Unicom fiber-optic telecommunications ring, contained Cisco optical transport gear in need of inspection and replacement.

In each of 18 sites, a Cisco ONS 15454 Multiservice Provisioning Platform (MSPP) needed to be inspected for a potentially bad capacitor and replaced. This particular type of capacitor had recently caused a failure of a single 15454 MSPP for a different customer.

Such a failure was a rare occurrence for Cisco, given the thousands of such units installed, but the company did not want to take any chances on similar equipment in Alaska, according to Ed McCarthy, Senior Manager, Optical Field Services. A bad capacitor could spark and catch fire, destroy other equipment in a telecommunications facility, and lead to downed phone and Internet services in the network, adds Cobos.