First of its kind
Missile Defense Space Battalion activated

By MAJ Laura Kenney

FORT GREELY, Alaska — A critical component of the nation's emerging missile defense system "stood up" here Jan. 22 when the Missile Defense Space Battalion was formally activated by its parent organizations, the U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command and the Alaska National Guard.

LTG Larry J. Dodgen, SMDC/ARSTRAT commanding general and Air Force BG Craig E. Campbell, adjutant general for Alaska's National Guard hosted the ceremony which centered on the unfurling of the new battalion's colors. Governor of Alaska Frank Murkowski was the keynote speaker.

"I am intensely proud of the role our state will play as the first line of defense for our nation," said Murkowski. "Having served as a senator, and on the Intelligence Committee, I am very well aware of the need for a missile defense system to defend our nation and our allies. To the Soldiers of this battalion, I say that you have the highest calling possible, and I pledge to you Alaska's full support for your vitally important mission."

The battalion is part of the 100th Missile Defense Brigade (Ground-based Midcourse Defense) headquartered in Colorado Springs, Colo. The battalion, which at full-authorized strength will number 110 Soldiers, will provide operational control and security over ground-based interceptors located in Alaska. The brigade operates the first part of the integrated Ballistic Missile Defense System, which, in concert with sister services, is designed to protect the nation from accidental or intentional limited ballistic missile attacks.

Alaska National Guard Soldiers will man the battalion as part of the homeland defense mission. Similarly, the brigade is staffed largely by Colorado Guardsmen, with a small contingent of active Army Soldiers. The units have dual reporting chains — operationally to SMDC/ARSTRAT, and, for personnel issues, to their respective state Guard channels.

"Today's activation marks an historic event. Using the National Guard is a good fit for this mission — in keeping with their centuries-old role of defending the nation. The only difference is the technology," said the brigade commander, COL Gary Baumann.

Symbolizing the Alaska Guard part of the equation, Campbell held the staff of the new unit's colors as the battalion's CSM David Masullo ceremoniously unsheathed the new flag, then slowly unfurled the blue and gold colors emblazoned with the unit's name and the SMDC eagle.

Dodgen said, "I have stood guard in Germany and Korea, as I'm sure every person in this room who's ever worn a uniform has stood guard. The mission of the unit we're activating today is to stand guard on the frontline of homeland defense. I know they will do us proud. Theirs is

Top, the Missile Defense Space Battalion, part of the 100th Missile Defense Brigade, Ground-based Midcourse Defense, will operate interceptors based in Alaska. Above, at the ceremony activating the nation's first missile defense battalion, CSM David Masullo unfurls the new unit's colors while Air Force BG Craig E. Campbell, adjutant general for Alaska's National Guard, holds the staff. LTG Larry J. Dodgen, commanding general of U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command, stands to Campbell's right. *Photos by MAJ Laura Kenney*

an uncompromising mission — they cannot fail. I know they are up to the task."

The system is scheduled to be operational this fall, by Presidential directive. The time line was expedited due to the events of Sept. 11, 2001, and officials expect to meet the accelerated deployment date.

GMD is designed to attack and kill any incoming missile in the "middle" phase or "midcourse" of its trajectory, after the boost or launch, and before it reaches reentry to impact, therefore destroying that missile in Space. Working closely with early warning architecture, provided in part by the Air Force and the Navy's Aegis missile cruisers, GMD will launch a booster missile toward a target's predicted location releasing a "kill vehicle" on the path of an incoming target. The kill vehicle uses data from the ground-based radars and its own onboard sensor to collide with the target.

Currently, the system's operators are involved in intensive training in Colorado, and plan to move to Alaska this summer. Military policemen are currently on post protecting the developing site, and have been "on guard" since September 2003. The National Guard men and women who comprise the battalion are all volunteers on three-year active Guard tours. The majority were not Alaska natives, but they face the rigors of the remote site with a mixture of excitement and fortitude.

"Our mission is in many ways similar to those of the Soldiers in Iraq. We are not facing the enemy directly, but he is out there, be it through terrorism, subversion, espionage or direct attack. Our mission is just as critical, if not more so. We take our job of securing this site and protecting our nation, very seriously. If the remoteness of this site lends to its protection, and it does, then that's a good thing. There are many things to enjoy in Alaska, and our families for the most part are looking forward to facing the adventures with us," said military policeman and platoon leader 2LT Phil Turner. Turner has 15 years of prior enlisted service in the infantry before volunteering for this mission.

The commander of the new battalion, MAJ(P) Greg Bowen, said, "We have long days behind us, to have gotten this far, and long days ahead. Standing up any new unit is a significant challenge, but standing up a first-of-its kind unit is an even bigger challenge. We have the excellent services of Boeing and other contractors — thousands of people working to help us in the mission of defending our nation. Be assured, we are on watch. We will not fail."

Operators graduate from first ever Ground-based Midcourse Defense Advanced course

By MAJ Laura Kenney

PETERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Colo. — Buoyed by a purpose as visceral as one can get — defense of the homeland — 31 Soldiers graduated Dec. 19 from the first ever Ground-based Midcourse Defense Operator Advanced Course. They belong to the 100th Missile Defense Brigade (GMD), which was activated here Oct. 16, 2003. Some graduates will move to the battalion in Alaska that will provide operational control over the GMD system's interceptors.

The graduation ceremony marked the formal recognition of the group's accomplishment. The 12 preceding weeks had often been grueling, but all students worked and learned with a firm sense of purpose — that of being the essential line of defense between great harm and their nation.

MG John W. Holly, program director, Ground-based Midcourse Defense, presided at the graduation.

"This is an important system — critical to the defense of your nation. The new system means defense of your families and loved ones. Never before have we had this capability, so it truly is a hugely historic moment," said Holly.

The seven-week advanced course followed on the heels of an intensive five-week basic course, which introduced the students to the basic fundamentals of the GMD system.

"The basic course was very challenging," said Distinguished Graduate CPT Amy Riggs.

"There was a great deal of terminology to learn, and the tests were very comprehensive."

The advanced course qualified graduates on the fire control system, taking them through day-to-day crises, and combat and recovery operations. As in most military courses, the school ended with a demanding practical exercise, made as true to life as possible.

"They put us into every possible scenario — what to do in response to this particular situation, what to do in case of failure; it certainly kept us on our toes," said SPC Joshua Wheeler, a communications operator in the battalion.

"The course is designed to teach students

three things," said lead contractor and instructor E. Paul Semmens.

"First, we teach them how to use the system. Second, we teach them the tactical principles such as the threat, and peculiarities of the system. Most importantly, we teach them how to think, to analyze, to develop appropriate courses of action to get the job done … which is defense of the nation," said Semmens.

"When they leave here, students will have mastered the system and foundations of tactical thinking. At the unit, they will learn their positions, and how to operate effectively as a crew."

The learning definitely didn't stop with the handing out of diplomas.

Operational procedure investigations follow, working with all components of the system, throwing out different threats, what ifs … teaching the crews how to function cohesively.

The goal, according to Presidential directive, is for the system to be operational by Fall 2004, on a timetable sped up by the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. The brigade will be staffed largely by active National Guard Soldiers, with a small contingent of active Army Soldiers. Colorado Guard Soldiers will man the brigade here, while Guard Soldiers serving at the battalion in Alaska are members of that state's National Guard.

"I came back into the Army — after a break in service of some years — partly due to Sept. 11," said Honor Graduate SSG David Smith. "I was serving as a recruiter when I saw the nation-wide advertisement for the GMD positions. It offered an opportunity to get into something great at the ground level. How much more important a job can you have than defense of the homeland?

"I have a lot of faith in the system. Out of the many classes I've had in the Army (I have five military occupational specialties) this is without a doubt the toughest and most challenging to date," said Smith, who will be the Readiness Operator for the 100th Missile Brigade.

"The instructors did an incredible job of formatting an extremely technical subject into something both interesting and learnable."

CPT Mike Edwards, who is slotted as a current operations officer for the brigade, was interested in the job due to a lifelong fascination with missile defense.

"I'm prior service infantry, but also had a lot of experience with forward area air defense. I've always been interested in Space, and while doing some research on it, saw the job vacancy announcements, and applied. I'm really glad to be involved, it's a great field, and there's a lot to learn," said Edwards.

Riggs and Wheeler were both attracted to the job by the lure of the Alaskan location, although both are professed city types, and their future duty station — Fort Greely — is considered remote.

"I've only seen pictures of Alaska, and I know it'll present challenges … but this is the perfect time in my life to take up such a challenge. I'm very proud to be part of the homeland defense operation, and Alaska just makes it that much more interesting," said Riggs, sensors operator in the battalion.

Wheeler, newly married and hailing from the far sunnier climes of Florida, is looking forward to the new experiences offered by the arctic regions of his upcoming duty assignment.

"I love the military, primarily because it's always offering something different. This is a great unit and program, and although my wife and I know we'll have to make adjustments, we're looking forward to it."

Semmens classified the graduates as "… an amazing group of Americans. They've uprooted their lives, come from across the country to train in a difficult and highly technical mission, to defend us, the nation. They have done a tremendous job of learning, and are really on the ball, taking everything we've thrown at them.

"I've never been prouder of a group of students — they will truly do well at what MG Holly rightly called the most critical mission of all, defending our loved ones and our nation."

SGT Ralph Fresquez, Readiness NCO for the 100th Missile Defense Bde., accepts his diploma marking his graduation from the Ground-based Midcourse Defense Operators Advanced Course from MG John W. Holly, Program Director, Ground-based Midcourse Defense. BG Robert P. Lennox, deputy commanding general for operation, SMDC/ARSTRAT, waits to congratulate Fresquez. *Photo by Dennis Plummer*