

Soldiers brave sub-zero temperatures for Force Protection Exercise

By SPC Jack W. Carlson III
49th Missile Defense Battalion (GMD)

FORT GREELY, Alaska — The Soldiers of the 49th Missile Defense Battalion (Ground-based Midcourse Defense) who took part in the most recent Force Protection Exercise here had to brave sub-zero temperatures.

Before the start of the exercise, which ran Jan. 19-23, the wind chill factor brought the air to a daunting 64 degrees below zero.

The exercise assessed the unit's ability to conduct security tasks such as site defense and civil disturbance. The security forces element here consists of a platoon of military police (MPs) and a platoon of infantry augmentees.

This particular exercise, fourth in a series, focused on testing the security force's ability to react to indirect fire. Mortar and artillery simulators added flash and bang realism to the pristine white mountains of snow. Patrols mounted on snowmobiles scouted for intruders.

The MP platoon's executive officer, 1LT Scott Slaughter, commended the unit's performance.

"The mortar attack was in reality a feint designed to draw the MPs from guarding the enemy's main objective. It didn't work — the security force did the right thing, and

sent only a small force to observe and detect the enemy position, while the main force maintained the proper security," Slaughter said.

The above mentioned intruders, native Eskimo Scouts from 1/297th Infantry Battalion, Alaska Army National Guard, were trained as an insurgent force by Special Forces Soldiers, and did their best to infiltrate the site. The heavy snow in this case helped the defending force, since it made tracking easier.

The extreme cold made this exercise more difficult than previous training, even for Alaska native and military policeman SPC Duane Ostrowski. "It's the wind that gets you — you have to make sure you are not exposing any skin to these unforgiving temperatures," Ostrowski said.

"It's amazing that we don't have that many cold weather injuries up here in Alaska," said LTC Dan Garcia, exercise executive officer and executive officer for the 49th's parent unit, the 100th Missile Defense Brigade, (GMD), based in Colorado Springs, Colo. "It really says something about these Arctic Warriors."



Above: LTC Jim Gierlach, right, SMDC/ARSTRAT Operations Center director, trains Eskimo Scout members of the 1/297th Infantry Battalion, Alaska Army National Guard, on the ins and outs of insurgency warfare, readying them to act as opposing forces during a Force Protection Exercise held at Fort Greely, Alaska.



Left: SPC Kevin Rupp, 49th Missile Defense Battalion, stands guard during a fiercely cold Force Protection Exercise at Fort Greely, Alaska. Cold weather gear was helpful in protecting against the 64 degrees below zero temperature.

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