

CHANGE OF COMMAND

at Nation's only Missile Defense Brigade

By MAJ Laura Kenney, 100th Missile Defense Brigade (GMD)

PETERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Colo. — The unit tasked with the mission of defending the United States against ballistic missile attack – the only unit of its type in the nation – gained a new commander May 15 when COL Gregory S. Bowen assumed command in a ceremony held here.

Bowen, a Colorado Springs resident, assumed command of the 100th Missile Defense Brigade (Ground-based Midcourse Defense) from COL Michael L. Yowell. Bowen was the first commander of the brigade's operational unit, the 49th Missile Defense Battalion (GMD) located at Fort Greely, Alaska, which is armed with the system's interceptors. Bowen stood up the 49th in 2004.

The traditional exchange of the colors marking a change of command took place at the Medal of Honor Memorial Field, with the old and new commanders flanked by the flags of the fifty four states and territories their unit protects.

Yowell handed the gold and teal guidon to BG Thomas D. Mills, Commander of Ground Forces for the Colorado National Guard, who in turn handed the flag to Bowen, signifying the passing of command.

Defending the homeland is historically the mission of the National Guard, and the 100th Missile Defense Brigade is a Colorado National Guard unit. The 100th was stood up by presidential decree in 2003, at an accelerated rate after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Its subordinate units, the 49th Missile Defense Battalion (GMD) and Detachment 1, located in California, are manned by full-time Guardsmen and women of the respective states. The headquarters, located here, is a multi-component unit with a small contingent of Active Component Soldiers.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT — Outgoing Commander of the 100th Missile Defense Brigade (GMD) COL Michael Yowell, stands next to BG Thomas Mills, Colorado National Guard Commander Ground Forces, during the change of command ceremony welcoming new 100th Missile Defense Brigade Commander, COL Gregory Bowen.

COL Gregory Bowen accepts the unit's colors of his new command, the 100th Missile Defense Brigade (GMD) from Colorado National Guard Commander Ground Forces, BG Thomas Mills, during a change of command ceremony. *Photos by SGT Michael Cost, 100th Missile Defense Brigade PA NCO*



A color guard comprised of 49th Missile Defense Battalion Soldiers from Alaska, held the National, State, and Army colors, while Sharon Hartman of U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command sang the Star Spangled Banner. The 100th is assigned to SMDC and falls under the operational control of Northern Command for homeland defense. Air Force Gen. Victor E. Renuart, Jr. commander of U.S. Northern Command and North American Aerospace Defense Command attended the ceremony.

Yowell, whose three year tenure in command saw the brigade become operational in response to the threat from North Korea, and who oversaw three successful flight and intercept tests of the system, bid a sometimes emotional farewell to the brigade.

"This is not the first time that Greg and I have stood before these Soldiers and passed the colors of command. The first was three years ago at Fort Greely, on a cold and windy beautiful May morning in Alaska. I was the new Brigade commander, and Greg was leaving a highly successful command – standing up the 49th."

"Shortly after I assumed command, North Korea began stacking missiles. My combatant command, Northern Command, ordered the brigade into operational status. I had to cancel family leaves and military schools. On the 4th of July, 2006, North Korea launched, and the Soldiers of the Brigade in Alaska, California and Colorado stood ready to execute their wartime mission. That launch failed, but the Soldiers of the 100th were ready. The vision President Reagan had of a defense for our nation against ballistic missile attack has been proven several times under my watch, and I'm sure will continue to do so under Colonel Bowen's command."

"The Soldiers of the Brigade are the reason this system has and will continue to be successful. It is they whom I'm most proud of and who I will most deeply miss."

For the last time, Yowell sounded off with the Brigade's motto

"Guard ... Engage ... Destroy – For none shall pass."

Bowen took the lectern for his remarks and drew an immediate laugh when he promised to comply with military tradition and keep the incoming commander's comments short, adding,

"Besides, in the past (looking at his watch) 26 minutes that I've been in command, I have not done anything worth talking about."

"But that will change."

Bowen went on to briefly describe the importance of the unit's mission, and to thank important people in his life, especially his mother Yvonne, who, during his childhood in North Dakota, had "given me a work ethic, set of values, and a love of country that has served me well over the years."

He then told how his seven-year old daughter, Carmen, was "proud that her dad was in the Army, and that he protected her."

"When I was her age, growing up in North Dakota during the Cold War, I recall doing 'duck and cover drills.' While I didn't understand it at the time, I do remember it scaring me. I don't ever want my daughter to be afraid of bad things falling out of the sky, so, Carmen, that's why daddy does what he does."

"The 100th is a unique unit with a unique mission. It is small in numbers, but its mission is strategic in nature. We have to be prepared to execute that mission with no notice, 24/7. To the Soldiers of the 100th, I want to let you know I have only two priorities. Priority 1 is accomplishing our operational mission, every time, all the time. Priority 1A is taking caring of Soldiers and their Families. These two things will focus our efforts as we move forward."

"It's time for me to get off the stage and get to work. Thank you all for coming, and ... I'll see you on the High Ground."