

# Recruits join 'Buddy Platoon' for basic training

by TSgt. Michael Fletcher

CAMPDENALI, Alaska – It's Oh-Dark-Thirty and the wake-up call has sounded. Blurry-eyed young Alaskans stumble to their feet as Alaska Army National Guard recruiters pound on hotel doors and do a head count as they hustle their charges to get ready. Welcome to the military.

"You're in the Army now..." The meaning of the song is just starting to be grasped by the 40 members of the "Buddy Platoon" as they finish up their last day of processing at Anchorage Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS).

"They are nervous, and rightfully so," said Capt. Catherine Jorgensen, MEPS operations officer. "Some of them told me that they didn't sleep very well in the hotel last night because they weren't used to the sound of automobile traffic. For most of the young men this will be their first trip outside of Alaska."

In less than 24 hours the new enlistees will be at Fort Benning, Georgia, home of the Army's Infantry Basic Training and Advanced Individual Training schools. There they will train as an Alaska platoon throughout the



"Attention means heels together!" Alaska Army National Guard Buddy Platoon members learn some of the basic military movements at the Anchorage Armory before departing for training at Fort Benning, Ga.

*Photo by Michael Fletcher*

initial basic training that will teach them the basics of soldiering. Then they will move across the Army post to the infantry school where they will learn the skills that will qualify them to become Alaskan Guard Scouts.

"The Buddy Platoon idea is to

have the young men who will be working together when they return to their Scout units go through their military training together," said Capt. Kenneth Blaylock, Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Office.

"At Basic Training, a trainee has

in his mind that he is all by himself. It takes weeks to get people working together. Sending an Alaskan platoon like this will help alleviate that."

Although the young privates are from communities across Alaska, they share some experi-

ences from being residents of Alaska.

Today, the experience is one of "hurry up and wait," while seemingly endless forms, examinations and interviews are completed and packets of documents are formed for each trainee. After lunch, the platoon is bused to the Alaska Army National Guard Armory at Camp Denali where seasoned sergeants tried to pass on hints about what they will experience at Fort Benning. Before boarding the buses for the airport all of the platoon knew which was their "military left" and the rudiments of a formation.

The buddy Platoon will return in mid-December. Then they will train in units close to their homes at monthly drills and during annual two-week training in Alaska and other locations. Through their enlistment into the Alaska Army National Guard, the recruits will earn a form of the "G.I. Bill," and other benefits to assist with education and employment.

A homecoming is planned for their return to Alaska. Additional information on the welcome will be available in early December.

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