

# Guardsmen must be ready for active, full-time duty

by Barbara Crane

Tundra Times reporter

When Alaskans join the National Guard, they agree to complete an initial basic training program, travel occasionally for advanced schooling and participate in regular monthly weekend drills and a two-week annual training exercise.

But there's another commitment as well.

Every Guardsman has to be ready for a call to active, full-time duty whenever his state or country needs him.

As the U.S. military buildup in the Persian Gulf continues, many Alaska National Guard members are wondering how a call to active duty might affect them.

"As yet there has been no involuntary call-up, and we do not anticipate being called up, but there have been many volunteers," said the Alaska Air Guard's Col. Jerry Gillean. "Roughly two thirds of our members have volunteered to go."

While the civilian jobs of Guard members serving on temporary active duty are guaranteed by law to be there when they return, the call to duty could mean some financial sacrifice.

An active duty Guard member would no longer receive his or her usual civilian salary, but would instead have to make ends meet on a usually lower military paycheck.

While some employers choose to show their support by making up the difference in their employees' wages, there is no legal requirement to do so.

Despite this financial sacrifice and the many other personal hardships of being away from home, most Guard members are willing to help if needed.

"Right now our direct participation in Desert Shield is rather small," Gillean said, "but we are backing up a lot of the units that are directly participating."

Alaska Air Guard planes and volunteer crews are flying extra missions and filling in for other units which have been called up for Desert Shield.

This includes flights to destinations

as far away as Panama.

Gillean said the Alaska Air Guard's turn to fly to Panama to re-supply embassies in South America usually comes up about once every 18 months.

"But we are now doing it in September and October, probably November and maybe indefinitely," Gillean said.

Though the crisis in the Middle East is half a world away, many Alaskans seem anxious to do something to help.

"Since the Desert Shield operation began, our enlistments and inquiries about enlistment are actually up," said Air Guard recruiter Senior Master Sgt. Dick Traini. "We have many people walking in the door, volunteering to go."