

# Army National Guard activates new battalion

WASILLA — The Alaska Army National Guard added a special touch to the Bicentennial celebration of the Constitution here recently when they activated a new support battalion.

The 297th Support Battalion, to be headquartered at Alcantra Armory in Wasilla, was activated during a formal ceremony that took place at the Cottonwood Creek Center.

"We're pleased that we've been so warmly received in the Mat-Su Valley," said Maj. Gen. John Schaeffer, adjutant general of the Alaska Army National Guard. "We were impressed with the welcome attitude expressed by both public officials and people of this area."

"This battalion is being formed to provide personnel, medical, logistical and maintenance support to the Army National Guard infantry battalions stationed throughout the state. The battalion is authorized 470 people, and its activation strength is 220."

Schaeffer said the battalion includes four companies: the Headquarters and Headquarters Company in Wasilla; Company A, the administrative company in Anchorage; Company B, the medical company in Fairbanks; and Company C, the supply, transportation and maintenance company in Anchorage.

According to Guard officials, the 113 person Valley unit is more than half filled already. The expansion translates into 78 part-time jobs and 35 full-time positions for the Valley-based unit.

"The economic impact for the Valley is very positive," Schaeffer noted, "because there will be nearly \$2 million in salaries added to the local economy."

He also said the Alcantra Armory will be expanded by about 15,000 square feet at a cost of about \$2 million.

"We have every reason to believe that this building project can and will be accomplished using local contractors and subcontractors when the time comes," he said. The expansion is expected by 1991.

The growth of the Guard in the Valley is part of an overall trend. Alaska National Guard officials had previously announced that Anchorage would receive 323 new positions; Fairbanks, 50; and Bethel, Nome and Kotzebue, about 20 each.

"The federal government has found it more cost effective to expand the Guard and Reserve in recent years," Schaeffer said. "We obviously support that notion and believe it's good for our communities and our state."



*Sgt. John Ford stands at attention to protect the U.S. flag as part of a color guard.*