

# New command takes charge in Alaska

by Barbara Crane

Tundra Times reporter

ELMENDORF AIR FORCE BASE — Men and women of the Air Force, Army, Navy, Coast Guard, Marines and Alaska National Guard gathered July 7 to witness activation ceremonies for the new unified Alaskan Command.

Since the early 1970s, military defense of Alaska and its surrounding waters has been fragmented.

Defense of mainland Alaska has been the responsibility of the Air Force and Army, while the Navy's Pacific fleet patrolled the Aleutian Chain.

With the activation of the new Alaskan Command, all forces based in Alaska are once again under the leadership of one commander, Lt. Gen. Thomas G. McInerney.

The new Alaskan Command, in turn, will report to the much larger Pacific Command headed by Adm.

Huntington Hardisty.

"With the addition of our Alaskan Command," McInerney said, "Adm. Hardisty's responsibilities now stretch from the Arctic to the Antarctic and from the West Coast of the United States to the east coast of Asia.

"Alaska, with its strategic location, immense size and valuable natural resources, is an important addition to this vital area. We bring proven

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*Capt. Billy Atseriak of Quinhagak commanded the Guard troops.*

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forces, in place, to support the Pacific Command's mission."

Hardisty acknowledged Alaska's increasing role as a major force in the Pacific region.

"This activation represents a proper recognition of the strategic importance of Alaska in the defense of the United States," Hardisty said.

As members of the Pacific Command, Alaskan forces will be more closely aligned with other forces throughout the Pacific region.

"In the future, U.S. Pacific train-

ing exercises will operate more frequently in Alaska and in the Aleutians," Hardisty said, "and Alaska-based units will have increased opportunities to train at other Pacific bases."

One immediate benefit of this reorganization is the addition of about 80 planners to the Alaskan Command. Officials predict their payroll will add several million dollars annually to Alaska's economy.

Hardisty thanked all Alaskans for their warm support of the military.

"You people of The Great Land are just that — great," he said. "We in the Pacific Command salute you."