

Guard class: First step in leadership

by Barbara Crane

Tundra Times reporter

CAMP CARROLL — Smiles were the uniform of the day Nov. 15 as 27 Alaska Army National Guard members walked across the stage to receive congratulations and diplomas certifying successful completion of the Guard's Primary Leadership Development Course.

The students had come to Camp Carroll from 17 villages across Alaska for the intensive 15-day course, which is the first step in the Guard's formal leadership training program.

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"It takes them a little time to get adjusted to our routine and to get to know each other and the instructors," said Sgt. 1st Class Kevin Knowlton, chief instructor at the Alaska Noncommissioned Officers Academy.

"There's such a big difference by the end of the class. Graduation day — that's our payday."

While most of the students didn't know each other before the course started, bonds of friendship quickly formed.

"From the time I first came here, before I'd eat every meal I'd pray that our whole class would pass the course," said Spec. John Nagasiak from Bethel. "I prayed that we'd all graduate together."

The course is deliberately designed to push the students, force them to make decisions and subject them to the same kinds of stress and hardship they would face in a real battle or other emergency.

With so much to accomplish in two weeks, there's not much time for sleep. By the end of the course, both students and instructors admitted to fatigue.

"One time I was taking a test," Nagasiak recalled, "and I realized that



photos by Barbara Crane



Among those participating in the training — and waving to people back home — are, above, from left, Spec. John Nagasiak, Spec. Timothy Henry, Sgt. Simeon Angaiak, Spec. Peter Makar, Sgt. Chris N. Mark, Spec. Gifford Berry, Sgt. George Black and Spec. Luke Tunutmoak. At left, Sgt. Lucille Charles of Koyuk, the only female graduate of the class, asks a question during class. Below, Spec. Timothy Snowball grabs a towel from his locker before heading to the shower.

I was somehow sleeping and taking the test at the same time. But I passed it anyway."

A field exercise was held the second week, with students and instructors camping out in temperatures at or below zero for most of the three days and two nights.

The first night, after setting up camp, the students watched and waited for an ambush they had been warned to expect.

"It was almost like real war, but I wasn't really scared because I knew what was going to happen," Nagasiak said. "Later we walked into a surprise ambush — now that felt real!"

Nagasiak said he would recommend the PLDC course to other Guard members once he got back home to Bethel.

"It was a pretty darn good course," he said. "I learned how to really listen to people when they talk, and I learned to be in control, how to give orders."

"I'm glad I came here because the Guard needs leaders, and someday it'll be our turn to take over."

Sgt. Richard Seals of Anchorage won two awards during the Primary Leadership Development Course graduation. He was the Distinguished Honor Graduate and the Commandant's Inspection Award winner.

Spec. Eric Hanson of Wasilla was named the Honor Graduate, and Staff Sgt. Gus Johnson of Manokotak won the Leadership Award.

'I'm glad I came here because the Guard needs leaders, and someday it'll be our turn to take over.'

—Spec. John Nagasiak

Also graduating were: Staff Sgt. Horace Akeya and Sgt. Harlan Kingeekuk (Savoonga); Staff Sgt. Levine Oozeva, Sgt. Morgan Apatiki and Sgt. Dale Tungiyen (Gambell); Sgt. Melvin Agwiak (Emmonak); Sgt. Simeon Angaiak (Tununak); Sgt. George Black and Spec. Charlie Andrew (Napakiak); Sgt. Lucille Charles (Koyuk); Sgt. Earl Esmailka (Kaltag); Sgt. Raul Rodriguez (Wasilla); Sgt. Christopher N. Mark (Quinhagak); Spec. Carlton Bell and Spec. Max Green (Hooper Bay); Spec. Gifford Berry, Spec. Peter Makar and Spec. John Nagasiak (Bethel); Spec. James Cragle (Unalakleet); Spec. Christopher Henry and Spec. Timothy Snowball (Stebbins); Spec. Timothy Henry and Spec. Luke Tunutmoak (Scammon Bay); and Spec. Dennis Tommy (Togiak).

