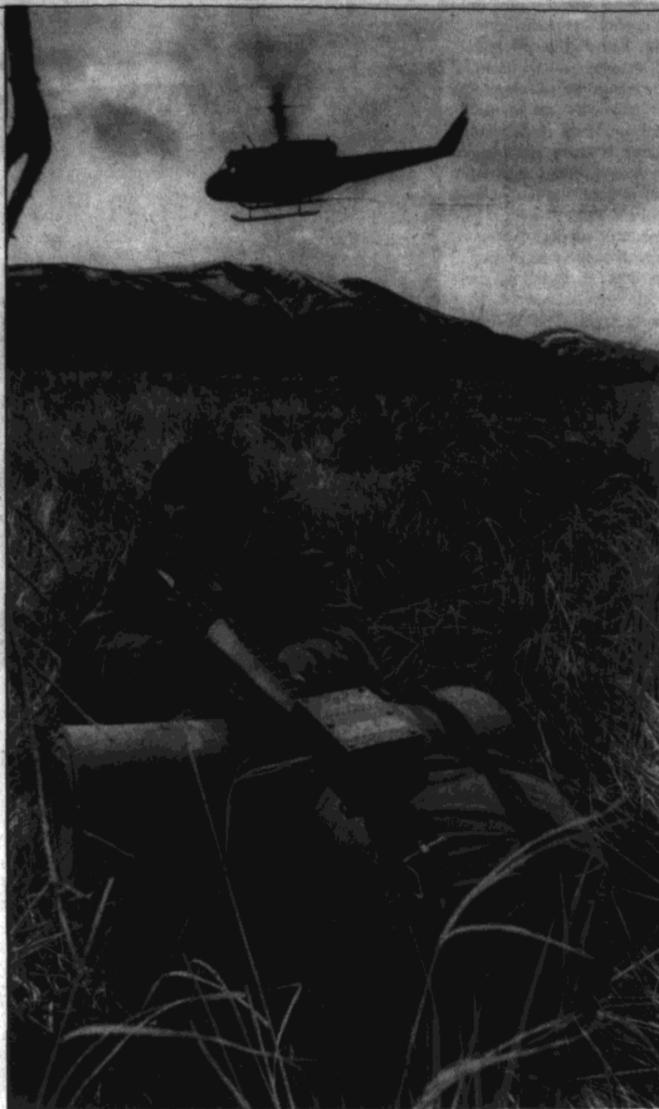




PHOTO BY BILL HESS

Elia Abruska of St. Michael lets a smile of happiness slip by after the Third Squadron reaches its objective on a hilltop in Fort Richardson. Abruska is one of many National Guard Scouts taking a two-week instruction at the Fort. Photos on pages 10 and 11.

'In this squad we all work together'



A soldier from Squadron Two protects a departing helicopter from enemy attack.

A young National Guard Scout from rural Alaska crouches behind a wall of fallen birch logs on a forest hilltop. He clutches a M-16 rifle. The reverberating whump-whump-whump of a helicopter penetrates the foliage as a menacing-looking, dark green chopper skims the top of the surrounding trees.

Periodically, the uneven pops of gunfire lift up from the valleys below as troops meet each other in combat.

The war going on here is not real; although any of the approximately 30 scouts participating from villages all over Alaska will know they have been "killed" when lazer beams shot in place of bullets activate some rather noisy reflectors they wear. Once a special key is inserted the sound goes off, and the "casualties" keep on breathing.

Sergeant-Major Rudy Firm, commandant of the Alaska National Guard training school at which the rural soldiers are taking two weeks of Officer Candidate School courses, explains that they are learning techniques they did not have a chance to master during their six weeks of basic training. They learn to move in proper formation across forest and cleared area alike, and to accurately chart their course by compass even on steep slopes covered with dense forest.

Many villages are represented here. "When these boys go back," Sgt. Firm explains, "they can teach the other guardsmen in their villages what they learned here."

David Cholok, leader of squadron three, is confident of the skill he and the other squad members have learned. They have an objective to reach, and he knows they will. "In this squad, we all work together." They will be out in the field for the next 96 hours, seldom getting more than an hour's sleep at one time. "Every one of us has to be mentally alert," Cholok stresses.

Warren Olanna of Shishmaref believes what he and the other scouts are doing is important work. "We need to be able to protect our own village," he explains. "Our own people. We think about it sometimes, especially being so close to Russia."

There are 17 guardsmen in Shishmaref. Could they really defend their tiny village against attack until the regular military force comes? "Yea," Olanna says, "I believe we could!"



Elia Abruska gets a little camouflage applied to his face.

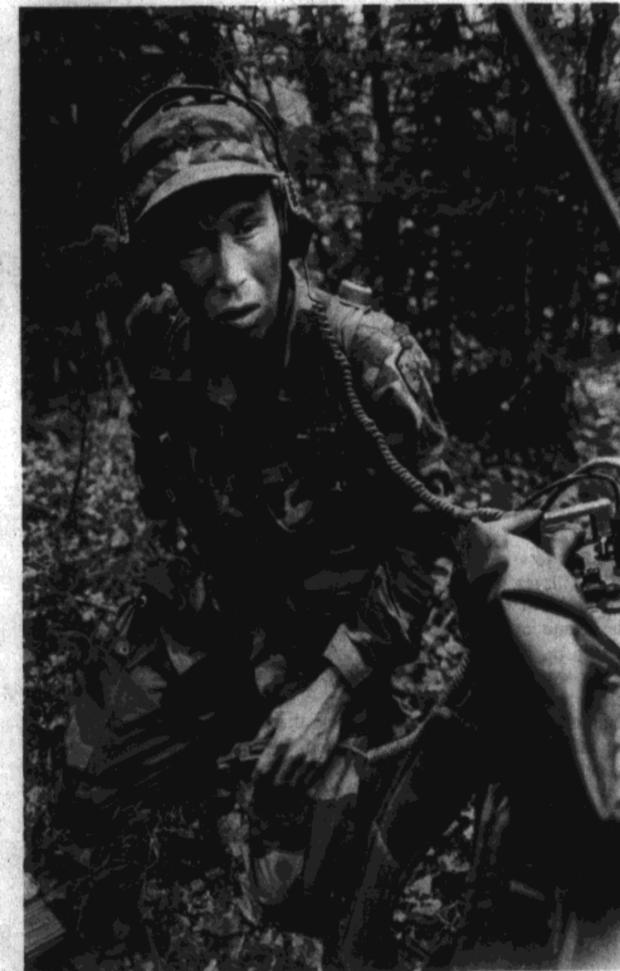


Members of Squadron Two charge toward the woods in combat formation.

Photos by Bill Hess



During a break, a tired soldier accepts a cigarette from another.



The strain shows on the face of Chris Berezkin of Quinhagak as he listens for incoming radio calls.



Although Warren Olanna looks a bit like a battlefield casualty, he is actually taking a nap during a short break. The scouts spend three days going 24 hours, during which time they are unlikely to get more than an hour's sleep at a time.

David Cholok of Chevak leads Squadron Three on a search for a hilltop where there may possibly be a prisoner of war camp. The POW camp turns out to be non-existent, but the scouts' skill in charting a course through thick vegetation and across steep hills was tested. They passed.

