

Alaska National Guard (extracted from: Annual Report, State of Alaska, Department of Military Affairs, Office of the Adjutant General, 1977)

In 1977 the National Guard celebrated its 341st birthday, dating its history to the citizen's militia that was voluntarily formed at Plymouth, Massachusetts by the colonists for their mutual protection.

This was some 100 years before the Russians first settled in Alaska and approximately 140 years before Alaska became a possession of the United States.

But from these earliest territorial days, residents of Alaska have banded together when regular Army forces were not available in times of unrest. The Alaska National Guard, however, had its real beginning in 1917 when the Governor advised officials in Washington that "a local organization has been formed for home protection in the absence of an organized militia." The Territorial Legislature appropriated funds for home guard units and two months later the War Department formally authorized the formation of a National Guard in Alaska.

After World War I, interest in the Guard units dwindled and by 1923 there were no active National Guard units here.

When threats of a second world war appeared on the horizon in 1929, the National Guard returned to Alaska. The first battalion of the 297th Infantry was allotted to the Territory and later received Federal recognition, a unit at a time. It was short lived, however, as a Territorial militia because two years later its personnel were inducted into federal service. Again, Alaska was without a National Guard.

This remained the case until early 1942 when the colorful and now famous Alaska Territorial Guard was formed as part of the Alaska Defense Command.

The Territorial Guard ultimately became the Scout Battalions of the Alaska National Guard as we know it today. That happened some three years after World War II ended and officials recognized the importance of having teams of Eskimo Scouts within hailing distance of Eskimo villages in the Soviet Union.

Since its authorization on July 30, 1948, the Alaska National Guard has grown, changed and modernized. For example, the snow machine has replaced the sled dog as a means of transportation. An engineer company, maintenance company, and mechanized reconnaissance battalion has been added. A new 207th Arctic Reconnaissance Group has been formed to streamline command, control and communications. Plans are underway for the formation of additional units suited to the skills prevalent in southeastern Alaska.

The Alaska Military Academy graduated its first class in 1977 and with the additional officers, the Army National Guard would be able to place greater emphasis on training its personnel in the skills which place our citizen-soldiers on a par with the regular forces.