

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND
VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

April 3, 2001
5:12 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Mike Chenault, Chair
Representative Lisa Murkowski
Representative Joe Green
Representative Pete Kott
Representative Sharon Cissna
Representative Joe Hayes

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Beverly Masek

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARING

Alaska Army National Guard, Brigadier General

Craig Noal Christensen, Colonel - Fort Richardson

- CONFIRMATION ADVANCED

PREVIOUS ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

CRAIG NOAL CHRISTENSEN, Colonel, Appointee
as Brigadier General
Alaska Army National Guard
(No address provided)
Fort Richardson, Alaska 99505

POSITION STATEMENT: As appointee to the position of Brigadier General in the Alaska Army National Guard, provided background and answered questions.

EDWARD FURMAN
P.O. Box 2361
Cordova, Alaska 99574

POSITION STATEMENT: Expressed concern about having adequate federal funds for training the National Guard; asked Colonel Christensen whether he believes the National Guard would be strong enough, should the nation go to war.

ACTION NARRATIVE

TAPE 01-9, SIDE A
Number 0001

CHAIR MIKE CHENAULT called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting to order at 5:12 p.m. Members present at the call to order were Representatives Chenault, Green, Kott, Cissna, and Hayes. Representative Murkowski joined the meeting as it was in progress. Representative Masek was excused.

CONFIRMATION HEARING

Alaska Army National Guard, Brigadier General

Number 0064

CHAIR CHENAULT announced that the committee would consider the appointment of Colonel Craig Christensen to the position of Brigadier General, Alaska Army National Guard. He invited Colonel Christensen to provide opening remarks and answer members' questions.

Number 0102

CRAIG NOAL CHRISTENSEN, Colonel, Appointee as Brigadier General, Alaska Army National Guard, first provided some personal history. He informed members that he came to Alaska in 1960 as a military dependent, moving to Fort Wainwright, which had converted from Ladd Air Force Base in 1959. After a few years out of the state, he returned in 1967 and has been in Alaska ever since. After graduating from high school in Anchorage and then from Alaska Methodist University (1972), he was eligible for the draft; instead, he joined the guard voluntarily. From 1972 until 1976 he served as E-1 to E-5 in the old 5th Battalion.

COLONEL CHRISTENSEN continued with his personal history, noting that in 1976 he entered the first Alaskan OCS (officer candidate school), which had six graduates in addition to himself; he is the sole remaining guard member on duty from that class.

Commissioned in 1977, he served with the Alaska Army National Guard for a number of years, including two or three years of also serving with the Army Reserve, which complemented his employment at Fort Richardson. Therefore, he has spent a number of years as a traditional, part-time guardsman in the state, both as an enlisted guardsman and an officer; in addition, in the late 1980s, after completing a three-year active guard and reserve tour, he worked full-time for the guard in a civil service capacity during the week as a technician and served on the weekends as a traditional full-time guardsman.

COLONEL CHRISTENSEN reported that he has held positions in personnel, in battalions, in companies, in units, and at state headquarters. He has an extensive background in training of units throughout Alaska. He said his logistics background relating to supplies is limited, but he has an extensive background in support to civil authorities and responding to state disasters, and was the Alaska plans officer and military support officer at the Big Lake-Miller's Reach fire, for example, as well as having dealt with a number of floods throughout the state.

COLONEL CHRISTENSEN informed members that he has a degree from the Alaska Methodist University in history and political science. On the military side, he has gone to military schools including the United States Army Command and General Staff College as well as the United States Army War College in Pennsylvania. He offered to answer questions pertaining to himself or the guard.

Number 0420

REPRESENTATIVE MURKOWSKI asked how there can be better recruitment in Alaska.

COLONEL CHRISTENSEN emphasized that recruitment and retention are top priorities nationally. Although recruiting in Alaska goes very well, there is an exceptional problem in Alaska with retention. He said the main reason nationwide why soldiers leave the National Guard is the feeling that their time isn't utilized well during weekend or annual training; they want to be engaged in the skills for which they signed up.

COLONEL CHRISTENSEN told the committee that to lead and inspire an organization in terms of "strength management," his own vision is that when guard members come to a weekend drill or annual training, they need to go home with "bragging rights" and

a sense of accomplishment from having worked in the areas for which they signed up and from having contributed to both the unit and the organization, either internally or externally.

COLONEL CHRISTENSEN reported that there is outreach to rural Alaska now, with the [Alaska Army National Guard] asking what it can do for the communities in terms of its programs, including drug-demand-reduction programs and a host of other programs such as "innovative readiness training" in the communities.

Number 0677

REPRESENTATIVE HAYES asked Colonel Christensen what he sees as the major challenges for the Alaska Army National Guard for the new millennium.

COLONEL CHRISTENSEN noted that in the Cold War era, the guard met the challenge of being the "eyes and ears" for national defense in Western Alaska. Part of the challenge now is to keep that tradition alive in the villages, so that there are meaningful missions resulting in members' going home with a sense of accomplishment and contribution. There are brand-new challenges, however, such as space and missile defense. Furthermore, there are renewed challenges such a homeland defense, which includes addressing terrorism, for example.

Number 0841

REPRESENTATIVE GREEN asked about training that would be required if the guard were nationalized, in order to prepare a peace force for military purposes.

COLONEL CHRISTENSEN answered that the Alaska Army National Guard's mission in Alaska is under "op" plan 5027, which means the guard stays in Alaska when it is federally activated and defends a number of critical sites in the state. The active Army actually "leans upon hostilities in Alaska," and the 172nd goes elsewhere in the world under some other "op" plans. The command and control headquarters for USARAK [U.S. Army Alaska] stays, and the guard, in essence, becomes the remaining force in Alaska, "post-mobilization, federalized."

COLONEL CHRISTENSEN remarked, "We train on those critical sites right now, when we come together for annual trainings and when we come together for collective training events, and do that quite well." He indicated the guard has partnered with the Alaskan Command and also with a lot of commercial activities,

including at the Tesoro refinery, in terms of practicing skills. In addition, the guard has had complementary activities; for example, many of these sites are tied to the "air bridge, 5027," which moves men and materials through Alaska to the Far East and "retrogrades things from the Far East, as noncombatants and others, back through Alaska [and] the Lower 48."

COLONEL CHRISTENSEN said in doing that, it was realized that much of the mission was related to fueling installations or fuel-handling. Thus only a year ago did the guard put forward to U.S. Senator Stevens an initiative that would provide members of Alaska's guard with hazardous-materials and response training. There is now a funded program for the mobilization mission at many critical sites, which provides the skills and abilities for guardsmen to go back to their communities and be hired by a commercial or civilian entity because they are licensed. He returned to Representative Green's question, saying the guard does practice those skills, and if mobilized federally today, would be capable of doing the critical site-security mission in Alaska.

Number 1010

REPRESENTATIVE GREEN responded that there must have been a change, then, because several years ago he had thought that if the guard were nationalized, then the Alaska defense force would "backfill" with regard to what the guard had been doing. He asked what the Alaska defense force is doing, then.

COLONEL CHRISTENSEN replied:

You're exactly right in what you had said, and let me put my words to that, or my impressions. The guard, years ago, its mission [was] the "eyes and ears" and was out on the periphery. For a number of middle years, we were actually "unmissioned" until we secured the critical site area here in Alaska, and, of course, the active Army secured some other missions outside of Alaska, being the Western area or the Pacific area's rapid defense force.

The guard, then, if it assumes its federal mission, of course, the state defense force is available and does become, if you will, the backfill for the guard for state response to emergency disasters.

Short of mobilizing the guard today, the guard is also available to respond to emergencies and disasters in support of ADES [Alaska Disaster Emergency Services] or other entities in the state. ... The Alaska state defense force, under General Oates, is engaged with Alaska Disaster Emergency Services to provide robustness to their ability to run emergency operation centers or evacuation centers or other entities associated with a state disaster.

So you're correct: They do augment the National Guard in state disasters and emergencies, and when the guard is federalized, they absolutely backfill and become the state's militia for state emergency or state response for the governor.

REPRESENTATIVE GREEN requested confirmation that there isn't a duplication.

COLONEL CHRISTENSEN said absolutely not.

Number 1117

REPRESENTATIVE KOTT asked Colonel Christensen how he would handle it if an Alaskan Native enlisted person came to him with a discrimination complaint that was being filed against one of Colonel Christensen's fellow officers.

COLONEL CHRISTENSEN answered:

We routinely have a number of discrimination complaints, whether they be from Native or other individuals in the organization. When I say "routinely," does that mean they come up every day? No. I would tell you that we probably only have two or three on the books right now that [we] are working.

We have an active program, through an ... equal-opportunity manager. It happens to be a Major Topshensky (ph) right now. The lady is outstanding at dealing with discrimination complaints in terms of talking to the individual making the complaint, determining if we really do have a complaint - because many times, perceptions are not reality - and some of those "most basics," she's able to resolve at the most basic level, right with the individual, upfront, of

what's perceived to be [an] EEO [equal employment opportunity] violation or ethnic-type complaint.

If she determines those to be genuine - and on occasion she absolutely does - we absolutely look into it through a full investigation, and that's talking to everyone involved, getting to the root of the problems.

COLONEL CHRISTENSEN emphasized the need to bring problems into the open, have professionals provide input, and then deal with behavior one-on-one. However, the bottom line is to look deeper at systemic problems - the underlying causes - and try to make changes at the most core level so those problems don't continue.

Number 1245

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA sought clarification about when the guard would remain in Alaska.

COLONEL CHRISTENSEN first addressed the federal mission, "critical site defense" in Alaska, which evolved after the Cold War when there was a void in the guard's mission. He said it fits the guard, with its small teams that come together collectively in order to train for and perform the mission. That can be done within the state, and the mission actually is within the state, "under the war plans that we're aligned under, which brings us our federal resourcing and priority in a number of areas." Under that federal mission, the guard would stay here. He noted that the future federal mission probably lies in the areas of national missile defense and space for the Army National Guard, and in other areas such as weapons of mass destruction. He emphasized that the foregoing applies to national emergencies.

Number 1337

COLONEL CHRISTENSEN next addressed the state mission, which includes search-and-rescue operations and being the first uniformed responders to any state emergency or disaster. Traditionally, if the mission isn't to go out immediately to save life and limb - which the guard does every day in a number of rural locations - it is in support of ADES and the governor's programs. He said ADES, after it uses those assets within the state that it has available, comes to the National Guard, both Air and Army, as the first responders; then the guard brings all of its assets to bear in a state role to support mitigation of

any further loss of life or property "and/or the recovery part of that."

COLONEL CHRISTENSEN noted that if the problem is bigger than the state, involving the Army and Air guard, the state defense force, and the naval militia, it is usually at the level of FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] and bringing in federal assets. He further advised the committee that the guard is looking internally at raising levels of education for its soldiers regarding drug-demand reduction, family support, and a number of other issues focused on individuals. He added that a lot of the state mission is "state-building," to help with infrastructure or problems in the state.

Number 1416

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA asked whether Colonel Christensen foresees the guard's playing a role in helping communities with grass-roots emergency response training; she cited the recent earthquake in Seattle, where community planning was helpful.

COLONEL CHRISTENSEN said yes, the guard does that. He noted that ADES is working through local emergency planning commissions and other entities, which he himself sees peripherally. In addition, the plans officer/military support officer has daily contact with ADES in terms of responding to state disasters. Routinely, at the National Guard level, both Air and Army, there also are "tabletop exercises" or weekend training assemblies, dedicated to no other purpose than responding to state disasters or emergencies at the first-responder level or in support of a larger effort; he provided a few details and examples.

Number 1644

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA asked Colonel Christensen whether he can see at least branching out to provide demonstrations in communities.

COLONEL CHRISTENSEN said the guard does that, but is prohibited in certain ways from using federal property and equipment for state missions. However, there is a national program called "innovative readiness training" whereby communities, federal agencies, or other entities can ask for programs or projects to be done by the guard in its training. For example, one program put in a year ago provides for federal funding to come into the [Alaska Army National Guard's] funding stream, which allows

"robustness" to do additional training or to bring additional people on, in order to practice search-and-rescue operations and interface with communities; he indicated much of that will be done in the Nome-Bethel area this year because of the number of accidents or emergencies in Western Alaska.

Number 1750

REPRESENTATIVE KOTT made a motion to advance the confirmation of Colonel Craig Christensen to the joint session of the House and Senate; he requested unanimous consent. There being no objection, the nomination of Colonel Craig Christensen to the position of Brigadier General, Alaska Army National Guard, was advanced.

Number 1820

EDWARD FURMAN of Cordova provided a handout to committee members regarding the buildup of forces in Russia and China, noting that he was a sergeant in the Army Reserves, from which he retired. He stated his support as an American for a strong military and a strong defense. He asked, if the nation were to go to war, whether Colonel Christensen believes the National Guard would be strong enough and well trained enough to fit in with the troops, and whether he believes there are insufficient federal funds for that training. He expressed concern that there are only ten divisions now, and said he is bothered by what is going on in Washington, D.C. He requested that troops be provided the proper training.

COLONEL CHRISTENSEN replied that the capabilities of the entire national defense are being looked at right now at the federal level. He noted that the Army Reserve and the Army National Guard make up approximately 50 percent of the Army now; the guard has a major portion of the combat forces that augment the Army, but little combat service support, which the Army Reserve has more of. He referred to Desert Storm; he said the National Guard is capable of responding. For the mission in Alaska, including the "air bridge" and defense of critical sites in Alaska, it will be the Army National Guard that mans and defends those critical sites, which it is absolutely capable of doing. He noted that "follow-on" forces outside of the state are programmed to augment that effort.

COLONEL CHRISTENSEN referred to the question of federal funding for training. He pointed out that the guard has changed the way in which members are trained; much is done with simulation,

rather than going to ranges and launching mortar rounds. He noted that the Anchorage armory has a fantastic training simulation device, for example, which puts real weapons in the hands of individuals who are hooked up electronically. Although the guard is getting less money, there is a lot more training for each dollar. He said Alaska's guard is far more professional and capable today of doing its job - at both the federal and state levels - than was the guard that he joined in 1972. He concluded by saying that today, from his observation of the other 54 states and territories, the National Guard is a first-class professional organization to be proud of.

Number 2054

REPRESENTATIVE KOTT suggested the fact that President Bush is more military-minded than his predecessor will probably set the tone in the country for building up a defense.

[The confirmation of Colonel Craig Christensen to the position of Brigadier General, Alaska Army National Guard, was advanced.]

ADJOURNMENT

Number 2070

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at 5:50 p.m.