

## Homeland Defenders

Feature

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The United States Northern Command, that includes a dozen members of the National Guard, was hailed as America's new line of defense against attacks on the homeland and the ravages of natural disasters during an activation ceremony in central Colorado on Tuesday, Oct. 1.

Approximately 1,000 people attended the morning ceremony in Hanger 140 at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs where 14,110-foot Pike's Peak and other Rocky Mountain summits provided a majestic autumn backdrop to the home of this country's newest military organization.

"Northern Command will define the security demands of the 21st century," projected Dr. Paul Wolfowitz, deputy secretary of defense. "It will provide a necessary focus for our aerospace, land, and sea defenses and critical support to our nation's civil authorities in times of national need."

Commanded by Air Force Gen. Ralph Eberhart, the Northern Command has been formed during the year since the terrorist attacks against New York City and Washington, D.C., to serve two purposes.

It will conduct operations to deter, prevent and defeat threats and aggression aimed at the United States, its territories and interests within its area of responsibility.

It will provide military assistance to civil authorities, as directed by the president or the secretary of defense.

"The Northern Command consolidates under a single, unified command existing missions that were previously executed by other Department of Defense organizations," it was explained. "This provides unity of command, which is so important to accomplishing our mission."

Its area of responsibility includes all air, land and sea approaches into this country and encompasses the continental United States, Alaska, Canada, Mexico and the surrounding water out to approximately 500 nautical miles, including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The U.S. Pacific Command will retain the responsibility for defending Hawaii and other U.S. possessions in the Pacific Ocean, officials explained.

The Northern Command's staff of 200 members of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Coast Guard and their reserve components is expected to increase to 500 during the next year. Twenty-three of those slots have been earmarked for the National Guard.

"We can't have a Northern Command, we can't provide for the homeland defense and the homeland security of this great nation and this area of responsibility without the National Guard," Eberhart told the nation's National Guard leaders meeting in Long Beach, Calif., during September's first weekend. "Just like the minutemen who came to defend our liberties at Lexington Green and Concord, the ranks of Northern Command will swell with the talents of our entire armed forces," Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said during the Oct. 1 activation ceremony.

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Maryland Army National Guard Maj. Gen. H. Steven Blum is the chief of staff and the highest-ranking member of the National Guard in the new command.

"There is no more important mission than the defense of this nation and the homeland," said Blum one week before the command was activated. "We cannot fail the American people. They have high expectations of us."

Blum and the other National Guard people are bringing something special to the new organization that will function differently from other U.S. military commands in Europe and the Pacific, in Southwest Asia and in Central and South America. The Northern Command will obtain the military assets required by other federal agencies during domestic emergencies.

The National Guard knows how to deal with the federal, state and local civil authorities – from members of the FBI to municipal fire chiefs – who will in most cases be in charge of the emergency situations that the Northern Command will be asked to support.

Those are the lessons that the active duty personnel and most of their reserve counterparts must master in order to abide by the commander's intent.

The Northern Command in almost every case will support another agency, "in most cases a lead federal agency that's been asked for help by your governors," Eberhart explained in Long Beach.

The assignments could come from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the FBI, or another government agency, he said. "We will take tasking authority or taskings from the lead federal agency or from whoever is in charge," he added.

While that may be a significant change for some of the Northern Command's staff members, everyone made the effort during a training exercise, United Defense 02-2, that was held in Colorado Springs on Sept. 16-19.

The Department of Defense exercise was the first test of the Northern Command staff's abilities to respond to several types of terrorist incidents within the United States, including an attack on an oil refinery, and to work with other government agencies.

"It's a steep learning curve for a lot of these folks because they're used to owning the ground," said Massachusetts Army Guard Col. Peter Alyward, chief of the new command's Plans Division. "This is a little different. They have to understand how we get involved with the civil authorities. We have a little ways to go in that regard."

Army Lt. Col. Tom Berry acknowledged he is leaning on the Guard people who know those ropes, including Alyward who worked closely with federal officials and Atlanta police while serving with the National Guard Bureau during the 1996 Summer Olympics in Georgia.

It is not a totally foreign concept, maintained Berry, the Northern Command's senior medical plans and operations officer.

"I saw some of my counterparts interface with civil authorities during the Los Angeles riots in 1992. So this is not a completely new mission," Berry said. "But this has definitely become more of the norm than in the past, especially since last Sept. 11. The active components and the reserves have all been coming together during the last five years. And our exposure to one another during the past year has definitely been

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magnified."

The Northern Command's budget will be about \$70 million for the first year. The staff is currently located in the North American Aerospace Defense Command headquarters at Peterson, but it will move into a new \$90 million, 158,000 square-foot headquarters building that is expected to be completed next March.