



**PRESS RELEASE**  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**Army Guardsmen visit with Bethel students during annual training**

**Napaskiak, Alaska** — Alaska Army National Guardsmen visited with students here Wednesday while taking a break from the annual training that brought them to Bethel and outlying villages. Soldiers from the 297th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade conducted a portion of their training in Napaskiak, a small village seven miles downriver from Bethel with approximately 400 residents.

The Soldiers were near K-12 ZJ Williams Memorial School while performing small unit support vehicle operator's training, and made sure to provide village residents with an interactive experience with the 10,000 pound vehicles.

"It's important for our students, for the children, to get these experiences with visitors from other places because as educators, we see it as part of their education," said Tolbert Bentley, principal of ZJ Williams Memorial School. "The presence of the Soldiers has given the kids a situation where they can ask questions and see opportunity beyond their world, all while having fun."

The Soldiers carved time into their training schedule in order to visit with students for two hours. Soldiers ate lunch with the students in their cafeteria, acquainted them with medical, audiovisual and other military equipment and tactical gear. Six Soldiers also provided an impromptu presentation to a classroom of 1st through 4th graders on what it means to be in the Alaska National Guard.

"We saw this as the perfect opportunity for community outreach for our Soldiers," said 1st Sgt. Rodger Morrison of the 1-143rd Infantry Regiment Detachment from Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. "One thing we try and train our Soldiers on is that there is so much more to Alaska than just Anchorage, Fairbanks and Wasilla ... and until our Soldiers are able to visit with and connect with the members of these smaller villages firsthand, it's something that's hard to train and even harder to grasp."

A significant amount of community involvement has been incorporated into the Soldiers' annual training this year, as a handful of smaller villages that surround Bethel have been coordinated with to provide the scene for military training scenarios.

"Being interactive with the community like this has been fantastic for our Soldiers," Morrison said. "Watching the excited expressions on the children's faces as they were climbing on the

equipment and trying on pieces of the uniform was a priceless experience for all involved, and definitely one of the highlights of my training this week."

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Soldiers with the 297th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade speak with elementary students at ZJ Williams K-12 School during a break in annual training in Napaskiak, Alaska, March 25. The Soldiers' annual training is based out of Bethel, Alaska, and includes many of the smaller surrounding villages.