



Maj. Gen. John Schaeffer spoke at the dedication. photo by Barbara Crane

New armory memorializes Gen. Marston

by Steve Pilkington

for the Tundra Times

KOTZEBUE — "He was more like a larger-than-life figure," Maj. Gen. John Schaeffer said last week, describing Marvin "Muktuk" Marston.

Schaeffer was speaking at the dedication ceremony here for the new National Guard Armory, named after Marston.

The \$7-million building is the largest armory north of the Arctic Circle. It has a special meaning to the Alaska Natives of Kotzebue, said Schaeffer, who was born and raised there.

"It was a big deal when he showed up," Schaeffer said, recalling the friendship Marston had with Schaeffer's family and the Native communities of Alaska.

Marston, affectionately known as "Muktuk" — a title reflecting his achievement in a muktuk-eating contest with an Eskimo village chief — was born in Tyler, Wash., in 1889.

His accomplishments in the Native community seem endless, and so does the Native communities' affection for him.

(Continued on Page Nine)



Drummers for the Northern Lights Dancers performed after the ceremony.
photo by Barbara Crane

• Marston honored

(Continued from Page One)

"He very much identified with the Eskimo people," Sen. Willie Hensley said at the ceremony.

"He was also frustrated with bureaucracy," Hensley said.

Members of Marston's family, including his son Brooke Marston, were present for the dedication.

Also present were Rep. Al Adams and Lt. Gen. David Nichols of the Alaskan Air Command.

"For 40 years this had been a dream of my father's lifetime, to have this armory established," Brooke Marston said of the 3rd Battalion's armory.

Marston's leadership in the Native community was an outstanding example.

"We had lost all our leadership," Schaeffer said of the Native community in Kotzebue.

Marston first appointed non-Natives as Kotzebue's leaders because of their connections outside of the state, Schaeffer said. But when Marston returned a year later, he found that they had done nothing because the leaders could not communicate with the people.

Marston's solution to the problem was simple, he fired all the non-Natives and replaced them with Native leaders who could get things accomplished in the community, Schaeffer said.

Marston was very accomplished in dealing with Alaska Native communities. Not only did he recruit countless numbers of Natives to serve in the Alaskan Territorial Guard during the mid-1900s, a period during which service was on a volunteer basis, but he also considered the people his friends.

Marston's achievements in the Army National Guard were many. He served as a recreation director on troop transports at the close of World War I, when troops were returning from Europe.

When he returned later to service, at the beginning of the Second World War, he was given direct commission as a major. He was assigned to Alaska because of his knowledge of the Arctic.

This was when Marston observed the Eskimo people and saw their potential as protectors of the Alaska coastline, which was a likely candidate for a Japanese invasion during the war. He traveled by boat, dog sled and foot from village to village, recruiting volunteers for the Territorial Guard.

Marston ended his military career with the rank of brigadier general.

He not only had a heavy influence with the Native communities in his military life, but also in his political accomplishments.

Marston served as a delegate to the Alaska Constitutional Convention in 1956. The convention produced the Alaska Constitution which became effective when Alaska became a state.

"I came to the Constitutional Convention to save the Natives," Marston told the *Tundra Times* at the time.

"When it looked like we were going to become a state, the Department of the Interior wanted to form reservations here, 100 of them. I stopped them, too."

He also was one of the first to donate funds — \$10,000 — to the Iditarod, which will honor Marston by naming him the Number One musher for the 1988 races.

Marston died at the age of 91 in Palm Springs, Calif., in 1980.

Kotzebue's new armory will have mostly civilian purposes, said Schaeffer. It is the largest, and newest building in Kotzebue.

Marston's wife Elsie, who lives in Palm Springs, wrote about the armory in a letter to Schaeffer: "Now Muktuk will be able to celebrate again with the people of the North."