

Guardisman leads company to top rating

by Barbara Crane
for the Tundra Times

KIPNUK — Peter Paul's life is a blend of two cultures.

He was born 39 years ago in Kipnuk, a small village on the bank of the Kugulik River in Southwestern Alaska. He grew up speaking Yupik, surrounded by family and friends and enjoyed the traditional Native lifestyle.

But when it came time for high school, Paul was sent far from home to attend the Chilocco Indian School in Oklahoma.

Paul had a tough time at first with speaking only English in Oklahoma.

"When I first went down there, I was rated at the sixth grade level, but I caught up to the ninth grade level in one month and became an honor student," Paul recalled. "I worked so hard because I believed the government paid for my education so I could go back and help my people.

"Even now, whenever I go off to training schools, I feel that I am representing the Native people. I do my best so I can show that Natives are as smart and capable as anybody else."

After high school graduation, Paul had scholarship offers from four different colleges, but following tradition, he asked his parents for their advice.

"My parents wanted me to come home," Paul said, "so I came back to Kipnuk. In the Native culture here, we still believe the parents must give their consent before their child does anything, no matter what age the child is. The parents have the final say so.

"It's gradually getting into the white man's system now. I see changes where our traditional culture is dissolving, whether we like it or not. The philosophy I have is that there's always some good and some bad about anything new."

When he returned home to Kipnuk, Paul found a job with the village corporation, Kugkaktlik Ltd.

"I worked there 12 years," Paul said, "but after a while I needed to do something different, so I took a job with the Alaska Army National Guard."

Paul is now the training supervisor for C Company of the 2nd Scout Battalion. His bilingual and cross-cultural abilities are invaluable in his job.

"Since English is a second language for a lot of Natives, it takes them double time to learn a lot of things," Paul said. "Especially for the older people, we've got to translate everything from English to Yupik."

When Paul became a patrol sergeant with C Company in 1982, that company had the lowest possible rating. He was determined to improve that rating as quickly as possible.

"We started evaluating the training of our people," Paul said. Paul attended several training schools and earned his instructor's certificate. Then he started training other instructors.

"We now have 116 soldiers in C Company," Paul said, "and 19 of them are assistant instructors."

C Company's rating is now the highest.

"Peter Paul and the other sergeants in the area have made C Company of the 2nd Scout Battalion the best company in the Alaska Army National Guard," said Maj. Gen. John Schaeffer. "They have made greater use of the Alaska Military Academy than any other unit in the state, and it shows in their performance."

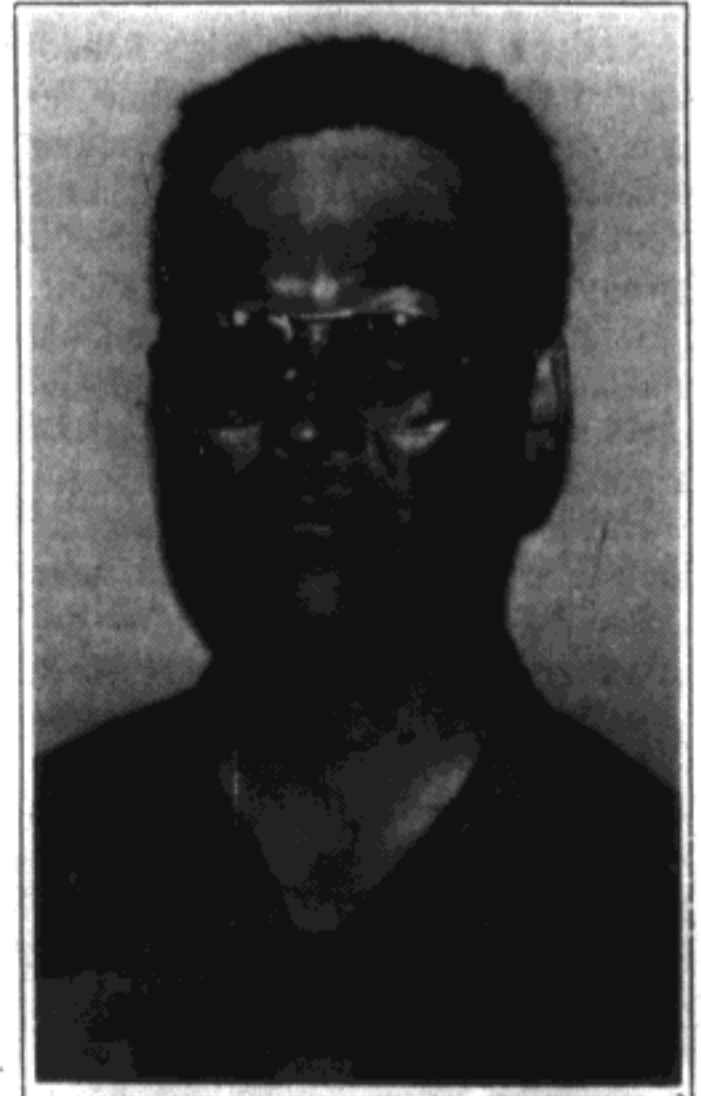
Paul has a natural curiosity and a love for learning and teaching.

"I read a lot of books," Paul said. "That's where I've learned most of the things I know. I do a lot of research and test things out for myself. Then I can train the other soldiers and share what I've learned."

Paul's family ties to Kipnuk are very strong. In fact, five of the 21 other C

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Peter Paul was born in Kipnuk.

Company soldiers who live in Kipnuk are his cousins. He likes living and bringing up his children in a strong community which has banned alcohol and stopped bootlegging activity by searching all visitors.

"We have our own rules and regulations that we try to enforce within our community, like banning drugs and alcohol. That's the biggest problem Native communities have. In other

villages I see a lot of kids who are smart but really messed up."

Paul's love for sharing his knowledge is also extended to his family.

Every summer he and his wife and their three children move to a fish camp on the Kuskokwim River. There he teaches the traditional Native ways which he hopes will someday be passed on to his grandchildren.