

Native officer takes service schools

by Carl Gidlund

for the Tundra Times

Jack King believes in taking advantage of the system.

The Kodiak Native and Anchorage resident has graduated from 15 residence and correspondence courses offered to Air National Guardsmen by the Air Force.

Further, for many of those classes, he received active duty pay, allowances and additional "points" that will increase his retirement pay when he finally hangs up his blue uniform.

Several courses from which he's graduated are closely akin to those offered in civilian schools.

So, through a program called the "Community College of the Air Force," he's transferred credits to his college transcript.

"At last count, I have about 50 credits," he says, "and would have a lot more, but I took most of the classes prior to 1968 when the community college program began.

"To date, I've completed a two-year associate's degree in aviation administration and I'm considering going for a bachelor's."

That kind of dedication has paid off for King.

A guardsman since he graduated from Anchorage's West High School in 1960, he's worked up through the ranks from airman basic to lieutenant colonel.

He's now in charge of the 160 men and women who provide the services needed by the 800 members of the Alaska Air National Guard.

And those services are many, including health care, base security, personnel management, administration,

computers and communications systems, photography and television, recruiting and career counseling.

Prior to that, he commanded the 170 guardsmen who maintain the eight C-130 Hercules aircraft assigned to the Air Guard's flying squadron.

That's not precisely the career Col. King envisioned when he joined the Air Guard.

"I wanted to be a sheet metal worker when I enlisted," he remembers.

"But at that time, there weren't any openings in that career field, so I was trained as a propeller mechanic at Chanute Air Force Base in Illinois."

King worked on propellers for five years then, after promotion to staff sergeant, he took over the shop.

And, because of his dedication to the job and all those classes, he's continued to progress.

In 1969, he was named first sergeant of the Alaska Air Guard's flying unit, the 144th Tactical Airlift Squadron.

Then, in 1976, he was commissioned as a captain and became an aircraft maintenance officer.

His job was to schedule repairs, and he found himself giving orders to many of the sergeants for whom he had worked.

"It was awkward now and then, but we worked it out," he remembers.

"It's different when you're an officer. Everyone wants to be liked, but occasionally you have to say 'no' to a friend. That's tough."

King loves Alaska and the outdoor opportunities it offers. He hunts, fishes and skis, usually with one or more of his four children.

But, when he accepted the additional pay of a commissioned officer, he also

accepted additional responsibilities. And, on occasion, that's meant travel.

"I really don't care for it that much. I'd rather be home with my family but my jobs have now and then required me to take my turn traveling with the aircraft on long deployments to make sure they're fixed when they have problems."

So, he's served in Central and South America as well as all over the Lower 48.

It's also meant he's had to study "on the fly" to keep up with the night school courses he's taking at Anchorage Community College.

However, he's managed to graduate with a 3.94 point average — nearly straight As.

A member of Cook Inlet Region, King reflects on the relative scarcity of Alaska Natives in the Alaska Air Guard:

"There are only about a dozen that I know of," he says. "That may be because it's a relatively new service whereas the Army Guard's been

around since territorial days. And, there are armories in villages throughout the state.

"But I'd point out we have lots of jobs that are similar to the kinds of things Army guardsmen do.

"For instance, the Air Guard has openings for security policemen, plumbers, truck drivers, cooks, pavement and grounds specialists and upholsterers.

"After enlisting, a man or woman might want to transfer into a more technical career field like turboprop mechanic, fuels management, radio operator or corrosion control specialist.

"And," he says, "just about every skill you learn in the Air Guard is transferable to a civilian job.

"When you add it all up — training, pretty good pay, travel, retirement, a chance to work with a broad cross-section of Alaskans — the Air Guard's a mighty nice part or full-time job.

"It's sure been good to me."

Lt. Col. Jack King, services officer for the Alaska Air Guard's Anchorage base, is proud of his membership in the Cook Inlet Region.

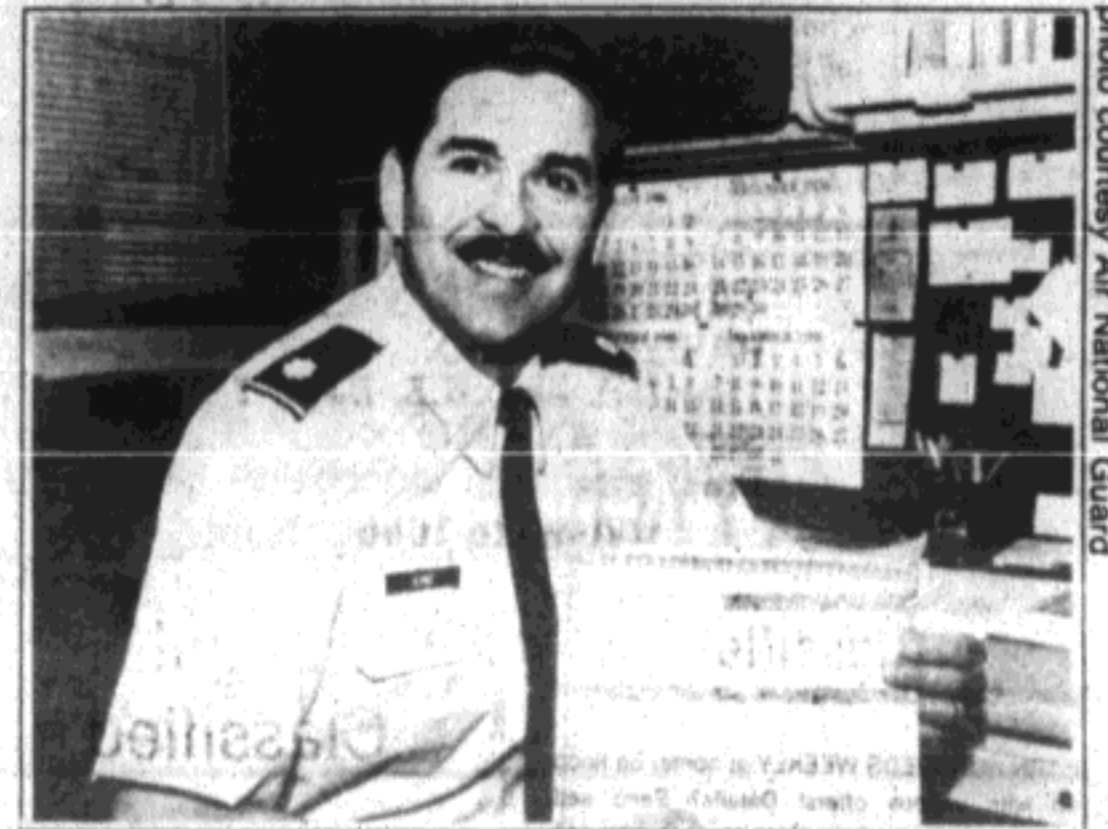


photo courtesy Air National Guard