

Remembering Archie Kahklen

By Martha Upicksoun Feenstra
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The official military pictures of Archie Kahklen are understandably solemn. I choose to remember him instead as the neighbor who took a near-boyish delight in driving the 1992 burgundy Ford Crown Victoria sedan given to him as a present by his wife Ida.

The occasion for the present was a party last summer of Archie and his sister Toni to jointly celebrate their birthdays; and to especially acknowledge Archie's rise in the Alaska Army National Guard ranks to Colonel Sergeant Major. By Dec. of 1991, he was again promoted, this time to State Command Sergeant Major.

As SCSM Kahklen, he was the Army Guard's highest-ranking enlisted man and Alaska Native. With 90 to 100 Guard units scattered across rural Alaska, there will be many in the Bush who mourn his death.

Archie Kahklen, 52, born in Haines but "claimed by Angoon," says sister Toni. Kahklen and seven other Army National Guardsmen died when their craft crashed while on approach to Juneau Nov. 12.

Kahklen was a Tlingit of the Raven Clan. His family crest was the Dog Salmon. His parents, former Bureau of Indian Affairs



Archie visits Arlington National Cemetery and the grave of Audie Murphy, the country's most decorated WWII soldier. Murphy was a hero to him, also.

school teacher Joseph M. and Vivian Kahklen, are retired in Juneau. In addition to his wife Ida, he leaves four children Keven Kahklen, Vivian Cormie, Matthew Kahklen and Kristen Kahklen from an earlier marriage; a stepson, Marcus Figuera; and a grandson Vincent Kahklen. He's survived by two brothers, Joe, Albert and one sister, Toni Kahklen-Jones.

Since I live on a corner lot near

the Kahklens' that leads into our neighborhood, I was privy to certain community "happenings." Like the sometimes-humorous sight of Ida and Archie showing two of their kids, Marcos and Kristen, the finer points of driving - such as pulling in front of the mailbox without stalling the vehicle - so the teens could get their licenses. To their credit as parents of teens, Ida and Archie turned the lessons into family events, where



Archie in his dress uniform.

they all drew and worked together.

Three days before his death, his other "family" - the Army Guard he served for 28 years - honored him. On Nov. 12 and with a standing ovation, the 207th Aviation Battalion gave him a special present. It was a much-coveted Huey helicopter rotor blade which had been spit-shined and inscribed with his accomplishments.

How fitting an insider tribute



Archie and Ida Kahklen
(Photos courtesy of Ida Kahklen)

to Archie Kahklen, a twice-wounded Vietnam veteran who had been awarded a Purple Heart. As Ida said a few days after Archie died, "If Archie ever wanted anything in his whole life, it was a rotor blade off a Huey... And that meant a lot."

(Editor's note: Military services for SCSM Kahklen and the other Army National Guard victims will be today at 2 p.m. at Ft. Richardson. Other services are planned later.)