

# Even small villages can have Guard units

by Barbara Crane

Tundra Times reporter

ANAKTUVUK PASS — Bad weather almost scrubbed their flight, but Alaska Army National Guard pilots brought their Twin Otter through a mountain pass obscured by clouds to land at this remote village 260 miles northwest of Fairbanks.

Bass Gordon, mayor of Anaktuvuk Pass, had been interested for some time in the possibility of having a National Guard unit based in his village.

So on April 4, Lt. Col. Charles Soxie, commander of the Guard's 3rd Battalion, led a delegation of Guard members to visit Anaktuvuk Pass.

The visitors were conspicuous in their Army uniforms as they walked through the village and visited the local store.

Children shyly circled around the strangers before getting up the nerve to ask, "What's your name, Army Man?" and the word quickly spread through the village that the visitors wanted to talk to young men and women about employment with the National Guard.

Sgt. 1st Class Duke Robb, a recruiter, answered questions about joining the Guard and took names of those who were interested.

At a meeting in the community center, Soxie told Gordon that his village's small population — only about 250 people — wouldn't keep them from having a unit if that's what they really wanted.

"We have good Guard units in places even smaller than Anaktuvuk Pass," Soxie said.



Photos by Barbara Crane

Lt. Col. John Phelps answers questions from Matthew Hugo, left, and Gregory Morry.



Anaktuvuk Mayor Bass Gordon, left, talks to Lt. Col. Charles Soxie.

Soxie told Gordon that what really matters is a community's level of interest, commitment and support.

"We can start with just one member," he said, "but we'd like to get together a group of about five people to get organized here and recruit the rest."

If a village provides a building for a minimum of five Guard members to train in, the Guard will pay for fuel and electricity. Once 15 soldiers are recruited, a community becomes eligible to have its own armory building constructed.

"I hope we can get a lot of our young people interested in joining the National Guard," Gordon told Soxie.

Gordon explained that after finishing high school in Anaktuvuk Pass, most people's opportunities to continue learning and growing are limited.

"But with the Guard, they would have a chance to do some traveling and

get some training, and they should take advantage of that," he said.

Gordon said the extra income would be more than welcome in his village. "Subsistence is OK," he said, "but it's pretty hard to survive anymore without some cash."