

Native woman creates Air Guard career

by Carl Gidlund
for the Tundra Times

Greta Angasan credits the Alaska Air National Guard with furthering her education and, consequently, her career.

The 32-year-old-staff sergeant, a telephone, teletype and computer operator in the Anchorage unit's Information System's Flight, took advantage of the Guard's tuition assistance program to learn computer programming.

Now, because of that training, she's a full-time Guard employee. And, the Cook Inlet Region Native is working in the field of her choice.

"I was a drafting technician with the State Department of Transportation and Public Facilities," she says. "I joined the guard in 1980, principally to supplement my income. But then I found some other benefits."

The Seward Native says one of the most important of those benefits was exposure to different types of jobs:

"The guard trained me as a material controls specialist. After six weeks' basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, I returned to Kulis Air Guard Base here in Anchorage for another six weeks of on-the-job training in the supply section."

But, after looking at the various part-time jobs available in the guard, she found one more to her liking. So, in September 1983, she entered the communications field.

That was as a "weekender," meaning she practiced her new military trade one weekend a month, plus two weeks a year of active duty training.

Despite the demands of being a guardsman, full-time state employee and 24-hour-a-day mother to her now 10-year-old daughter, Greta made time to attend a commercial computer programming school.

"The state's educational assistance program helped," she explains. "Since I was a guardsman, I was reimbursed for half my tuition charges."

Because of her formal education and exposure to the field as a part-time member of the guard, Greta became eligible for full-time employment with the organization. And, a year ago she was selected.

In addition to retaining her "weekender" status, she's now also a civil service technician.

Greta says the military shopping privileges she earns as a guardsman help her pocketbook. And, when you're sole support for a growing child, every bit helps.

So, she buys clothes, furniture, garden supplies and sundries in military stores called "exchanges" at Elmendorf Air Force Base and Ft. Richardson.

Currently, guardsmen can use the exchange four times a month which is, Greta says, sufficient for her needs. And, she can shop in the commissary whenever she's on active duty for more than three days.

"Then I really stock up on groceries. I save about 25 percent of what I'd be spending in a regular market."

Greta explains that, because of her sole-parent status, she's unable to take full advantage of another benefit of her part-time job:

"Travel. I'd like to do more, catch space-available flights for vacations,



SSgt. Greta Angasan credits the Alaska Air National Guard with helping her redirect her career. The Cook Inlet Region member enlisted in 1980 and last year became a full-time guard employee. Air National Guard photo

go to the Lower 48 or overseas for training. But I stay close to home because of my daughter."

Usually, the units stationed at Kulis Air Guard Base on Anchorage's International Airport train at different times, and that can be anywhere in the world.

Locales have included Central and South America, Europe and Korea.

"I spent one training weekend at Hickam Air Force Base in Honolulu," says Sgt. Angasan. "But I wish I could take other trips."

She has only one complaint about her guard experiences so far. This Alaska Native shivered in Texas.

"I went through basic training in November, and I just couldn't get used to that damp cold.

Up here, we can dress for the weather. But down at Lackland, they

didn't issue us ear protection, and the only gloves we had were for dress wear."

"Give me 'warm' Alaska every time."

To Greta, one of the most valuable side benefits of her part-time guard job is the people with whom she works.

"They're nice, from all over Anchorage, the Mat-Su Valley, Kenai

Peninsula and Fairbanks. They're not only fun, but helpful too. For instance, I've had some good job tips from them.

"It's funny, but in many ways I'm closer to them than I was to many of the people I worked with on my regular 'civilian' jobs.

"I guess that's because we're a real team. We rely on each other."

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