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March 6, 2014

Moving On

Master Sgt. David Moore, Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs

The top noncommissioned officer in the New Jersey Army National Guard, who oversaw the largest deployment in state history, the response to two major hurricanes, and made his mark by placing the right troops in the right spot at the right time, is stepping down after eight years in the Army's highest enlisted spot.

Command Sgt. Major Jerome Jenkins enlisted in 1972. His desire to serve never waned.

"I am as proud to serve now as I was then," Jenkins said recently, before he relinquished the post to Command Sgt. Maj. Edwin Santiago at a change of responsibility ceremony at the Atlantic City Armory on March 2.

Jenkins spent the majority of his time in uniform serving as a traditional guardsman and working as an insurance executive before being appointed to the full-time position of State Command Sergeant Major on March 26, 2006.

He served two Adjutant Generals, two brigade commanders and nearly a dozen battalion and company commanders.

"Each commander has a unique style," Jenkins said. "I was able to conform to that and make sure communication was effective up and down the chain."

Jenkins grew up in Jersey City and had four college scholarship offers as he neared graduation from Lincoln High School. He chose St. Peters College and considered higher education before joining the military, but a guidance counselor convinced him to do both by joining the National Guard.

There are many things Jenkins remembers about his basic training at Fort Jackson, S.C., but his drill instructor's name is not among them. Here are some of the things he does remember about the man: the time he hit Jenkins in the head with a helmet liner hard enough to draw blood; the way he relentlessly pushed his trainees on lung-



Outgoing State Command Sgt. Maj. Jerome Jenkins, left, hands off the New Jersey National Guards colors for the last time to Brig. Gen. Michael Cunniff, the Adjutant General, during his Change of Responsibility ceremony at the Atlantic City armory March 2, 2014. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 1st Sgt. Kryn P. Westhoven / Released)

scorching runs up Tank Hill; and his decision to force Jenkins into leadership roles by making him the guideon bearer and the overseer of four other New Jersey recruits.

Jenkins also remembered this about the drill instructor, a hardened Vietnam veteran: the man had wisdom about soldiering and was able to teach it.

Even so, "I didn't want to meet any person like him again," Jenkins said.

But something happened as Jenkins began his climb up the NCO ladder.

"I became him," Jenkins said.

By the time he became the first sergeant for a young company commander named John Langston, Jenkins was known across

the 113th Infantry Battalion as "the hammer."

Langston, now a colonel, pulled Jenkins aside.

"He told me, 'Top I like the results you're getting. I just don't like your methods,'" Jenkins recalled. "He taught me a different leadership style. How to absorb things before moving right in on it."

So Jenkins's leadership style evolved as he accepted even larger responsibilities, including time as the command sergeant major of the 113th Infantry Battalion and 50th Infantry Brigade Combat Team before being selected from a pool of five other ap-

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“It isn’t a hat. It’s a lifestyle”

Story by Staff Sgt. Landis Andrews, 444th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment.



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Joe Donnelly

The United States Army prides itself on Soldier appearance and stresses uniformity with the Army Combat Uniform. So, it comes as a surprise to many to see Soldiers wearing black Stetsons on their heads and spurs on the boots.

But, for the 102nd Cavalry Regiment, the spurs and Stetson are not only a part of the uniform, they are pieces of unit and personal pride.

The story of Staff Sgt. Pablo Chavez’s cavalry career is proudly displayed on his deep black headgear. Two gold cords wrap around the Stetson representing his status as an enlisted man. On the front, three chevrons and a rocker show his rank. On the rear, crossed sabers sit behind his unit crest, surrounded by two more crests to show how many times he has been deployed to a warzone.

Even though his headgear says so much, Chavez is not short for words about his favorite piece of the uniform.

“It isn’t a hat. It’s a lifestyle,” he said. “It carries so much history and honor, that calling it a hat is an insult.

The headgear is named after John B. Stetson, a second generation hat-maker and New Jersey native who popularized the style and also invented the Cowboy hat. Though not authorized in Army regulations, the Air Cavalry revived the Stetson to bring about esprit de corps and the rest of the Cavalry followed suit.

“We work hard to honor the history of the cavalry and everyone else should have the same respect,” said Chavez.

Only a select few members of the New Jersey National Guard

are permitted to don the Stetson. Even fewer are able to attach spurs to their combat boots. They harken back to the 1800s when the cavalry controlled their horses with the spurs.

Since today’s cavalry don’t ride horses, they earn the spurs by completing a Spur Ride -- a series of physical and mental task relevant to Cavalry. Soldiers get tested on leadership, technical and tactical proficiency as well as physical fitness. Those who pass all tests are allowed to wear spurs. Silver spurs represent the completion of the Spur Ride while gold signifies a soldier who has engaged the enemy in combat.

Sgt. 1st Class Mauricio Vega doesn’t have his spurs, but has watched many of his Soldiers earn them. He spent years as a recruiter bringing many of those Soldiers into the Army.

“Spurs represent a level of competency that not every cavalryman can attain,” he said. “Seeing them with the Stetson and spurs lets me know just how squared away these guys are. In just a few years, these young soldiers have become the future of our army and have the gear to prove it.”

Though still not included in AR 670-1, the wear and appearance of the Stetson is a commander’s discretion. There is a story behind every Stetson and there is history in every spur. The members 102nd Cavalry Regiment are very familiar with that history, but those who aren’t are given a small lesson every time they lay eyes on a cavalry soldier.

Without saying a word, the 102nd soldiers “Show’em the way.”

HIGHLIGHTS

JENKINS

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plicants as state Command Sergeant Major.

Although his exterior had softened, the drive to push others NCOs to achieve still burned within Jenkins.

“I hate to fail. You have to own the mission. At the end of the day when you put your head down to go to sleep, you have to know when you’re training you met the standard and you got that boxed checked GO. When you wake up, you need to get the next box

loss. I will always remember. I still hear the crying.”

Jenkins said he’s been guided on his path by his belief that the National Guard is a family.

And by his belief that the families of the Soldiers and Airmen are the ones that create the conditions that allow them to serve.

He doubts he would have made it through basic training without an upbringing by parents who raised him in a home filled with both care and discipline, especially his mother, Henrietta, who was “tough as nails.”

“My parents had me more than ready to endure the things I was about to endure entering the service,” Jenkins said. “Today we call

“I am proud to serve now as I was then”

Outgoing State Command Sgt. Major Jerome Jenkins

completed – green – GO.”

Jenkins said the highlights of his job were the opportunity to reward good NCOs with the next opportunity to thrive and to be accessible to any Soldier who needed him, regardless of their rank.

There were some very tough days on his watch too.

The darkest days came with the losses of four Soldiers in Iraq and one in Afghanistan.

“To this day and I will never forget one of those Soldiers being returned to Dover and standing there with the family,” Jenkins recalled. “I remember the Soldier’s sister screaming out over the

it resilience and living the Army Values. I knew I had that.”

He’s also quite certain a 42-year military career would not have been possible with the support of his wife, Kim.

“Every time I would go out the door for an assignment, she said ‘I got this.’”

Jenkins, the father of five children – who range in age from 6 to 44 – said the next phase of his life will focus on his family.

“I’ve had a great career,” Jenkins said. “I’m looking forward to paying my wife back for all the great things she did for me, holding down the fort.”



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U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Care and Benefits for Veterans Strengthened by \$164 Billion VA Budget

WASHINGTON – Continuing the transformation of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) into a 21st century organization, the President has proposed a \$163.9 billion budget, a 6.5 percent increase over Fiscal Year 2014, that will support VA's goals to expand access to health care and other benefits, eliminate the disability claims backlog, and end homelessness among Veterans. The budget includes \$68.4 billion in discretionary spending, largely for healthcare, and \$95.6 billion for mandatory programs – mostly disability compensation and pensions for Veterans.

"This budget will allow us to continue the progress we have made in helping Veterans secure their place in the middle class," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "It is a tangible demonstration of the President's commitment to ensuring Veterans and their families have the care and benefits they've earned and deserve."

The \$68.4 billion total in discretionary spending includes approximately \$3.1 billion in medical care collections from health insurers and Veteran copayments.

"We remain committed to providing Veterans the opportunity to pursue their education, find meaningful employment and access high-quality health care," Shinseki added. "From the men and women of 'the greatest generation' to the Veterans who have returned from our most recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, no one deserves it more."

VA operates one of the largest integrated health care systems in the country with nearly 9 million enrollees; the ninth largest life insurance program; monthly disability pay, pensions and survivors payments to more than 5.1 million beneficiaries of monthly pay, pensions and survivor benefits; education assistance or vocational rehabilitation benefits and services to 1.2 million students; mortgage guaranties to over 2 million homeowners; and the largest cemetery system in the nation.

Here are highlights from the President's 2015 budget request for VA.

Health Care

With a medical care budget of \$59.1 billion, including collections, VA is positioned to provide care to 6.7 million patients in the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1. The patient total includes over 757,000 people whose military service began after Sept. 11, 2001.

Major spending categories within the health care budget are: \$7.2 billion for mental health; \$2.6 billion for prosthetics; \$561 million for spinal cord injuries; \$229 million for traumatic brain injuries; \$238 million for readjustment counseling; and \$7.0 billion for long-term care.

Expanding Access

The President's proposed budget would ensure that care and

other benefits are available to Veterans when and where they need them. Among the programs that will expand access under the proposed budget are: \$567 million in telehealth funding, which helps patients monitor chronic health care conditions and increases access to care, especially in rural and remote locations; \$403 million for health care services specifically-designed for women, an increase of 8.7 percent over the present level; \$534 million for the activation of new and enhanced health care facilities; \$562 million to continue on-going major construction projects; \$86.6 million for improved customer service applications for online self-service portals and call center agent-assisted inquiries; and \$3.6 million to open two new national cemeteries in Florida and prepare for the opening of two new rural national Veterans burial grounds.

Eliminating Claims Backlog

The President's proposed budget provides for full implementation of the Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) robust Transformation Plan -- a series of people, process and technology initiatives -- in FY 2015. This plan will continue to systematically reduce the backlog and enable the Department to reach its 2015 goal - to eliminate the disability claims backlog and process all claims within 125 days with 98 percent accuracy.

Major transformation initiatives in the budget proposal invest \$312 million to bring leading-edge technology to the claims backlog, including: \$173 million (\$137 million in Information Technology and \$36 million in VBA) for the next generation of the electronic claims processing system Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS); and \$139 million for Veterans Claims Intake Program (VCIP) to continue conversion of paper records into electronic images and data in VBMS.

Eliminating Veterans Homelessness

A major strategic goal for the Department is to end homelessness among Veterans in 2015. The budget request targets \$1.6 billion for programs to prevent or reduce homelessness, including: \$500 million for Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) to promote housing stability; \$374 million for the HUD-VASH program wherein VA provides case management services for at-risk Veterans and their families and HUD provides permanent housing through its Housing Choice Voucher program; and \$253 million in grant and per diem payments that support temporary housing provided by community-based organizations.

Other Services for Veterans

Other features of the administration's FY 2015 budget request for the department are: \$257 million to administer the VA-run system of national cemeteries; \$3.9 billion for information technology; and \$1.2 billion in construction, cemetery grants and extended care grants.

HIGHLIGHTS

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SANTIAGO NAMED NEW STATE COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR

By **Spc. Devon Bistarkey, 444th MPAD**

Command Sgt. Maj. Edward Santiago took over as the top enlisted leader in the New Jersey Army National Guard on March 2, 2014.

He's got a simple message for the state's other top enlisted leaders: let your Soldiers learn from their mistakes.

"Empower your soldiers to take charge, make decisions, and allow for mistakes without fear or reprisal," Santiago said.

In February, Santiago was selected by Brig. Gen. Michael L. Cunniff, the Adjutant General of New Jersey, to replace Command Sgt. Maj. Jerome Jenkins, who has held the post of State Command Sergeant Major since 2006.

"There is no higher honor than being a citizen Soldier," said Santiago, who entered into military service in November 1979, and has worn a uniform ever since.

Serving previously as the Command Sergeant Major for the 50th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Santiago has more than proven his abilities. Throug his career he has served in the United States Marine Corp Reserve, the New Jersey State Police and held various leadership positions in the New Jersey Army National Guard.

This transition puts 6,000 soldiers un-

der Santiago's responsibility; a challenge embraced by a leader whose command philosophy is geared toward taking care of Soldiers. For him, success is measured through his Soldiers.

Santiago said junior enlisted Soldiers can ensure a successful military career by completing the Structured Self Development Training (SSD), maintaining a commitment to physical fitness and by doing the right thing.

"The right choice may not always be the most popular," said Santiago, "Don't strive to be a 'liked' leader, strive to be a respected leader."

Santiago's journey to the top of the NCO structure started the same way all Soldiers begin their military career – at Basic Combat Training. Words from his senior drill instructor still resonate with him. The message was simple, what you do today, and how you push yourself is a reflec-



Photo by 1st Sgt. Kryn P. Westhoven

tion of your character.

For Santiago, his character will continue to be connected with the term leader. With his new title comes an enormous amount of responsibility and authority. What hasn't changed is his vision of success: enforce policy, maintain standards and empower Soldiers.

New Jersey National Guard Airmen take part in Cajun Care 2014

Story by **Tech Sgt. Matt Hecht, 177th Fighter Wing PA**

Fourteen airmen from the 177th Medical Group are taking part in one of the largest Department of Defense community outreach efforts in the south, Cajun Care 2014.

U.S. Navy and U.S. Air National Guard medical personnel will be providing free medical, dental, optometric, and pharmaceutical services to Abbeville, La. and its surrounding communities from Feb. 26 to March 6.

New Jersey Guardsman and Cajun Care Mission Commander Lt. Col. Jamie Ruffing said although their primary mission is ensuring U.S. military medical professionals are able to rapidly establish a functional medical facility, the mission's benefits to the community



Maj. Jason Winterbottom, 177th Fighter Wing, examines a child's eyes during a Cajun Care 2014 community outreach effort at the Lighthouse Christian Academy in Abbeville, La., Feb. 28. (Courtesy photo)

cannot be understated.

"We will be working in a joint environment, learning each other's military culture and training for a mission which

could happen anywhere at any time," said Ruffing. "Most importantly, however, we fully expect to become part of this community. This will be our home for two weeks, and the people of Abbeville and the surrounding communities will be our neighbors."

Cajun Care 2014 is a joint Air National Guard and Navy Reserve medical training mission serving the real world medical needs of the medically underserved residents of the Vermilion Parish in Abbeville, La.

"It's been extremely rewarding to help the community members here," said Master Sgt. Kara Kauffman, 177th Medical Group health systems technician. "They are so appreciative, it makes it all worthwhile."

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The National Guard Association of New Jersey is holding its annual **membership drive** through **31 March**. All commissioned and warrant officers in the New Jersey Army and Air National Guard are eligible for membership in the association.

The goal of the NGANJ is to promote the interests of our membership, their families and all members of the NJ National Guard. Your membership in the association helps us achieve those goals. For further information on the association, visit our website at www.nganj.org. Information on membership dues can be found at www.nganj.org/membership.

You can pay directly online via credit card or you can pay through your unit representative. If you need assistance finding your unit representative to the NGANJ, send an email to secretary@nganj.org for further information.



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