

New leader implements big changes to Calif. National Guard

By Charles Piller, Sacramento Bee

Adjutant General David S. Baldwin returned in April from a tour of duty in Afghanistan to lead the California National Guard – and inherited a force plagued by mismanagement and freighted with scandal.

Neglect had reduced Camp Roberts, a giant training site near San Luis Obispo, to decrepitude. An auditor had accused Guard members of skimming extra fire-duty pay. And a criminal inquiry had been launched into pilots who allegedly enriched themselves by violating safety rules. Baldwin's two immediate predecessors were under investigation for improper double dipping – two days' pay for a single day of work.

Dwarfing those problems, an estimated \$100 million in dubious or illegal payments to Army Guard members had been made from incentive funds meant to boost recruiting and retention of soldiers. That alleged fraud – like the other cases, exposed in recent *Bee* investigations – is the subject of a major criminal probe by four federal agencies, including the FBI and IRS.

"The problems were monumental," said Baldwin. He said they had to be tackled without neglecting the Guard's responsibilities to serve in overseas wars and respond to local emergencies.

To reform a culture that had "lost its focus on the value of selfless service," Baldwin dismissed past leaders and said he installed others who have fought in today's wars and experienced their soldiers' sacrifices.

Baldwin also has moved aggressively to address the Guard's ethical lapses, particularly in the Recruiting and Retention Command. He's trying to recoup millions of dollars paid to Guard members improperly or illegally, and, under his command, three recruiting leaders were removed from their posts.

Brig. Gen. Charlotte L. Miller was ousted from the Guard altogether because, Baldwin said, "I had lost faith, trust and confidence in her abilities as a senior leader." Miller declined to comment.

Col. Diana L. Bodner and Lt. Col. Jodee A. Rowe were shifted into jobs with less responsibility. Each of them declined to comment, other than denying wrongdoing.

Baldwin also has tackled ongoing graft and extravagance that suggested a stubborn culture of impunity.

He removed Command Sgt. Maj. Bobby L. Rollins, a top assistant to Rowe, from full-time employment in the Guard for involvement in recent schemes that improperly rewarded recruiters with gift cards and Apple iPads – and for intimidating a subordinate who pushed back against the order, according to an official report obtained by the *Bee*.

Rollins did not respond to requests for comment.

Guard officials said four other officers involved in the iPad scam, whom they declined to name, were reprimanded, fired from their full-time jobs and removed from recruiting duties. On appeal, two were retained outside of recruiting.

Finally, Baldwin canceled an extravagant conference for recruiters and their families, planned at a Lake Tahoe resort, that Guard members likened to an extended party.

He voiced frustration that his crackdown has been delayed by the need to cooperate with a slow-moving federal investigation, whose officials seized most of the incentive-

fraud evidence. But Baldwin said he already knows enough to identify the genesis of the problems: "Incredible pressure that came from above" to increase Guard membership.

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