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# PERSPECTIVES

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## History Made as Guard Chief Gets 4<sup>th</sup> Star

By

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Hearty cheers filled the Pentagon auditorium Monday [November 2008] afternoon as history was made when a fourth star was pinned on the shoulders of the new Chief of the National Guard Bureau for the first time in its almost four centuries of existence.

Just as important to the hundreds of Guardsmen in attendance, Air Force Lieutenant General Craig McKinley also will serve as principal adviser to the Defense Secretary through the Joint Chiefs Chairman on all National Guard matters. No such position previously existed.

McKinley will also continue as principal adviser to the Army and Air Force Secretaries and Staff Chiefs on matters related to the Army and Air National Guards.

This elevation of the Chief of the National Guard Bureau to four stars underscores the critical importance of the Guard to America's overall national defense, Defense Secretary Robert Gates told the gathering. It also signifies the vital role the Chief has in bridging the state and federal components of our government and the active and reserve components of our military.

McKinley's promotion "is recognition of his outstanding leadership abilities and shows the confidence the President and I have in him to be the nation's senior Guard officer at such a critical time," Gates said.

Several of the roughly 30 states' Adjutants General in attendance said the move is long overdue.

The awareness will be much increased about the critical role that the National Guard plays for our nation, both at home and in combat operations around the world, said Army Maj. Gen. Bob Lee, Hawaii's Adjutant General. When you add the Army and the Air Guard together, it is just short of a half-million folks. So it is about time we got a four-star General that controls so many resources.

The fourth star and new advisory role follow recommendations by the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves and last year's *Defense Authorization Act*, in which Congress also established the Guard as a joint activity of the Department of Defense.

McKinley succeeds Lieutenant General Stephen Blum, who in January [2009] will become the first National Guard Deputy Commander of U.S. Northern Command—another commission recommendation.

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The commission based its recommendation to make the National Guard Bureau Chief a four-star on several findings:

- That a formal relationship should be established between the Guard and the Defense Secretary, the Joint Chiefs, the Unified Commands, and other federal agencies on non-federalized National Guard matters such as operations and exercises.
- That the Chief performs simultaneous service chief-like duties for the Guard components of both the Army and Air Force, which the commission called a “complex task”.
- Two federal studies on General officer responsibilities from which the commission concluded that the Guard Chief’s duties rate four stars.

The commission also pointed out that making the Guard Chief a senior adviser to the Defense Secretary would “expand access” to the Chief’s expertise, particularly with regard to response to domestic emergencies, and would “mitigate the difficulties inherent in the current structure” in which the Guard had to work through Army and Air Force channels to interact with other Pentagon organizations, such as NORTHCOM and Joint Forces Command.

At the same time, the commission argued against making the Guard Chief a full member of the Joint Chiefs, concluding that the duties of each of the Joint Chiefs are greater than those of the Guard Chief. Doing so could also create the sense that the Guard is a separate service when, the commission agreed, it is not.

In his remarks, McKinley noted that he is meeting Tuesday with Gates to discuss the commission’s recommendations, issued in January [2009].

According to a defense official, Gates is being briefed on where the Pentagon stands on all the 95 recommendations made by the commission, eighteen of which have already been implemented.

The official said that if Gates is satisfied with what he hears, he may sign out an action memo on the remaining recommendations.