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National Guard Bureau Chief visits Air Forces Northern

By Mary McHale, AFNORTH Public Affairs

TYNDALL AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – She wears blue. She speaks purple.

She is Chief Master Sgt. Denise Jelinski-Hall, the National Guard Bureau's Senior Enlisted Leader who recently visited Air Forces Northern facilities, met with enlisted AFNORTH Airmen, shared her thoughts and solicited theirs.

Chief Jelinski-Hall is the first Air National Guardsman to be selected for the NGB/SEL position; the previous two were command sergeants major from the Army National Guard. In her role as senior enlisted leader, the chief advises Gen. Craig McKinley, Chief of the National Guard Bureau, on all enlisted matters that affect National Guard Soldiers and Airmen, from training and utilization to the health of the force.

Speaking to an audience of enlisted members Wednesday, the chief stressed the joint nature of her role and how she consistently works in partnership with Army and Air National Guard senior enlisted leaders. Together they work the tough issues for the betterment of the enlisted corps.



"I speak purple," she said, referring to the euphemism for a mix of green and blue, the two colors associated with the branches of military service. "I came to the job and found our senior enlisted leadership engaged, working together and exchanging information to further our goals for the enlisted force across the nation," she said. "Recently I sat with my team and we looked at where we've been, what we've done, and where we're going. From there, we set priorities and goals for the next year."

Chief Jelinski-Hall shared some of the priorities at the enlisted call.

"Warrior care continues to be a top priority," she said. "We need to continue building resilient warriors and setting good processes in place to ensure the best care for our Soldiers and Airmen. There are tools and resources in place; leaders across the National Guard need to ensure our members know what they are and how to access them."

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She said the ultimate goal is for our warriors and families to have the tools before they need them. Being trained and prepared builds resiliency to face life's challenges. Ensuring we have ready, trained and resilient warriors speaks to organization and individual mission success.

"Supervisors, you better know your people like you never have before. Leadership by engagement and that means eyes-on," she said. "The (operations) tempo is high and will continue to be. Leaders need to unplug, walk around and listen. Every Soldier and Airman is important to our National Guard family and it is important that they know we are there for them 24/7."

Another topic she focused on was enlisted force development and how it is meant to benefit the individual and the organization as a whole.

"We take people from the field and bring them to the National Guard Bureau for a tour of duty," she said. "Now, not only does that allow us to get field perspective from them, at the end of their tour, they are able bring the Bureau's perspective back to the field and help further develop their respective State's organization. Without a doubt, force development is a mutually beneficial relationship."

She also stressed there has to be preparation and readiness on the individual's part and that is more than just professional military education. Civilian education and experience is equally important.

"You must constantly be readying and developing yourself for that next leadership opportunity, assignment or promotion," she said. "Take a class on base or in the community to further develop or to hone your skills. Don't let an opportunity pass you by because you haven't met one of your basic requirements."

Of course, she pointed out, proper development can't happen without some risk.

"There may come a time in your career where you have to take a risk. To continue to grow and lead you may have to step outside your comfort zone and then grow beyond your perceived capabilities. Taking a calculated risk to continue moving forward may be what leadership is calling you to do. I encourage all Soldiers and Airmen to challenge themselves and to be ready for when leadership calls their name. It is our inherent responsibility to develop our people, equally important is self development."

The chief provided an example.

"When you're in the same position for five years, you may not be as effective -- you may be comfortable, but you can stagnate," she said. "That's when you should think about taking your skills and strengths to another area, bring a fresh attitude and new ideas to continue to grow the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization."

She explained her leadership philosophy today is the same as when she was coming up through the ranks. She would ask her supervisor three questions.

"I used to ask myself, 'What do I need to stop doing? What do I need to start doing? What do I need to continue doing?' The first addresses weaknesses, the second addresses career development and the third speaks to one's strengths or what is already going well."

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Two other tools she is never physically without are the Air Force Enlisted Force Structure (referred to as the little brown book) and the Air Force blue book of core values.

“It’s essential to adhere to our core values, do what is right and expect the best from our Airmen and Soldiers. When you maintain the highest standards and have those high expectations, people are going to rise up to them.”

Her remarks concluded at the enlisted call as they had begun, with heartfelt thanks for the service of the Guard’s enlisted force.

“I’ve had a wonderful day here, and on behalf of General McKinley, I want to thank you and your families. It is because of your commitment and our incredible National Guard families that we are able to successfully carry out the mission. I am very, very proud of you and your service and humbled to represent the finest enlisted corps in the world. May you and your families have a safe, healthy and prosperous year.”