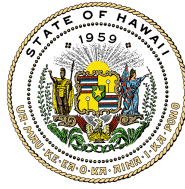


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GOVERNOR



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MAJOR GENERAL
ADJUTANT GENERAL

STEPHEN F. LOGAN
BRIGADIER GENERAL
DEPUTY ADJUTANT GENERAL

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
OFFICE OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL
3949 DIAMOND HEAD ROAD
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96816-4495

MEDIA RELEASE

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Hawai'i National Guard bids Aloha to Brig. Gen. Kaowi after 39 years of service, welcomes Col. Ross as the new Director of the Joint Staff

HONOLULU, HI- The Hawai'i National Guard (HING) welcomes its new Director of the Joint Staff today. Outgoing Director Brig. Gen. Moses Kaowi, Jr will retire with 39 years, 10 months and 18 days of service for the HING. Incoming Director is Col. Walter R. Ross, Jr, who will be pinning on Brigadier General rank in mid-January of 2023. Both Kaowi and Ross have been working together during the transition for the past three weeks.

"I have had the privilege and honor of serving the people of Hawai'i throughout many major disasters, beginning with Hurricane Iniki in 1992, and ending as the HING Joint Task Force Commander for COVID-19 mitigation efforts. I thank the people of Hawai'i for being resilient and for supporting the Hawai'i National Guard during those difficult times. But most of all, I'd like to thank my wife, Joni, and the rest of my 'ohana for supporting me during my career," Kaowi said, regarding his retirement.

Kaowi has been the HING Director of the Joint Staff since 2017. As the Director, he was responsible executing joint HING operations, actions, and activities with the Hawai'i Army National Guard (HIARNG) and Hawai'i Air National Guard (HIANG). He also was responsible for participating and supervising in HING operations, actions, and activities in partnership with United States Indo-Pacific Command and United States Army Pacific.

He has over 30 years of disaster management experience. Kaowi planned and executed HING civil support operations for both state and county-level natural disasters within the State of Hawai'i, in response to presidential emergency declarations for hurricanes, lava flows, floods, and the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. He coordinated operations with Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency, in addition to multiple county leaders and emergency managers.

"I wish Brig. Gen. Kaowi the best as he retires with 39 years in the Hawai'i Army National Guard," said Maj. Gen. Kenneth S. Hara, Adjutant General, State of Hawai'i. "We came up

through the Guard together and I was able to witness him flourish through the years and become the Director of the Joint Staff.”

Kaoiwi graduated from Hilo High school, followed by the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, receiving his Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies with a concentration in Administration of Justice, with honors. In 1990 he graduated from the Hawai'i County Police Department's 47th Recruit Class as the “Outstanding Recruit”. Working for the Hawai'i Police Department as a Police Detective Sergeant in 2003, Kaoiwi went on Military Orders to fill an Active-Duty position as Security Plans officer for the Hawai'i National Guard, focusing on Anti-Terrorism and Physical Security. He had a successful 12-year civilian career as a law enforcement officer.

He joined the Hawai'i Army National Guard as a Private on January 13, 1983, at the age of 17 while still in high school.

“The recruiter promised me a lemon chicken fried rice plate from the Mung Chung Lau restaurant [now closed] on Kilauea Street in Hilo,” said Kaoiwi. “And a two-thousand-dollar bonus as well as free tuition to any University of Hawai'i college.”

Kaoiwi became an officer in 1988 via Officer Candidate School. He attended the Combined Arms Staff and Services School, Command and General Staff Officer's Course, and the US Army War College where he received a Master of Strategic Studies degree.

Kaoiwi was deployed twice to Iraq and once to Arizona. He has commanded at all levels, including company and battalion commander, 29th Infantry Brigade commander, and finally as the Commander of the Hawai'i Army National Guard. He received his active-duty retirement out of the Hawai'i National Guard on November 30, 2022.

“My first priority will be to take break,” said Kaoiwi. “I want to spend time with the family. Then I will re-evaluate my options, not discounting any opportunity to serve the state again.”

Col. Walter R. Ross, Jr. will be the new HING Director of the Joint Staff as of December 1, 2022. He was commissioned as a Second Lt. in the Medical Service Corps as a Distinguished Honor Graduate of the Hawai'i Officer Candidate School in 1999.

“I am excited and filled with unbounded enthusiasm for the opportunity to humbly serve Hawai'i and our Nation as the Director of the Joint Staff for the Hawai'i National Guard,” Ross said during his first day as Director.

Ross has served in numerous positions of increased authority and responsibility including Joint Surgeon, State Surgeon, Medical Detachment Commander, and State Military Personnel Officer. Col. Ross also served at the Combatant Command level at HQ U.S. Indo-Pacific Command at Camp Smith for the National Guard Bureau. He has multiple combat tours from his time as an Enlisted U.S. Marine and U.S. Army Officer.

In addition to his federal service, he served in several State of Hawai'i missions in support of local authorities, including his most recent assignment as the Chief of Staff for the Hawai'i National Guard Joint Task Force for COVID-19 Pandemic Response.

Col. Ross holds a Master of Strategic Studies degree from the U.S. Army War College. He holds a Bachelor of Science and a Master of Public Administration degree from the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. Additionally, he is a Defense Support of Civil Authorities Specialist.

Col. Ross has the unique distinction of receiving awards and decorations from four of the Armed Service branches. He was awarded the prestigious Order of Military Medical Merit, the Major General Deborah C. Wheeling Award of Excellence from the Army National Guard Chief Surgeon, Colonel George Richard Lynch Leadership Award from the U.S. Army Medical Department, Hawai'i Adjutant General's Award, The Academic Board Award, The Erickson Trophy, and Hawai'i National Guard Association Award.

"Col. Ross brings a wealth of experience from his numerous medical leadership positions," said Hara. "I look forward to collaborating on solutions with him as the Hawai'i National Guard Director of the Joint Staff."

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Media Contact:

MAJ (RET) Jeff Hickman
Director, Public Affairs
State of Hawai'i, Dept. of Defense
808-441-7000
jeffrey.d.hickman@hawaii.gov