

Gettys, Nelson retire from the Alaska National Guard

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Two senior Alaska Air National Guardsmen marked 63 years of combined service in an Aug. 4, 2018, joint retirement ceremony at the 212th Rescue Squadron ~~alert bay?~~ ~~Headquarters?~~ at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson.

Brig. Gen. Blake Gettys, director of the ~~joint staff, Alaska Joint Forces Headquarters,~~ ~~Alaska National Guard,~~ marked 30 years of service, and Command Chief Master Sgt. Paul Nelson, senior enlisted leader, ~~AKNG,~~ marked 33 years of service during the ceremony.

Retired Col. Mark Hedlund, former commander of the ~~Alaska Air Guard's~~ 168th Wing at Eielson Air Force Base, said he shaved and sat for a haircut before putting on his dress uniform to preside over Gettys' retirement ceremony.

Airmen, Soldiers, family members and friends crowded into a bay of the 212th RQS ~~headquarters~~ building. Hedlund said the leadership of Gettys and Nelson was instrumental in securing the pararescue facility, and it stands as one of many monuments to their service.

"A lot of what you see here today at this complex is because of the both of them," the colonel said during his remarks.

Hedlund said he took a break from retirement because of a pact he made with Gettys years ago stating the two would retire each other. Gettys presided over Hedlund's retirement ceremony in November 2015.

"Blake could have easily retired after his time as wing commander, but his patriotism compelled him to serve, and he continued to serve at the state level," Hedlund said. "Selfless service, unwavering dedication and patriotism are what Blake will be remembered for."

Gettys presided over Nelson's ceremony. As a ~~former~~ 176th Operations Group commander, Gettys said he really got to know Nelson after he selected the noncommissioned officer as group superintendent.

"In hindsight, Chief, it was the best hire I made in 30 years," the general said.

Gettys said Guard Airmen and Soldiers should avoid ~~self-pity~~ and always keep in mind the task at hand.

"When faced with choices, if you keep the mission as your central focus and motivation, you will be headed in the right direction," he said.

Nelson said he was never challenged in finding the right words when advocating for the Alaska National Guard with state and federal officials.

"It's amazing how really easy you all made my job," he said. "For that, I am forever grateful. I thank every one of you for how you enriched my life and my experience in the Alaska National Guard. I wouldn't want to serve anywhere else except with this organization in this state."



Alaska Air National Guard Brig. Gen. Blake Gettys, director of the **Joint Staff - Alaska Joint Force Headquarters**, and Chief Master Sgt. Paul Nelson, Alaska National Guard's **Senior Enlisted Leader**, mark decades of service Aug. 4, 2018, during their joint retirement ceremony at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. Gettys and Nelson chose the 212th Rescue Squadron as the venue in honor of Nelson's service as a pararescueman with the unit. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Maj. John Callahan)



Retired Col. Mark Hedlund (left), former 168th Wing commander, presents a certificate of retirement to Brig. Gen. Blake Gettys, director of the **Joint Staff - Alaska Joint Force Headquarters**, Aug. 4, 2018, during his retirement ceremony at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. Gettys served for 30 years. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. David Bedard)



Chief Master Sgt. Paul Nelson, Alaska National Guard's Senior Enlisted Leader, ceremonially blouses his boots Aug. 4, 2018, during his retirement ceremony at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. Jump boots and maroon beret are parts of a pararescueman's distinctive uniform. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. David Bedard)