

The Virgin Islands Consortium

To Fight Corruption At VING, Incoming Adjutant General Willing To 'Make The Hard Call'

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ST. CROIX -- Colonel Deborah Howell, the soon-to-be first female in the territory, and first African American female in the U.S. to be appointed Adjutant General of the National Guard, according to Governor Kenneth Mapp, has promised to quell ongoing corruption in the Virgin Islands National Guard (VING) by going back to the basics and following protocols already in place to combat such activity.

She's also willing to make difficult decisions.

In a video interview conducted on Monday at Government House with *VI Consortium* (full video interview goes live on Sunday), Howell said she does not believe that the recent

indictments of the [two VING soldiers](#) represent a culture of corruption, because as with any other organization, there are always "one or two" cases of wrongful behavior.

Nonetheless, to prevent such activity from happening under her tenure -- which takes hold this summer once current Adjutant General Ronaldo Rivera retires -- Howell intends to take early action.

"What I want to do once I get in is to make sure we go back to basics, do what we need to do, follow policies and procedures and do those things that will prevent things like that from happening," Howell said. The colonel added that standard National Guard operating procedures encourage the constant checking and following of regulations.

"So if you're doing management assessments, and doing it at the required times, you will pick on things like this before it becomes a big problem."

On April 30, two high-ranking Virgin Islands National Guard officers were arrested after a federal grand jury returned indictments charging them with wire fraud, theft of government money, and making false statements to the government, according to U.S. Attorney Ronald Sharpe.

Lt. Col. Kenneth Alleyne, 45, who is chief of the VING's strategic initiatives and plans division, was charged in a 46-count indictment with 44 counts of wire fraud, one count of theft of government money and one count of making a false statement to the government, Sharpe said. If convicted of all the charges, Alleyne faces a maximum sentence of 35 years in prison and up to \$750,000 in fines.

Staff Sgt. Emmrie Edwards, 37, was charged in a 49-count indictment with 47 counts of wire fraud, one count of theft of government money and one count of making a false statement to the government, according to the U.S. attorney. Edwards also faces a maximum sentence of 35 years in prison and up to \$750,000 in fines.

But Col. Howell believes that these outcomes could have been prevented if procedures were followed.

"If we were doing what we need to do, instead of letting it run, you can nip it early," she said. "You can do some administrative-type discipline and deal with it. For example, for housing allowance, there's a requirement that every year you certify, so at least if you're doing that you can check, and if there are any flaws, you can correct them."

Furthermore, Howell said she isn't afraid to take tough, disciplinary actions when necessary. She also believes in rewarding servicemen and servicewomen for outstanding performance.

"When things come to me, I have to look at it and make the hard call; that's what I'm being paid for," she said. "If it means you discipline somebody, you do it, if it means you reward them, you do it."

Lookout for the full video interview on Sunday.

Correction: June 3, 2015

A previous version of this article incorrectly stated that Colonel Howell, once appointed, will be the first female in the U.S. to hold the office of Adjutant General. Col. Howell will be the first female in the territory and first African American female, but not the first female in the U.S. The story has been updated to reflect the correct information.

Feature Image: Colonel Deborah Howell at Government House in Christiansted, St. Croix.

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