



BRIG. GEN. EDWARD AGUIAR
— Leaving in September

Base commander retiring after high-level probe

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Brig. Gen. Edward R. Aguiar, commander of the Fresno-based 144th Fighter Interceptor Wing of the California Air National Guard, will step down Sept. 30 as a result of a top-level investigation into numerous allegations.

Air Guard personnel were told May 17 that Aguiar had been placed on "terminal leave" and would be forced to retire by the end of July. But the California National Guard's top command in Sacramento reversed that action Friday after state Sen.

Ken Maddy, R-Fresno, made inquiries on the general's behalf.

In a decision that high-ranking officers described as a compromise, Aguiar agreed to retire voluntarily in September.

Through Lt. Col. James A. Arthur, spokesman for the Air Guard base at the Fresno Air Terminal, Aguiar referred all questions to Col. Donald Foley, spokesman for the California National Guard command in Sacramento. Foley said he could not comment on the investigation or Aguiar's status.

According to current and past Air National Guard officers, the

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investigation began in January after at least two pilots filed complaints against Aguiar. The officers said most of the charges involved abuse of authority and minor improprieties.

Among the most serious known charges was that Aguiar intervened to improve poor performance ratings for some pilots. Other charges included such things as instructing personnel to buy extra copies of base yearbooks because too many had been ordered.

The investigation was conducted by three Sacramento-based officers, including Lt. Col. Stuart Brody, judge advocate general for the California National Guard, and Lt. Col. John Dougherty, commander of the California Army National Guard's military police detachment. In civilian life, Dougherty is the Sacramento County district attorney.

Officers who declined to be identified said a 700-page report of the investigation was reviewed by Maj. Gen. Raymond Hebrank, commander of the Air National Guard, who decided the charges did not warrant termination.

Hebrank's boss, Maj. Gen. Willard Shank, however, ruled Aguiar should be retired, three

senior officers said. As commander of the California National Guard, Shank directs both the air and army national guards. The quiet announcement of Aguiar's termination resulted from Shank's order two weeks ago.

But last week, Hebrank and Aguiar met with Shank and successfully argued that the action was too harsh. Shank also had been contacted by Sen. Maddy's office, the three senior officers said.

According to several local officers contacted by The Bee, Aguiar created controversy shortly after assuming command in Fresno in February 1982. They said he purged several veteran officers and replaced them with others he had worked with during other assignments.

Aguiar took command locally after commanding a rescue and recovery group based at Moffett Naval Air Station. A veteran of 34 years in the Guard, he had served previously at the Fresno base from 1957 to 1975. In his current capacity, he also commands fighter interceptor groups stationed in Oregon, Montana and Michigan.

He flew 43 combat missions in Vietnam and also has been a transport and rescue pilot. He received his general's star in Dec. 1982.