

STATE OF OHIO  
OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

RANDALL J. MEYER, INSPECTOR GENERAL

REPORT OF  
INVESTIGATION



AGENCY: OHIO ARMY NATIONAL GUARD  
FILE ID NO.: 2014-CA00066  
DATE OF REPORT: SEPTEMBER 4, 2015

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*“Safeguarding integrity in state government”*

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Randall J. Meyer  
Ohio Inspector General



STATE OF OHIO  
**OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL**

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RANDALL J. MEYER, INSPECTOR GENERAL

**REPORT OF INVESTIGATION**

**FILE ID NUMBER:** 2014-CA00066

**SUBJECT NAME:** Jason Edwards

**POSITION:** Sergeant First Class

**AGENCY:** Ohio Army National Guard

**BASIS FOR INVESTIGATION:** Complaint

**ALLEGATIONS:** Criminal Conduct

**INITIATED:** October 3, 2014

**DATE OF REPORT:** September 4, 2015

## **INITIAL ALLEGATION AND COMPLAINT SUMMARY**

On October 3, 2014, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General received notice from the Ohio Adjutant General's Department of possible wrongdoing by Ohio Army National Guard Sergeant First Class (SFC) Jason D. Edwards. Edwards is a National Guard member who was assigned to the Military Funeral Honors unit. It was alleged that Edwards submitted false claims for vehicle mileage reimbursement in the Defense Travel System (DTS) for funeral honors missions he did not perform. The Ohio Army National Guard reviewed a spot audit of the funeral honors unit between October 8 and November 6, 2013, and found approximately \$1,600 in mileage reimbursements that Edwards was not entitled to receive.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Ohio Adjutant General's Department "... is responsible for the command of the Ohio National Guard, Ohio Military Reserve, and Ohio Naval Militia ... ." The Ohio National Guard serves as the organized military for the state, except when it is ordered into federal service, and may be ordered by the governor to provide protection of life and property. These missions are accomplished through emergency relief support during natural disasters, search and rescue operations, and support to civil defense authorities. The governor, who also serves as the commander-in-chief of the state militia, appoints the adjutant general and assistant adjutants general. Headquarters for the department is located at the MG Robert S. Beightler Armory located in Columbus, Ohio.<sup>1</sup>

The Ohio Army National Guard Military Funeral Honors (MFH) unit participates in funeral honors ceremonies by providing the sounding of taps, the folding of the flag, and the presentation of the flag to beneficiaries. U.S. Department of Defense policy mandates that a military funeral honors ceremony will be provided to eligible beneficiaries upon request.

The honorable transfer of remains is not a ceremony. Rather, it is a solemn movement where the remains of a deceased service member are transferred from the transport vehicle to the hearse to be escorted to the funeral home. An honor guard ensures movement of the remains in a dignified and honorable manner from the transport vehicle to the hearse.

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<sup>1</sup> Sources: Ohio National Guard, Adjutant General's Department, annual reports (2014 and 2015).

## **INVESTIGATIVE SUMMARY**

On October 6, 2014, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General and the Ohio State Highway Patrol met with Ohio Adjutant General Department officials Major Joseph Schwade, Captain Adam Leonatti, Major Jerry Mourn, Colonel Julie Blike, and Captain Doug Franz at Beightler Armory to be briefed on the specifics of the allegation. The adjutant general received information that Jason Edwards submitted pay vouchers for mileage reimbursement for funeral missions he did not attend. After receiving this information in July 2014, Mourn reviewed Edwards' submissions for a week and found invoices for missions Mourn knew Edwards did not attend. Mourn then conducted a spot check audit for the dates of October 8 - November 6, 2013. Mourn found that Edwards was not present at 19 of the 21 missions for which Edwards submitted pay invoices. From September 2013, Edwards was the southwest regional coordinator of these missions, and in that capacity Edwards was responsible for submitting the pay invoices. As the coordinator, Edwards would substitute his name in place of the full-time funeral honors unit member's name on invoices before submitting them for payment. On April 1, 2014, Edwards' sister took over as the southwest region coordinator, but Jason Edwards continued to submit the invoices listing his name for missions he did not attend. Schwade informed investigators that the Adjutant General's Department was not pursuing Edwards' claims for daily pay because he did perform his coordinator duties.

SFC Jason Edwards began his active duty military career in 1995 which continued until 2006, when he joined the Ohio National Guard. Edwards returned to active duty in 2010 in the Ohio Army National Guard Military Funeral Honors unit and was the southwest region coordinator from approximately September 2013 until March 31, 2014, when his Active Duty Operational Support (ADOS) orders expired, but he continued to serve as a MFH mobilization day (M-day) team member. Edwards also continued functioning as the southwest region coordinator after transitioning to M-Day status.

Active Duty Operational Support, or full-time soldiers assigned to the MFH team, receive their regular pay whether they have a funeral mission or not. M-Day, or part-time soldiers, only receive pay for days they actually work. Both full-time and part-time soldiers can receive mileage reimbursement if their travel is more than 50 miles when they use their personally

owned vehicle. The MFH southwest region team had a General Services Administration (GSA) vehicle available for use by team members.

When a request for military funeral honors is made in Ohio, state MFH civilian coordinator Robert King<sup>2</sup> then forwards that request to the regional coordinator, who assigns two MFH members to the funeral detail. Edwards, as the southwest regional team coordinator, would assign team members (both ADOS and M-Day) to the various details. After the completion of a funeral service, the team coordinator accesses the MFH database and lists the names of the soldiers who performed the mission. This database tracks the number of missions ADOS members perform and initiates a payment voucher for any M-Day soldiers listed. This entry of the soldiers on the mission operation order would create a Defense Tracking System form that soldiers could complete to be reimbursed for mileage when using their personally owned vehicles, when the distance is more than 50 miles.

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General reviewed the records of the MFH operation orders and the travel reimbursements from September 28, 2013 - July 28, 2014. An analysis of these records was completed to compile the following summary.

<b>J EDWARDS TRAVEL ANALYSIS - SUMMARY</b>		
	<u>Amt.</u> <u>Claimed</u>	<u>Count</u>
Scenario 1: Not listed on MFH operation orders	\$7,226.98	89
Scenario 2: Edwards listed but travel shows different city	\$1,417.74	17
Scenario 3: Date/City not listed on MFH operation orders	\$2,207.28	24
Totals	<b>\$10,852.00</b>	<b>130</b>

The analysis revealed 89 instances where Edwards claimed mileage to funeral details that he was not listed as attending on the operation orders. The analysis also revealed 17 instances where Edwards was listed on the operations orders, usually for local funerals that were not eligible for mileage reimbursement, but Edwards claimed mileage to a funeral farther away from his home,

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<sup>2</sup> A civilian-contracted state coordinator works for the contracted company under a national contract awarded by the National Guard Bureau in support of the Ohio Army National Guard MFH Program.

while the other soldiers who attended used the GSA vehicle. The analysis revealed 24 instances where Edwards was not listed on the operation orders and he claimed mileage to a location where no military funeral took place.

After Edwards' ADOS ended, the occurrences in which he claimed reimbursement for mileage increased. Of the 130 instances reviewed, 62 instances occurred between April 1, 2014, and July 28, 2014.

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General and the Ohio State Highway Patrol conducted interviews of SFC Vernon Harris, Sergeant (Sgt.) Nicholas Szymczak, Staff Sergeant (SSG) Eric Leavitt, Sgt. Alexis Edwards, SFC Jason Edwards, and Robert King.

On December 29, 2014, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General and the Ohio State Highway Patrol interviewed SFC Vernon Harris. Harris has been involved in the MFH program since 2008. Harris explained that the MFH program is a voluntary program that has a small budget, and the fund does not permit participants to retire from the MFH fund. Soldiers are required to be assigned to divisions or functions of the National Guard that has the funding to support retirement payments. Harris explained that soldiers on ADOS orders are taken off active duty roles prior to retirement. Edwards was nearing his 20-year mark, and was due to rotate off ADOS orders. Harris stated that, when Edwards was taken off active duty status, "... somehow or another, he convinced the people in the office that's in charge of the Ohio Funeral Honors Program that they should let him continue to do the coordinating over in the Dayton area." Since Edwards was no longer on active duty orders he would not be receiving pay unless he actually attended a funeral mission. Harris stated that in order to earn enough pay to justify his coordination, Edwards would need to attend "... a funeral every day."

Harris said on July 1, 2014, the four MFH regions were combined to make the north and the south regions. After merging the regions, Harris noticed Edwards was not listed on any funeral service operation orders. Harris checked the Casualty Operations Office pay records and found Edwards was being paid for funeral services for which he was not listed on the operation orders. Harris went back to the Casualty Operations Office pay records a second time to discover that

Edwards was also claiming travel reimbursement "... four or five days a week." Harris reported his findings to Casualty Operations Office Major Jerry Mourn.

Harris said at this point Edwards' access to the database to submit pay requests was stopped and Harris was now designated as the southern regional coordinator. Edwards received a request from a funeral director for a service, so he called Harris to relay the information. Harris said during this conversation, Edwards stated,

... I think I've really got myself into some trouble here ... they all just don't like the way that I've been paying myself. ... I'm the one to blame because ... I'm the one who decided to do it that, that way.

On December 31, 2014, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General and the Ohio State Highway Patrol interviewed Sgt. Nicholas Szymczak, who has served as the southern region MFH coordinator since mid-November 2014. Szymczak was also a member of the southwest region and had access to the mission database. Szymczak said that, as active duty, he was paid regardless of his attendance at a funeral, however part-time soldiers, like Edwards, were only paid for funerals they attended. Szymczak stated that he noticed in the database that after a funeral mission was complete, but before it was closed out in the database, his name was being removed from funeral missions he had completed, and being replaced with Edwards, with a payment invoice being generated for Edwards. The mission was then being closed out.

Szymczak stated that after his discovery he confronted Edwards about the database changes, and the payment being generated for Edwards. Szymczak stated that Edwards told him that he is authorized by the state to change the mission records, in order for him to get paid. Szymczak stated that Edwards excuse for placing himself on funeral mission he did not attend was that there was no administrative fund to pay for funeral coordinating services, and that this was the only way for Edwards to get his pay

Szymczak added he was being sent to Lima, Ohio, several times a week in the GSA vehicle. Szymczak said, after checking the mission database, he found, that Edwards had claimed travel reimbursement as well as pay for the Lima funeral missions completed by Szymczak. Szymczak

stated that when he began asking more questions, he found that Edwards had revoked his database access privileges. Szymczak stated that losing his access "... threw off a red flag."

When the regions merged, Szymczak had the opportunity to work with SFC Harris. Szymczak said he complained to Harris about Edwards' behavior. After this conversation with Harris, he was called to meet with Sgt. Kingery and Major Mourn, where Szymczak repeated the information he gave to SFC Harris.

On December 31, 2014, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General and the Ohio State Highway Patrol interviewed SSG Leavitt who is a member of the south region MFH team. Leavitt said he had previously complained about Edwards' misuse of the GSA van, which resulted in Edwards receiving a written reprimand.

Leavitt said that because Edwards reached his 17-year service mark with the military, Edwards would not be permitted to continue as the team coordinator. Leavitt believed he (Leavitt) would take the position of coordinator on March 31, 2014; however, Edwards transitioned his sister Alexis Edwards into the position of southwest region coordinator.

Leavitt said he then became aware of a problem with the MFH mission database after April 1, 2014, when Edwards had become part-time. Leavitt explained that the database used to assign funeral missions is set up by the National Guard Bureau. The database is used to accept funeral missions, assign soldiers to those missions, and process payment and mileage reimbursement for part-time soldiers. The final person who handles a mission in the database processes the payment and travel. Leavitt explained that the final person who closes a mission "... was, for the longest time, Sgt. Edwards." Leavitt recounted one particular week when there was a funeral mission on Monday, no mission on Tuesday, and then six missions between Wednesday and Saturday. Leavitt stated he was with Szymczak for all six of those missions.

The following week Leavitt stated that Szymczak told him that Leavitt's name had been removed from all six of those missions, and Edwards had received pay for those four straight days.

On December 31, 2014, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General and the Ohio State Highway Patrol interviewed Sgt. Alexis Edwards who is an ADOS member of the south region MFH team. Alexis Edwards was assigned to the MFH detail on October 1, 2013, and became the southwest region coordinator when her brother's ADOS status ended. Alexis said her brother told her "... that there was no one else that could do it and he thought it would be good for me ... I didn't want to do it either. I did not want to do it whatsoever." Alexis said she did not do any of the coordinator duties, but her brother was still performing the coordinator duties. Alexis said Szymczak asked her if she noticed Jason changing participants in the mission database, and she said she did not. Alexis asked Jason about issues with the database, and Jason replied, "No, it's fine." Jason said, according to Alexis, "That everything --- like this --- the state knew about it. Like they --- he was allowed to do it or something. Like everything was fine. That's just what he would just keep saying."

Alexis denied ever authorizing mileage reimbursement for Jason saying, "I never once touched the DTS and travel because I was never --- I never had access to DTOD<sup>3</sup> in the first place."

Alexis Edwards confirmed there was no vehicle log in the GSA vehicle. Edwards explained that anyone using the GSA vehicle sent a text message to her with the beginning and ending mileage. Alexis then logged these mileages into a spreadsheet, but added this practice just began the previous month.

On January 7, 2015, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General and the Ohio State Highway Patrol interviewed SFC Jason Edwards. Edwards took over as the full-time southwest coordinator on September 13, 2013, and continued in that capacity until March 31, 2014, when he reached his 16 ½-year career mark and his ADOS full-time status ended and M-Day part-time status began. At that point, Edwards recommended his sister Alexis take over as the southwest regional coordinator and he would help her learn the position. Edwards said because Alexis was busy with school, he just continued to perform the job of the coordinator. Edwards explained that, as the coordinator, he would assign soldiers to the various funerals in the southwest region. After

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<sup>3</sup> The Defense Table of Official Distances (DTOD) is the official source for worldwide distance information used by the Department of Defense.

completing a funeral detail, Edwards would access the MFH database and record the names of the soldiers assigned to each funeral. This process would track the number of funerals completed by ADOS (full-time) soldiers and authorize a day's pay for the M-Day (part-time) soldiers. If the soldiers assigned to a funeral did not use the GSA vehicle, and the distance to the funeral site was more than 50 miles, the soldiers were eligible to submit a request for mileage reimbursement, but it was the individual soldier's responsibility to make the Defense Tracking System request for the mileage reimbursement.

***Edwards claiming travel reimbursement when not listed on operation orders.***

Edwards was asked to explain why he was paid for travel to funerals that he was not listed as having attended on the operation orders. Edwards said he was receiving complaints about some of the soldiers conducting the funeral missions. Edwards claimed he was going to funerals to observe the soldiers covertly. Edwards admitted he did not report any complaints of MFH services to any supervisors, nor did he record talking to any MFH soldiers about complaints. Edwards was asked why he did not report to MFH state coordinator Robert King, that he was conducting these covert inspections of the funerals. Edwards said,

... we were only authorized two soldiers at a service. They would not authorize a third individual at a service even for observations ... . It would never be authorized ... . As far as authorizing three soldiers to be at one location, that is what is not authorized. That is why the database had to be kind of manipulated to ensure everybody got credit for what they were doing.

Edwards admitted creating questioned operation orders, explaining,

Because there might be times that we need M Day soldiers that are in a local location to do ... like say, four of them at Dayton National Cemetery. I would not give credit for all four of those services to those M Day guys. I would give them credit for one and make sure they got paid for the day because it doesn't matter if they do one or four ... . And then I would distribute those remaining three to my ADOS team to ensure their numbers were where they needed to be to keep their jobs.

Edwards admitted that King did not authorize Edwards to do that.

Edwards explained that he would remove the name of an ADOS soldier on the operation orders and insert his name as one of the soldiers participating in the funeral. By placing his own name on the operation order, Edwards was eligible to claim mileage reimbursement and a work day's pay. Edwards noted,

It was recommended by Mr. King that just rotate one out and throw you in there and it was fine. It wasn't a --- you know, he's like you're working 8-10 hours a day; do what you gotta do and ... I ensured that all the team was meeting their requirements as far as their 23. I wasn't putting any of them in jeopardy of their performance. But at the same time, for my day of work that was the --- without doing the service or if I was doing a service that was the way sometimes it had to be swapped out.

***Edwards claiming travel on days with no funerals performed.***

Edwards suggested that,

... the only thing that could justify that is that morning service after I sent the OP order out or a late evening call --- 'cause those Op orders were sent out by 3:00 the day previous and it wasn't uncommon to get a call from a funeral home saying hey, we had a veteran that's funeral's tomorrow. The family could not produce discharge paperwork. They just walked through the door at 6:00 tonight. Can you have a team out here? So instead of me trying to have a team --- like contact several people, I would go as one and then I would have another soldier that was ADOS go with me.

***Edwards on operation orders for local funeral, but claiming mileage to a different location.***

Edwards was questioned<sup>4</sup> about his being listed on operation orders to local funerals but claiming travel to distant funeral locations. Edwards explained that he covertly traveled to the more distant funerals to observe the soldiers conducting the services, and afterwards traveled to the local funeral service he was assigned to conduct. Edwards again noted that if he claimed mileage to a location, he was there.

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<sup>4</sup> After the recorded interview was completed, but in the presence of Ohio State Highway Patrol Trooper Getz.

Edwards could not explain how he performed at a funeral at 10:00 a.m. in Kettering, Ohio, then travel approximately 94 miles to Lima, Ohio, to observe a funeral at 11:00 a.m. and travel back approximately 94 miles to West Alexandria, Ohio, to perform at a funeral at 12:30 p.m. as operation orders and mileage reimbursement claims indicate.

On March 25, 2015, the Office of the Ohio Inspector General and the Ohio State Highway Patrol interviewed Robert King. King, as a civilian contractor, was the state MFH coordinator overseeing all the funerals across Ohio. King explained that funeral requests come from the Casualty Assistance Center (CAC) out of Ft. Knox, from funeral homes, and sometimes families. King explained that once he receives a request for funeral services, he forwards that request on to the regional coordinator. Once the regional coordinator confirms that the manpower is available, King notifies the CAC and the mission is accepted. Once the mission is complete, it is the responsibility of the regional coordinator to enter the information into the database, identify the soldiers who performed the mission, and note whether that soldier was active duty or part-time, in order to process payment for the part-time soldier. King identified Edwards as the southwest region coordinator.

King said 99 percent of the funerals performed by the MFH are two-man details. There are times when they would authorize a third man as a contract bugler. King added that if it was a full-time honors funeral, then they would send a seven-man detail.

King stated that regional coordinators do occasionally observe the soldiers conducting funeral missions, however, they are not covert and they are requested and planned in advance. King denied knowing or authorizing Edwards to conduct covert inspections of funeral details.

King was aware that Edwards was planning to help his sister with the coordinating duties. King denied Edwards' claim that King told him since he (Edwards) was on part-time status, to replace the actual soldiers' names who were doing the funeral details and replace their name with his.

King said,

And my words to him were, 'No, I don't have a problem with you doing that [helping his sister], but if you're working and you expect to be paid you need to put yourself on a

mission and you need to go out and do a mission in order to get paid and then --- and once you do that you can help her the rest of the day.’

King confirmed that ADOS soldiers are to perform 20-plus funerals a month and to supplement manpower needs with M-Day soldiers. Also, King stated he believed that a GSA vehicle mileage form or log existed; however, he noted that the regions only reported the total vehicle mileage for each month.

On May 15, 2015, King was contacted again and verified that it was possible for Edwards to access the DTS screen without being listed on operation orders, because those two systems are not connected. King added that no one compares the operation orders against the DTS requests.

King confirmed again that there is no written policy on the number of funerals to be performed by ADOS members a month. King stated that he believed the unwritten goal for MFH unit members is to attend 20 funerals each month to assure full-time MFH members are working a full-time schedule. King confirmed there is nothing written on inspecting funeral missions, complaints, or area coordinators’ selection. King confirmed there is no prohibition on M-Day soldiers having access to the mission database.

## **CONCLUSION**

SFC Jason Edwards was on active duty with the Ohio Army National Guard assigned to the Military Funeral Honors (MFH) program as the southwest region coordinator. The MFH program utilizes both ADOS full-time and M-Day part-time soldiers; however, because of the time consuming duties of the coordinator’s position, the coordinator must be an ADOS soldier. ADOS full-time soldiers are paid whether or not they perform funeral services. M-Day part-time soldiers are paid only on days they perform a funeral service.<sup>5</sup>

As the southwest region coordinator, Edwards assigned team members to funerals and designated when the GSA vehicle was to be used. After a funeral service was completed, Edwards would access the mission database to log the information from the funeral service and

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<sup>5</sup> In addition to the annual training days.

the soldiers assigned. By doing this, the ADOS soldiers would get credit for performing the funeral service and the M-Day soldiers would get paid for that day of work. This would also enable the soldiers who drove their personal vehicles to funerals to request reimbursement through the DTS system.

On March 31, 2014, Edwards' active duty orders ended and he became an M-Day soldier. Edwards recommended that his sister Sgt. Alexis Edwards take over as the southwest region coordinator and that he would train her in those duties. There is no formal process for the selection of the regional coordinator. In selecting his sister as the region coordinator, Edwards was able to continue to function as the coordinator with access to the mission database.

Edwards claims he conducted unauthorized covert inspections of funeral details after receiving undocumented complaints of funeral detail operations. Edwards did not report the alleged complaints on funeral detail members or his covert inspections of funeral details to any superiors. The state MFH coordinator did not authorize Edwards to conduct inspections of MFH details. The state MFH coordinator was aware that Edwards was still acting as the region coordinator, but expected Edwards to actually perform at a funeral service if he was going to claim pay for that day. The state coordinator was not aware, and did not authorize Edwards, in conducting the alleged inspections of funeral services.

Mileage reimbursements did not require the inclusion of the corresponding mission number. The use of the GSA vehicle was not tracked with a vehicle log.

**Accordingly, the Office of the Inspector General finds reasonable cause to believe a wrongful act or omission occurred in this instance.**

Jason Edwards was indicted by a Franklin County Grand Jury on September 1, 2015, on one count of Theft in Office and one count of Tampering with Records.

### **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General makes the following recommendations and asks the Ohio Adjutant General to respond within 60 days with a plan detailing how the recommendations will be implemented. The Ohio Adjutant General should:

1. Create a process that requires a comparison of operation orders to mileage reimbursement payments, to include a mission number or reason for the travel prior to payments being issued to personnel.
2. Consider a written policy for the MFH program to address the selection process for the regional coordinator, documentation of complaints, and authorization of inspections of MFH details.
3. Create a GSA vehicle log to record daily beginning and ending mileage and occupant information.

### **REFERRAL(S)**

The Office of the Ohio Inspector General has determined that no referrals are warranted for this report of investigation.



STATE OF OHIO  
**OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL**

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RANDALL J. MEYER, INSPECTOR GENERAL

**NAME OF REPORT: Ohio Army National Guard**

**FILE ID #: 2014-CA00066**

**KEEPER OF RECORDS CERTIFICATION**

**This is a true and correct copy of the report which is required to be prepared by the Office of the Ohio Inspector General pursuant to Section 121.42 of the Ohio Revised Code.**

**Jill Jones**  
**KEEPER OF RECORDS**

**CERTIFIED**  
**September 4, 2015**

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