



**PRESS RELEASE
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By Sgt. Balinda O’Neal

Alaska Army National Guard commander retires after nearly 35 years of service

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska – Brig. Gen. Leon “Mike” Bridges retired after nearly 35 years of National Guard service during a ceremony held at the Alaska National Guard Armory here, May 8.

A career National Guardsman who served in Oregon, Washington and Alaska units, Bridges started his journey by enlisting during the Cold War; a post-World War II rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union (which is now Russia and several other republics.).

“I enlisted to be an infantryman,” said Bridges. “I wanted to be ready to fight the Soviet Union and the Iranians who had taken Americans hostage.”

A year after enlisting as a private in the Oregon Army National Guard on September 9, 1980, Bridges was commissioned as an infantry second lieutenant. The decision to commission was based on following a path that his uncle, who had been killed in Vietnam in 1967, had embarked.

“My uncle had enlisted in the Guard, made platoon sergeant and then commissioned through officer candidate school,” explained Bridges. “I wanted to follow his path and replace him in the ranks. I also wanted to be an enlisted member first to know what it was like.”

Between pinning on his first pair of mosquito wings and star, Bridges served in a number of command and staff assignments.

In 2005, Bridges graduated from the U.S. Army War College and was awarded a Master of Science degree in strategic studies. He also deployed for a year in Iraq, serving as deputy team leader and governance advisor of an embedded provincial reconstruction team in Baghdad during 2007 and 2008.

Bridges’ favorite part of his journey has been serving beside amazing people and watching them thrive and figure out ways to accomplish hard tasks he assigned.

“I’m going to miss the people and being around a large population of very like-minded individuals who want to serve. The National Guard has been an amazing team to be a part of,” said Bridges. “Being able to be in the woods, on firing ranges and then in combat, side by side with the same incredible people, has been so rewarding.”

After serving as the deputy chief of staff for logistics, Bridges was chosen to be the assistant adjutant general and commander of the Alaska Army National Guard. While serving as the ATAG, Bridges was also selected to be the first National Guard deputy commanding general for the Combined Arms Support Command and Sustainment Center of Excellence in Fort Lee, Va., where he was a liaison for Army Guard and Reserve students going through transportation, quartermaster and ordinance schools and the Soldier support institute.

“My greatest accomplishment has been convincing young people that service is bigger than themselves,” said Bridges. “Service to one’s state and nation is the most honorable calling I know, and I have had the privilege to witness these young people raise their hand and enlist or commission them along the way.”

From anti-armor platoon leader and recruiting and retention manager to his first command of the 1st Battalion (Scout), 297th Infantry, in rural Nome Alaska, Bridges’ diverse career has taken him around the world, to all 50 states and several countries.

Most recently, Bridges was asked to step up as the acting adjutant general during a period of time that the Alaska National Guard needed a strong leader to help steer the command climate and organization in a different direction.

“The opportunities I have had as a Guardsman blows me away. It’s been a remarkable opportunity to do what I have done for nearly 35 years,” said Bridges. “I served, and no one can ever take that away from me.”

Before diving back into the civilian workforce, Bridges plans on taking a couple of months to spend time with his wife, Anne, and concentrate on volunteer work.

“There are a lot of career opportunities in this state; I just have to feel like I’m helping others in that capacity,” explained Bridges. “In addition to my work with Rotary, I will be chairing a steering committee with other community members to support service members, veterans and their families through the Alaska-Forget Me Not Coalition.”

“I’m not ready to put my feet up on a desk or drink mimosas on the back deck,” added Bridges. “I feel like I have plenty of productive years ahead of me.”

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Cutlines:

150508-Z-CA180-046

Alaska Army National Guard State Command Sgt. Maj. Pamela Harrington prepares to case Brig. Gen. Leon “Mike” Bridges one-star flag during his retirement ceremony at the Alaska National Guard armory on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, May 8. Bridges retired after nearly 35 years of National Guard service. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Balinda O’Neal)

150508-Z-CA180-050

U.S. Army, Alaska, Commander Maj. Gen. Michael Shields presents Alaska Army National Guard Brig.

Gen. Leon “Mike” Bridges with a certificate of appreciation for his service in the armed forces during Bridges’ retirement ceremony at the Alaska National Guard armory on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, May 8. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Balinda O’Neal)

150508-Z-CA180-090

Alaska Army National Guard Brig. Gen. Leon “Mike” Bridges makes his final remarks during a ceremony held at the Alaska National Guard Armory on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, May 8. Bridges thanked the many people he has served with during his nearly 35 years of National Guard service. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Balinda O’Neal)

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