

NATIONAL GUARD GENERAL RETIRING; LEAVITT PRAISES YEARS OF SERVICE TO UTAH

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DRAPER -- Old soldiers do not fade, they just retire and take their grandchildren fishing. At least that's what Maj. Gen. John L. Matthews will do when he leaves his job as adjutant general for the Utah National Guard on Sept. 30, ending a 40-year military career.

"I've got 20 grandchildren, so I'll go to a lot of birthday parties," he quipped Tuesday. "I'm hoping to do a lot of fishing and golfing and I like to get the grandkids out in the mountains when I can."

But that's not all the 62-year-old aviator has planned.

He looks forward to serving in Gov. Mike Leavitt's Economic Development Department as a private-business consultant.

"General Matthews is the most respected adjutant general in the country. He has been and he will continue to be a great asset to the state," Leavitt said.

As adjutant general, Matthews said his greatest challenges were Desert Storm and the floods of 1983. His career high point was serving as president of the National Guard Association. While he said there was no real low point, he has solemn memories of airlifts in and out of Vietnam.

"We kind of watched the war progress and then wind down. My last trip was in 1972," Matthews said. "That was really difficult."

Matthews was first appointed Utah adjutant general on Oct. 1, 1982, by then Gov. Scott Matheson. He was the first Air National Guard officer to hold the position. He was reappointed by then Gov. Norm Bangertter on Oct. 1, 1988.

When he presided over mobilization of Utah Guard forces sent to the Persian Gulf in 1990, Matthews extolled the virtues of citizen-soldiers. While regular armed forces personnel were younger, he said, his troops were imbued with invaluable experience and discipline.

"There is no doubt that there is a deficit in the energy levels between a 55-year-old and a 19-year-old," the general said. "But there is an offsetting balance between energy level and experience throughout life."

Matthews also is chairman of the board of the Historical Society of the National Guard and Militia and serves as president of the National Guard Association of the United States' Insurance Trust. He also serves on the Off-Site Committee for the U.S. Army chief of staff.

The Sandy resident has commanded the guard through emergencies and fanfare in Utah.

They include the floods of 1982 and 1983, the Wilberg Mine disaster, range and forest fires, and the national convention of the National Guard Association in 1992 that included appearances by then President George Bush and Democratic candidate Bill Clinton.

He directed extensive expansion of National Guard facilities statewide.

Matthews was commissioned a second lieutenant through the BYU Air Force ROTC program in December 1954. After receiving his pilot's wings, he was an instructor pilot on active duty and joined the Utah Air Guard as a fighter-interceptor pilot in 1959.

As he climbed the ladder of military hierarchy, he was principal of Dixon Junior High School, Provo, and later served as the first principal at Timpview High School, also in Provo.

He was named air commander of the Utah Air National Guard in 1979 after serving as commander of the 151st Air Refueling Group. He flew missions accumulating 7,300 miles.

His successor will be named by Leavitt, said Lt. Col. Bob Nelson, spokesman for the Guard.