



MG Gus L. Hargett served
47 years in the Tennessee
Army National Guard.

Five Generations of Service

**TENNESSEE ADJUTANT GENERAL
TALKS WITH GX UPON RETIREMENT**

Story by Clint Wood, photos by Evan Baines

GX had the distinct privilege of chatting with the 74th adjutant general of the Tennessee National Guard, Major General Gus L. Hargett, upon his Dec. 30, 2009, retirement from the Guard.

From growing up in a typical American small town to his storied Guard career that has spanned more than 40 years, Hargett told us about his life.

When asked what aspect of his Guard life will leave the biggest impression, Hargett said, “The great Americans, the people who are willing to do everything for our state and country. [I’ll especially] remember the families of the [Soldiers] who paid the ultimate sacrifice for their country.”

SALT OF THE EARTH

Hargett, a married father with four children and seven grandchildren, described the people of his hometown of Ripley, TN, population 7,000, as “salt of the earth. It’s typical rural America.”

When asked about his high school days there, he summed it up with, “Lots of fun. Lots of good-looking girls. [Plenty of] football and baseball.”

Ripley is where Hargett’s interest in the Guard began, inspired by his father, who rose to the rank of major in the Army National Guard and

Guard. They all attended Basic Combat Training together, and Hargett chose infantry.

His high scores on the ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery) allowed him to attend the Personnel Administrative Specialist School at Fort Knox. This meant that once he returned to Ripley, he had to learn everything about operating an M1919, Browning .30 caliber machine gun by “on-the-job” training. His first unit was Company A, 3rd Battalion, 117th Infantry.

We wanted to know what he found most challenging about being a machine gunner. He replied, “Taking that machine gun [that weighed 31 pounds], running through the boonies of Fort Stewart, GA, and falling down in the pine needles among the snakes.”

To add to this challenge, he said, once he had dug his foxhole and set up a firing position, the command would move them to another firing position and start the process all over.

RISING THROUGH THE RANKS

After four years as an enlisted Soldier, Hargett entered Officer Candidate School. He made second lieutenant in August 1966.

Originally, he hadn’t intended to stay in the military. “I thought I was a six-year guy,” he admitted. But his father’s example served as an inspiration to become an officer, and also, Hargett knew that officers receive more pay than enlisted Soldiers.

THE ITALIAN JOB

Among many unique accomplishments, Hargett has the distinction of being the first National Guard officer to attend the resident NATO Defense College in Rome, Italy. He considers this assignment one of the best of his

career. He was treated well by officers from all branches, and learned about NATO issues.

Observing the leadership styles of Guard generals early in his career helped him become a leader, he said. “I learned something from every one of those assignments.”

Hargett credits his tenure as the National Guard Bureau’s Chief, Operations/Exercise Division during Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm with his understanding of how to handle the Tennessee Guard’s budget.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The biggest challenge as adjutant general, according to Hargett, has been preparing the Guard for the future. But, the troops themselves were instrumental in his success. “It became easier for me because we’ve got great people,” he

Beginning of a Legacy

Major General Gus Hargett enlisted in the Tennessee Army National Guard Aug. 31, 1962, serving as an enlisted infantry Soldier. Upon completion of Officer Candidate School (Tennessee Military Academy), he was commissioned as an infantry officer on Aug. 6, 1966.

Hargett has served on various staff and leadership assignments within the Tennessee Army National Guard and the National Guard Bureau, including assignments as the assistant adjutant general, Army; Chief, Mobilization Plans with the III US Corps; Chief, Plans Division Fifth U.S. Army; and Chief, Overseas Deployment Training, HQ, U.S. Army Europe; War College Fellowship, Ohio State, and served a six-year term as a member of Army Reserve Forces Policy Committee.

He has the distinction of being the first National Guard officer to attend the resident NATO Defense College in Rome, Italy. In 2004, Hargett completed a two-year term as the Chairman of the Board, National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS). He currently serves as a member of the Department of Defense, Reserve Forces Policy Board.

Major awards and decorations

- * Distinguished Service Medal
- * Legion of Merit (with 1 Oak Leaf Cluster)
- * Meritorious Service Medal (with 2 Oak Leaf Clusters)
- * Army Commendation Medal (with 1 Oak Leaf Cluster)
- * Air Force Commendation Medal
- * Army Achievement Medal
- * Army Reserve Component Achievement Medal (with 1 Silver Leaf Cluster)
- * National Defense Service Medal
- * Armed Forces Reserve Medal (with 1 Gold Hourglass Device)
- * Army Service Ribbon
- * Overseas Service Ribbon

said. “We’ve got Soldiers who have been everywhere and done everything, and who understand organization. They understand what we should look like. They have truly worked hard to position us for the future.”

ARMED TO THE TEETH

Hargett has facilitated many successes during his eight-year tenure as adjutant general. He’s pleased with the increase in educational benefits for Soldiers. He’s glad that Gov. Phil Bredesen has supported employers of Guard members and provided benefits for those who are state employees. He’s thrilled with the upgrading of Guard facilities across the state.

But most of all, he’s proud of the Tennessee National Guard’s overall readiness.



MG Gus L. Hargett (left) and his successor, BG Terry M. “Max” Haston, have served together for nearly 30 years.

served for 27 years. Hargett’s fond memories of his dad’s service include attending his father’s drills in the fire hall, where the Soldiers used broomsticks for drill and ceremony, and the C-rations his dad would bring back from annual training every year.

“I always thought that stuff was pretty cool,” Hargett said.

One of his most treasured memories is of his dad driving him to his grandparents’ house so they could watch him while his dad was at drill. On the way, his dad would pick up his fellow Soldiers, and they’d ride in the back of his pickup truck.

BEGINNINGS

Three months after graduating from high school, Hargett and 10 classmates joined the

"I VOLUNTEER SIR"

During the War of 1812, thousands of Tennesseans enlisted in response to then-Gov. Willie Blount's call for volunteers. Young Tennesseans still display this spirit, with more than 20,000 Tennessee Guard members deploying overseas since 9/11.

Hargett isn't surprised.

"Hey, we're the Volunteer State," he quipped. "There are other great Guard states out there, but if there's a better one, they'll have to convince me. Because I think ours is the best in America. We make end strength every year, and we've never failed to perform any mission, state or federal, that we've been asked to do."

The 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment, headquartered in Knoxville, returns to Iraq in the spring of 2010. This unit also served there during 2004–2005. Their motto: "I Volunteer Sir."

"I think they'll do great," Hargett said. "I think they're well-led, well-equipped and fully prepared. They have all the right stuff to go back and do the mission. I would expect nothing less than excellence from them."

FRONT TO BACK

With these deployments comes the opportunity for Hargett to show these brave Citizen-Soldiers support.

"The biggest thing for me is to be able to stand up in front of those guys and say, 'Hey, I got your back while you're gone,'" explained Hargett. "I'll take care of your families. We'll work with your employers. You're going to take care of the needs of our nation—we'll take care of your needs while you're gone."

"Then, when they get home, it's good to be able to look them in the eye and say, 'You fulfilled your commitment. I hope we fulfilled ours.'"

NEW KIND OF WAR

Hargett knows the fight in Afghanistan will be different from the one in Iraq. "All you have to do is fly over the countryside and you can see the difference in the culture and the people," he said.

Winning the war there will be difficult, Hargett acknowledged, because unlike Iraqis, who are for the most part educated and have some infrastructure, Afghans lack education and the country needs to be rebuilt.

Comparing the two countries, Hargett said, "They're both in the Middle East. That's about all you can say."

SOURCE OF PRIDE

When Hargett sees a Guard member's pride, it makes him proud, too.



UPFRONT WITH MG HARGETT

GX: How do you feel when you hear the National Anthem?

GH: I tell this to my family and everybody. If you don't get that little tingle down your spine, you ought to check your hole card. Because there is something un-American about a guy who doesn't get that.

GX: What advice do you have for new recruits?

GH: Be prepared to be lucky. I say this to all of these guys. You get in the Guard, and you really don't know where your Guard career is going to take you. But it is just like life: If you prepare yourself with the proper education, the proper

attitude and work hard, and you are in the right place at the right time, you will benefit from all that.

GX: What Army values do you live by?

GH: Integrity and honesty. If you can't be honest with people, you can never be successful in life. Because if you lie, you've got to keep on lying.

GX: What is your leadership style?

GH: I want to be hands-on. I want to talk to Soldiers to learn their issues. They are the best source for [making improvements]. You would be surprised, if

Soldiers trust you, how much they will tell you. You will find out the good, the bad and the ugly.

GX: What is your advice to your successor, BG Terry M. "Max" Haston?

GH: That is an interesting one because I told him a couple things the other day. The most difficult thing for me is time management and figuring out what is important. Because everything is important to everybody. You're pulled in so many different directions. Understand what you don't know and concentrate on [that] as opposed to what you already know.

"Because then I know that we have done the right thing. We've prepared them, supported them, brought them home, and helped them reintegrate with their families and back into their jobs," he explained. "So for them to be proud is what makes me proud."

Hargett will remain closely involved with the National Guard as newly named president of the National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS). NGAUS provides the National Guard representation before Congress. He's a perfect fit for this role, with his many years of experience.

Guard members have NGAUS to thank for several of their benefits, including modern

equipment and TRICARE health insurance, he said. "It's because of NGAUS, along with [the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States] and the military coalition, that Guard members [have] these things."

Taking over Hargett's role with the Tennessee Guard is Brigadier General Terry M. "Max" Haston, whom Hargett has known for about 30 years. "He has been to all the right schools and has had all the right assignments," Hargett affirmed. "He has been groomed to be a general his whole life. He'll do well." Which allows Hargett to hand over the reins with peace of mind. **GX**