

Maj. Gen. Scott L. Thoele retires after 35 years of service

by Story by Staff Sgt. Robert R. Adams, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs
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Springfield, Illinois – For many, retired Illinois National Guardsman Maj. Gen. Scott L. Thoele will be remembered as an empowering leader who put Soldiers first. Others will remember him for his leadership during the 2008 to 2009 historic deployment of the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) to Afghanistan.

Thoele of Teutopolis, Illinois retired on Sept., 30 after a 21-year career in the Illinois National Guard. Thoele also served 14 years in the active duty Army.

Thoele received his commission in the U.S. Army in December 1980 from the Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia. In September 1994, Thoele joined the Illinois Army National Guard.

"Joining the Illinois National Guard was one of the best moves I ever made, the Illinois National Guard is a first-class organization," said Thoele. "I had some great mentors over the course of my career in the Illinois National Guard."

Thoele served in a variety of positions of increasing responsibility as an active-duty officer and traditional Guardsman, culminating as the Deputy Commanding General-Army National Guard for the United States Army Forces Command at Fort Bragg, North Carolina from August 2012 to August 2015.

Thoele said he was honored to serve as the Deputy Commanding General of the ARNG, but he views his time with 33rd IBCT as the highlight of his career.

Thoele deployed to Afghanistan as commander of the 33rd IBCT in 2008 as the Deputy Combined Joint Task Force Phoenix VIII Commander, his Illinois Guard Soldiers directly trained the Afghan National Security Forces.

Thoele said this was not just his last assignment with the Illinois National Guard, but he considers commanding the 33rd to be his best assignment.

"A lot of people forget how hard that deployment was. It was really a team effort," said Thoele.

During the deployment 36 Americans from Combined Task Force Phoenix were killed during the 2008 to 2009 deployment, 18 of those were from Illinois.

"We knew it was going to be a tough year when we took three casualties and we hadn't even deployed the brigade (main body) to theater yet," said Command Sgt. Maj. Mark Bowman, former Command Sergeant Major for the 33rd IBCT and current Land Component Command Sergeant Major for the Illinois National Guard. "Losing those Soldiers made it harder on every Soldier during the mobilization."

Bowman said despite the hardships the brigade endured, Thoele stayed focused and his guidance was always the right thing to do.

"He had a calm presence about him, but you always knew he was in charge," said Bowman.

Col. Eric Little, United States Property and Fiscal Officer for the Illinois National Guard, who served as the Logistics Task Force Commander for the 634th Brigade Support Battalion, 33rd IBCT said Thoele was a smart, influential and dynamic leader.

"His character and style brought empowerment to Soldiers and leaders and the overall Brigade together," said Little. "Soldiers and leaders strived to do everything they could do to serve him and the organization he represented. He was truly a leader that served the Soldier."

During that deployment, Thoele met with U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Richard P. Formica, of Alexandria, Virginia, the Commanding General of the Combined Security Transition Assistance Command - Afghanistan every Saturday morning in Kabul.

"I am proud to say that I served with the 33rd IBCT," said Formica now retired. "It has been six years, but what hasn't changed and what I haven't forgotten is the tremendous respect and admiration that I had for the courage, the tactical competence, the determination and the grit of the Soldiers of the 33rd IBCT."

Formica said he was very proud of the Soldiers and leaders of the 33rd.

"My heart goes out to the families and loved ones of the 33rd daily, and I will never forget their sacrifices," said Formica.

Later on in Thoele's career, he served as the Deputy Commanding General for United States Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) and at many strategic-level positions for the Army National Guard Combined Arms Center. There he applied his Illinois National Guard experiences to implement national policies and programs.

"It is really amazing what Scott added to our military, the rest of this nation and to our Army through his influence in various positions throughout his career," said Maj. Gen. Richard Hayes, the Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard. "His work affected half a million people in the Guard and Reserves while serving in the positions he did."

Thoele graduated from Quincy University in Quincy, Illinois, in 1980 where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Accounting. In 1991, Thoele graduated the Graduate School of Banking from the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Wisconsin.

He has attended numerous U.S. Army leadership courses including the U.S. Army War College at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania; Army Strategic Leadership Develop

Program basic, intermediate and advanced levels; CAPSTONE, National Defense University in Washington, D.C. and Advanced Joint Professional Military, Joint Forces Staff College in Norfolk Virginia.

Thoele has participated in Operation Urgent Fury at Grenada, Desert Storm Southwest Asia Cease Fire Campaign, Iraq, Hurricane Mitch Relief Operations, Operation Noble Eagle for the USA, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. His most recent combat assignment was Commander, 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team and Deputy Commander, Combined Joint Task Force Phoenix, Kabul, Afghanistan, from September 2008 to November 2009.

Thoele's awards include Legion of Merits, Bronze Star Medals, Meritorious Service Medals, Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal, NATO Afghanistan Service Medal, Bronze Medal of the Polish Army, French National Defense Medal, Special Forces Tab, Combat Infantryman Badges, and Combat Action Badge.

"I know its bittersweet for Scott to take off the uniform, but I know he will continue to serve our National Guard in other capacities," said Hayes.

Formica said he wishes the best for Thoele.

"Congratulations on a wonderful career and thanks to your family and to you for your service," said Formica.

In the civilian sector, Major General Thoele retired as, Senior Vice President and Senior Loan Officer for United States Bank, Lewistown, Missouri and Vice President, Compliance Officer and Credit Analyst for First Bankers Trust Company in Quincy, Illinois. Thoele and his wife Paula have four children and three grandchildren. The general and Paula reside in Quincy, Illinois.