

Gov. Pritzker Announces Retirement of Major General Rich Neely

March 18 2024 1:29 PM



CHICAGO — Governor JB Pritzker announced today that Major General Rich Neely, The Adjutant General for Illinois, Commander of the Illinois National Guard, and Director of the Illinois Department of Military Affairs will retire from the military in May after 40 years of service.

Governor Pritzker has selected Major General Rodney Boyd, the Assistant Adjutant General – Army and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, as the 41st Adjutant General for Illinois and the next Commander of the Illinois National Guard and Director of Military Affairs. General Boyd will be the first Black officer and person of color to command the Illinois National Guard.

“Throughout his entire career, General Neely led by example, providing a steady hand through some of the most tumultuous times in the history of our state and our nation. I can say with confidence that the Illinois National Guard is better because of General Neely’s service. He has honored our state many times over and we wish him all the best in retirement,” **said Governor JB Pritzker.** “With that said, I could not be more thrilled that he is leaving the Illinois National Guard under the exceptional leadership of General Rodney Boyd. General Boyd is a key component of the Illinois National Guard’s success and his appointment as Adjutant General marks another historic milestone in a storied military career.”

As Adjutant General, General Boyd will serve as the Commander for both the Illinois Army and Air National Guard and will be responsible for daily operations and oversee approximately 13,000 military members, 2,200 fulltime military/federal employees and 230 civilian state employees. As the Commander of the Illinois National Guard, he will be responsible for the training, preparation and deployment of Soldiers and Airmen in support of combat operations worldwide.

The National Guard will hold its official Change of Command ceremony in May. Governor Pritzker is the Commander-in-Chief of the Illinois National Guard, and the appointment of General Boyd does not require Illinois Senate confirmation.

“I am grateful to the Illinois National Guard’s 13,000 Soldiers and Airmen who met and overcame every challenge over the last five and a half years,” **General Neely said.** “Our service members and their families have demonstrated unparalleled selfless service and the ability to innovate throughout multiple missions, many of which were impossible to foresee. It has been my greatest honor to serve as the commander for these amazing American heroes who have volunteered to serve their State and Country. I’m very confident that General Boyd will be very successful in leading this great organization through future challenges.”

As Commander of the Illinois National Guard, General Neely oversaw the federal overseas deployments of 4,800 Soldiers and Airmen to 21 countries around the world and 5,600 service members on state active duty exceeding 500,000 duty days combined.

General Neely, who has two combat deployments in Iraq, has served as The Adjutant General since February 2019. Beginning in 2020, General Neely directed the largest and longest domestic operations activation in Illinois National Guard history in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Illinois National Guard Soldiers and Airmen assisted with 250,000 COVID-19 tests, delivered eight million masks, administered nearly two million vaccines throughout the state among many other support missions.

General Neely directed five Illinois National Guard activations in response to civil unrest including support to the nation's capital following January 6, 2021. These activations involved 1,500 service members and more than 14,000 duty days. He also led the Illinois National Guard during major flooding in 2019 involving 830 Soldiers over nine weeks.

During his tenure, General Neely oversaw the Illinois National Guard's State Partnership Program with Poland. During one mission the Illinois National Guard service members provided direct training support to Poland's newly formed Territorial Defense Force in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Due to General Neely's exceptional efforts, he was awarded the Polish Commanders Cross with Silver Star Order of Merit from the President of Poland in 2022.

General Neely was also the nation's first Cyberspace Officer to serve as an Adjutant General and was a nationwide leader in cyber security. He was the Senior Cyber Advisor to the Chief and Vice Chief of the National Guard Bureau, National Lead for implementation of the Nationwide Integration of Time Resiliency for Operations (NITRO) program, Vice Chair of the National Guard Bureau's Cyber General Officer Advisory Council, Chair of the Army National Guard's Information (Cyber) Readiness Advisory Council, and the Senior Advisor for Cybersecurity and Critical Infrastructure for U.S. Northern Command's Dual Status Commanders Course. General Neely was only the second Air Force officer to serve as The Adjutant General of Illinois, the first since Major General Harold Holesinger retired in 1991.

Prior to his appointment as The Adjutant General, General Neely served in the Pentagon for nearly five years starting as the Chief of Current Operations then as Deputy Director for Cyber, Communications and Space Operations while also serving as the Air National Guard's Chief Information Officer. His final assignment in the Pentagon was as the Principal Deputy Director for Air Operations, Intelligence, Cyber and Space Operations.

General Neely holds a bachelor's degree from Illinois State University and was inducted into the ISU College of Business Hall of Fame last year. He also holds a master's degree in Public Administration, Policy and Leadership with a Chief Information Officer concentration from the National Defense University.

General Boyd, a combat veteran who has served in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kuwait; has been the Assistant Adjutant General and Commander of the Illinois Army National Guard, since July 2021. He became the highest-ranking person of color in the history of the Illinois National Guard in February 2023 when he received his second star as a major general.

“I’m truly honored and humbled to be selected as the Adjutant General for Illinois,” **General Boyd said.** “I also know that I stand on the shoulders of many great leaders before me.”

General Boyd grew up on the South Side of Chicago. After graduating from Wendell Phillips High School, he enlisted as a Marine Corps Reservist before transitioning to the Army National Guard and then commissioning through the Guard's Officer Candidate School on Camp Lincoln, Springfield, in August 1990. He has served honorably in the military for more than 38 years.

He commanded the Chicago-based 108th Sustainment Brigade before being selected in 2020 as the Assistant Chief of Staff, J4 (Wartime), United States Forces Korea and being promoted to brigadier general.

Prior to being selected as the Assistant Adjutant General – Army, Boyd was a traditional National Guard Soldier holding positions in the private sector after retiring as the Chief of Police in Bellwood, Illinois.

General Boyd holds a bachelor's degree in Criminology from Northern Illinois University, a master's degree in Education from the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle and a second master's degree in Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College.