

# Dept. of Military Affairs: Former Wisconsin National Guard leader remembered

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MADISON, Wis. — Retired Maj. Gen. Albert Wilkening, Wisconsin's adjutant general from 2002-07, passed away April 8 after a long fight with cancer.

"I never had the honor of serving alongside Maj. Gen. Wilkening, but his reputation as a leader of character and courage is well known," said Maj. Gen. Paul Knaap, Wisconsin's current adjutant general. "I join with the rest of the Wisconsin National Guard in mourning his passing."

Wilkening commanded the Wisconsin National Guard during some of its most active and trying days early in the Global War on Terror. He was serving as the deputy adjutant general for Air when he was thrust into duty on Sept. 11, 2001 because the adjutant general at that time, Maj. Gen. James Blaney, was undergoing scheduled surgery.

Wilkening has been credited with developing the framework for managing deployments, as well as the state's protocols for when Wisconsin service members lost their lives serving overseas. He also served as Wisconsin's homeland security advisor and chairman of the governor's Homeland Security Council.

"Few have had as significant and lasting positive impact on the Wisconsin National Guard as Maj. Gen. Wilkening," said Brig. Gen. (ret.) Gary Ebben, former deputy adjutant general for Air and a close friend of Wilkening. "He has been a tremendous leader and role model for us all. A respected and great man."

Wilkening joined the Air Force as a pilot in 1968, and demonstrated such proficiency

that he became a flight training instructor after one year. During his career he tallied more than 3,000 flying hours as a command pilot in the Cessna T-41, T-37 Tweet and T-38 Talon training aircraft, Cessna O-2A Skymaster, Cessna OA-37 Dragonfly, and the Fairchild A-10 Thunderbolt “Warthog” aircraft.

In 1973 Wilkening realized a three-year goal when he joined the Wisconsin Air National Guard unit in Madison.

“They had just won the William Tell — they were the best fighter unit in the world back then,” Wilkening said during an April 2019 award presentation. The 176th Fighter Interceptor Squadron — the precursor to the 115th Fighter Wing — won the William Tell Meet, an air-to-air rocketry competition, in 1972. “I wanted to be part of that organization.”

Wilkening served in a number of command and staff positions in the Wisconsin Air National Guard, including commander of the 176th Tactical Fighter Squadron and deputy commander for operations, 128th Tactical Fighter Wing. He served as Wisconsin’s deputy adjutant general for Air from December 1990 to August 2002. His military awards include the Legion of Merit, the Meritorious Service Medal with oak leaf cluster, the Air Force Commendation Medal with oak leaf cluster, the Army Commendation Medal, the Combat Readiness Medal with two oak leaf clusters, and others.

After retiring from the military, Wilkening was active with the Wisconsin chapter of the Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve. He remained an ardent backer of the Wisconsin National Guard.

“I’ve watched this organization grow and grow and become more and more of the benchmark organization it is today,” he said in 2019. “There is no finer organization than the Wisconsin National Guard — Army and Air.”