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Tennessee National Guard Celebrates 250th Birthday

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Soldiers, Airmen, and friends of the Tennessee Military Department gathered at Nashville’s Joint Force Headquarters on August 16 to celebrate and honor the Tennessee National Guard’s 250th birthday.

Maj. Gen. Warner Ross, Tennessee’s Adjutant General, and Command Sgt. Maj. Dale Crockett, Tennessee’s Senior Enlisted Leader, hosted the ceremony where hundreds of servicemembers reflected on the organization’s heritage, accomplishments, and service over the last two and a half centuries. Ross presided over a ceremonial cake cutting, servicemembers listened to guest speakers, and everyone honored the sacrifice and accomplishments of all those that came before them.

“Celebrating 250 years of service to our state and nation is a remarkable achievement,” said Crockett. “I am proud of what our Soldiers and Airmen have done over the years, and it is reflected in the traditions and accomplishments they’ve performed since the first militiamen volunteered to serve back in 1774.”

The Tennessee National Guard’s origins trace back to before Tennessee became a state. In 1774, the Virginia frontier was under attack by Shawnee Indians, so Lord Dunmore, the Royal Governor of Virginia, ordered four regiments of militia and volunteers to organize and repel the attacks. Capt. Evan Shelby, a militia leader from the self-governing Watauga settlement, that was in Tennessee’s present-day Sullivan and Carter counties, formed the settlement’s first volunteer militia company, named the Fincastle Company, to assist the Virginia governor. Shelby and 49 other militiamen assembled on August 17, marching from their homes to join the amassing Virginia regiments. This marked the first time “Tennesseans” deployed for war as a militia.

“That moment represents the birth of the Tennessee militia, which transformed into the present-day Tennessee National Guard,” said Ross. “It also started a tradition of volunteerism that is celebrated as our state’s nickname and is a core belief of everyone here today.”

During the ceremony, Ross spoke about the importance of this special day, thanked everyone in attendance, and honored all guardsmen who served. He also played a video that chronicled the organization’s history and many of its historic milestones. After the video, Ross introduced the guest speaker, Will Summers, who spoke about the importance of service and honoring traditions.

Summers, a retired communications sergeant with the 5th Special Forces Group and a member of ODA 595 Special Forces Team, discussed his career and what it means to devote yourself to a life of selfless service. Summers was with the first team to arrive in Afghanistan in response to



the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, earning his team the moniker “The Horse Soldiers.” His team’s experiences were brought to life in the Hollywood film, *12 Strong*.

“It’s an honor to be here with Soldiers and Airmen who live by the motto, ‘Ready Now,’” said Summers. “Being ready is critical to success in any mission and in life. It is a mindset like that which makes the United States the best nation in the world.”

After Summers spoke, Ross performed a ceremonial cake cutting and asked Pfc. Christian Amacher with Tullahoma’s 1175th Transportation Company, and Col. Mark Phillips, Tennessee’s state chaplain, to join him to assist with making the first cut. It is customary that the oldest and youngest service members in attendance be given the honor of cutting the cake with a ceremonial saber. Phillips, the senior member in attendance, represented the Guard’s past, while Amacher, the most junior service member, represented the Guard’s future.

“It was an honor to participate today,” said Amacher. “I’m proud to be a member of an organization with such a strong history defending America and Tennesseans.”

Following the ceremony, the attendees enjoyed refreshments, finished lunch provided by the Gary Sinise Foundation, and continued learning more about the history of the Tennessee National Guard.

“250 years ago tomorrow, the first Tennessee militiamen left their homes and families to help and protect those in need,” said Crockett. “They were our state’s first citizen-soldiers, willing to sacrifice their lives at a moment’s notice. Their legacy continues with the men and women serving in the National Guard today and should never be forgotten.”

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Tennessee's Senior Enlisted Leader, Command Sgt. Maj. Dale Crockett, looks on as Pfc. Christian Amacher and Col. Mark Phillips perform the ceremonial cake cutting during the Tennessee National Guard's 250th birthday celebration at Nashville's Joint Force Headquarters on August 16. (photo by retired Sgt. 1st Class Edgar Castro)

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