



MEET RICHARD NASH

Always ready, always there

Sarah Fister Gale



Major General Richard Nash, adjutant general of the Minnesota National Guard, didn't plan a career in the military when he was growing up in the small Minnesota town of Jordan.

"I wanted to be a teacher," Nash says of his early career plans, but his timing was all off.

Nash attended Mankato State University in Mankato, Minn., where he studied biology, health, and physical education and received a degree in June 1972. He started looking for a teaching job, but within a month he was drafted.

Instead of teaching physical education, he spent a year on active duty, then joined the Army Reserve, and ultimately the Army National Guard, for the remainder of his six-year obligation. Back in Minnesota, he started his job hunt again, but there were no teaching positions to be had. He took a job as night manager at FabCon, a precast concrete wall panel company that had just opened a facility in Savage, Minn.

It was supposed to be a gap job until a teaching position opened up, he says, but he stayed at FabCon for nearly three decades. Nash quickly moved up the ranks to day manager, then plant manager, then plant supervisor, and eventually became the vice president of operations.

While at FabCon, he joined PCI, where he served as a member of the PCI Board of Directors and worked with Sid Freedman to update the *PCI Blue Book*. He also secured several individual and group patents on processes, finishes, and techniques devised at the company.

"It was exciting to be able to help move the industry along," he says.

During that same period, he was moving up in the military ranks as well. Over the next 28 years Nash received several promotions, becoming platoon leader, then company commander, then battalion commander, and later colonel.

"My military and my professional careers grew in parallel," Nash says. "I don't think I would have been as successful in either one if I hadn't done them both."

But eventually the two paths diverged. On October 1, 2000,

Nash was promoted to the rank of brigadier general and assistant division commander of the 34th Infantry Division, a division in the Army National Guard known as the Red Bulls.

At that time he retired from FabCon and devoted himself full time to the military.

In 2003, Nash was deployed to Bosnia, and a year later he was promoted to the rank of major general.

When he came back, he briefly returned to civilian life as general manager of Hanson Structural Precast but retired again when he was assigned the role of special assistant to the combatant commander of the North American Aerospace Defense Command, in Colorado Springs, Colo.

He returned to Minnesota in 2007 to become commanding general of the 34th Infantry Division, and in 2009 the Red Bulls were deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

When his tour ended in February 2010, Nash was selected to take the position of adjutant general of the Minnesota National Guard, where he will serve until 2016.

Nash is known in Minnesota for looking out for the troops. In light of the high unemployment facing returning veterans in 2012, he persuaded several Minnesota employers to come to Kuwait to meet returning troops and train them in job-search skills.

Although Nash hasn't held an official role in the precast concrete industry for many years, he is still connected with former colleagues and PCI members and keeps an eye out for new precast concrete projects going up in Minnesota.

"You used to see tower cranes all over the skyline in St. Paul, but now there is only one," he laments.

Although he worries about the struggles the industry has faced during the recession, he encourages the next generation of leaders to learn lessons from these difficult years.

"This industry has highs and lows, and you have to be ready for that," he says.

He also says he believes the work that PCI does will continue to smooth over some of the rough times.

"Whether it's around testing, lobbying, R&D, or finding new equipment and technologies, PCI is always on the cutting edge," he says. "They do things that smaller companies couldn't do on their own, and that helps the whole industry." ■