

One Man's Opinion

By Chuck Hardaway

Three kinds of generals

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The banter was ongoing as five of us descended in the elevator. We had wrapped up a somewhat extended board meeting, and the joking and ribbing, as we called each other general-this and general-that, was in part due to a feeling of "free at last."

After listening to all this, a fellow traveler aboard the elevator asked us in a soft, hesitant voice, "Are you guys really generals?"

My friend, Bob Hipple, looked him straight in the eye and replied, "Yep, we're generals."

The other guy said, "Gosh, I was only a private."

That quieted us down for the rest of the ride, since we really weren't trying to put on pretenses. Nevertheless, we realized that's exactly what it must have sounded like to anyone listening in.

Technically, however, Bob was right - we are generals. But, of course, there are all kinds of generals. **There are the military generals of the armed forces; there are the Washington Generals; and then there are those who are just a general nuisance. We fall in that second category but occasionally slip into the third.**

Awhile back, I was invited by Susan West, the then excellent interviewer for CNN Comcast Local Edition, to appear on one of their five-minute TV segments that was shown multiple times for about a month and tell about the Washington Generals. I must admit I was as nervous as Mayberry's deputy sheriff, Barney Fife, concerning the TV taping process, but Susan made it a pleasant and easy experience.

At the completion, I was given a DVD of the interview, and Marge and I played it as soon as we got home. Actually, it wasn't too bad - all the words came out relatively smooth and made reasonably good sense. **But, good grief, who was that old-looking guy talking to that young and vivacious lady?** Marge said it must have been bad lighting and that it certainly didn't do me justice. (She has learned well over our 50+ years on how to bolster and protect her hubby.) In this case, however, I had to question how the lighting was at fault, since Susan West looked like Miss Texas.

The first thing she asked me was, "What are the Washington Generals?" I explained that the Association of Washington Generals is an honorary organization established by then-Lt. Gov. John Cherberg. He and others had felt it important for our state to have a way of recognizing outstanding service of individuals and also to bring them together into an organization to enable them to continue to serve our state. It is an organization similar to the Kentucky Colonels. However,

not wanting to be outranked, the bar was raised to general.

The second question was "How does one become a Washington General?" I replied that the individual recommended for the award must first be reviewed by a selection committee and then approved by the board of directors. **The commissioning document is signed by the Governor, Lt. Governor, Secretary of State, Commander of the organization and contains the great seal of the State of Washington.**

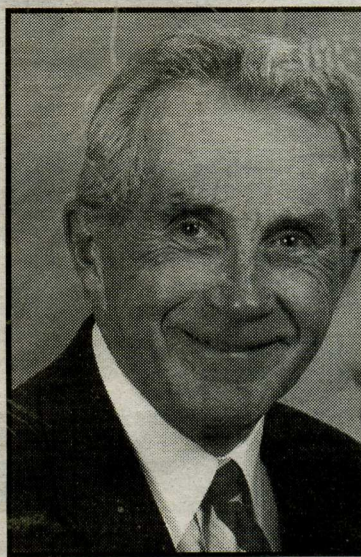
Our organization has approximately 200 on the active roll, but there are thousands of generals from all over the world. There are past presidents (Harry Truman is one) and governors (Gary Locke was made a Washington General at the conclusion of his State of the State Address in 2005). There are U.S. senators, business leaders, sports figures, ambassadors, and royalty from other nations.

Next, I was asked to tell about the important piece of legislation affecting the Washington Generals. My response: Although we've been around since 1970, it wasn't until 2005, under the leadership of **Lt. Gov. Brad Owen**, that the organization was codified under law as part of the State of Washington with the passage of Substitute Senate Bill 5862. **Among other things, it formally establishes the Washington Generals as official Ambassadors of Trade, Tourism, and Goodwill for the state.**

In conclusion, Susan noted that I was wearing five gold stars on my collar and asked me to explain the ranking system. I explained that the association is designed in a military format. When first commissioned, a person becomes an honorary, one-star general. If they become involved in the activities and pay the \$50 annual dues, they are awarded a second star as a major general. A third star can be awarded for an individual's outstanding commitment and service to the organization's goals and projects. The fourth star is awarded to members of the board of directors, of which there are 12. The fifth star is awarded for life to the commander. While serving as commander, the stars are gold. After retiring, the stars remain at five but are silver.

This February, I presented plaques of appreciation for outstanding service to the Washington Generals. The Maple Valley Rotary welcomed us to make the presentation at one of their Friday breakfast meetings. **Frank Warnke, Bob Hipple, and Bill VanRuff were honored for their four years of service as vice commander, treasurer, and adjutant, respectively.**

During the presentation, I



pointed out that if we live long enough, our den walls can be covered with documents suitable for framing. However, when our grand kids or, hopefully, it's the great grand kids, clear our dens, these plaques will be the keepers. They represent grandpa or grandma doing something to help the people of the state of Washington. That, in my opinion, is the mission of our state's Association of Washington Generals.