

Dakota Images

Major General Duane Leonard (“Duke”) Corning, a veteran of World War II and the Korean conflict, served as adjutant general of the South Dakota National Guard for twenty years, overseeing the state’s National Guard troops during crises such as the Rapid City flood of 1972.

A native of Madison, South Dakota, Corning was born 1 April 1917 to Leone and Maude Winters Corning. He enlisted in the South Dakota Army National Guard in 1935 as a private in the 147th Field Artillery. In 1941, he joined the Navy Air Corps and served in Newfoundland, Iceland, and England, flying 104 combat missions during World War II in seaplanes, bombers, and night fighters. Corning graduated from Sioux Falls College and married Catherine Schnaidt in Sioux Falls on 1 October 1942. The couple had three children.

Corning returned to Sioux Falls in 1946 to help World War II flying ace Joe Foss—later governor of South Dakota—form the 175th Fighter Squadron, becoming its first operations officer. Promoted to lieutenant colonel in 1950, he served during the Korean conflict as commander of the 175th Fighter Squadron and later the 132d Fighter Group. Afterward, he commanded the 114th Fighter Group for the South Dakota Air National Guard. He was promoted to colonel in 1956 and to brigadier general in 1963, when Governor Archie M. Gubbrud appointed him adjutant general for South Dakota. Promoted to major general in 1964, Corning served as the state’s senior military officer until his retirement in 1983, filling roles as secretary of military and veterans affairs on the governor’s cabinet; state civil defense director; selective service director; and emergency services planning director. He also served as president of the National Guard Association of the United States from 1974 to 1976.

His many awards included the Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal, Air Medal with Gold Star, and, after the Rapid City flood, the Legion of Merit medal. He was inducted into the South Dakota Hall of Fame in 1982. Corning also worked with Northern State University to establish the South Dakota National Guard Historical Resource Collection in the Beulah Williams Library Archives to help preserve the state’s military history.

Duke Corning died on 22 April 1991 and is buried in Black Hills National Cemetery, Sturgis, South Dakota.