

Military's public face hangs up flack jacket

Senior Colonel Yang Yujun, who officially retired as a spokesman for the Ministry of National Defense on Wednesday, often peppered his briefings with humor and internet buzzwords.

Yang, 47, who joined the ministry's information office in 2010 and was appointed its director in 2015, stepped down due to the health issues of close family members.

Hailed by his colleagues as an independent and deep thinker, he also is regarded as someone who managed to connect with younger generations.

In 2013, during a news conference on the possibility of China's first aircraft carrier, the CNS Liaoning, taking part in a far-sea operation, Yang said the vessel was not a zhainan, a word commonly used by netizens that translates as "indoorsy man".

He also suggested in September that Ash Carter, then the US defense secretary, should not shuaiguo – a buzzword meaning to throw unwanted responsibility onto others – after the United States criticized China following a nuclear missile test by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

"I love my uniform, and my job at the information office, and I have given my heart and soul throughout my military career," Yang told Global Times.

He received a thundering ovation from the journalists in attendance at his final news conference in April.

Over the years, Yang has answered countless questions from reporters on urgent and sensitive issues.

In addition to a monthly news conference, the information office is tasked with public relations, crisis management, media exchanges, helping to draft the national security white paper, and interacting with netizens through social media.

"My family has been very supportive for my work, but I have owed my family too much, and now they need me more than ever," Yang said. He said he has no other plans for the future, and would first spend his summer with his family.

Typically, senior government spokesmen and women go into business or teaching after retirement.

Senior Colonel Wu Qian, 44, has been appointed as the new director of the ministry's information office. He was previously deputy director and has been a spokesman since 2015.

He graduated from the People's Liberation Army Institute of International Relations in 1995 and has also been a counselor at the ministry's foreign affairs office before joining the information office.