

Profile

A Life of Service

By Marie Glasgow, *The Heron*

Some residents know Art Williams, the community leader, who retired from the military in 1996 and quickly became active in Herons Glen.

Most current residents know Art, the watercolor artist. With retirement came the ability to pursue a lifelong dream. Beginner classes in watercolor were followed by painting with a variety of established artists to further develop his talent. Art shows and sells his watercolors at art shows in Herons Glen and art galleries in Southwest Florida. Seeing the need to provide “opportunities for residents to develop their artistic interests in fine arts,” Gary Olson, Jean Purins and Art formed the Herons Glen Artist Group.

However, this profile is about Art Williams, Army Lieutenant General and Commanding General of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

A native son of Watertown, N.Y., his long military career began serendipitously at St. Lawrence University in the field house where he came to sign up for classes his freshman year. Art had a full scholarship but there was a need to cover basic living expenses. A large banner “ROTC we pay you \$27.90/month” caught his eye. He asked what ROTC meant and was told to come to class on Monday and find out.

After three years Art obtained a Bachelor of Science degree from St. Lawrence; two more years at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) resulted in a Bachelor of Civil Engineering. The young civil engineer then began his two-year obligation in the military and every time the two years were almost completed, Art re-enlisted. His education also continued. Art holds a Master’s Degree in Civil Engineering and Economic Planning from Stanford University, RPI awarded him with an Honorary Doctorate of Engineering, and he is a graduate of the U.S. Naval War College.

Art’s 34-year military career began with an Army Engineer Officer commission in 1960. An engineer officer is responsible for providing full support to the wide range of engineering duties, which include building structures, developing civil works programs and even providing combat support. This was followed by 18 years in command of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). This military service took Art and his family across the continental United States, Hawaii and foreign countries including Germany and Korea. There were so many moves that all three of his children attended three different high schools in their last three years. For Art the move to Herons Glen upon retirement was his 29th relocation in 35 years. He gives a lot of credit to having a strong spouse and resilient children.

The last four years before retirement, Art was commanding general of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), a federal agency with approximately 37,000 civilians and soldiers, under army command, delivering engineering services in more than 90 countries. As our nation’s “environmental engineer” the USACE is the number one federal provider of outdoor recreation; owns/operates more than 600 dams; operates/maintains 12,000 miles of commercial inland navigation channels; maintains 926 coastal, Great Lakes and inland harbors; restores wetlands such as Florida Everglades; and owns/operates 24 percent of the U.S. hydropower capacity or 3 percent of the total U.S. electric capacity. The USACE also works to strengthen our nation’s security by building and maintaining America’s infrastructure and providing

military facilities where our service members train, work and live. By providing technical and construction support to more than 100 countries, the Corps protects America's interests abroad while promoting stability and improving quality of life.

Art served two tours in Vietnam in the late '60s. He vividly remembers coming back from deployment in uniform, alone, and being met by protestors calling him names, spitting at him. He is proud now when he sees a very different homecoming. Our soldiers return with their unit, there are banners welcoming them home, and citizens thank them for their sacrifice and service. Art is concerned that less than 0.45 percent of the current population serves in the U.S. military. This means that many units and individuals have had too many deployments. During WWII 8 percent served, and during Vietnam, 11.4 percent were in the military. But the modern volunteer army is the way to go with the higher standards that were established for enlistment. We just need more people willing to serve, willing to give to their country. During WWII, everyone participated in the war effort: men enlisted, women went to work in factories, children saved scraps of foil, everyone lived on rations. Could we do it again? Art likes to think we could.

Would Art do it all over again? Yes! Yes to deployments, yes to building schools and hospitals in Middle Eastern and Third World countries. Yes, even with the multiple one-year periods of being away from his young family. Only about 5 percent of his experience warrants a firm no. Those were times when his responsibilities got very political.

As you look at Art's military portrait, notice the gold castles on his lapel. The gold pin belonged to Army Gen. Douglas MacArthur who served in the Corps from 1903 to 1917. He presented his castles to Major Gen. Sverdrup who served as chief engineer on MacArthur's staff in the Southeast Pacific area in WWII, saying that the castles "deserved to be worn by a real engineer." After 30 years, the gold castles were presented to Lt. Gen. W.C. Gribble, who then announced they would be handed down to his successor at the conclusion of Gribble's tenure as the 43rd chief of engineers "thus initiating an important tradition as well as discharging...trust" to his successor. Lt. Gen. Arthur Williams, the 48th chief of engineers, wore the castles from Aug. 24, 1992 until June 6, 1996.