

# LAKE PLACID NEWS

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## **ROTARY CLUB NEWS: Rotary puts spotlight on the colonel**



Col. Kerry Gates (Photo provided)

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A Rotary member since 2011, Col. Kerry Gates and his wife Carol, moved to Lake Placid in 2008. After coming up to the Adirondacks for many years to ski, they decided to make it their permanent retirement home.

“Colonel Gates” as he is affectionately known to his Rotarian cohorts joined the club as a way to get involved in the local community.

In a recent interview he shared a few escapades of his illustrious 24-year career in the U.S. Army retiring as a full Colonel.

When did you know you wanted to join the army?

Army life was in my blood. Both my father and grandfather were doctors in the army.

It was December 1941, and we were living in Hawaii. I was 7 years old and recall the Japanese flying over our house. The aircraft were about 50 feet off the ground when they started shooting. It was then that I decided, a life in the army was my calling. And I never looked back.

Because of the army lineage, there was an expectation I would follow the family tradition and become a doctor. Instead I opted to become an engineer.

I don't think my father ever forgave me for that. He expected me to be a third-generation doctor. It was my brother who took that route instead.

What was a highlight of going to West Point?

West Point changed me from becoming a professional French horn player to a second Lieutenant.

When I graduated in 1957, I thought that the Corps of Engineers would give me the opportunity to get a PhD. There were many promises made, but instead, I got a master's degree.

Where were you stationed after graduation?

I was stationed at Fort Belvoir in Fairfax County, Virginia, which at the time was the headquarters for the Corps of Engineers. They gave us a three-month course in digging up roads and putting roads back down. We had to learn how to do anything attached to a combat battalion. Road maintenance was critical to get the troops moving forward, quickly.

What did you do in Vietnam?

When the Pentagon assigned me to Vietnam, an amusing thing happened. I was Captain Gates in the morning and Major Gates in the afternoon. This accelerated promotion served me well in Vietnam.

I was originally assigned to the 864th construction battalion, but soon after my arrival was promoted to the general staff in construction management. We were stationed at Cam Ranh Bay located at an inlet of the South China Sea on the southeastern coast of Vietnam, about 180 miles northeast of Saigon. Our major responsibility was airfield construction.

Interestingly, the South Vietnamese weren't known for being combat troops. They raised crops, rice, and vegetables. It was the North Vietnamese who protected the rest of Vietnam from the Chinese.

A meaningful part our interview was Colonel Gates enthusiastically sharing his formal military uniform and the significance of all the medals and ribbons.

However, the real pride and joy, was showing off his amazing collection of 19th century weapons. From muskets to bayonets, the conversation went way over my head to capture the intricate details of the muzzles, stocks, magazines, swords, triggers and a whole lot more.

But that's material for another article.

During the COVID-19 pandemic the Rotary Club of Lake Placid now meets via videoconference on Thursday mornings from 7:20 a.m to 8:30 a.m. If you are interested in attending a meeting, please email [RotaryLakePlacid@gmail.com](mailto:RotaryLakePlacid@gmail.com).

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(Susan Friedmann is a member of the Rotary Club of Lake Placid in charge of publicity.)

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