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Eddie Belk: Retiring, “Embracing the Journey,” and Recalling His Service to the Nation’s Inland Waterways

By Tracy Zea, President/CEO, Waterways Council, Inc.

Mr. Edward (Eddie) Belk

retired from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) on July 31, 2025, after 38 years of service, most recently as the Corps’ Director of Civil Works, the highest civilian position within the federal agency.

While Waterways Council, Inc. (WCI) advocates, with its 175 member companies and organizations,

for a modern, efficient, well-maintained system of inland waterways and ports, it does so side-by-side with the Corps of Engineers. And among the Corps representatives WCI has worked with over the last 22 years, Eddie Belk has been a statesman, a problem solver who always sought solutions rather than “no” answers, and an industry partner who clearly understood that the Corps working with industry produces better results



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Eddie Belk (left) stands with Waterways Council, Inc.’s Chairman **Jeff Webb** at WCI’s 2024 Annual Waterways Symposium held in San Antonio, TX, where Mr. Belk was a speaker.

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than either going it alone. He has said that the Corps cannot be successful without sponsors and partners, which are “force multipliers.” And while success and accomplishments are important, Eddie is someone who values people and relationships even more.

He began his career in the private sector at engineering firms but always wanted to work on the Mississippi River, something he thought of as a “dream job.” He began with the Corps as a temporary mid-level government GS-9 position on a hydrographic survey crew on the Mississippi.

In that first position with the Corps, Eddie said he learned to embrace flexibility, adaptability and to be open to new ideas, advice he would later give to other Corps employees. He very much “embraced the journey,” and looked to the possibilities each new position and role within the Corps offered him.

In fact, his tours with the Army/Corps of Engineers in Iraq taught him to “not sweat the small stuff.” On his first tour, on the jet to Kuwait flying into a war zone, Eddie recalled this is what he signed up for and was called to do. Overcoming fear, not letting others down, refusing to fail, embracing commitment and follow-through gave him the grit he needed to hurdle the challenges.

Eddie’s view of the Corps as a complex water resources organization encompasses his many past roles, most recently informing a national perspective from Corps’ headquarters in Washington, DC in addition to a division or district view. He said his interactions with Congress and the Administration, no matter who was serving in the White House, had been very positive because those in office appreciate and respect what the Corps does for the country. He noted the Corps’ workload is at record, unprecedented levels, managing its eight mission lines for Civil Works: Navigation; Flood and Storm Damage Reduction; Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration; Hydropower; Recreation; Regulatory Permitting; Environmental Enhancement; and providing support to other federal agencies, state and local governments, and private entities on a variety of water resources-related issues.

In addition to these core mission areas, the Corps

provides a vital role in emergency response, particularly for natural disasters.

Referring to the Corps’ work as a “Silent Servant,” first coined by Deputy Commanding General for Civil and Emergency Operations Maj. Gen. Michael Walsh, Eddie acknowledges that despite America being a maritime nation, many people are unaware of what the Corps does. The U.S. maritime industry – its ports, waterways, and harbors – facilitates interaction with the world economically, and the Corps’ navigation work is front and center to that activity.

Its flood risk management is ever-critical given climate variability and more than 50% of the U.S. population living near a coast. Finding ways to harmonize and add value to ecosystem restoration has been key to the Corps, he said, and given that 25% of U.S. hydropower is produced by dams for growing urban centers raises the bar for the Corps’ work on that mission line.

He cited 260 million visitors to U.S. recreation sites over the last few years has generated more dollars than entry to Walt Disney World, so recreation drives the economic engine in addition to providing relaxation.

In his retirement, he plans to return to his home state of Mississippi, where his wife, oldest daughter and two grandkids are. He wants to travel and continue to work, whether it is to “hang out a shingle at an engineering firm or become a Walmart greeter, I am not a rocking chair guy,” he said.

As the Corps this year celebrates its 250th anniversary of service to this country, leaving the Corps is bittersweet for Eddie. His advice for anyone joining the Corps today is to stay humble, be kind, put people first and make time for them, choose people over things, be a positive force inside the organization, and uplift others to be enthusiastic and pursue opportunities.

Wise words from the wisest of men. We thank you, Eddie Belk, for your service to the Corps and to Waterways Council and its members, and for your stalwart commitment to always finding solutions.

** Some details drawn from the Corps’ July 11, 2025 [Inside the Castle Episode 162](#) podcast interview with Mr. Belk.*

