

DAKOTA IMAGES

In his career with the United States Army, Leonard ("Bud") Williams traveled the world. Retiring to his native South Dakota, he applied the leadership skills he had learned in the military to a second career in public service to his hometown.

Williams was born 6 May 1918 to Leonard B. and Minnie Barger Williams in Mitchell, South Dakota, where his father worked for the Milwaukee Railroad. Bud Williams attended the local schools and graduated from Mitchell High School in 1936. He participated in sports, the YMCA, and Boy Scouting, becoming South Dakota's first African-American Eagle Scout. Following graduation, he worked for a local automobile dealership before entering the United States Army.

During World War II, Williams served as a captain with the Twenty-fifth Infantry in the Pacific Theater. In 1950, he was called back to active duty in Korea and, later, in Viet Nam. Williams was a graduate of the Officer's Candidate School and the Army Command and General Staff College. His military honors included the Legion of Merit Award, the Army Commendation Medal, and the Bronze Star. He retired as a lieutenant colonel in 1968 and returned to Mitchell with his wife Georgia ("Bonnie") Watts, whom he had married in 1950.

In Mitchell, the couple became active in civic and church life. Bud Williams served as director of the Mitchell YMCA through 1974, followed by nine years as coordinator of student affairs for the Mitchell Area Vocational Technical Institute. In 1985, he won election to the city council. The next year, he ran successfully for mayor.

During his four terms as mayor, Williams became known for his open, common-sense approach to city management. Popular with his constituents, he ran for the office unopposed in 1988, 1990, and 1992. In recognition of his many contributions to the Mitchell community, especially its youth, the school district named a new elementary school after Williams during his last term as mayor. In 2001, Dakota Wesleyan University awarded Bud and Bonnie Williams honorary doctorates.

Bud Williams was a lifelong member of the Congregational United Church of Christ and was active in the Mitchell Rotary Club, Optimists, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and South Dakota Municipal League. He died on 6 March 2006 following a short illness.

—Betti Carol VanEpps-Taylor



Leonard ("Bud") Williams

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