

Honoring special group of South Tahoe veterans



Veterans residing at Barton's Skilled Nursing Facility, from left, Gaston Mariolle, Richard Elder, Ray Goodenough, Gale Parsons, Frank Duff and Chuck Newbre. Photo/Barton Health

By Kathryn Reed

"I think the military is one of the proudest things this nation has. It did more for me than I did for it."

Those are the words of Ray Goodenough.

He is one of six veterans living at Barton's Skilled Nursing Facility who was honored Nov. 10 – an early Veterans Day tribute. Also recognized were volunteer Jim Carpenter and hospital staff.

Being in the military is a life-changing experience for almost everyone who serves. It doesn't matter if they did so voluntarily or were drafted.

For the 88-year-old Goodenough, the Navy taught him discipline and how to be a man. At 14 he had run away from home in Lockport, N.Y. He lied about his age, trying to join the service. At 17 they let him in; this was after the bombs had been dropped on Japan.

World War II was a popular war for young men; where they saw a purpose and something worth fighting for, where the enemy was real and the cause understood. A sense of patriotism permeated the American culture in the 1940s.



Ray Goodenough wrote "Parallel Journeys" with his daughter, Kathy Rem. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Goodenough stayed nine years – until 1955 – which put him in the Korean War, too. He had plans to make a career of the military, but his wife at the time wanted a different life. Plus, they had two kids.

Mostly he worked on aircraft carriers where he had to manage the arresting gear to stop the planes as they landed. And while one time he got hit by a wire and flew 4 feet in the air, he was lucky not to be thrown overboard.

It was in 1972 that he moved to Tahoe. While he had met his second wife, Callie, just as he was leaving Orange County, it was two more years before they were married and they both

called South Lake Tahoe home. Together they founded Sierra Council on Alcoholism, Tahoe Turning Point, and both worked for O.P.E.N. – Ordinary People meeting Extraordinary Needs. She died earlier this year.



Nov. 11 is Veterans Day. Photo/LTN

Most of the residents at the SNF are WWII era vets – Gaston Mariolle was in the Navy from 1943-46, Chuck Newbre in the Army Air Corps from 1942-46 and Frank Duff in the Navy from 1944-46. Gale Parsons was in the Marines from 1968-71, and Richard Elder in the Army from 1957-59.

They each received a plaque noting their service that will be placed in their rooms.

For Jim Carpenter, it was having his mom sign for him at age 17 after high school to join the Air Force in 1962 that changed his life. He wasn't a bad kid, but lacked direction.

For the last eight years the veteran has been volunteering at the SNF.

In the military he was a crew chief – a jet mechanic – working on fighter planes. He served from 1962-66. Six months of that he was deployed, the rest of the time he was at Travis Air Force Base. He worked in the “alert barn” where with five-minutes notice he had to have the planes ready to be airborne.

In 1974 he moved to South Lake Tahoe with his wife and son. He worked in body shops; now he spends his summers detailing boats.

For Carpenter and Goodenough the military is still something they are proud of. Without hesitation they would recommend it for young men and women.

Like many who have served, talking about the experience takes some prodding, and even then the stories are limited. And that’s OK. They and those they served with know what they did. Theirs is a kinship that crosses military branches and generations.

Today, though, is when the rest of the country has the opportunity to acknowledge their service.