

VFW POST CELEBRATES 99 Y/O WWII VETERAN & BAY PINES VA VOLUNTEER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE –

MADEIRA BEACH, Fla. – May 23, 2017 – Veterans of Foreign Wars, Post 4256, celebrated the 99th birthday of one of its members: Mel Smith, a U.S. Navy World War II veteran who still maintains a weekly volunteer schedule at a local veterans' hospital. The event was attended by Smith's fellow VFW members, family and friends.

Smith joined the navy in 1944 and served on an LST (a large combat landing craft), throughout the Pacific including Okinawa, New Guinea and the Philippines. On January 9, 1945, Smith's LST was among a group of three such landing craft from which General Douglas MacArthur waded upon a beach in triumphant return to the Philippines.

Prior to joining the navy, Smith was a civilian welding contractor at Pearl Harbor. On December 7, 1941, he found himself in the midst of the Japanese attack and vividly recalls seeing the attacking planes up close. "They were coming right at us and we all hit the ground," he said. "They were so low," he remembers, "that I could see some of the pilots in the cockpits." Smith continued, "Though they looked like they were coming right at us, their targets were our ships in the harbor about a mile away."

Smith left the navy in 1946, and, using his service experience with diesel engines, worked for a truck leasing company for 23 years. In 1964, he bought 40 acres of land in Wisconsin. "There, I chopped down oak trees and, with that wood, built a house," he said.

Smith, a widower, has three children, eight grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Currently, Smith volunteers at the Bay Pines VA Hospital staffing the information desk at the facility's outpatient entrance. Since 2001, he has logged over 7,400 volunteer hours.

Asked what his secret to life is, Smith said, "Believe in yourself."



Mel Smith (center seated) is flanked by his daughter, Barbara Wright (left), and great-granddaughter (right) as friends and fellow veterans celebrate his 99th birthday at the Madeira Beach VFW.

Contact information:

Ron Mills, VFW Post 4256 Commander; email: HVFW1@tampabay.rr.com

John Kieffer, Adjutant/Communications Officer; email: johnkieffer@thevfw4256.org

12901 Gulf Blvd., Madeira Beach, FL 33708

Phone: 727-397-3767

Website: <http://myvfw.org/fl/post4256/>