

Smoot relishes LW life

Admiral discovers 'community' in retirement

By Susan Vanderpol
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Adm. Roland N. Smoot never knew what it was like to belong to a community until he came to Leisure World in 1966.

The Navy moved him around the world and the United States continuously from 1918 when he entered the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis until 1962 when he retired.

And, according to Adm. Smoot, that's why he has given so much of his time to Leisure World since moving in. His only regret is that he'll never be able to give back to the community what it has given him.

Leisure World resident of the month of May, Adm. Smoot was contacted by Administrator Robert L. Price the same week he moved into the community.

"Price asked me if I'd be organizing president of old mutual 12," Adm. Smoot recalled. "I met with Price and he told me what it was all about."

Adm. Smoot, 75, stayed with Mutual 12 until it assimilated to Mutual 2 and then served as president of the new mutual. Three years ago he was elected to the Golden Rain Foundation of Laguna Hills board of directors and is now winding up a year as GRF president.

What's next? Adm. Smoot learned last week that he has been elected to the Saddleback Community Hospital board of directors, a supervising agency that runs and administers the affairs of the hospital.

Adm. Smoot thinks highly of the directors he has worked with in the past three years on the GRF board.



Adm. Roland N. Smoot

"It's a cohesive, respectful board," he said, thoughtfully. "It has the total and soul objective of the community at heart." Adm. Smoot added that the board has a fine record of cooperation this year.

Adm. Smoot, 615-A Ave. Sevilla, is the first Leisure Worlder of the month to be nominated by residents of the community. An original oil portrait of the admiral has been commissioned and will be hung in the main rotunda of the sales pavillion during May. At the end of the month, it will be presented to Adm. and Mrs. Smoot in informal ceremonies.

A 1923 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, Adm. Smoot's early career included assignments to destroyers, submarines and battleships with duties about evenly divided between engineering and gunnery.

His later career was devoted to command at sea and personnel administration ashore. Duty at sea included command of two destroyers, two destroyer squadrons, a destroyer flotilla, a heavy cruiser, a division of cruisers and the Mine Force of the U.S. Pacific Fleet.

Adm. Smoot recalls, during World War II, when he had to swim out from one ship in Okinawa because the destroyer "sunk under me." At the time, which was the height of the kamikaze attacks, he was in command of a screen of 32 destroyers.

But Adm. Smoot doesn't like to recall the bad things about the war, which he terms "very impersonal. If you live you are very lucky." He likes to talk about the good things. Like a reception in the Philippines when prisoners were released from the Japanese.

"We saw people that had been in prison for four years greet American friends for the first time."

Adm. Smoot was in Iceland, escorting convoys across the North Atlantic when World War II broke out. Here, he says "the main enemy confronted was the weather."

He shudderingly recalls one trip when the wind was so strong that the anemometer blew away at a 170 knot (190 mph) reading. "We were traveling seven knots into the wind, and 12 knots back. We couldn't see a thing and were totally lost. The runs around Murmansk, were frightful because of the weather," he said.

After Pearl Harbor, Adm. Smoot's first duty was in command of a new destroyer assigned to escort old battleships through the Panama Canal out to the Pacific where the fleet participated in the famous Jimmy Doolittle raid on Japan. Then followed the amphibious landings on Guadalcanal and many air-sea battles and nighttime forays in the prolonged campaign in landings at Leyte and Lingayen in the Philippines, where in command of a squadron of nine destroyers in the Suragao Strait, he directed a coordinated torpedo attack against an enemy battle line. In this battle, the furious and devastating kamikaze attacks began and destroyed six of the nine destroyers in Adm. Smoot's command.

Following this, Adm. Smoot commanded support of landings at Iwo Jima, Okinawa and finally the surrender of Japan. He witnessed the historical signing of the instrument of capitulation on the USS Missouri.

In his final four years of active duty, Adm. Smoot was assigned as

senior naval officer in the far east with the title of Commander Taiwan Defense Command. Here, his most important duties were those required from the collateral as assignment as senior U.S. military advisor to President Chiang Kai-shek.

Adm. Smoot met his wife, Sally in 1920. "She was what the Navy called a 'blind drag,'" Adm. Smoot chuckled. "I studied a lot at the academy and my roommate told me to get my nose out of my book and meet a friend of his girlfriend's."

"After meeting her, I never looked at another girl," he said. The couple was married in 1923.

"She was a seagull type of wife," Adm. Smoot said, explaining there are two types of Navy wives: seagull and turtle. "She lived in an automobile. Wherever I went, she followed with the kids and pots and pans and set up house where I was stationed," he said. The turtle type of wife settles in one community and waits for her husband to come home, he added.

The couple has two children, eight grandchildren and two great grandchildren.