

VETERANS DAY IN BEDFORD, 2016

MIKE ROSENBERG, CHAIR, BEDFORD SELECTMEN

We are observing Veterans Day with all of the right ingredients -- respect, appreciation, humility, admiration.

But at ground level, Veterans Day is so much more than gratitude and platitudes. Veterans Day is a collection of hundreds of thousands of stories about individual lives -- lives that were influenced by their military service. So permit me to take a couple of minutes to tell you about one of our neighbors.

Arland Reynolds grew up in Billerica and enlisted in the Navy right out of high school in 1964. He spent much of his four-year hitch at sea. The USS Markab was a repair vessel, sailing around the waters of East Asia to keep other American equipment working far from home.

Recruiters used to say "Join the Navy and See the World," and Arland actually did -- Japan, Hong Kong, the Philippines.

Then there was Vietnam. But Arland only visited Vietnam once -- on the refrigerator ship USS Zalima, delivering supplies to the harbor at DaNang. "None of us ever set foot on land," he said. They transferred cargo from ship to other ships in the harbor.

Mr. Reynolds left active duty in 1968 as a petty officer second class -- a sergeant, in more general terms.

He never saw combat, but remembers that upon returning to civilian life, "We were kind of shunned."

Arland re-entered service in 1982, joining the Navy reserve and serving in the Seabees as a mechanic for eight years until he stepped down for medical reasons.

Arland Reynolds was married with a family and a good job running a parts department in an Oregon car dealership. But tragic circumstances sneak up on people sometimes. Arland's wife became seriously ill; she passed away in 2009. Then there were serious family issues. And two years ago, this Vietnam veteran -- in his mid-60s -- ultimately found himself homeless.

For more than a year he scrambled to find shelter, often shuttled from one distant relative to another, when he was lucky. A nephew brought him back home to the Shawsheen

Valley. And a few weeks ago, about a mile north of right here, he moved into the sparkling new Bedford Green apartments at the VA Hospital.

“This is like heaven,” Arland said to me, looking around his apartment as the sunlight streamed in. “You know, I moved in here with just my clothes. Now I have everything I need. Massachusetts is the best place for veterans bar none. And I have been to quite a few.”

So more than 50 years after his active service, military service still means so much to Arland Reynolds and helps define who he is. “Veterans Day means a lot to me. Now, when you go someplace, people actually say, ‘Thank you for your service’.”

Thank you all.