

Granite Peak honors World War II veterans

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RIB MOUNTAIN — The main room of the chalet at Granite Peak Ski Area was dedicated Thursday to the 10th Mountain Division, a division of the U.S. Army that fought the enemy on skis during World War II.

The event brought together four members of the division, their families and a number of local skiing enthusiasts.

"It's wonderful," said Chuck Luedtke, 81. "I didn't expect this."

Luedtke was 18 when he joined the all-volunteer unit. To join, Luedtke and 21 other Marathon County men had to answer a questionnaire and provide three letters of recommendation.

Al Berens, 84, of Stevens

10th Mountain Division members

The following is a list of Marathon County men who fought with the 10th Mountain Division:

Dan Augustine
Russell "Spike" Berg*
Alex Blumentfel
Wally Burson
Clarence Butenhoff
Steve Clinton
Joe Duskey**
Grant Ford
Bryard Giroux
Harry Heinemann

Ervin Huckbody
Chuck Luedtke*
James Luedtke**
John Martin
Gilbert Oppen
Norm Peterson*
Philip Puchner*
Floyd Radant
Robert Reiche
John Schneider
George Schubring
Gerald Wiren**

* — soldiers injured
** — soldiers killed

Point joined the elite group for one reason.

"I liked to ski," he said with a laugh.

Berens, Luedtke and Russell "Spike" Berg, were a font of memories as they

stood near a glass case filled with their personal memorabilia. The large wall display contains skis, magazines, uniforms and photos.

As he looked at the items, Luedtke talked about the time

he was shot. He was climbing Monte Belvedere in Italy as the Germans attacked from the bottom of the mountain. A German soldier with a machine gun was hiding atop the hill, waiting for the U.S. forces to draw closer, Luedtke said. When they did, Luedtke's friend was shot.

"He was wounded badly and was yelling for me," Luedtke said. "I started to crawl up and was shot in my left hand. It hit me so hard it spun me around."

Luedtke continued to crawl to his friend and was shot in the back, only an inch or so from his spine.

Of the 22 men from Marathon County in the unit, three were killed in action and four, including Luedtke, were injured.

The division was deactivated in October 1945. Nationwide,



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10th Mountain Division veterans Russell "Spike" Berg, 82, from left, Chuck Luedtke, 81, Dr. Bryard L. Giroux, 82, all of Wausau and Al Berens, 84, of Stevens Point attended Thursday's ceremony at Granite Peak Ski Area.

the division lost 1,000 men and sustained 4,100 injuries. The 10th Mountain Division was reactivated Feb. 13, 1985.

The National Association of the 10th Mountain Division has more than 3,000 members in 21 chapters.