

100 years of Elks in Hawaii: World War II - an Elk is not forgotten

November 1941: Elks 616 practices the virtues of fidelity, charity, and brotherly love. A committee plans participation in Honolulu's Nov 11 Armistice Day Parade. Army and Navy brass promise to notify Elks in the military and facilitate their marching with 616. The Hickam Field band performs after a meeting. Meetings end with a Defense Bond¹ drawing. Weekly Lodge dances, heavily attended by Elks in the services, feature drawings for Defense Stamps.² The USO asks Elks to invite service men to their homes for Thanksgiving.

War Elks: In 1939-1945 meetings added 20-30, even 40 new members - 'war workers' and servicemen, mostly Sailors. Some servicemen were initiated for hometown lodges. A crew member joined 616, then proposed ship mates. The USS *Minneapolis*, *Lexington*, and *Yorktown* had many 616 Elks on board. It would have been hard to find a Pearl Harbor vessel, surface or sub, without at least one Elk aboard. Yard craft, oil barges, tugs, and destroyers all were home to Elks. By war's end over 40 vessel names were given as the address of Navy Elks. The Lodge was popular with civilian war workers and later with Navy men at the Ship Repair Unit and Salvage details cleaning up Dec 7th damage.

616 Elks also came from US Army and Army Air Corps bases: Hickam, Shafter, Schofield, and Wheeler. In 1939, they were career men who gave their occupation as "Soldier" on the Elks application form: officers, non-coms, and enlisted men, vets of World War I, and men who needed a job in the Depression.

By March 1942 Hawaii was awash in malihini, newcomers seemingly outnumbering residents. Socially, things were all mixed up with thousands of young men unaware of Hawaii's social rules AND away from home and the restraint of family for the first time. Men on shore leave thought "eat, drink, & be merry for tomorrow we die" and they did. Hotel Street beckoned with temptation: Club Hubba Hubba, the ZigZag and Kit Kat clubs. Sin competed with *very* chaste USO events for a sailor's leisure time. Word circulated that 616 was a place to relax, for afternoon dances (blackout remember), a place you could mention

when you wrote your mother or your wife, but still have fun and a drink.

Problem: By March 1944 the list of 616 Elks who appeared delinquent on dues was rising. The problem shot up in 1945-46 and topped out in 1947 when the Secretary "taking a deep breath" read on the Lodge floor 209 names dropped for non-payment. 616 knew some servicemen and civilians were POWs³ and unable to pay. Addresses read "Navy, Mail Ret'd", or Manila, Guam, Wake, and "Prisoner." Still, 616 was paying Grand Lodge a per capita fee on each name, money needed for programs to serve men who were in Honolulu.

The Lodge knew the status of POWs, or men listed as MIA/KIA only if Hawaii family or mainland relatives wrote. Information was slow in coming, even restricted. Hiding the true depth of the damage to America's fighting capacity, information on ships sunk on Dec 7th came slowly or not at all. No list of dead or sunken vessels was published.

Arizona's sinking was not confirmed in print until Dec 15. *Loose lips sink ships:* knowing when and where Navy vessels, and their Elks, might sail was discouraged. Ships sank; survivors



were reassigned and thrown back into battle with no time to tell 616. Dec 12, 1941: Military censors review all news media; casualties are no longer listed or given⁴. 1944-45: Elks didn't know the end of the War⁵, and their problem, was close. Rather everyone expected a lengthy ground invasion of Japan.⁶

Answer: 616 dropped men 3 payments in arrears, planning to reinstate returnees, forgive dues, and credit time missed to life membership. For some it worked: POWs returned; servicemen mustered out in Hawaii or stayed in the military and in 616; dozens transferred to home lodges.

Not everyone returned: 616 held a Lodge of Sorrow for those servicemen they knew were killed in action, plus a few non-battle related military deaths. POWs from 616's ranks included soldiers in Europe, civilian workers on Wake, and Honolulu businessmen and their families caught in the Philippines. Most POWs returned, but at least one died in prison. 1942-1946: Hundreds of Elks sailed away from Honolulu and did not return, their fate unknown to 616. As the war in the Pacific intensified more men were lost at sea and more memberships lapsed. The immense Pacific Ocean meant battles fought at sea resulted in a high level of MIAs in the Pacific compared to European battles. Punchbowl's Courts of the Missing hold 18,096 names and a similar Manila memorial 36,282 more. Web access to many records allows us to identify some Elks dropped in the 1940s as MIA/KIA/POW. We will remember these men in several ways in coming months. They represent the Elks who were lost, but whose fate is unknown to us, and those who were not Elks when they served but joined later. At the Dec 2, 2pm, Elks Memorial service we will honor these men, and all those they represent. Consider what they gave to you and give back a few hours to honor them.

Anita Manning, 616 Lodge Historian

References:

616 Membership records
616 Minutes 1939-1947
Allen, G 1950 *Hawaii's war years*
Hawaii Newspaper Agency clippings morgue
NewHampshireStateLibrary www.nh.gov/ww2
Star Bulletin Dec 1941, Jan 1942

Looking for info on your World War II vet?
Watch the Lodge Bulletin Boards (and soon on our web site) for web sources of vet info.

¹ Bonds were for a stated period. After war began, bonds were redeemable at war's end. After Japan's surrender, ads urged bond holders not to cash in. Government couldn't redeem all bonds at once.

² Stamps took a smaller investment, were pasted in a savings book, & value added up as the book filled.

³ POW - Prisoner of War, KIA - Killed in Action, MIA - Missing in Action

⁴ Later this policy would be reversed as Pres Roosevelt and others decided a knowing public was more committed to the war effort.

⁵ 2Sept45: Formal surrender signed on Missouri

⁶ 9Jun45: Premier Suzuki vows Japan will keep up fight, not accept unconditional surrender.