

100 years of Elks in Hawaii: World War II - Elks on Wake Atoll

Because of the mid-Pacific dateline Dec 7th and World War II came for some Elks on Dec 8th. For 2 Elks and dozens of Hawaii citizens the first battle of the war began Dec 8th and lasted 16 days.

Good Luck becomes Bad:

Early in 1941 Elks 616 member Elmer Puccetti, initiated May 24, 1940, was hired as Mechanic 1st Class on a job that sounded good. Great salary, free transportation to the job, room & board included. There wasn't much to spend your money on, so you could save plenty. He'd be working on Wake for the new mega corp - Contractors, Pacific Naval Air Bases (CPNAB). The consortium of big construction firms had contracts to build up military bases across the Pacific as war raged in Europe. When he got the job, he considered himself lucky. It turned out Brother Puccetti's luck was all bad.

Born July 24, 1906, in the 1920s Puccetti emigrated from his birthplace, Lucca, Italy. In America life looked good and like many who made the journey, he acquired an American name. Now he was Elmer. By 1928, Elmer Puccetti was working on ships between Hawaii and the west coast. In 1936 he rose to Assistant Engineer on Matson's SS *Mauna Loa*, now a naturalized citizen of his adopted country. Still at sea in 1939, he traveled to California, New York, and Havana, Cuba, on the SS *Maui*.

Recruiters for the CPNAB were signing up US citizen cooks, stewards, boat crews, and craftsmen all across the mainland, and in Hawaii. The USS *William Ward Burrows*¹ transported workers to Wake periodically and new recruits got free workers-hotel room & board while waiting in Honolulu. Elk Theodore Granstedt would have spent time at such a hotel while waiting for transport to Wake.

Born Jan 17, 1909, in Scandia, KS, the first son of Theodore and Emma Granstedt, Ted was initiated Oct 3, 1941. The young man who in 1930 declared himself a "free lance actor" signed on with CPNAB as a carpenter. He probably was on the *Burrows*' last trip arriving on Wake November 11.

December 8, 1941:

In coordination with the Pearl Harbor attack, Japanese aircraft carrier based planes, destroyers, and patrol boats attacked Wake Atoll. The US Marines, Navy, and Army personnel joined by civilians like Elks Elmer Puccetti and Theodore Granstedt repulsed that attack and many more. Granstedt helped load a 5' cannon that, sighted by a Marine, sank a Japanese destroyer. What was to have been an easy win for the Japanese military became very costly²: 900-1000 dead, 2 destroyers, 1 submarine, 2 patrol boats sunk, and 21 planes disabled. American losses: 49 military, 75 civilians, 12 aircraft. Among those who died were 4 Hawaii residents: Paul J. Gay Jr. (Wilhelmina Rise Clerk), Ralph Higdon (Kalihi Steel worker), Robert Kapihe (Kalihi Tug Operator), and Herschel Peterson (Kailua Steel worker). When Wake finally surrendered, Dec 23, 1941, Japanese forces treated military and civilians harshly.

Aftermath:

Granstedt and Puccetti were part of a group held back on Wake as forced labor to clear battle debris and finish some construction projects. Oct 1942, when the 2 Elks and others were sent to POW camp Fukuoka 18 Sasebo, a group of prisoners were kept on Wake for more work. As food became scarce³ and Allied invasion seemed close, those Wake prisoners were executed by the Japanese Oct 7, 1943. The commander would be hung by American forces when the story surfaced after capture of the atoll, Sept 4, 1945. The executed included Honolulu's Henry C. Ling (laundry), Willis C. Stone (cook), and Harry T. K. Yuen (messman).

<p>● RE-ENFORCING ROD MEN</p> <p>● CARPENTERS</p> <p>Men now employed on national defense will not be acceptable. Positive evidence of citizenship required.</p> <p>Contractors</p> <p>PACIFIC NAVAL AIR BASES Ala Moana, opposite Pier 4</p>
<p>Nov-Dec 1941: Honolulu newspaper want ads noted applicants must be US citizens not already in defense jobs.</p>

In Japan, Granstedt and Puccetti were forced to quarry stone to build Soto Dam. Puccetti described a few years earlier as 5 ft 6 in, 180 lbs, would die Mar 12, 1943, of starvation, overwork, and pneumonia. Other Hawaii residents also died in prison: Mark B. Franklin (Palolo Mechanic), Ah Chong Kahinu (Tug Operator), and Charles E. McCulley (Saratoga Rd Steel worker). Granstedt remained a prisoner, moving to Camp 1 Fukuoka, Kyushu Apr 1944.

Return:

After the war Elmer Puccetti's ashes were claimed by family and he is buried in California. July 10, 1953, the remains of 44 Marines, 3 Navy, and 131 civilians were interred as a group at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, Punchbowl⁴. Remains continue to be found on the atoll in disturbed soil.

Aware of the men's status, but unsure of their return, in 1944 Elks 616 dropped Granstedt and Puccetti as members. Granstedt, and several other Hawaii citizens, survived prison, to be liberated Sept 14, 1945⁵. With back dues forgiven, Oct 1, 1946, Granstedt resumed 616 membership, but soon rejoined CA family. For a time he ran night clubs in San Francisco. Returning to Hawaii in mid-1950, he was among the first to give night club tours. Interviewed for the *Honolulu Advertiser* by a young Bob Krauss, Granstedt said he took about 100 tourists from show to show in Waikiki, about 4000+ a year. Ted reassured readers that *Aloha* was alive in Waikiki, relating kindnesses to a young office worker during her visit. In 1981, recognizing his service, the Navy gave him an "honorable discharge" awarding him World War II Victory and South Pacific Victory medals. Granstedt continued to grow his business and family in Honolulu until his death in 1985.

Anita Manning, 616 Lodge Historian

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¹www.history.navy.mil/danfs/w9/william_ward_burrows.htm

² Specifics on losses by both sides vary in different reports, but all agree the Wake defenders inflicted lopsided losses.

³ Allied forces fought past Wake, blockading reinforcements or resupply, but not attempting to fight for the atoll until war's end.

⁴ Map at <http://www.cem.va.gov/cems/maps/nmcp899.pdf>; pay your respects to the defenders of Wake at grave G68, easily found beside the drive.

⁵ Photos of liberation / reintegration home.comcast.net/~japanpow/Recovery/Recovery.htm