

100 years of Elks in Hawaii: World War II - Guam and beyond

In close coordination with the Dec 7th bombing in Honolulu, Japanese forces attacked American and British interests at Midway, Philippines, Malaya, Thailand, Shanghai, and Guam. Japan's goal was to disable or capture Allied equipment and bases, and so to supply Japanese forward troop bases -control oil and rubber production, plus land to grow food for Japanese troops. Elks would battle to keep these places and lose. Later other Elks would battle to retake the same ground.

Elks under attack - Guam: US Navy Water Tender, 1st Class Ernest Franklin **Eudy** was born Jun 21, 1909, in Cleveland, NC, to parents Mary Hill and Charles Ray Eudy. In the Navy and away from home, he was recommended to 616 by hometown Elks. Not long after his Aug 8, 1941, initiation, Eudy was assigned to the oil storage vessel USS *Robert L Barnes*¹ tied up in Guam's Apra harbor. When the Japanese began their attack on Guam Dec 8th, the *Barnes* was bombed and strafed at her moorings. Damaged and leaking she fell under enemy control with the capture of Guam Dec 10.² Eudy with many Elks in Guam's Lodge 1281 became POWs. He was held at Camp Chikko Osaka until liberation in 1945. At war's end, it appears Eudy wasted no time speeding back to North Carolina to marry his sweetheart Margaret. Dropped from 616 in 1944, on his return to Honolulu his dues were forgiven and he was reinstated to Elk membership. Eventually he moved to California where he died in 1965.

Arthur William Soule - USS *Langley*: Lt Com Arthur Soule was born in Honolulu, Apr 14, 1898, first son to Arthur L. and Mercedes Soule. Between 1910 and the start of World War I, the family relocated to California living with his mother's family. After World War I service in the Merchant Marine, work in a California sugar factory sent him back to the clean, open ocean where he rose to 1st officer then Captain. Initiated as an Elk in May 1921 during a Honolulu port call, Soule became familiar to 616 Elks. A member of the Naval Reserve in Dec 1941, he left the Merchant Marine to join the Navy. Assigned to the USS *Langley*,³ he was quickly in battle.

Feb 26, 1942, carrying Army fighter planes to Indonesia⁴ the *Langley* with the USS *Pecos*, was attacked by Japanese planes and damaged beyond escape. With the planes returning, aware sailors were still on and around the *Langley*, commanders made a hard decision. Accompanying destroyers were ordered to withdraw to fight another day, and to sink the *Langley* to keep it out of enemy hands. The Allies had precious few ships after Dec 7th and could not afford to fight sea battles with low chances of success. Worse would be to give the enemy a ship that could be made battle worthy. Feb 27, 1942, when the order came to captains of the destroyers to sink the *Langley*, Lt Com Soule and a few men were "in a tiny rubber life raft" alongside the ship. Almost certainly the men were killed in the blasts sinking the ship. A year later, through a chance San Francisco meeting with a *Langley* survivor Soule's family learned of his efforts during the battle, his selflessness in evacuating sailors, and lifting others to safety.

In Lodge meetings 1942-1945 *Sickness & Distress* informed members of a son wounded or an Elk POW. April 12, 1942, the Minutes record "member 2017" was reported as a POW⁵ and Soule's relative Bill Lederer⁶ announced his MIA status. Family held out hope in 1942 and 1943, but the 1944 need to trim the large list of members in arrears for dues, forced Lederer and others to face that Soule would not return. Elks 616 held a Lodge of sorrow and placed his name on the bronze plaque in the Lodge room. Awarded a Purple Heart, Brother Soule is remembered at the Tablets of the Missing at the Manila American Cemetery in the Philippines.

Robert M. Sprague USS *Houston*:

Chief Machinist's Mate Robert Sprague, was born Jan 7, 1903, Madison, WI, to George D. and Grace M. Sprague. By 1910 the family had relocated to New York. Later a young Robert moved to California and joined the Navy. By 1940 Sprague made Chief Machinist's Mate on the USS *Childs* (DD-241). The *Childs* was assigned to Pearl Harbor, arriving June 29, 1939, but kept busy at stations off Midway, Wake, and Guam. Shortly after the *Childs*' return to Pearl, Sprague became a 616 member, initiated Sept 27, 1940. He didn't get much time to use his membership benefits as the *Childs* sailed to the Philippines, Oct 1, 1940. The *Childs* was at Cavite Navy Yard for repair and survived the Japanese attack Dec 10, 1941.

Sprague at some point transferred to the largest U.S. warship in the Far East, USS *Houston* (CA 30)⁷. The *Houston* was involved in several battles after Dec 7th. An enemy bomb disabled her aft gun turret Feb 4, 1942, but she remained in combat, taking part in the Battle of the Java Sea. In the Sunda Strait, between Java and Sumatra, on the night of Feb 27 - Mar 1, 1942, she was hit by multiple torpedoes, rolled over and sank causing 693 deaths, including Chief Machinist's Mate Robert M. Sprague.

The fate of USS *Houston* and Elk Sprague was not known for months, and an accounting of missing vs. POWs could not be made until war's end. Awarded a Purple Heart, he joined Brother Elk Arthur Soule and 36,282 other Southwestern Pacific casualties on the Tablets of the Missing in Manila. The crew of the *Houston* also is recalled at Melbourne, Australia's Shrine of Remembrance.

Unaware of his status, 616 dropped Sprague from membership in 1944.

Anita Manning, 616 Lodge Historian

References:

616 Membership records and Minutes
Advertiser/Star-Bull news morgue, University of Hawaii, Hamilton Library
ancestry.com and familysearch.org
Honolulu city directories & phone books
National Archives World War II Archival Databases
www.abmc.gov/search/wwii.php
www.navsource.org/archives/09/02/0203n.htm

¹ Read about the *Barnes* AG-27, see photos <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/sh-usn/usnsh-r/id3088.htm>

² Read Military Governor's report on surrender http://www.mansell.com/pow_resources/guam/mcmillan-rpt.html

³ Read about the *Langley* CV-1, see photos <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/sh-usn/usnsh-l/cv1.htm>

⁴ Then Netherlands East Indies, a Dutch colony

⁵ Of this member we know nothing else.

⁶ Famous as a fight promoter and for his downtown bar, PER Lederer was Lodge Secretary and Club Manager for many years.

⁷ Read about the *Houston* <http://www.history.navy.mil/danfs/h8/houston-ii.htm>