

## 100 years of Elks in Hawaii: World War II - 1942 Allies (& Elks) bite back

After a bad first half of 1942, the U.S. achieved a decisive World War II victory and a turning point in the Pacific at the Battle of Midway, Jun 4-5, 1942. The year looked better in Aug and Sept with the first substantial U.S. offensive landings at Tulagi and Guadalcanal, in the Solomon Islands. The US was making progress, but at a great price. When word reached Honolulu, Elks took notice. During a Lodge meeting, Brother Sherry reminded members of “the boys who had been and were in the Solomons engagement.” Some of “the boys” were 616 Elks.

Lt JG **Glenn D. Wood** was born Oct 12, 1905, in Tower Hill, IL, to parents William A., a coal miner, and Jessie, a 33 year old mother who had lost one child in infancy. It was a busy household of boys: two older brothers, one already hired out to “odd jobs,” and 3 years later twin brothers. Life as a coal miner was hard and dangerous. Glenn Wood decided life in the US Navy was a better choice. It was a choice that brought him to Honolulu, where he was working as a pay clerk. He was initiated as a member of Elks 616 May 12, 1933. He paid dues promptly through Feb 22, 1942, and then payments stopped. Knowing only that Wood was assigned to the USS *Wasp* (CV-7), 616 dropped him as a member in 1944.

What the Lodge couldn't know was that after several Atlantic missions, as the war in the Pacific became more intense, and as many ships were lost in sea battles, USS *Wasp* was dispatched to join the Pacific Fleet. Sailing on Jun 6, 1942, for San Diego to take on more aircraft she arrived off Tonga Jul 18<sup>th</sup>. She participated in the Aug 1942, Guadalcanal invasion. The *Wasp* fought to hold the island as the Japanese struggled to recapture it. Sept 15, 1942, while south of Guadalcanal, USS *Wasp* was hit by 3 torpedoes from a Japanese submarine. The strikes hit nearly full gasoline tanks and ammunition magazines. Planes triced up in the hangar overheads fell and landed on others on the hangar deck. Fires broke out almost simultaneously in the hangar and below decks. Explosions had disabled fire fighting equipment. As the ship listed to starboard, oil and gasoline, poured onto the sea and caught fire. Finally "abandon ship" was given and with all wounded and able seamen transferred, the *Wasp* was sunk by 5 torpedoes from her own escorting destroyer. Battle casualties totaled 193, including Elk Glenn Wood, listed as Killed in Action.

Among the vessels fighting in the Guadalcanal battles was the minesweeper USS *Vireo* (AM-52) given as the address of at least four 616 Navy Elks. **Chief Edward J. Serra** (initiated Oct 10, 1941) served on the vessel which came to Pearl Harbor in late 1940. Serra was a strong 616 recruiter. Among his recruits were Fireman 1st Class **Robert Lee McNair, Jr.**, Water Tender 1st Class **Harold R. Waldrop**, and Water Tender 1st Class **William E. Willis**.

Elk **McNair** was born Dec 1, 1915, in Wendell, NC, to parents Etta and Robert Sr. Initiated into 616 May 23, 1942, we know very little about his life before he became an Elk. **Waldrop** was born Jul 23, 1908, in Palestine, IL, the third of four children to farmer Frank and wife Elnora. Between 1910-20, his father died and his mother remarried Perry, a wage laborer. Waldrop was initiated Jan 11, 1942, in the Elks 616's first post-December 7<sup>th</sup> meeting. **William E. Willis** also was initiated Jan 11, 1942, with fellow Water Tender Waldrop. Willis was born Apr 13, 1916 in Russell, KY, second son to Fannie Odessa and railroad worker Bert Willis.

The *Vireo* left Honolulu Aug 27, 1942, for the Guadalcanal fight. After initial landings on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands on Aug 7, 1942, fighting was intense and American planes needed gasoline and bombs. The *Vireo* and other vessels were towing barges loaded with this explosive combination when attacked by Japanese planes Oct 15. Under attack, the *Vireo* crew was ordered to abandon ship and they were taken on board the *Meredith*. Almost immediately after the *Vireo* crew boarded, the *Meredith* was attacked by 35 carrier-based Japanese planes using bombs, torpedoes, and

bullets. The *Meredith* sank rapidly taking most of the doubled-up crew with her. Only 63 men survived the attack and 3 days in the open sea with sharks before rescue. Elks McNair and Waldrop were not among the survivors.

Willis came to Honolulu on the USS *Vireo* and was serving on her on Dec 7, 1942. Later he was assigned to the USS *Barton* (DD-599) after she was commissioned May 1942. The *Barton* went directly into the Pacific fighting: in Oct at the Battle of Santa Cruz and then Nov 13, 1942, in the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal off the Solomons. In that battle, the *Barton* was struck twice by torpedoes: in the forward fireroom, and seconds later in her forward engine room. As a Water Tender, Willis was almost certainly below decks. Men on the nearby USS *Fletcher* (DD 445) reported the *Barton* "simply disappeared in fragments." 86 men aboard, including Elk Willis, were lost.

Ship sailings were not announced in Honolulu and men were not to tell friends they were leaving. "Loose lips sink ships" was the motto. 616 might guess the men had left and people who worked at "Pearl" could certainly see a ship was missing, but where it had gone and what battles it participated in were only learned months later. Unaware of why dues payments by McNair, Waldrop, and Willis had stopped, Lodge 616 dropped all three men from membership in 1945. All three were awarded a purple heart and are remembered on the Manila American Cemetery's Tablets of the Missing.

Although in March 1943 Brother Serra was reported to 616 as MIA, the report proved false. He survived the *Vireo* sinking and served on the USS *Intrepid* CV-11, and continued as a 616 member until 1953. He retired to Florida where he passed away in March 1978.

Anita Manning, 616 Lodge Historian

References:

616 Membership records and Minutes  
familysearch.org and ancestry.com  
National Archives World War II Archival Databases

Read / see photos of *Vireo*: <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/sh-usn/usnsh-v/am52.htm> and at <http://www.history.navy.mil/danfs/v3/vireo-i.htm>

Read / see photos of *Wasp*: <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/sh-usn/usnsh-w/cv7.htm> and at <http://www.history.navy.mil/danfs/w3/wasp-viii.htm>

Visit the Manila American Cemetery & Memorial at <http://www.abmc.gov/cemeteries/cemeteries/ml.php>