

100 years of Elks in Hawaii: World War II - Mysteries and Secrets

Honolulu 616 was often unaware of World War II Elk deaths, because family didn't know to report the loss. The post Dec 7th evacuation of service men's wives¹ to the US west coast also hurt communication. As 616 learned of some war deaths, Lodges of Sorrow were held. Yet even these cases left unanswered questions.

War creates mysteries

Member **Hugh F. Cook**'s death is a mystery. Member Cook was born Aug 16, 1901, Joliet, IL, the son of Gayle and Fannie Cook, both Tennessee transplants. Hugh joined the US Navy in San Pedro, CA, and rose to Chief Water Tender on the USS *Portland*. He was initiated Sept 13, 1942, while his ship was in port. He did a stint with the Shore Patrol, but must have been back at sea Dec 1943. At the Lodge meeting Jan 23, 1944, the Secretary announced his death. The lodge learned from family only that the death "happened in some isolated spot in the Islands south of here." A lodge of sorrow was held and his name was inscribed on the Lodge room plaque. Military records mark his death as Dec 19, 1943, but give no location. The date follows the Dec 15 US troop landing in New Britain, Solomons. Perhaps this is the "isolated spot in the Islands" where Cook died. Today he rests in Punchbowl's National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific,² grave A493.

We can't reconstruct some events because of incomplete information or nicknames. The Minutes report that "**Chief Smith**" was Killed in Action some time before the report reached Elks 616 in Sept 1943. We know "**Bill Marshall**" was a member of the Antlers, a group for young men planning to become Elks. In the Army Air Corps, he was shot down over Germany, and became a POW in late March 1944. Elks 616 learned of his status and planned to propose him for Elks membership in absentia. Limited information, common and nick names mean the story is unfinished for Chief Smith and Bill Marshall.

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Even when Elks 616 did learn of the death or wounding of a military member during World War II the report might be frustratingly cloaked in secrecy.

Minutes, Apr 25, 1943, report the death at Wheeler Field of Elk **Francis C. Mabry**. 616 could not learn how or why Mabry, a civilian, died. Born 1921 in CA, Mabry listed his occupation as 'Firefighter, Wheeler Field'³ when initiated Dec 13, 1942. We can speculate that he died as a result of his work, but news censors quashed reports of disasters. Elks held a Lodge of Sorrow and inscribed his name on the Lodge room plaque. Lodge officers were frustrated that they were not allowed to attend the funeral on base or visit the grave. After the war, Mabry was moved to Punchbowl, grave P562. Today we can visit and express our appreciation.

In late Jun 1943, the 616 Secretary learned member **Thomas Henry Cary**, Shipfitter First Class, died at Pearl Harbor Jun 21. No explanation of his death, burial on base, and Elks forbidden to attend the funeral. Cary was an unlikely sailor. Born in Montana, Feb 22, 1921, he migrated to Bellingham, WA, where he joined the Navy to see the world. He spent time on the USS *Yorktown* (CV-5), but left the ship before the May 1942 Battle of the Coral Sea, and June

1942 Battle of Midway sinking. Initiated Dec 13, 1942, Thomas Cary had less than a year to enjoy his membership. He is buried at Golden Gate National Cemetery, CA. He has company. His boss - Adm. Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet during World War II, is there, too.

Mar 1944, it happened again. **William F. Keller**, an electrical engineer and war worker, was proposed Jan 23, initiated Feb 27, 1944. The ink still damp on his membership card, Keller was reported buried Mar 3 at Halawa Naval Cemetery. 616 could get no details on his death. Born Apr 3, 1902, in Philadelphia, he was one of thousands who came to Hawaii to fill defense jobs. His local address was the Niumalu Hotel, a well known war workers single men's barracks. In Jan 1949, Keller joined his fellow Elks at Punchbowl, grave B989.

Combining mystery and secrecy is the Aug 13, 1943, death of member **George Sickett**. He left no traces in the public record - birth, parents, census - nothing. His Elk record claims his occupation as pipefitter, born New York City, Jul 16, 1901. Initiated Aug 23, 1942, he appears to have been a war worker, coming to the islands after Dec 7th. There was a postage stamp sized obituary, but it identifies him as a Pearl Harbor auditor living at an address not on his membership card. The Elks were told he died of burns from an earlier plane crash. Again a military funeral, this time at Red Hill cemetery. Elks not allowed. In Dec 1949, Elk Sickett moved to Punchbowl, grave P684. In a final burst of secrecy, Sickett's card is missing from the Punchbowl files. The volunteer assisting me said "this has never happened before." Whatever you were really doing during the war, George, we who benefited from your sacrifice, say "Thanks!".

Anita Manning, 616 Lodge Historian

References:

616 Membership records and Minutes
www.familysearch.org & ancestry.com
American Battle Monuments www.abmc.gov
National Archives World War II Archival Databases
Hawaii Newspaper Agency clipping morgue

¹ This was a hardship for Hawaii women married to servicemen as their support system was here. A few officers' wives with family 'pull' did stay, but many shipped to the west coast had real difficulties.

² Regional national cemeteries like Punchbowl are a post-W W II effort to bring service men closer to families from temporary war time burial. The Visitor's Center provides a map to locate graves.

³ Civilian firefighters continue on most Hawaii military bases. Thanks to John Clark, historian and retired Firefighter, for fire fighting info.