



1938-1958

Answering the Call

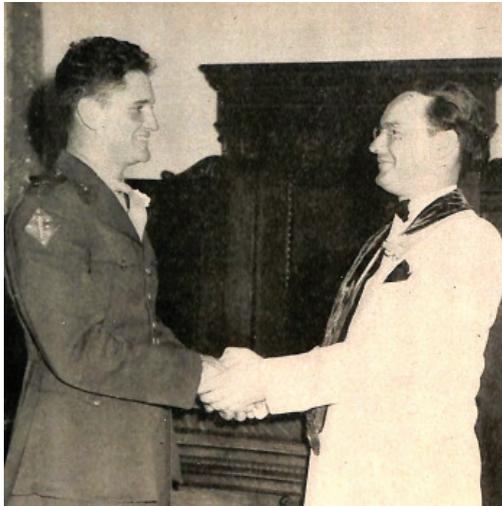


This photograph shows members of the Guadalcanal Lodge, a temporary lodge organized in the summer of 1944 by a group of Elks who were serving in the US armed forces and stationed on the Pacific island of Guadalcanal.

AS THE BENEVOLENT AND PROTECTIVE ORDER OF ELKS entered its eighth decade of existence, it became increasingly evident that the nation and world were in great danger. Germany's armies were amassing for another war in Europe, and Japanese troops were on the march in China. Although the United States was neutral at the outset of World War II, it was apparent that patriotic Americans would soon be called to the nation's—and the world's—defense.

In recognition of this fact, seven Past Grand Exalted Rulers were appointed to the Elks National Defense and Public Relations Commission during the 1940 Grand Lodge Session. The commission's goal was to organize the Order so that it could contribute to the nation's defense in the event of war. Local lodges and state associations across the country also established their own National Defense Committees, and much of the work in the coming years was undertaken by these groups.

The initial work of the National Defense Committee involved sponsoring a national patriotic essay contest and organizing and hosting public meetings that were focused on making Americans aware of



US Marine Corps Maj Joseph Foss is welcomed by Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Lodge ER John McDowell following his induction into the lodge in 1943. Foss received the Medal of Honor as a result of his heroic service as a pilot during the Battle of Guadalcanal.

the growing need for national defense. The Order also waived the dues of any members who entered the armed forces and encouraged Elks to support the nation's service members by providing them with entertainment, friendship, and medical and legal services.

Although the nation was not yet at war, in July 1941, the US government asked the Elks to help locate qualified young pilots to fly for the US Army Air Forces and assist in preparing these recruits for the rigors of aviation training. More than four hundred local lodges responded by actively seeking out pilots and hosting refresher courses to help them pass the army's rigorous entrance exams.

The Nation Goes to War

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor catapulted the United States into the war in December 1941, the Elks National Defense and Public Relations Commission was renamed the Elks War Commission. The commission immediately received \$25,000 from the National Memorial and Publication Commission and \$5,000 from the Elks National Foundation to help it in its work. It also received a \$5,000 donation from the Queens Borough, New York, Lodge. The commission then solicited contributions from all the lodges of the Order to help support the war effort. The commission's work was provided with further financial assistance in 1943 and 1944 when the Grand Lodge Sessions in each of these years approved a one-dollar per capita assessment on members of the Order.

One of the Elks War Commission's most ambitious programs involved the establishment of what it called Fraternal Centers. These facilities, which numbered 119 at the program's peak, were intended to serve as a home away from home for members of the US armed forces. They provided soldiers, sailors, marines, and members of the US Coast Guard stationed around the country with social activities, entertainment, and in some cases even temporary places to stay.

Given the Order's success with the army's pilot recruitment program prior to the war, the Department of War turned to the Elks in 1942 to help find pilots and ground crewmen to enlist in both the army and navy's air corps. In 1943, the Order was again asked to



These young men, photographed during a dinner at the Oakland, California, Lodge, were students in a refresher course that the Oakland Lodge hosted for young men seeking to enlist in the US Army Air Forces.



The Brooklyn, New York, Lodge's purchase of \$75,000 worth of war bonds was recognized when this P-51 fighter plane was renamed the *Spirit of Brooklyn Elks*.

help with recruitment. This time the government was looking for competent and patriotic mechanics for the US Army Corps of Engineers and the US Navy Construction Battalions. With the Order's assistance, the government was able to meet its recruiting goals months ahead of schedule.

In 1944, the Grand Lodge Session created the Elks Emergency Educational Fund and allocated \$25,000 to provide for the children of any Elk who was incapacitated or killed while serving during the war. The fund was increased to \$50,000 the following year and placed under the administration of the Elks National Foundation. (In 1954, the fund's mission was expanded to provide for the children of any Elk who lost his life or was incapacitated.)

By the war's end, more than eighty thousand Elks had served in the US armed forces, and Elks were represented at all levels of the war effort, right up to Commanders in Chief Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman, who were members of the Poughkeepsie, New York, Lodge and the Kansas City, Missouri, Lodge, respectively.

Throughout the war, Elks sent thousands of care packages to US servicemen and women. Local lodges encouraged their members and the public to purchase war bonds, and by August 1944, the lodges themselves had purchased a total of nearly \$22 million worth of war bonds.

Postwar

Following the Allies' victory, the Elks were among those American organizations that were attempting to deal with the war's tremendous costs. During the 1946 Grand Lodge Session, the Elks National Veterans Service Commission was created to carry on those activities of the Elks War Commission that were still needed and to provide comfort to wounded veterans in the nation's hospitals. The Order also provided \$250,000 to the Manila Lodge to rebuild its magnificent building, which was destroyed during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. Also in 1946, the Elks National Memorial was rededicated to recognize the sacrifices of WW II veterans.

During the 1948 Grand Lodge Session, the Elks of California donated \$26,000 worth of deer hides that were distributed to twenty-one veterans hospitals to be used for therapeutic activities for veterans. This was the beginning of the Elks Veterans Leather Program, which continues to accept donated deer hides to make leather gloves for veterans who use wheelchairs and craft kits for veterans. During the same session, the Order recognized the renewed danger posed by Communist subversion, and the Grand Lodge amended the statutes to require each new member to formally forswear membership in the Communist Party or any other organization dedicated to the violent overthrow of the American form of democratic government.

In 1949, the Veterans Service Commission reinstated the Fraternal Center program, locating the centers near many large military bases. By the beginning of the Korean War, twelve such centers existed across the country to provide service men and women with various types of comfort. By 1958, only six Fraternal Centers were still operating, and after determining that they were no longer needed, the Veterans Service Commission closed these centers.

In 1952, the commission reported that it was actively assisting disabled veterans in 166 hospitals located across all forty-eight states. That same year, the Veterans Service Commission and all Elks of the Order bound themselves to a pledge to the nation's veterans, a pledge that today reads as follows: "So long as there are veterans, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks will never forget them."

Although an account of the Elks' unselfish work for the war efforts is crucial to any attempt to relate the history of the Order during the period between 1938 and 1958, the Elks also accomplished other important things during this time frame. In the later 1940s, for instance, an annual youth free-throw shooting competition that was initially organized by future Grand Exalted Ruler Frank Hise, of the

Corvallis, Oregon, Lodge, was quietly being adopted by more and more lodges across the state of Oregon.

In 1949, the Order established the Grand Lodge Youth Activities Committee to coordinate youth programs on a national level. The committee set May 1 as National Youth Day, and with the help of funding from the Elks National Foundation began a contest to recognize one outstanding young man and woman for their leadership each year. By 1958, this contest was drawing more than fifty thousand entries nationwide.

Between the years 1938 and 1958, the Order grew steadily. In 1950, Raymond Cole was initiated into the Bay City, Michigan, Lodge as the Order's one millionth member. The Elks began the period with nearly 480,000 members in 1938, and by 1958 could count more than 1.2 million Americans among their numbers. Having helped the nation through one of its darkest hours and recommitted itself to the service of the nation's veterans, the BPO Elks found itself rewarded with a renewed growth and energy that would carry it forward into the next decades. ■