

Local VFW salutes Silas Wainwright

Post named in honor of native who died at Pearl Harbor in '41

By Dick Sterling

Each year Gouverneur VFW Post 6338 holds a ceremony in recognition of Pearl Harbor Day. This certainly isn't the only service held in the area, but it holds special meaning to many Gouverneur area residents, particularly the large Wainwright family which, for the most part, is spread out across the Gouverneur and Macomb areas.

On Dec. 7, 1941 Pearl Harbor, Hawaii was attacked by the Japanese. The attack brought the United States into World War II. It also brought news of the first Gouverneur area resident to fall victim to the war. Silas Alonzo Wainwright, who was just 26 years old, was aboard the USS Arizona. The ship was sunk on that historic moment and Silas Wainwright was one of nearly 3,000 military who died or were wounded on that day.

Michael Webster, who was born three months before his Uncle Silas was killed in Pearl Harbor, directed Sunday's ceremony at the VFW post that now bears the name of his late uncle. He spoke proudly of Silas Wainwright, and what he stood for. The following is the text of Sunday's presentation.

"Sixty-two years ago the attack at Pearl Harbor brought the United States into World War II. Nearly 3,000 military personnel were either killed or wounded. One of those who lost his life was Silas Alonzo Wainwright (the namesake for this VFW post). He was the first young man to die for his country in the Gouverneur area."

"Silas was born June 22, 1915 to Weldon and Rachel Ingram Wainwright. He had ten brothers and sisters: Addie Sawyer, Harriet Chauffy, Weldon (Buster), Helen Mack, Abigail Webster Barney, Robert, Roberta McGregor, Helena Laidlaw, Bedorah Wells and Rachel Devendorf. Of that family only six remain." Mr. Webster identified Mrs. Mack as the only sibling in attendance. He presented her with a bouquet of flowers.

"Silas attended school in the Macomb area until entering the Dean High School in Gouverneur in September 1928. During his high school years, he was active in nearly every extra-curricular affair the school sponsored. He was outstanding in football, with that and the French Club being his favorites. "Si a jovial, sincere farm boy, was certainly a popular guy."

"After graduating from high school in 1932, he worked on the farm with his parents until Oct. 8, 1935 when he was sworn into the U.S. Navy at Albany. His three month boot camp was at Newport N.T.S., in Newport, Rhode Island. He then went to Providence, RI."

"At first his aim in the Navy was to become a doctor, but he later changed his goal to laboratory technician, specializing in X-ray work. When his enlistment was up he came home for a short leave and reenlisted for four more years on Oct. 7, 1939. He spent a great deal of time in various schools and hospitals on the west coast and, on March 3, 1941, he was assigned to the USS Arizona. He held the rate of Pharmacist's Mate First Class."

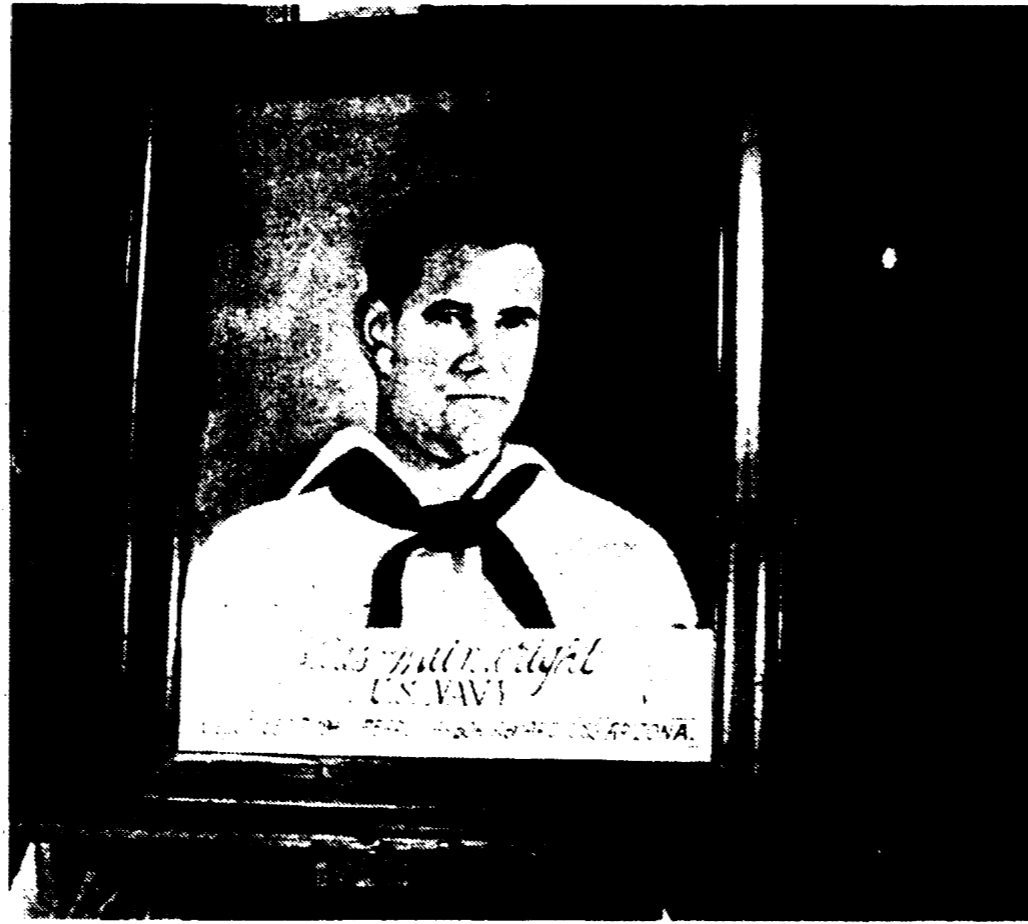
"He was aboard the USS Arizona on Dec. 7, 1941 when the attack came. He died along with the others aboard when the ship was bombed and sunk. It was in his memory that this VFW was named."

Mr. Webster continued: "My mother (Abigail) had made several entries in her diary about Silas. She wrote about him being home in 1939 and also about him being home in 1940. She referenced him being missing Dec. 7, 1941. 'His boat went down in Pearl Harbor and he was reported lost Dec 17, 1941.' She also noted that 'Mom and Dad were notified on the 21st of December'

Mr. Webster added that his extended family never let he or any of his cousins forget about who Silas



Members of the Silas Wainwright family took part in a special Pearl Harbor remembrance ceremony on Sunday at the Gouverneur VFW post. Seated above are (from left): Lisa Green, Krista Wainwright, Marlene Webster, Julia Fahrig, Helen Mack, and Virginia Roberts. Standing are: Richard Wainwright, Vernon Wainwright and Michael Webster. The family is pictured with a photo of the late Silas Wainwright, who was killed at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. (Dick Sterling photo)



SILAS ALONZO WAINWRIGHT

was. "In 1967 I was transferred to a Patrol Squadron based at Barbor's Point, Hawaii, and on several occasions I visited the Arizona Memorial. I photographed Silas' name inside the memorial, as well as on the Memorial Stone Monuments at the Punchbowl Cemetery near Honolulu. It was eerie. I never met him, but I felt I knew him."

"We of the Wainwright family remember Dec. 7, 1941 as a loss of a family member, as do many other families who lost loved ones there, but it is bigger than that, these losses are a loss to our country. Now we have new losses. If only nations could realize that peace is the attainable goal, their people, their most valuable resource, would not be lost senselessly."

Mr. Webster, an Industrial Arts teacher at Canton Central School, went on to say that he feels the importance of what happened at Pearl Harbor is no longer being taught in our public schools.

"With each new history book more and more information is being deleted. A few paragraphs here, a few more there, and before long the facts of what happened in 1941, and why, is lost. I asked groups of middle school and high school students what Pearl Harbor Day was all about. Only one student from each group could accurately tell me about the events of Dec. 7, 1941. I'm not blaming the kids. It's what we teach them. They could all remember the events of Sept. 11, but only two knew the significance of Dec. 7."

"We have to tell our children and grandchildren," said Mr. Webster. "We can no longer rely on history teachers to teach this important information. We cannot stop remembering what our servicemen do for us. I hope that we remember those fighting today better than we remember those who died at Pearl Harbor."

After the reception refreshments were served and those present, mostly veterans affiliated with the VFW and members of the Wainwright family, reminisced about Silas and the rest of the large family. In addition to the December remembrance observance the Wainwright family meets for other family gatherings. In addition to the good talk, good humor and good food, the family always takes the time to let the younger family members know about Silas Wainwright and the attack on Pearl Harbor. It's a piece of history that should be important to us all.



Michael Webster presents a bouquet to Helen Mack, the sister of Silas Wainwright, during a special ceremony Sunday evening at the Gouverneur VFW Post. Mr. Wainwright was killed aboard the USS Arizona during the attack on Pearl Harbor. (Dick Sterling photo)

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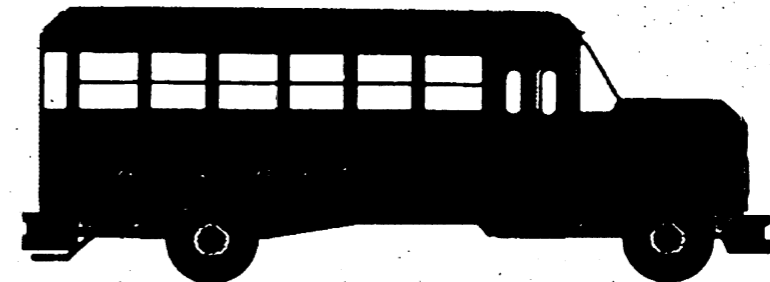
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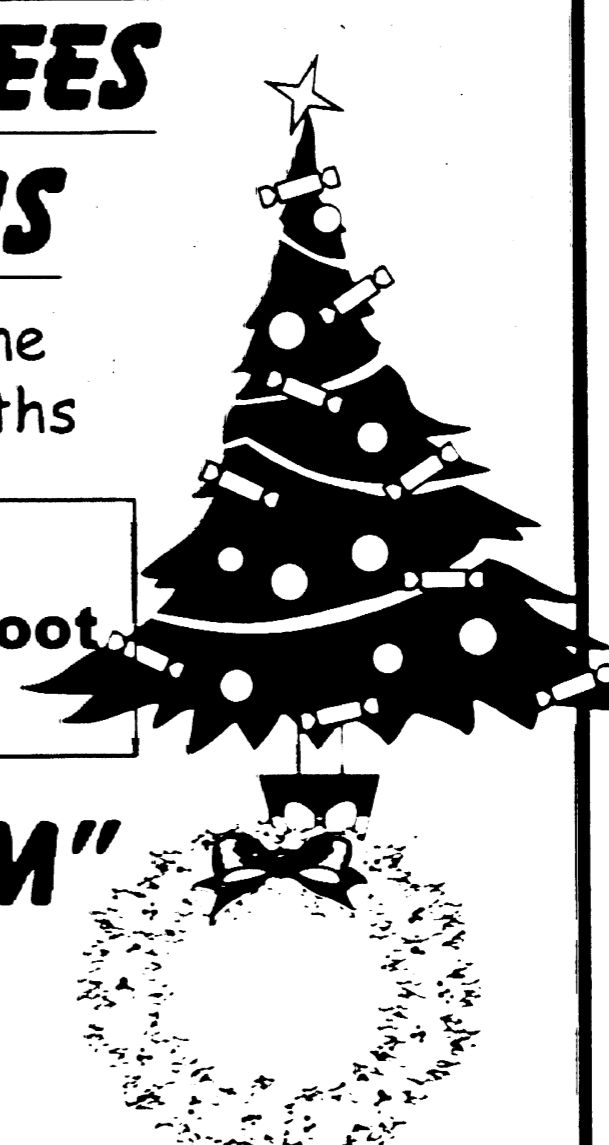
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