

Will Elder

Date March 23, 2010

Section(s) Obituary

Byline

Wilbur Mayo **Elder**, 86, of St. Simons Island died Sunday, March 21, 2010, at Hospice of Golden Isles in Brunswick.

Born Aug. 9, 1924, in Stapleton, Will was the son of a Methodist minister, the Rev. Edward Mayo **Elder**, and Bonnie Reynolds **Elder**. He was preceded in death by his wife, Maida, and brothers, Jack and Bill **Elder**.

Survivors include his son, Jim **Elder** of Puako, Hawaii; daughter, Judi E. Morgan and husband Gil of St. Simons Island; granddaughter, Molly M. Hammond and husband Mike of San Antonio, Texas; and grandsons, Wyatt **Elder** of Puako and Billy Morgan of Athens; as well as numerous nieces and nephews.

Will's life revolved around service to his country and love of his family. He enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in August of 1941 at the age of 17, attending boot camp at Parris Island, S.C. Shortly thereafter, World War II broke out, and Will sailed from San Diego, Calif., in the spring of 1942 to Pago Pago, Samoa, where he was a member of the 2nd Marine Brigade during the Pacific Theatre.

Later, back in the states at Fort Stewart in Hinesville, Will met his future wife, Maida Geiger of nearby Pembroke, at a base dance, one of many. They married in 1948, after his service as a Drill Instructor--back at Parris Island where it all began. They traveled throughout Georgia during Will's time as a young Marine recruiter, before moving to Portsmouth, Va., where their son was born in 1951. Immediately following Jim's birth, Will received orders to Korea, where he remained for 15 months during the Korean conflict. He received a battlefield commission during that time.

Upon Will's safe return, they lived in Quantico, Va., before receiving orders to Camp Pendleton, Calif. Their second child, Judi, was born there in 1956. Next he was stationed in Okinawa, Japan, followed by a stint in Camp Lejeune, N.C. His final and coveted orders took the family to The Kaneohe Bay Marine Corps Air Station on the island of Oahu in Hawaii in 1965. While there, he participated in an inspection tour during the Vietnam War; Will was seriously wounded, resulting in his receiving the Purple Heart.

It was difficult to say goodbye to the Corps and the island life in Hawaii, but Will retired as a Major in 1969 after 28 years in the USMC. His devotion to and love of the Marines stayed with him until the day he died. "Once a Marine, Always a Marine," indeed.

Among medals awarded during his service -- in addition to the aforementioned Purple Heart -- were the Combat Action Ribbon and the Presidential Unit Citation. Will was also awarded numerous campaign medals for service in World War II, Korea and Vietnam. Much later, on the 50th anniversary of the Korean War, he received the Korean War

Service Medal, presented by his nephew, Naval Capt. Robert **Elder**.

A return to their native state of Georgia -- Statesboro -- was a happy decision, however. Will was vice president of First Federal Savings and Loan, and later, a realtor. He retired again in 1987, moving to St. Simons Island, when Judi and Gil's second child, Billy, was born.

There began a new chapter of life. He and Maida were known throughout the island at area restaurants, where they lunched nearly daily, and they were active members of St. Simons United Methodist Church. He was a member of The Retired Officers' Association; Rotary Club of St. Simons, and played tennis regularly with a group of friends at the then St. Simons Island Club. Will and Maida were very proud grandparents -- attending nearly all of Billy's baseball games, soccer matches and golf tournaments, as well as Molly's horse shows, gymnastics and dance events and games at which she cheered. While grandson Wyatt lives on the big island of Hawaii, Will kept up with his every achievement, especially his keen surfing skills, learned from his dad.

Known as "Major," Will moved from Fairhaven Assisted Living to Hospice of the Golden Isles. Among the many loving caregivers along the way, one in particular stands out: Pamela Whitten of Brunswick. Friend and cardiologist, Mitchell Jones, provided exceptional care and support.

A true hero, Will was also the ultimate gentleman and a kind and loving father, grandfather and friend who will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

A graveside service, with military honors, will be held at 2 p.m. Thursday, March 25 at Christ Church, Frederica, 6329 Frederica Road on St. Simons Island, with the Rev. William Littleton officiating.

A reception celebrating Will's life will follow at the Morgan's home. Family and friends are invited.

Memorial contributions may be made to Hospice of the Golden Isles or a charity of your choice.

Edo Miller and Sons Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.