

# WAR HERO

## LAWRENCE F. WHITMER

*written by his wife, Evelyn Whitmer*

# WORLD WAR II

I met Larry when I moved to Alpine after I graduated from Mesa High School in 1940. He had such pretty blue eyes and a cute dimple in his chin. Besides, he looked so handsome riding a horse, just like he was glued to it!

We went together until he was conscripted into the Army in January 1941. He was just supposed to put in one year, training to fight, and then be released. But Pearl Harbor was bombed 2 weeks before he was to be released. We never saw him again for nearly 4 years.

His division was sent to Panama Canal for jungle training and to protect the Canal for nearly a year. Then they were shipped to Australia on a captured German boat called the Hermitage. They had to zig-zag so much to confuse the enemy that it took them 33 days to reach Brisbane, Australia. From there they were sent to Port Moresby, New Guinea where they were first under enemy fire.

Their first engagement with the Japanese was at Sarme New Guinea May 14, 1943. From there to Milan Bay, New Guinea then to Kareena Island to Woodlark Island French Haven to New Britain where he was

sent on a patrol to search out the enemy and found their dead bodies along the trail where they had starved due to General Mac Arthur's strategy of bypassing the enemy and cutting off their supplies. Then they were sent to Noemfoor Island where they were engaged in combat. The Army dropped a company of paratroopers to give them reinforcements. Instead the 15th had to administer first aid to the paratroopers because they had been dropped too close to the ground and broke their legs, etc. (Garland Lee's boy from Nutrioso was in this paratroop group and received a broken leg that left him partly crippled for a while.) Also this is the place Larry got a fish bone caught in his throat and was in a lot of pain. They started taking him by motor boat to another island for first-aid treatment when the bone slipped free. They were glad because it was going to be a risky trip. They had several close calls dodging enemy patrol boats and one time they came within moments of being blown up by a U.S. patrol boat who mistook them for Japanese!

From Noomfaer they were sent to invade the Philippines. They were in their worst fighting there on

the front 353 days at a time, Then they were sent back to rest, but instead of resting, they trained them for an invasion of Japan.

Larry nearly lost his life one time when he was directing the man under him in the machine gun platoon. A bomb hit closer to him than anyone and even though he was standing (which was more dangerous) and the others were laying on the ground, most of the others were killed. He was knocked out for a while. It blew the front off his helmet. This caused him to do some serious thinking that maybe the Lord had a purpose for him on this earth.

One other time as his platoon was walking through a group of "dead" Japanese, the man behind him shot a "dead" Japanese that had a bead on Larry. That was a humbling experience. Larry was in a company

that zoomed Manila before the Japanese knew the Americans had reached there, so they could reach a big prisoner camp and free our prisoners before the Japanese could get to them first (afraid they would kill the prisoners). Larry says they were walking skeletons and they broke down and cried when they were rescued.

For many years Larry seemed to quit having nightmares and put those terrible times behind him but since he retired 4 years ago, he started reading a lot of books on the Japanese war. Now he "Fights" in his sleep again. He suffered from Malaria attacks for 10 years after the war. He was being discharged at Fort McArthur in San Francisco when Japan surrendered in August 1945.