The trails of the Superstition Wilderness Area have yielded many interesting characters during the past century. They came here to search for lost treasure or gold mines. These individuals followed in the footsteps of Coronado’s Children according to Frank J. Dobie, a noted western author. If anyone could be classed as one of Coronado’s Children the Whistler certainly was such a man.

This obscure recluse wandered the deep canyons and towering peaks of the Superstition Wilderness for more than two decades. His search for the Lost Dutchman Mine began in 1939, and was immediately interrupted by World War II. The Whistler first knowledge about the Lost Dutchman Mine came from Barry Storm’s book, On The Trail of the Lost Dutchman. The Tortilla Flat area served as the Whistler’s base camp from 1949-1951. The years following 1951, he prospected an area around Willow Springs. The Whistler walked from First Water to Apache Junction monthly to up pick his VA disability check and his monthly supplies after 1951. He was always whistling a tune.

The keen eyes of hikers and prospectors rarely spotted the whistler. They often heard him, but didn’t see him. Even the Barkley cowboys rarely saw him. He always wore dark clothing, even during the hot summer months. His dark clothing was his trademark. It was his whistling at night while he walked that gave him his nickname. His nocturnal habit of hiking through the Superstition Wilderness at night during the summer months caused other prospectors to be suspicious of him. Some men claimed he was a camp robber.

He never found the gold of Superstition Mountain, but then again he may not have been searching for it. I had only met the man once, and to this day I don’t recall exactly what he looked like. Was the Whistler a war hero? Or was he searching for peace to ease his tired and worn soul? He is now a forgotten man swallowed by time. He is nothing but a ghostly face from the past that once defended our nation, walked the trails of the Superstition Wilderness and followed in the footsteps of Frank Dobie’s Coronado’s Children. Ironically I have never forgotten General Hap Arnold’s words, “never to be forgotten by this grateful nation.”

American soldiers during World War II with the following inscription in it.

“To Hal, The service you have given to your country in the time of war will never be forgotten by this grateful nation.” Signed General “Hap” Arnold, U.S. Army, 1943.

How ironic this statement was I thought. Here was a man who gave everything for his country in the time of war and now was just trying to hold on to a few meager possessions while hospitalized. I couldn’t imagine the Whistler being a war hero, and also being in this desperate position. To this day I don’t know who the Whistler was, except for his first name. Bill Barkley just considered him another one of the nuts hunting for the Lost Dutchman Mine. He might not have been a war hero, but somehow he had attracted the attention General “Hap” Arnold.

This tale enlightened us about those who we sometimes prematurely judge. Most of the cowboys thought the Whistler was a bum wasting time on a legend of gold. The Whistler eventually returned to the First Water Ranch and picked up his camp from our tack shed. He returned to the mountains to search for his dream.

The only treasure the Whistler found in the Superstition Mountains was probably peace and solitude. He never found the gold of Superstition Mountain, but then again he may not have been searching for it. I had only met the man once, and to this day I don’t recall exactly what he looked like. Was the Whistler a war hero? Or was he searching for peace to ease his tired and worn soul? He is now a forgotten man swallowed up by time. He is nothing but a ghostly face from the past that once defended our nation, walked the trails of the Superstition Wilderness and followed in the footsteps of Frank Dobie’s Coronado’s Children. Ironically I have never forgotten General Hap Arnold’s words, “never to be forgotten by this grateful nation.”

Many lost souls have roamed the Superstition Wilderness over the decades searching for gold. The Whistler was just one of many searching for peace and solitude. Many years later Tim O’Grady told me Hal, the man I knew as “the Whistler” was a highly decorated hero of World War II.

If you have time today tell a veteran thanks for his sacrifice that has insured us a free nation, you don’t have to wait for a national holiday to do this.
West Boulder Canyon, where the "Whistler" spent most of his time.

Caption: WBC 1

Looking into West Boulder Canyon from high up on the slopes of Superstition Mountain’s eastside. The tip of Weaver’s Needle can be seen in the distance just beyond the high ridge east of West Boulder Canyon. This was “The Whistler’s” domain.

Caption: WBC 2

Looking south up West Boulder Canyon from near Tim’s Saddle. This rugged canyon was home for the Whistler for almost two decades.