

WHISTLER'S GOLD

by Tom Kollenborn (c) Rev. 2004

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 Superstitions at night during the summer months caused other prospectors to be suspicious of him. Some men claimed he was a camp robber.

It was quite strange for cowboys to be sitting around a campfire and hear somebody whistling a tune in the distances while walking. Many of us believed the Whistler was afraid of the dark. He whistled to vent his anxiety.

The Whistler spent much of his time in the West Boulder Canyon area. His camp was located in the high rocks above the canyon floor. He chose this location for his camp because of flash floods and the occasional hiker wandering through the area. He wanted a camp safe from detection and the floodwater's of West Boulder Canyon.

While rounding up cattle in West Boulder Canyon in the spring of 1959, we came across the Whistler's Camp by accident. We heard somebody with a serious cough. When we rode up the hillside to investigate we found the Whistler flat on his back with either the flu or pneumonia. Barkley sent me back to First Water and Apache Junction to contact the Sheriff's Office. The next day the Whistler was taken out of the mountains and admitted to the Pinal County General Hospital then transferred to the VA hospital at Fort Whipple near Prescott. The Whistler asked us to look after his meager belongings while he was in the hospital. I rode back to his camp three days later with a packhorse and picked it up. Among his possessions was a small Christian Bible given to

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.