



In Loving Memory of
Hank (Bubbe) Armstrong
November 7, 1923 - March 8, 2009

This is a tribute to Deadeye Henry Armstrong of Castle Rock, Washington who passed away March 8, 2009. Henry was buried with Deadeye shirt and his hat. He was born Nov. 7, 1923, in Kapowsin, Wash., to Thomas and Carrie (Karr) Armstrong. Hank graduated with the Castle Rock High School Class of 1942.

Hank was a logger, owned Castle Rock Feed Store and retired as a supervisor from Reynolds Metals. He was extremely proud to have served his country during World War II as an Army staff sergeant. His 96th Infantry "Deadeye" Division received the presidential citation for extraordinary heroism in Okinawa and Leyte. Hank enjoyed attending the 96th national reunions, clam digging, hunting and farming. He was an avid reader and "almost" a master gardener.

Hank is survived by his wife of 62 years, Colleene Armstrong at home; a daughter, Cindy in Kelso; a sister, Myrtle Pete of Kelso; many beloved nieces and nephews; some very special neighbors and friends; and his constant canine companion, Rosie.

He was preceded in death by his parents and four sisters, Effie, Nellie, Mae and "Bill".

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By Nils Bue
FOR THE DAILY NEWS

CASTLE ROCK — Henry “Hank” Armstrong is among many veterans who reflexively duck when they hear loud noises. At 84, he still shuns July 4 celebrations.

“I didn’t realize what a big bundle of nerves I was when I came home,” Armstrong said, but for the most part “it finally wore off, I guess.”

There were flashbacks and nightmares, he said. “And choking your wife in the night,” put spouse Colleene Armstrong laughing.

They were dating at the time he entered the service during World War II and she faithfully sent letters to him. At mail call, he would hear, “Armstrong, you got a letter from that little girl with the green ink.”

Armstrong joined the 96th Infantry Division in January 1944 and re-entered civilian life two years later in February. He did his basic training in South Carolina, “a long ways for someone who’d never been out of Cowlitz County,” he said.

He and the soldiers in his unit experienced fierce action in the Philippines and Okinawa. They were headed back to the Philippines, preparing to go to Japan, when the atomic bomb was dropped.

During his service to the country, Hank was awarded the Bronze Star, a Purple Heart (among other commendations), his combat infantryman’s badge and a good conduct medal.

Colleene, 80, updated a framed collection of memorabilia for her husband on Valentine’s Day this year. It includes those awards, a photo of him in uniform at age 21, his dogtags — accompanied by a coin his niece sent to him while he was serving — and a presidential unit citation for action in Okinawa.

The 96th Division is one of only three or four that Harry S. Truman awarded a presidential citation at the end of the war though it was presented rather later than he intended — in 2003 — because it had been overlooked, Armstrong said.

It reads, in part, “For extraordinary heroism in military operations against an armed enemy,” and, “The esprit, heroism and continuing demonstrations of raw courage throughout the battle exemplified the highest traditions of the military service.”

The citation had not arrived and Colleene didn’t find the good conduct medal for the first framed collection she gave Hank at Christmas some 10 years ago. That earlier collec-

tion delighted him except that his medal was missing. “Good conduct — who would’ve thought,” she asked.

Armstrong was awarded the Bronze Star for his heroic actions on April 14, 1945.

It was night, he and his buddies were in their foxholes taking heavy fire, and they lost contact with headquarters. “We could see the flashes, knew where (the enemy) was at,” Hank said. But the radio was hit by shrapnel and the phone

lines were broken, so they couldn’t direct return fire.

As a communications staff sergeant, it was Armstrong’s job to crawl out, find breaks in the line and fix them. He was the one who had to do it; all the other communications specialists were wounded.

Armstrong crawled out to repair a line and returned to his foxhole. Still no communication with headquarters. Out he went again to locate other breaks. Communication was reestablished.

Armstrong’s division was called the Deadeyes because he and so many others proved themselves excellent marksmen, had landed in Okinawa in April 1945, his company 192 men strong.

By the end of April, 38 survivors were pulled off the front line. In addition to the loss of men, they had gone 30 days without hot food and clean, dry clothes.

Replacements joined them and the Deadeyes returned to the front on May 8, V.E. Day (Victory in Europe), which marked the

defeat of Germany.

On May 19, Armstrong was awarded the Purple Heart after shrapnel from an artillery shell hit him, leaving “part of my mouth hanging loose,” he said.

“I waited in my foxhole until daylight, with wet and mud everywhere,” Armstrong recalled. A Weasel, an amphibious-track rig, arrived in the morning and got him back to headquarters. Armstrong spent a week in a field hospital before returning to his company.

The division was deactivated in 1945 and eventually became the 96th Recon, a regional Army Reserve command based in Fort Douglas, Utah.

Armstrong was among those in the original 96th who were honored during the Heritage Day parade in Salt Lake City last year, Colleene said. “It was a wonderful reunion. It was a great experience for those guys. They were quite the celebrities that day.”

“You wouldn’t believe it,” Armstrong said. “I’ve never seen so many people in my life. It’s the third largest parade in the United States, after Macy’s and the Rose Bowl.”

Sadness registers in the eyes of this couple when they talk about “the kids serving in Iraq.” “If there was a reason for it, it wouldn’t be so bad, but there is no reason for it,” Armstrong said. They worry about the danger, the deaths, the maimed.

“I remember,” he said. “You don’t forget.”

From the President of the United States:



*The United States of America
honors the memory of
Henry G. Armstrong*

*This certificate is awarded by a grateful
nation in recognition of devoted and
selfless consecration to the service
of our country in the Armed Forces
of the United States.*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Dwight D. Eisenhower".

President of the United States