

A WORLD WAR TWO SECRET

Glenn P. Larson and the U-505

BEVERLY LARSON CHRISTENSEN

Hellgate Press



Ashland, Oregon

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This book is dedicated to my parents, Glenn Peter and Clara Larson, and
all members of the Greatest Generation

“Uncommon valor was a common virtue.”
- *Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, March 17, 1945.*

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for
the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”

- *Joshua 1:9*

“Courage is being scared to death, but saddling up anyway.”

- *John Wayne.*

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A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

MY DEEP THANKS TO THOSE WHO have helped and encouraged me in writing this book. It is the story of my father's World War II navy adventure, including the hunt for *U-505*. After 12 years of research, interviews, planning, procrastination, and collaboration, it has finally become a reality.

Thank you to my mother, Clara, who turned 97 years old on May 9, 2021. She contributed her recollections as it is her story also. Dad's letters to Mom were also an important source, and my cousin, Linda Larson Engelman, provided me with her father, Duane Larson's, WWII letters to Uncle Martin. A special thank you to Julian Austin, 96, for corresponding with me about his first hand account of the *U-505* story. Thank you to the late Don Baker, *Guadalcanal* crew member, who I met in 2009 in Chicago at the 65th Reunion of the *U-505* capture. At the banquet, my mother and I sat at a table for four and visited with Don and another veteran beside the submarine. Thank you to his wife, Sue, for graciously allowing me to share select portions of his writing. Also, much gratitude is owed to the late Captain Daniel Gallery for the books that he wrote about the USS *Guadalcanal* and the *U-505*.

A special thank you to my sister, Shirley Larson Gniffke, for creating the cover. Several people have helped with editing: Julie Ingman Johnson, Cindy Nasset Rogers, Cathy Langemo, William Gay, Julie Eikamp, Kevin Carvel, and Dr. C. Herbert Gilliland. Thank you to those who shared stories: my mother Clara, Alton Ivey, Kasper Binstock, Avis Rutherford, Harold Bach, Richard DeMarco, Duane Larson, Lee Soehren, and others.

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INTRODUCTION

WAR CHANGES EVERYONE. IN JULY 1944, 900 men stood in formation as U.S. Navy Captain Daniel V. Gallery ordered everyone on the USS *Guadalcanal* to keep their recent event a secret. They could tell no one, but no one, about what had just happened on this cruise- not even wives, parents, or siblings. Gallery instructed the Commanders of the five Destroyer Escorts to also notify the 1,000 men on their ships in this Anti-submarine Warfare Task Group with the same warning.

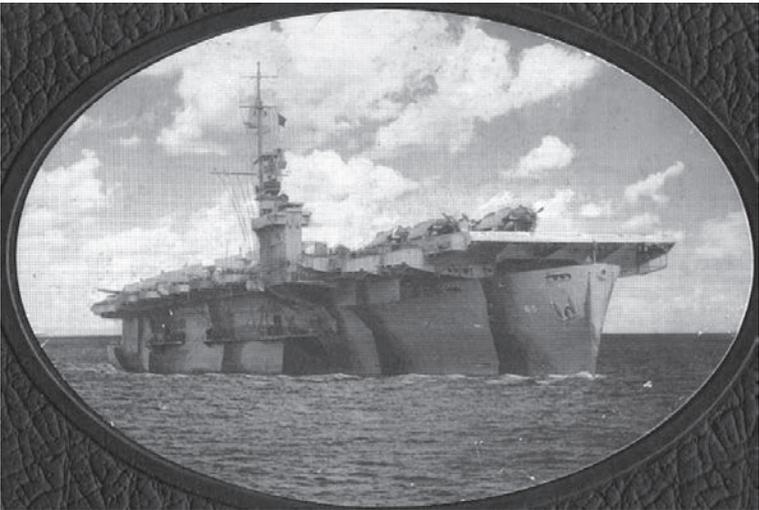
A young North Dakota farm boy, Glenn Peter Larson, of Regent, was among those bursting with the best story of his life, but he and the rest kept the secret until Germany surrendered in 1945.



Glenn Peter Larson

CHAPTER 1

The Shakedown Cruise: Training for Battle



USS Guadalcanal aircraft carrier

ON OCTOBER 15, 1943, THE MEN of the newly commissioned USS *Guadalcanal* escort aircraft carrier completed preparations with a series of drills and loaded provisions. The ship left Astoria, Oregon, and headed down the Columbia River to the famous Columbia Bar, where the river meets the Pacific, creating huge waves. Heavy seas pounded the ship during her maiden voyage, and she pitched and rolled as they headed north toward Bremerton, Washington.

The ship's commanding officer, Captain Daniel Gallery, noted:

That first night at sea, my farmer boys received a tough initiation into the realm of Neptune. We crossed the bar of the Columbia River on the

tail end of a northwest gale. The bar was breaking, and white-capped rollers swept in before the wind, which was blowing great guns. The old girl started chomping at the bit as soon as she stuck her nose into it, and immediately proved that she knew how to heave and roll and pitch like a real ship. Before we had been out 15 minutes we were taking green water aboard on the flight deck, and I'm sure most of my lads bitterly regretted that they hadn't joined the Army.

As one sailor recalled years later, "The ship went up and down, but my stomach just went up." Glenn Larson, a 21-year old farm boy from the western North Dakota prairies, suffered sea sickness like many others on the cruise but soon developed his sea legs.

That first night, the crew was alarmed by the noise created when the thin plates between the hangar deck and the flight deck "oil canned" or buckled, on every pitch of the *Guadalcanal*. The plates would spring in when they were over the back of a wave and in tension and then spring out when they got in the lowest point or trough. The flexing metal caused a thunderous booming that reverberated throughout the ship and made them wonder if she would break in two.

In his book, *My Navy Career*, former *Guadalcanal* crewman, Howard Sherer, recalled, "The ship took a heavy beating and, that night, a forward lookout was washed overboard and could not be found."

Captain Gallery reported:

*There is one word which makes everyone's blood run cold when it rings through a ship. The cry is, "Man overboard!" On a dark night, it strikes a chill into every heart on the ship, but it hits the skipper harder than anyone else. He knows that what he does in the next five minutes will determine whether his man is recovered or lost. We heard the cry once on the *Guadalcanal* early in our career, when a green sea lifted one of our lookouts out of his station at the forward end of the flight deck and carried him overboard.*

I did everything I could think of that night, but it wasn't good enough.

I couldn't find our man. Everyone in the ship knows that looking for a man in the water on a black night with a rough sea running is practically hopeless, and that a man can only survive for about 10 minutes at most in near-freezing water, but even so you hate yourself when you give the order to resume course and leave the spot. It's like abandoning the search for a lost child.

Captain Daniel V. Gallery, born on July 10, 1901, in Chicago, was appointed to the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, in 1917. In 1927, he volunteered for naval air and received flight training at Pensacola, Florida's Naval Air Station. He flew seaplanes, torpedo planes, and amphibians, eventually winning third place in the National Air Races. He was assigned as the Naval Attache at the US Embassy in Great Britain. In 1941, shortly after WW II began, he was appointed commander of a patrol plane detachment in Reykjavik, Iceland, assigned to guarding passing ship convoys against German U-boats. Captain Gallery received a Bronze Star for his aerial fighting against German U-boat submarines. But the detachment's patrol range over the Atlantic was limited by the amount of fuel the planes could carry.

It became apparent that convoys crossing the Atlantic would have to be protected by aircraft carriers, if they were going to survive. U-Boat Hunter-Killer Groups were formed, with flanking escort destroyers positioned to protect the carriers. One of these task groups was formed around Captain Gallery's new carrier, the USS *Guadalcanal*.

After learning the maneuvering characteristics of the ship, Gallery returned the *Guadalcanal* to the Puget Sound Navy Yard, in Bremerton, Washington. A flat-bottomed barge pulled alongside her and delivered ammunition to the deck force. The all-hands crew hoisted cargo nets full of bombs out of the barge, hauled them over the deck and moved them below late into the night as the ship's disc jockey played "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition."

C H A P T E R 2

Before the Shakedown Cruise Pre-Commissioning School

AS THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER WAS BEING prepared, Captain Gallery's crew, coming from cities, small towns and farms around the country, assembled. Before boarding their ship, the crew got about six weeks' training at Bremerton. Most of the crew members were just out of boot camp and here, the men learned some of the basic facts of life about ships in general. Glenn and his friend, Randall J. Novak, were a little ahead of the game after attending a Navy training school in Iowa.

Here at Bremerton, the men studied the plans of the ship and many of the actual machines they would have to operate. They were organized into 13 ship crew divisions and started to get acquainted with their officers. The course's final week was a cruise in Puget Sound on the *Casablanca*. Like most of the new sailors, this was the first voyage on saltwater for Glenn and Randall.

Surviving crew members of some of the large U.S. carriers that were sunk at sea early in the war were now split up among the crews of the smaller escort carriers. In many cases, they were the only experienced sailors in the new crews, including the USS *Guadalcanal's*. The young men learned quickly how to operate the machinery which included the guns, radar, boilers and engines.

As Electrician Mates, Glenn and Randall served under the ship's Chief Electrician, S.S. Shepard. Electrician's Mates are petty officers who maintain and repair all electrical equipment on board. The equipment was quite varied and included such things as motors, generators, battery chargers, telephone systems, signal systems, electrical controls, power distribution systems, and lighting systems.

All of *Guadalcanal's* crew went through the Navy's Fire Fighting School at Bremerton. Run by professional firemen, the school taught the men how to fight fires all day long. They set fires to full-scale models of engine rooms,

hangar decks, and other parts of a model ship. The students learned all of the newest fire fighting techniques and equipment, and how to rescue trapped people, snuff out the fire, and enter a blazing compartment using a fog nozzle as a shield.

Captain Gallery wouldn't ask his boys to do anything that he wouldn't do himself. He wrote:

For the week you were in the school, you were just one jump ahead of being fried alive. They would put you in the far end of a gasoline-drenched compartment, light the thing off, and leave you to your own devices. The only way you could get out of there was to drive the fire out ahead of you, or get dragged out by the boys in the asbestos suits who watched through peepholes from the outside, ready to rush in, in case you hadn't studied your lesson properly and passed out... This training which the boys got at the Fire Fighting School paid off in a big way later.

The ship's captain also went through the school. He recalled:

They put me in places the Devil himself would have squawked about the heat and would have gotten the hell out of there. Time and time again, the only sensible thing to do was to throw that damned hose away and run.

The only trouble was they, my shoe crew, were right there watching me.... So I just had to sweat it out, hoping that the boys in the asbestos suits would step in if necessary.

Captain Gallery's crew respected him for that.

The sailors also had instructions on seamanship, swimming, airplane and ship identification, and physical fitness training. After Pre-Commissioning School, Glenn was granted two weeks' leave from the Navy.

Heading east, the train rumbled through the Rocky Mountains and across the Great Plains. On the home farm at Regent, the wheat harvest was in full swing.

It felt good to be home again.

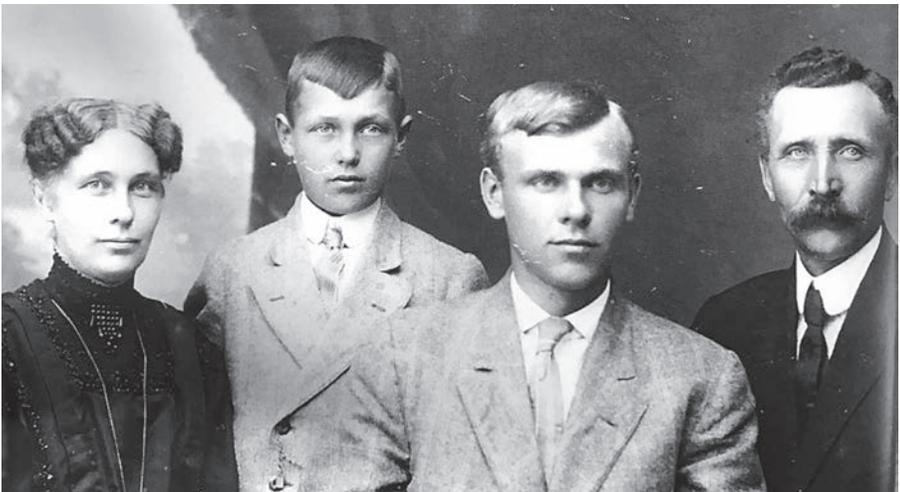
CHAPTER 3

Prarie Roots

GLENN LARSON'S STORY BEGAN BACK IN Regent, North Dakota, a small farming community. He was delivered by Doc Hill just before midnight on September 12, 1922. Raymond, his Danish father, had arrived in the Regent area at the age of 16 to farm with his father, James Peter Larson, in 1906. Glenn's Grandpa James only stayed on the farm one year, and then moved to Mott, North Dakota, where he took a job at the Equity Elevator.

Before the village of Regent was established in 1910, Raymond rode his horse across the prairie over the present town site and he observed prairie dogs, coyotes, and three wolves on his way to Buffalo Butte.

Glenn's mother, Lillie, was the daughter of a Norwegian immigrant who moved his family west from North Dakota's Red River Valley in 1911. Robert



Clara Paulsen, Russell, Raymond and James Peter Larson



An early view of Regent, North Dakota

Schow opened a blacksmith shop in the new village established by the Milwaukee Railroad, where he operated a machine shop, blacksmith shop, and auto livery.

Once Glenn was born, the family, with two older brothers, Duane and Wayne, was complete.



Glenn's parents, Raymond and Lillie, June 15, 1915

In the years before Glenn's birth, Lillie's parents, Robert and Minnie Schow, of Regent, made frequent visits to Raymond and Lillie's farm, two miles east of town, to see their little grandsons. While en route to one of those family visits, tragedy struck one evening. It was November 11, 1920.

Lillie's sixteen-year-old brother, Robbie, was driving his parents' car when they approached the railroad tracks. The evening train was in sight. Robert told his son, Robbie, to hurry across the tracks so they could avoid a wait at the crossing. Robbie obeyed. The freight train struck the vehicle.

Robert, only 55 years old, was thrown under the train engine and killed instantly. The train continued moving, pushing the car forward until it came to a complete stop a short distance from the Regent Depot. Minnie's right arm sustained multiple fractures and, although Robbie wasn't injured physically, he was no doubt emotionally traumatized by the event for many years to come.

Robert Schow's funeral was a sad day for the family and the little village. A large crowd gathered at the Lutheran church, and he was buried beside his son, Karl, who died in 1916 when he was twelve years old. Robert, a blacksmith, had lovingly hand-forged and installed a chain-link fence around the Schow plot in the Regent Cemetery a few years prior in memory of their son, Karl. That chain fence remains to this day on the western edge of the Regent cemetery.

Two years later, Glenn was delivered at home by Dr. S.W. Hill, who had arrived in Regent in 1911 from the coal-mining region of West Virginia. His birth brought some joy to the grieving family. Duane and Wayne were so excited about their baby brother that they burst into the bedroom where Lillie was nursing the newborn. An excited six-year-old, Duane, tossed a toad on the bed and proudly declared with a smile, "Here's Andy," his prized toad. Raymond laughed and shared that story for years.

Like green grass after a warm summer rain, the Larson boys grew quickly in the wide-open prairie spaces. All three attended a country schoolhouse one mile north of their farmstead. The little white school house, Mauzey #1, stood like a sentinel on the prairie, with Black Butte looming in the background to the north-west. The schoolyard had two outdoor privies, better known as outhouses. A merry-go-round, teeter-totter, and metal



Lillie's parents, Robert and Minnie (Noben) Schow. Robert came from Gardner, ND

swing set were nearby for students to wear off extra energy at recess. A horse barn stood nearby where Glenn sometimes kept his pony after he arrived at school.

There was no school water well, so every week a different farm family was assigned the task of bringing drinking water. It was then poured into a large stoneware crock with a spigot, which was kept on a table in the school entry.

Periodically, some of the boys would sneak some of this precious water at recess and attempt to drown pocket gophers. (These pests can destroy crops and back then gopher hunters were instructed to bring gopher tails to their local township clerks, who would fill out the necessary paperwork and pay them the bounty of one cent per tail.)

One day, the teacher caught Glenn in this mischief, and she made him stay after school as punishment. Alton Ivey, a younger student, recalled with a chuckle that, as he picked up his lunch box to go home, Glenn said, "What about Alton?" To his dismay, he too, had to stay inside as the other students were dismissed.

Winter snow provided fun outdoor activities at recess including playing a game of Fox and Geese, snowball fights, making forts or building a snowman. Every winter brought at least one blizzard, and the Larson boys were delighted to be kept home from school while the storm raged. Since outdoor farm chores, such as milking the cows, still had to be done, the boys helped as able. After the storm subsided, the landscape was transformed into a winter wonderland with newly formed snow drifts so high that they beckoned the boys to dig tunnels and caves. Glenn's best friend in country school was J. Slade DeLaney, who also had a prestigious war career. He went on to earn his wings in 1944 during WWII. He served as a multi-engine pilot with the Manhattan Project, the code name for the development of the first atomic bombs.

While growing up, Glenn's brothers would sometimes take him along to the Cannonball River on a sultry summer day. It flowed past Regent and the Larson farm, winding its way through the beautiful prairie grass to the Missouri River. Here, the boys enjoyed swimming and horseplay with their friends.

One warm day, after Glenn had learned to swim, he dove in. To his shock, his head stuck in the mud at the bottom of the river. He frantically struggled to free himself and learned a valuable lesson about diving.

Glenn's lifelong love of horses was reflected in his favorite childhood book, *Black Beauty*. Occasionally when he was a child, his father would help him put



Glenn and his pony, Ben



Brothers Wayne, Glenn and Duane Larson

a little harness on his pony, Ben, and attach a small cart. He is hauling some corn in the photo.

When the drought of the Dirty Thirties hit, life became more difficult. Temperatures soared above 100 degrees for multiple days, and the grass and crops dried up. Swarms of grasshoppers flew in on the wind and devoured anything that looked faintly green. The extreme drought caused cattle and sheep to starve, and with no crops to sell, many farm boys sought jobs elsewhere. Glenn's brother, Wayne, left the farm and took a job as an orderly at St. Paul Ramsey Hospital in St. Paul, Minnesota.

In 1933, the third year of the severe economic depression, President Franklin Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps or CCC program to provide jobs for unemployed young men between ages 18 and 25. They received \$30 in payment per month, plus room and board.

In 1934, when Glenn was 11 years old, a Hettinger County CCC project began to build a dam on Spring Creek near Larson's farmyard. His father, Raymond, signed an easement to allow a low area of his land to be flooded by water behind the dam. Using one tractor and several teams of horses, the CCC constructed a concrete, earth-filled dam to raise the water level on Spring Creek by 12 feet to form Larson Lake in a dry lowland area to the south.

Glenn's oldest brother, Duane, age 17, and a neighbor, Tony Binstock, were hired, but lived at home. Using their own teams of horses, they joined

the CCC men who traveled from their camp at New England, North Dakota, every morning.

Three more years of drought followed the completion of the dam. Glenn recalled that one afternoon rain clouds appeared and then precious drops of rain finally began to fall. It continued through the night, pelting the window panes and roof, answering everyone's prayers.

The next morning, Glenn rushed to the upstairs hall window, where he observed with delight a lake had formed overnight. Now the Regent area had a lake in which to swim and cool off after a hard day's work. Little did Glenn know that his swimming skills would one day enable him to pass the required Navy swimming test.

Glenn enjoyed working on the farm, and one of his duties was to cultivate the young corn plants. The prairie was filled with songs of meadowlarks and blackbirds, which followed behind the cultivator to eat worms and insects in the freshly dug up soil. Sometimes, while cultivating, Glenn said he would daydream about sailing the high seas someday.



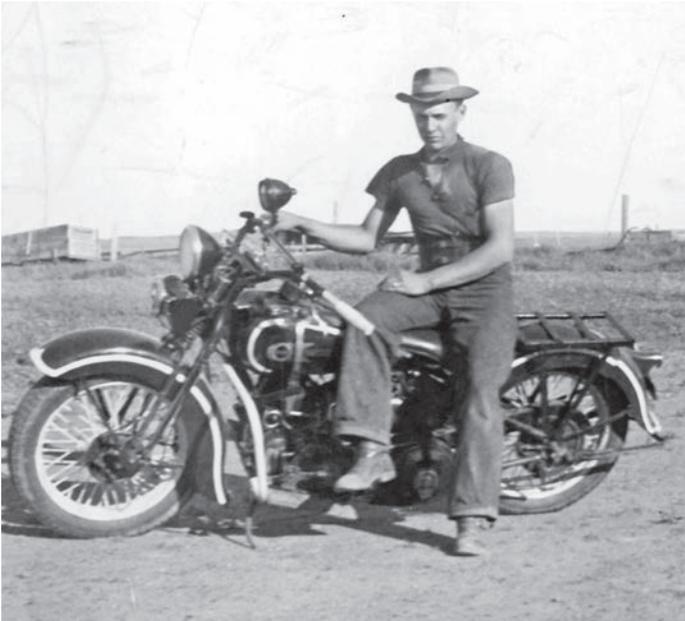
Glenn, Duane, Raymond and Wayne Larson

All three boys attended high school in Regent. Raymond promised the boys a gold watch if they didn't smoke during their formative years. Duane and Wayne received a gold watch upon graduation from high school, but Glenn was caught smoking out behind the barn.

After his brother, Duane graduated, he went to work for his uncle, Martin Schow, near Stanton, North Dakota. Martin was a rancher and pioneer pilot who had built an airplane in 1927 and taught himself how to fly. Here Duane learned about aviation when he was not busy with chores.

While Glenn attended high school, war was escalating in Europe. Germany's Adolf Hitler invaded Poland in 1939, followed by Britain and France declaring war on Germany.

One of Glenn's schoolmates, Avis Trunkhill Rutherford, turned 95 on May 14, 2021. She recalled that Glenn was a lot of fun and always a daredevil in high school, especially with his motorcycle. His younger neighbor, Kasper Binstock, shared that sometimes Glenn took him along in his sidecar when he checked his fur trap line on the Cannonball River.



Glenn and his motorcycle



Glenn before he enlisted in WWII

Glenn graduated from Regent High School in 1940 along with 16 other students. There was a sense of pride in growing up at Regent, and the community supported the youth with their positive values and sense of patriotism.

One summer, probably 1941, Glenn, and his good friend, Randall Novak, of Regent rode motorcycles to Sturgis, South Dakota in the Black Hills, a distance of about 180 miles. The first Sturgis Motorcycle Rally was held there in 1938 and has been held every year since except 1942 when gasoline was rationed.

