

# Erickson, Hjalmar August (1895–1969) and Helen Hoffman Livingston (1895–1983)



Hjalmar Erickson

Photo courtesy of Loma Linda University Archives.

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Hjalmar A. Erickson, a medical missionary doctor, served with his wife, Helen, in Africa, China, and the Philippines. He was a hospital director, author, prisoner of war, and veteran of the United States Navy.

## Early Life, Education and Marriage

Hjalmar August Erickson was born on December 1, 1895, in San Francisco, California,<sup>1</sup> to August and Anna Erickson.<sup>2</sup> He grew up in San Francisco. The family later moved to St. Helena. Erickson had three siblings, Arthur, Esther Helen, and another unnamed sister.<sup>3</sup>

Erickson received his education at Sanitarium School, Pacific Union Academy, and Pacific Union College.<sup>4</sup> He served in the United States Army during World War I. After his enlistment ended, he entered the College of Medical Evangelists (now Loma Linda University),<sup>5</sup> where he completed his medical course graduating in the class 1932.

In 1981, Erickson married Helen Hoffman Livingston<sup>6</sup> with whom he shared the birthdate of December 1, 1895. Born on a ranch in Galatia, Burton County, Kansas, to Lindley Hoffman, Jr. and Florence Ross Livingston (1862-1924; 1863-),<sup>7</sup> Helen moved to Fresno, California as a teenager with her mother and brother, John Douglas (1894-1967). John Livingston became a teacher and taught in Adventist schools in California, Cuba, Argentina, and Maryland.<sup>8</sup> Helen earned a nursing degree from St. Helena Sanitarium in 1917.<sup>9</sup> The Ericksons had three children, Helen Jean, Barbara, and Arthur.<sup>10</sup> Helen Jean died on September 5, 1925, when she was only three years and four months old.<sup>11</sup>

## Career and Ministry

Erickson practiced medicine for a short time in Arlington, California, and was later asked to be the medical director at Walla Walla Sanitarium. He served here until 1926.<sup>12</sup> That same year he was called to Africa to Kanye Hospital, Botswana, and Malamulo Hospital and Leprosarium, Malawi, for a term of mission service starting in 1927.<sup>13</sup> After serving in Africa for two and a half years, due to Helen Erickson's ill health, they returned to the United States in January 1930.<sup>14</sup>

In the later part of 1932, Erickson was called to the Manila Sanitarium and Hospital (now Adventist Medical Center–Manila) as acting medical director. After one year, he moved to Shanghai Sanitarium and Hospital.<sup>15</sup> After a few years in Shanghai, Erickson returned to the Manila Sanitarium and Hospital where he remained until 1938.<sup>16</sup> The keen foresight and “capable medical work” of Erickson and his predecessor, Dr. Horace Hall, contributed to the vast improvement both the physical structure and health practices of the hospital.<sup>17</sup>

The Ericksons returned home in 1938 for their furlough, but eventually applied for permanent return which was granted in 1939.<sup>18</sup> Upon his return to the United States, Erickson served at the Boulder Colorado Sanitarium in Colorado until 1940,<sup>19</sup> when he was called into the United States Navy. He was assigned active duty in the Philippines at Cavite Naval Base.<sup>20</sup> When World War II erupted, he was put in charge of the naval hospital at Corregidor and assigned the rank of commander.<sup>21</sup> Corregidor was an island fortress for the United States and Filipino soldiers that served as the last resistance to the initial Japanese invasion.

When Corregidor fell to the Japanese forces, Erickson was captured and was interned for thirty-seven months in Japanese prisons for military personnel.<sup>22</sup> Of the thirty-seven months in captivity, he spent sixteen months in Bilibid prison and fifteen months at the Cabanatuan Japanese prison camp, where he was rescued when the American forces regained the Philippines.<sup>23</sup>

## Later Life

Erickson retired from military service as Rear Admiral of the Marine Corps of the United States Naval Reserve on April 1, 1947.<sup>24</sup> In 1952, he was called by the General Conference to fill an emergency vacancy at Andrews

Memorial Hospital in Kingston, Jamaica. He was intended to serve until Dr. H. R. Hoehn arrived,<sup>25</sup> however it is unclear whether he accepted the call.

Although not in perfect health, Erickson continued to engage in private practice in Northern California at Fort Jones until 1954.<sup>26</sup> He then worked at the California Veterans Hospital at Yountville from 1956 until his retirement in 1965. He settled in Napa, California, after retirement from medical practice.<sup>27</sup>

Erickson passed away on September 24, 1969, at the age of 73 in Napa, California,<sup>28</sup> following surgery for a gastric ulcer.<sup>29</sup> He was buried in the St. Helena Cemetery.<sup>30</sup> Helen Hoffman Erickson died on June 30, 1983, at the age of 87 in Napa County, California, and was also buried in the St. Helena Cemetery.<sup>31</sup>

## Legacy

Hjalmar August Erickson's unique experience and legacy encompassed both service to the Adventist Church as a medical missionary doctor and hospital director and service to his country during both World War I and World War II. He was instrumental in the development of the physical facility and the medical services of the Manila Sanitarium and Hospital. While in military service, Erickson wrote a short book, *Development of Military Leaders*, published by the Army War College.<sup>32</sup>

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## NOTES

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6. See "Hjalmar A. Erickson obituary," *Pacific Union Recorder*, November 27, 1969, 7.
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8. "John Douglas Livingston obituary," *ARH*, September 7, 1967, 28.
9. "Helen Erickson obituary," *ARH*, September 22, 1983, 22.
10. "In Memoriam: Hjalmar A. Erickson."
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