

JEROME WIRKUS

GRADUATED FROM EDGAR HIGH SCHOOL IN 1940

In the midst of World War II, Jerome Wirkus joined the United States Navy in 1942. After completing basic training, he began his military service in earnest aboard the *USS Birmingham* in Norfolk, VA. The first military venture for the *USS Birmingham* was to join the Atlantic fleet in the Mediterranean, where they provided support for the troops in North Africa and the invasion of Sicily. The *Birmingham* received new orders and set off across the Atlantic Ocean and through the Panama Canal to join the Pacific fleet. On October 4, 1944 during the Battle of Leyte Gulf near the Philippines, Jerome was injured. A nearby ship, the *USS Princeton*, had been hit by a Japanese dive-bomber. The *Princeton* was on fire and the *Birmingham* crew was helping to try and save that ship. When the *Princeton* exploded, many men on the deck of the *Birmingham* were killed or severely injured. Jerome's injuries were so severe it was uncertain if he would make it to the sea-ship hospital. He survived in initial ordeal but the recovery was a long process. He was honorably discharged from the military on April 13, 1945, earning many awards and the rank of PO3.

After his discharge from the military, he made his way back to his home in Edgar and by September of 1945 he had opened his own grocery store. His work ethic and ever-expanding knowledge made his business a true success. Jerome sold the Wirkus IGA store in 1971. He continued to work at the store and at Ken & Dick's United Foods until his retirement in the late 1980s.

Jerome is very active in the American Legion and VFW, holding many leadership positions in both organizations over the years.

Jerome Wirkus married Alvina Hall in November of 1945 and they raised four children, all of whom helped in the store at one time or another. Today at the age 85, Jerry is still very active and enjoys hunting and fishing.