

## Corpsman

Wilbur Harmon Creighton, Jr.'s World War II experience stands out for his having participated in the two largest amphibious operations in history. Creighton was a Navy hospital apprentice first class and he served in both Europe and the Pacific.

Creighton was an agriculture major from North Augusta. He was at Clemson only during the 1942-43 academic year. Then, the War and Navy Departments ordered most college-age men to active duty.

While still only 18, Creighton opted for the Navy and became a corpsman, that service's title for a medic. Navy corpsmen served not only aboard ships and submarines, they also were assigned to Marine Corps units fighting ashore.



According to a newspaper account, Creighton, participated in the June 6, 1944, D-Day invasion of Normandy, likely serving aboard one of the hundreds of Navy vessels in the massive fleet supporting the ground forces. Fast forward to the spring of 1945 and Creighton was in the Pacific Theater accompanying the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division as it battled on Okinawa.

Okinawa is considered by many historians to be the most brutal fighting of the war. The Japanese defenders most often fought to the death in an attempt to make conquest of the island so costly that the United States would seek a negotiated peace rather than continue to insist on unconditional surrender. The battle saw the heavy use of kamikaze attacks, particularly against the naval ships of the invasion fleet. Estimates put Japanese and Okinawan deaths during the battle at more than 140,000.

From the Navy's perspective, Okinawa was the costliest battle of World War II with more than 3,800 sailors killed, over 10% of the Navy's total deaths during the war. Those included sailors serving aboard ships as well as those ashore with the Marines.

Eugene Sledge, who served with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines on Okinawa, wrote that the Navy corpsmen "were probably more highly respected by Marines—as a group, and as individuals—than any other group of people we were involved with." They served alongside the Marines, enduring the same miserable conditions and braving the same dangers. The Japanese would specifically target corpsmen in order to keep wounded men from receiving the care that might eventually return them to battle.

On May 12, 1945, Creighton was killed in action as the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division fought to capture "Sugar Loaf Hill" on the western side of the Japanese defensive line near Shuri.

Hospital Apprentice First Class Wilbur Harmon Creighton, Jr. was survived by his parents. He is buried in North Augusta's Sunset Hill Cemetery.



See also *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa*, by E. B. Sledge, 2007.