

Icy Waters

The United States Marine Corps was famous for amphibious operations in the Pacific Theater during World War II. In storming the beaches at Guadalcanal, Peleliu, Iwo Jima and dozens of other Pacific Islands, the Marines solidified their reputation for tenacity, endurance and victory. They also incurred horrific casualties. To fill the leadership void created by the loss of so many platoon and company leaders, the Marines operated Officer Candidate Schools throughout the war at their Quantico, Virginia base just south of Washington, D.C. on the banks of the Potomac River. Rigorous training helped prepare these Marines for the unimaginable trials of combat. And while so many of their famous operations took place in the remote tropical regions of the faraway Pacific, the training and preparation in Virginia continued through that cold, hopeful winter of 1944.



Charles Francis Middleton, Jr. was from an old Charleston family. Charlie attended Charleston High School and entered Clemson College for the fall term of 1933, embarking on studies in textile engineering. A four-year private in the Cadet Corps, Charlie's interests ran more towards the literary than the military; he was also a four-year member of the Calhoun Literary Society.

Following his 1937 graduation, Middleton joined his family's warehouse business, Concentration Compress and Warehouse Company, the largest cotton warehouse in Charleston. Charlie married Anne Shand Kirk of Charleston and they made their home there. Middleton was a member of the Home Guard when he volunteered as an officer candidate in the Marines in July 1943. At his commissioning ceremony, Middleton's guests included his sister Margaret and her husband, Mendel Rivers, the second-term Congressman from South Carolina's First District. In her book, "Mendel and Me," Margaret Rivers described her relief that her brother would not be immediately assigned overseas. Instead, Charlie expected to continue his training at Quantico.

On February 1, 1944, Lieutenant Middleton volunteered to participate in a night training exercise on the frigid waters of the Potomac River. According to Mrs. Rivers, Middleton had little sleep the night before, but desired to "improve his officership." Middleton and his men embarked on a "landing craft" and Mrs. Rivers reported that he was last seen on deck near the stern. When the craft reached its destination, there was no sign of her brother. For six weeks, the Middleton family agonized over the fate of Charlie, clinging to the slimmest hopes that he might have somehow survived. Sadly, that was not the case.

Six weeks after he disappeared, wrote Mrs. Rivers, "His body was finally recovered after the icy waters released their hold on his remains." The Marines notified Congressman Rivers who made the sad journey to Quantico to identify the remains of his brother-in-law. "Mendel recognized Charlie's Clemson ring."



Realistic training helped prepare Marines for the unspeakable chaos

and horror of battle. It helped save lives. Charlie Middleton's sacrifice was no less important for having occurred in training.

Charles Francis Middleton, Jr. was survived by his parents, his wife Anne, their sons Charles III, aged 2, and Philip, born a week after his father was lost. He was also survived by his two sisters, Margaret and Dorothy.