



Photo from Mark Bugnaski / Baltimore Sun

Waverly Bernard “Woody” Woodson, Jr.

Served as a U.S. Army Combat Medic on Omaha Beach, June 6, 1944

Woodson enlisted in the United States Army in Philadelphia after graduating from Pennsylvania’s Lincoln University. He attended anti-aircraft officers’ training school, one of only two blacks in the course. But before graduation he was told there were too many anti-aircraft officers and was sent back to the 320th Barrage Balloon Battalion for training as a medic. The battalion’s job was to set up explosive-rigged balloons to deter German planes. At a time when the military was still segregated by race, the balloon battalion was the only African American combat unit to land on Normandy on June 6, 1944. Roughly 2,000 African American troops are believed to have hit the shores of Normandy in various capacities.

Woodson’s landing craft hit a mine on the way to Omaha Beach. He was wounded in the back and groin while on the landing craft but went on to spend 30 hours on the beach tending to other wounded men before eventually collapsing. Senator Van Hollen is heading an effort to have Woodson posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions on D-Day. But lack of documentation - in part because of a 1973 fire that destroyed millions of military personnel files - has stymied the effort.

While in the Army during his initial enlistment and subsequent re-enlistment, Woodson completed tours of duty in England, France and the Pacific. Woodson was also assigned to Fort George G. Meade, Valley Forge General Hospital, the Communicable Disease Center, Chamblee, Georgia, and Walter Reed Army Hospital, Washington, D.C., where he served as the Sergeant-In-Charge-Morgue, performing all autopsies.

Woodson served his country with distinction and was awarded many military decorations and citations for his service in the Army. He received the Purple Heart, Bronze Star Medal, Good Conduct Medal, American Campaign Medal, European, African, Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with Arrow Head and two Bronze Stars, Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal, National Defense Medal, World War II Medal, Korean Service Medal and the United Nations Medal.

Woodson went on to study medical technology and worked for 28 years at the Naval Medical Center in the Bacteriology Department for several years in Bethesda, Maryland. After leaving there he was employed by the National Institutes of Health, Clinical Pathology Department, performing post-operative clinical procedures for open-heart surgery and all other in-patients from 1959 until 1980 when he retired. He was well-known for his hobbies, electronics, building equipment, TV and stereo accessories, woodworking, growing beautiful roses, and his collection of tropical fish.

Woodson, who lived in Clarksburg, Maryland, died peacefully on Friday, August 12, 2005, at the age of 83, leaving behind his beloved wife Joann, two daughters, one son, six grandchildren and many great-grandchildren.