

Harvey Ralph Erickson Biography

Pre-WSC Experience

Harvey Ralph Erickson was born on February 8, 1906 to Peter and Josephine Erickson in Erickson, Nebraska.¹ The family moved to Spokane, Washington shortly after Erickson's birth. Peter Erickson was a Swedish immigrant, as was Josephine Erickson's father; the former worked as a laborer in Spokane and Mrs. Erickson worked as a housekeeper.² Harvey had a younger sister, Evangeline, and a younger brother, Nelson.³

WSC Experience

Erickson attended Washington State College (WSC) from 1929 through 1934, graduating with a Bachelor's degree in Hydraulic Engineering.⁴ He married Mary Isabelle Peters and following his graduation from WSC, he worked as a general foreman for Pacific Gas and Electric Company in San Jose, California.⁵

¹ "1910 United States Federal Census for Harvey Erickson," *Ancestry.com*, https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/7884/4454887_00142/173677063?backurl=https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/23846215/person/13058125512/facts/citation/31982772385/edit/record (Accessed July 24, 2019).

² *Ibid.*

³ "1920 United States Federal Census for Harvey O (sic) Erickson," *Ancestry.com*, https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/6061/4392031_00950/63494138?backurl=https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/23846215/person/13058125512/facts/citation/31982772217/edit/record (Accessed July 24, 2019).

⁴ *Powwow*, November 1945, WSU 25, WSU Publications: Alumni Office <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc/finders/wsupubslst.htm> at Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc>.

⁵ *Ibid.*; "Harvey Ralph Erickson in the U.S. WWII Draft Cards Young Men, 1940-1947," *Ancestry.com*, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=2238&h=18887642&tid=&pid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=ixh877&_phstart=successSource (Accessed July 24, 2019).

Wartime Service and Death

Erickson enlisted in the United States Army Air Forces in February, 1943 and was commissioned an officer.⁶ He was stationed initially in San Diego with the 19th Coast Artillery Regiment, a unit that was part of the defense of the city and its surrounding environs from land, sea, and air attacks during World War II.⁷ He was transferred to the 1924th Engineer Aviation Battalion, which was formed on July 9, 1944, and sent to Geiger Field in Washington.⁸ The 1924th left Washington on May 3, 1945, reaching Hawaii a week later, then Guam on May 25, 1945, where they remained until July, at which time they headed to Okinawa.⁹

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was created on June 16, 1775 when General George Washington appointed Colonel Richard Gridley as the first chief engineer of the Continental Army.¹⁰ Throughout its history, Army Engineers performed civil works in addition to military engineering projects. This included the construction of coastal fortifications such as lighthouses, piers, and jetties, and in the 20th century, levees, dams, and reservoirs.¹¹ During World War II, the Corps of Engineers provided services for all U.S. Army and Army Air Forces construction projects, which included building airfields, roads, bridges, ports, petroleum pipelines, and perhaps most famous of all, the Pentagon, whose construction was completed in 1942.¹²

⁶ Letter from Evangeline Erickson to E.O. Holland, August 21, 1946, Box 1, Folder 6, Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc>.

⁷ Ibid.; National Archives copy, "War Period History Harbor Defenses of San Diego," [militarymuseum.org](http://www.militarymuseum.org), <http://www.militarymuseum.org/SanDiegoWWII.pdf> (Accessed July 25, 2019).

⁸ Letter from Evangeline Erickson to E.O. Holland, August 21, 1946, Box 1, Folder 6, Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc>; "CBI Order of Battle: Lineages and History, Corps of Engineer Units," [cbi-history.com](http://www.cbi-history.com), http://www.cbi-history.com/part_iv_eng.html (Accessed July 24, 2019).

⁹ "CBI Order of Battle: Lineages and History, Corps of Engineer Units," [cbi-history.com](http://www.cbi-history.com), http://www.cbi-history.com/part_iv_eng.html (Accessed July 24, 2019).

¹⁰ "Army Corps of Engineers, U.S.," [encyclopedia.com](https://www.encyclopedia.com), <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences-and-law/political-science-and-government/military-affairs-nonnaval/united-states-7> (Accessed August 1, 2019).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

Erickson, by now a First Lieutenant, was directing the construction of a water pipeline on Okinawa.

The Battle of Okinawa ended on June 22, 1945 after a battle that claimed the lives of more than 12,000 Americans and 100,000 Japanese; these figures included the commanding generals on both sides.¹³ Civilian casualties were also high, with 100,000 losing their lives in combat or by suicide at the order of the Japanese military.¹⁴ Control of the island following the end of the battle fell to the U.S. Navy, and construction projects were initiated right away. The Japanese surrendered to Allied Forces on August 15, 1945 but the 1924th remained on the island to complete projects already initiated. On August 18, 1945, Lieutenant Erickson went out by automobile for a late-night inspection of the work site and his car crashed into another Army vehicle. He suffered a traumatic brain injury from which he did not recover. He died on August 23, 1945.¹⁵

Postwar Legacy

In her letter to E.O. Holland nearly one year after her brother's death, Erickson's sister wrote that his death "was a great shock to us coming as it did after VJ Day when he was confidently expecting his...return."¹⁶ Erickson was initially buried on Okinawa, but was reinterred in Honolulu Memorial, within the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific

¹³ Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Battle of Okinawa," *Britannica.com*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Battle-of-Okinawa> (Accessed August 7, 2019).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Letter from Evangeline Erickson to E.O. Holland, August 21, 1946, Box 1, Folder 6, Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

(Punchbowl).¹⁷ He was survived by his wife, who at the time of his death was working for the rationing board in San Jose.¹⁸

¹⁷ “Harvey R. Erickson in the WWI, WWII, and Korean War Casualty Listings,” *Ancestry.com*, <https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=8853&h=107646&ssrc=pt&tid=23846215&pid=13058125512&usePUB=true> (Accessed July 24, 2019).

¹⁸ *Powwow*, November 1945, WSU 25, WSU Publications: Alumni Office <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc/finders/wsupublist.htm> at Washington State University Libraries’ Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) <http://libraries.wsu.edu/masc>.