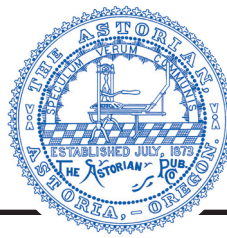


# OPINION



# the Astorian

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Founded in 1873

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## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

# Once a Marine, always a Marine

I have had the honor of talking to many World War II veterans over the years — American, Canadian, British, German, French, Belgian and Dutch.

Many were reluctant to talk about their experiences. They grappled their entire lives to deal with memories of fallen comrades and the horrors of war.

Some, usually the loudest, boasted of fictitious accomplishments. Their accounts didn't stand up to closer scrutiny.

Others were proud of their service, but reluctant to cast themselves as heroes. They served in support roles and didn't experience front-line combat. They did their duty and contributed what they could to the war effort.

Juanita Price of Astoria definitely falls into the last category.

Her story is relatively unique, at least to me — my interest was piqued when I heard the words "World War II," "woman" and "Marine" in the same sentence.

She writes in her memoir that she was a student at the University of Missouri journalism school in the winter of 1944, working on the copy desk, as the teletype machine spewed out news of battles raging across the globe, including the Anzio landings in Italy. The news included dispatches from Ernie Pyle, one of the most famous war correspondents of all time.

There were hardly any men in the journalism school, she said. They'd all been drafted. She had a poster in her dorm room aimed at women: "Be a Marine — Free a Marine to Fight." The Marines had reluctantly started recruiting women because they had run out of men. So while on spring break, she went to a recruiting office in St. Louis and signed up.

She helped publish a D-Day "extra" edition of the Columbia Missourian newspaper on June 6, 1944, graduated the next Sunday, then boarded a train June 12 for boot camp at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

### 'You are not WACs'

In six weeks, she and the other women were converted into Marine Corps privates, doing everything the men were expected to — even the obstacle course.

"I didn't care for before-breakfast calisthenics and lights out at 10 p.m., but the routine kept us all healthy," she wrote.

She vividly remembers the white-glove inspections, everything shined, pressed and folded exactly as specified. Even their girdles and slips were regulated. Sometimes, in an unannounced surprise inspection, they'd hurriedly line up in what she called their "undress pinks."

"It was our one bit of self-identity," she laughed while remembering that particular detail.

The platoon sergeant — a man — instructed the recruits prior to review.

"You will stand at attention until put 'at ease,'" he said. "If you feel like fainting, well don't. You are not WACs," referring to the Women's Army Corps.

After graduation, she was assigned to the Marine photo lab at Quantico, Virginia, where she served as a quartermaster. She was the only woman Marine quartermaster on the East Coast. It was considered good duty because of its proximity to Washington, D.C., and New York City. The lab trained cameramen in both still and cine (video) photography for service as combat photographers.

She left the Marines on April 26, 1946, with the rank of corporal. Seeking a newspaper job after the war, she experienced her first (but not last) brush with discrimination — editors told her she was a woman, not a veteran.

### Common bonds

Talking to Juanita is a delight. She's the most active 90-something I'll probably ever meet.

She seemed particularly proud to show me her 4x5 Speed Graphic camera, which she began using at Quantico and was standard equipment for news photographers. We both noted the irony when I took a picture of her and that camera using my iPhone, which weighs under 7 ounces.

We have some common bonds. We both majored in journalism in college, 40 years apart. We both joined the military after graduation and worked



Juanita Price with her 1940s Speed Graphic camera.

Jim Van Nostrand/The Astorian



Juanita Price as a Marine.



John Price as an Army captain.



Juanita Price

A Marine processing images at the photo lab.



Juanita Price

Marines at the photo lab.



Juanita Price

Marines in class at the photo lab.

*'THERE'S SOMETHING DREADFUL ABOUT WAR.  
IT MAKES A PEACEFUL PERSON OUT OF YOU.'*

Juanita Price

in newspapers after leaving the service. And we both met our spouses in newsrooms.

Her husband, John Price, who passed in 2011 at the age of 95, served as a tank platoon leader and staff officer in the 33rd Armored Regiment of the Army's Third Armored Division in World War II, earning a Bronze Star in the Battle of the Bulge.

His unit landed on Omaha Beach on June 23, 1944, while Juanita was

in boot camp. The division spearheaded the First Army's drive across Normandy.

I have visited several of the battlefields on which John served, including Mons, Belgium, and the Hurtgen Forest in Germany. He wrote in his memoir, titled "A Narrow Road Through the Forest," that as a personnel officer, he served behind the combat units. But he was close enough to the front lines to experience shelling, air attacks and

some close encounters with enemy soldiers that the lead units had bypassed.

John's regiment liberated the Nordhausen concentration camp in Germany, where French, Belgian, Polish and Russian prisoners labored on the V-1 and V-2 rocket assembly lines. He recalled seeing streams of walking skeletons newly freed from the death camps.

After the war, John, who had majored in journalism at the University of Idaho, joined the Times News in Twin Falls as a reporter.

Juanita was already working there as a reporter and photographer, covering nine counties in the southern part of the state. She remembers him walking in and surveying the room on his first day in late September 1946. They were married in 1948 in Portland and moved to Astoria in 1960.

Juanita's contributions to the Astoria community have been well-documented in the pages of this newspaper. She worked as a librarian and was active in the American Association of University Women and the National Alliance on Mental Illness, among other organizations. She was honored with a George Award in 2012 for her selfless volunteerism.

Looking back at her military service, all these years later, she remembers the Marines who came home from the South Pacific, many of them physically and mentally scarred. It made her become an advocate for peace not war, she said.

"There's something dreadful about war," she said. "It makes a peaceful person out of you."

Jim Van Nostrand is editor of *The Astorian*.