

# Saluting an American Hero

By Marie Rasnick Fetzer



WWII Veteran Marione Rasnick receiving a cheering welcome upon her Honor Flight arrival in Washington, D.C. 2012.

## WWII Veteran Still Going Strong at 91 LUTHERSVILLE, Ga.

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, we lose an estimated 640 WWII veterans daily. As time is running out, the country has made a real effort to honor these members of “the Greatest Generation” before they are gone. And now, seventy-two years after the end of World War II, Corporal Marione (Brace) Rasnick is set to celebrate her 91<sup>st</sup> birthday just a few days before Veteran’s Day. As a remaining veteran, and especially a remaining living woman veteran, she is pretty rare.

Born in Atlanta, GA. on November 7, 1926, Marione was the oldest of five children of Merritt and Alma Brace. By the time she was in first grade, the family had moved to Middlebury, Vermont, and then back again to Atlanta in time for Marione to attend the eighth grade at West Fulton High School. She left home by the time she was 16, and got a job in Macon working in a war plant servicing airplanes during WWII. Her next job, also working for the war effort, took her to Washington, D.C., where she tracked and recorded weather data and wind speeds from the atmosphere. She would release balloons on a rainy or cloudy day and every thirty seconds use a special measuring device called a “theodolite” to track the angles of the weather balloons. That information was used by the Army weather service and pilots to gauge the weather and flying conditions.

At the age of 18, Marione's parents signed consent for her to enter the Army and she enlisted in the Women's Army Corps at Ft. McPherson in Atlanta in 1945. She did her Basic Training at Ft. Oglethorpe and afterwards was assigned to Northington General Hospital in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Her duties were similar to a nurse's aide, however she was trained as a Surgical Technician circulating in the Operating Room. It was there that she met her husband, Byrl, who had arrived from overseas to receive treatment for a serious injury sustained during the Battle of the Bulge. She nursed him back to health, fell in love and they married on November 14, 1945. After discharge, Byrl received training as a plumber through the G.I. Bill. They received a V.A. loan and "put fifty cents down" on a home in East Point, Ga., where they settled and raised their five children. With Marione's help, Byrl started a plumbing business, and they stayed busy working and raising children until retirement to Florida in 1980. Having more time on her hands, she returned to school and earned her LPN degree in nursing and worked for several years at Fish Memorial Hospital in DeLand, Fl. One of the more interesting stories she tells is the day several escaped prisoners entered the hospital and took her and her coworkers hostage until they were captured sometime later, without incident.

Marione has always been very proud of her military service and in May of 2012, was thrilled to be chosen for an Honor Flight trip to Washington, D.C. to visit the WWII Memorial. She described it as an "awesome" trip, and in a letter she wrote to the Honor Flight Conyers Board, described how it "strengthened and renewed" her, and that she was there representing "the dear veterans who suffered and sacrificed so much". She went on to share the following experience: "As we deplaned in D.C we were greeted by many people, old and young, military, etc. One U.S. Army Master Sergeant, with many ribbons on his uniform, shook my hand and smiled. I could not help but give him a hug. Later at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, we passed each other again and smiled. About two hours later, after we witnessed the President of Mexico and his entourage lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, this same U.S. Army Master Sergeant passed me as we were leaving the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. He smiled and reached to shake my hand, except he had in his hand a large oval medal! He passed on by, no words were spoken. The medal is decorated on both sides with these words: "Joint Force Headquarters National Capital Region" and "Awarded for Excellence". The other side said "US Army" with an outer circle in red with the Staff Sgt. Insignia....The Center background shows the Stars and Stripes, the Washington Monument, the Capital and a large Eagle!" Marione also went on to say that she planned to give the medal to her son, Bob, a veteran of the Vietnam War who had been wounded in combat. He said he would be happy to keep the medal for her and, even though they had not spoken with each other in a long time, she considered their conversation a great blessing. Sadly and unexpectedly, Bob died the next year.

Shortly after the Honor Flight, Marione was contacted by a student named Michael, who asked about her Honor Flight trip, and about "bravery". In a letter to him, she responded this way: "I want to tell you that it was a most excellent day! I was the only woman WWII veteran with the group. Know that there was not the number of women in the military during WWII, compared to today. You spoke of bravery. Bravery was not the reason that I wanted to join the Women's Army Corps. Some of the men were as young as 16 years of age, most 17 and older. Every man who served in wartime or died in battle or from his wounds is the definition of BRAVERY. When the men (or women) enlist to serve our great country, they do so knowing they may lose their life for serving in the military to protect the American people.... I loved every day of my Army service from the KP (kitchen police) duty to taking care of different type patients. Thank you for your love and kind words. My trip to Washington D.C. was AWESOME!"

Over the years several moves occurred, with Marione finally ending up back in Georgia. Her beloved Byrl died in 2004, and for the last few years she has been lovingly cared for by her son Judge John Rasnick and his wife Beth and their children Dominic and Emma. Although she has had her own health challenges, all in all she is doing well, and even though she's getting a little slower, still enjoys her life-long love of exercise and walking in the outdoors. Occasionally she enjoys helping answer phones in John's office, or can be spotted sitting in on one of the cases in his courtroom in Greenville.

Marione was a faithful daughter and wife and is a devoted member of St. Francis de Sales Roman Catholic Church in Mableton. She has done many good works and kindnesses throughout her life and was a proud and active member of American Legion Post 294 in Powder Springs, where she served as the Post Historian. She enjoyed singing in the church choir, is a talented artist and quilter and very interested in world events and politics. She has a deep love of this country and has passed a legacy of patriotism and duty on to her sons and grandsons, and is loved and respected by her four remaining children, nine grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

When asked what additionally she'd like to say about her life, it was this: "I've had the most wonderful life. I've had the most wonderful husband and I've had the most wonderful children. Really." What more can you say!



Private Marione Brace. 1945.



Marione Brace Rasnick sitting in front of the Meriwether County Courthouse, Greenville, Ga. 2017.