

100th

CONTINUED FROM | PAGE A-3

their lives for their country and to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of Women in the Marine Corps – the enduring legacy of the “Lady Leathernecks.”

The Women’s Memorial Bell Tower – the only monument of its kind in the nation – is a physical manifestation of the “semper fi” spirit – a 55-foot bell tower dedicated to all American women who lost their lives in service to their country.

On Aug. 13, 1918, Opha May Johnson was the first woman in line of 300 women recruits to enlist in the Marine Corps. At the end of World War I, all women serving in the military were discharged and sent home. It wasn’t until World War II, on July 30, 1942, that President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Congressional Act permitting women to enlist again. On Feb. 13, 1943, more than 23,000 women flooded the Marine Corps recruiting offices with the goal to “Free a Man to Fight” and to help win the war. At the end of WWII, in September 1945, the WWII Victory Medal was established, to be awarded to any member of the U.S. military who served on active duty or the reserves between December 1941 and Dec. 31, 1946.

In February, eleven WWII female Marines were recognized at the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs by Lt. Gov. Nancy Wyman and Commissioner of Veterans Affairs Thomas Saadi in a commendation ceremony. At this ceremony, sponsored by the Women Marines Association, the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation and

the Marine Corps League, three women received WWII Victory Medals in person, four others in absentia, and four more, honored posthumously.

Though Opha May Johnson was allowed to enroll for clerical duty only, throughout the past century, women marines have served as intelligence officers, military judges, sharpshooters, tank mechanics, military police, jet mechanics, rifle platoon leaders, brigadier generals, White House Honor Guard members, Marine Amphibious Assault Officers, rifle platoon leaders, Space Directors, master gunnery sergeants, drill instructors, Parris Island Range Officers, Battalion Drill Masters, Navy Aviation Depot Commanders, strike fighter pilots, combat pilots, osprey pilots, marine helicopter squadron commanders and NASA astronaut corps leaders in the development of the Orion spacecraft. Each and every woman was a pioneer, brave enough to take the path less travelled and break another gender barrier.

At the request of Jamie DePaola, Area Director 1 of the Womens Marines Association, Sgt. Clara L. Carr (Pechacek) will be the guest speaker for the Memorial Day service. Carr served from 2008-2012 as a Field Radio Operator, stationed in Okinawa, Japan, then deployed to Afghanistan, before being honorably discharged in 2012. Carr has her Bachelor of Science in Human Services and will complete a Masters of Social Work in 2019 from the University of New Hampshire. This fall she will intern in the Primary Care Department at the Manchester VA Medical Center.

Carr: “My time in the Marine

Corps afforded me the opportunity to not only learn about the military infrastructure, but also understand and relate to the stressors and traumas being faced by my fellow service members.”

“Semper Fi” means unconditional loyalty – not only on the battlefield but at home as well.

New Hampshire is the only state in the country – besides Alaska and Hawaii – that does not have a full-service VA Hospital. Last February, when a VA Task Force formed to determine whether New Hampshire needed a full-service hospital, it concluded that by the time a full-service hospital was constructed, “demand would not be large enough to justify the investment.”

Karen Barilani, a former marine Field Radio Operator who served 2001-2005, and deployed to Kuwait in 2003, firmly believes this conclusion is erroneous. A Police/Fire/EMS Dispatcher in Hillsboro, Barilani has lost four members of her unit to suicide, and still others from incidents of domestic violence, auto accidents, cancer and heart attacks. Barilani obtained her BA in Psychology in 2015 and this spring completes a Masters of Mental Health Counseling also from New England College. She will soon begin her career serving veterans affairs.

Barilani: “There are far more veterans in New Hampshire than is believed – they do not come forward because they do not trust the VA – or because when they have tried to obtain services, it took months. That is not a way to build trust.”

The Marine Corps league today boasts 55,000 members nationally. It is difficult to imagine that New Hampshire veter-

ans do not have the numbers to merit a full-service VA hospital.

The Women’s Memorial Bell Tower is a physical reminder of unsung women who gave their lives for their country. But it is also a tangible reminder about how we so often overlook the obvious – women who walk by it to be married at the Altar of the Nations often do not realize that they are walking by the most important national monument to women in the country.

Some memories engage us haphazardly – they come as gifts or crosses, visiting us without our deliberation. Other memories – most often memories about those outside our own families – need to be engaged.

As the daughter of a Parris Island Rifle Instructor, I am happy to report that I grew up in the tall shadows of “Semper Fi” – and then later married a Marine. Every military experience in all the services is about loyalty – loyalty to the moment at hand, loyalty to the task and loyalty to the team. We all need to employ such loyalty as we think about how to serve those who have already served.

I urge anyone – especially women – grandmothers, mothers, daughters, aunts and nieces to engage – to be present for this special service, to acknowledge the women who were present for us. Visibility and voice matter – more than ever for the unsung women represented by the Women’s Memorial Bell Tower – the most unique monument of its kind in the nation.

Quincy Whitney is a career journalist, author, historian and Nashua resident for more than 40 years. Contact her at quincysquill@nashuatelegraph.com or quincy@quincywhitney.com.