

Scott honored as first woman Veteran of the Month

By Sherri Onorati, Special to The Leader

Just five short years after the first eight American women were sworn in as regular Marines in 1948, the Tipton County Museum Veteran of the Month for May 2017, Elizabeth M. Scott, joined the United States Marine Corps at age 21 in February 1953, a move she deemed necessary in order to join without her parents' permission.

"I could have had my mom and dad sign, but I didn't think they would," explained Scott for the reason of waiting until age 21 to join. "You know, I don't know what made me join, but I was working for the airlines at the time and I was tired of it. I wanted to do something different. My father was in the Army, I had a brother in the Navy and one in the Air Force, but no one was representing the Marines, so I thought why not?"

Nominated by fellow veteran HT Ray, Scott, also affectionately known as Marge, was the youngest of five children born on Jan. 7, 1932 in Sharon, Penn. She went to work for Northwest Airlines in New York City after high school, but quickly tired of it and wanted a change. She found it in the United States Marine Corps.

She joined the Corps a month after her 21st birthday and shipped off to Parris Island, S.C. for 10 weeks of boot camp, before departing for Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Fla., for eight weeks of Airman Preparatory School and then on to Olathe, Kansas for 12 weeks of Air Traffic Controller training. She reported to her first duty station in as a member of Women Marine Detachment 1, based at Marine Corps Air Station El Toro, Calif.

"Boot camp... well, it was alright," said the octogenarian, chuckling. "They had a saying they would tell us, 'Let the sand fleas eat because you eat,' and that type of thing... but then you're out there trying to swat at them and they're yelling at you to keep those arms down!"

During the Tuesday evening event, it was revealed Marge met the love of her life, her husband Harmon Scott, after he was having problems finding his way back to the base after spending the evening celebrating his 21st birthday. She helped him to get onto the bus and back to the base safely, but then promptly gave no more thought to the Marine until she ran into him again while he was working behind the counter at the enlisted club. She said she placed an order for fries and when they arrived, the Marine promptly started eating them, saying he had given her too many. Her astonishment soon gave way to curiosity, and when he asked her out on a date, she accepted. They soon became inseparable and were married a short six months later on Aug. 6, 1954 at the Wedding Chapel in Anaheim, Calif.

At that time, women were not allowed to continue their careers once they became wives and mothers, and so Corporal Elizabeth "Marge" Scott was soon discharged a few days after her marriage to Harmon Scott. She had served in the Marine Corps for two years when she was forced out but she says she wouldn't change a thing and would do it all over again if she could, pointing out if she hadn't joined she probably never would have met her husband.

"I had a good time in the service and I made good friends," she said. "And, I believe I was destined to meet Harmon but I really thought I would be able to stay in since he was a Marine and I was a Marine and we were both in aviation. I thought we would be able to get the same duty stations, but then he got Japan and I couldn't go there."

She began a career in banking after her discharge, including working for People's Bank for more than 20 years, but was not completely free of the Marines Corps, as she followed her husband who continued to serve on active duty, from duty station to duty station. Along the way, they soon welcomed two beautiful children, son, Brian and daughter Cyndy. Marge is also the proud grandmother of three – Stevie, Scott and Spencer Austin, and mother-in-law to a beautiful woman she said she considers to be more of a true daughter than in-law. After 62 years of marriage, she lost her beloved husband in Feb. 2016 and is very grateful and appreciative her children, including her daughter-in-law, Debra Scott, have stepped in to help her.

“We were married for 62 years when he passed in February 2016,” Scott said, her voice cracking. “He was born in February and he passed in February. Brian and Debbie have both been a rock for me. They both gave up their jobs in Florida and came up here to help me and they’re still here, for four years now. How many children would give up everything to take care of us? He had Alzheimer’s and it hard, but we survived. God makes sure you don’t have more than you can chew, but sometimes I want to question him. You make plans and he laughs.”

The Tipton County Veteran’s Council presented Scott with several awards for her years of service, including a certificate of honor, a year’s membership in the Tipton County Veterans Council, a certificate for a canvas portrait given by Munford Funeral Home, a two hour house cleaning by Merry Maids and a resolution signed by the governor and a flag flown over the state capitol, given by District 81 State Representative Deborah Moody.

HT Ray thanked Scott for her service and for the privilege of nominating her.

“Marge, it’s a pleasure to nominate you for this honor,” stated H.T. Ray. “We know a military wife, as well as being in the military, is one of the greatest jobs that any lady can ever have. Following her husband, taking care of his children, going from base to base, state to state. Thank you for all you did in support of our military.”

Just as she was a trailblazer for the Marines, Scott is also one for Tipton County – she holds the distinction of being the first woman veteran to be recognized and honor as a Veteran of the Month.

“I’m very proud to have been a Marine and to be your veteran of the month,” she told those in attendance. “I’m hoping it will open the doors for other women to be Veteran of the Month. It’s an honor to be the first one.”

Kathy Desjarlais, president of the Tipton County Veterans Council read her certificate of honor and added a special thank you for her service.

“I also want to thank you on behalf of myself and for the other women veterans present,” she said, “without you doing what you did when you did it, we would not have been able to do what we did when we did it. Thank you for your service.”

Tipton County Veteran Service Officer Guy Critelli also echoed that sentiment.

“In a time when women were looked down on for their military service, we appreciate you stepping up and paving the way for future women veterans. Thank you for your service,” he remarked.

Tipton County Girl Scout troop 13804 helped hosted the event’s reception and provided many delectable treats which were thoroughly enjoyed by the guests.

The Veteran of the Month program is sponsored by the Tipton County Museum, Veteran Memorial and Nature Center and the Tipton County Veterans Council. Sponsors of the monthly event include Tipton County Veterans Council, Patriot Bank, The Bank of Tipton and Munford Funeral Home. Underwriters include the VFW Post 4840 and the Disable American Veterans Auxiliary in Millington. Honorees are recognized on the second Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. and the public is invited to both make nominations and to attend the ceremony.