



profile

# Margie Stone

## WWII vet, 101, makes historic Normandy trip

By Allison McCrory / Photos by Kate Treick Photography & provided



**A**we and gratitude are strong in the heart of Pensacola World War II veteran and volunteer 101-year-old Margie Stone.

And possibly no life moment was more awe-inspiring than sitting behind President Biden on a stage in Normandy, France, on June 6, and hearing her name called out to commemorate the more than 350,000 women who answered the call to World War II service.

Stone tried to sit in a less prominent spot, but organizers wanted her positioned just behind the presidents, to highlight women's contributions to the war effort.

"So they put me on the front row and sure enough when Biden gave his speech, he mentioned the ladies and he mentioned my name," said Stone, who was born on July 4, 1923, in Maine.

Stone was one of 68 veterans ages 96 to 107 who visited the iconic region in June for more than a week to celebrate the 80th anniversary of D-Day.

### FINDING THE BEAUTY

After landing in Paris, one of the first stops for the veterans was at Suresnes American Cemetery where the oldest

veteran, a 107-year-old former gunner, laid a wreath to remember the 4,414 Allied troops who died on D-Day,

A military musician played taps as the veterans encircled the wreath.

"That just sends you somewhere. It just gets to you in a very special way," said Stone.

The visit was bittersweet, Stone said. "All of these white crosses slant down the hill and it is something else to see that many crosses. And when you're looking down the hill, here's the Eiffel Tower in the distance. It's just so pretty.

"Most of them were 18, just out of high school," Stone recalled. "Some of them didn't even graduate they were so eager to be a part of it. It's just unreal."

Other stops included Utah Beach and Omaha Beach, where veterans each tossed a red rose on the beach. The group was welcomed by schoolchildren along their historic journey, was serenaded by a military choir, watched a reenactment of the historic era, visited museums, lunched at a historic chateau, participated in a parade in Pointe du Hoc where they were greeted by townspeople who generations after

very regimented, she quickly adapted to the rules.

"You fall into them easily because everybody is doing it too. It was fun learning to march and do different things," Stone said.

"We were so proud that we could have a little part in all of it. When something that big happens, you want to be part of it. You want to be able to help. And so we were. So many fields opened up and from there — look at where the women have gone. They do so much now," said the mother of three daughters.

From Oklahoma, she was sent to Jacksonville to work on airplanes. She met her husband, Harry Stone, also stationed in Jacksonville, and after the war, they moved to his hometown of Pensacola and raised three daughters.

While Stone is a quiet person, "her actions speak for her," explained her daughter Barbara Grass.

At 101, Stone drives, lives independently and volunteers at least weekly at Baptist Hospital. She's in a sewing group and makes blankets, scarves and other gifts for family and friends. She tends to her many plants, cross stitches and is active in D.A.R. and East Brent Baptist Church. She loves to attend local Blue Angels events and "anything patriotic," said Grass.

Grass remembers that often as a child when her dad would travel, Stone would announce "Girls, we are going camping," packing up the tent, the girls and everything else needed for a nature adventure — to the Smokies if they had more time or to St. Andrews State Park if they had less.

Always an adventurer, Stone went on to swim competitively into her '90s.

Despite the passing of more than 80 years since the United States was immersed in World War II, Stone's passion for peace is strong.

"If there's any way we can, we should avoid another war. Look at all of the thousands that were killed in that war. And now with this nuclear, it would be just unbelievable. It would just destroy so much. We need to avoid another war. We just couldn't imagine what could happen now."

*“The thing about it is, this was such a big invasion. I guess it was different from all the others because you had the landings, you had the air and the ships bombing all the time. It was a huge, huge undertaking. There’s a saying, I think Eisenhower said it, that there was no Plan B if this hadn’t worked. There was no Plan B.”*

— Margie Stone, 101, WWII vet



Photo by Frank M. Jackowiak

D-Day expressed their gratitude to the veterans.

“The people are just so excited and so glad to see you. When you get to Normandy, those people remember what happened and they know that they were saved. They appreciate it. They’re not forgetting it and they have a celebration every year. They keep it all alive,” said Stone.

“Beautiful” is a word Stone used over and over — to describe the cemeteries, the French bread, the new buses that transported the group, the clothes and blankets gifted to the veterans.

“It was such a nice trip and so well planned. All the places that we stayed were so nice. And the food was excellent, and the restaurants went out of their way to please you,” said Stone.

#### **“PROUD TO BE PART OF IT”**

After she completed two years of college, on the day after her 20th birthday, Stone joined the Navy WAVES.

Her younger brother Donald was drafted and that prompted her to seek military service also.

“I had one brother that I grew up with and we were very close, and my brother had to go. He was drafted and I wanted to go too.”

She went to boot camp at Hunter College, NY, then rode a train to Norman, OK, for airplane mechanic training.

“I can remember that train trip and the black cinders were falling in my lap,” recalled Stone with a chuckle.

Rather than being scared, Stone said she was excited. While the military was