

# 1945 November 19-25

## His and Her Navy Whites

12 — THE LA CROSSE TRIBUNE. SUNDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 25, 1945 —  
**Husband, Wife Team From La Crosse In Navy  
 Returns Home After Being Given Discharges**



—Tribune Photo  
**Both Serving In The U. S. Navy, Theodore C. Erickson, radio-**  
 man, second class, and his wife, Evelyn, storekeeper, third class,  
 received their discharges and returned to La Crosse.

Our image of marriages during World War II is mostly the stereotype of a girlfriend or wife of a serviceman waiting anxiously and patiently for her man to return from the war. There were also courtships accelerated by the urgency of war between men who were stationed all over the country and the world and local women. "War brides," both domestic and foreign, were numerous during and right after World War II.

Less typical was the case of a husband and a wife both serving in the armed forces. Military regulations on marital status and marriages within the armed forces varied by the branch of service.

Army:

- Only single women could be Army nurses at the beginning of World War II, but that later changed to allow nurses to be married.

- Members of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) and Women's Army Corps (WAC) could be single or married. When a woman married, she had to notify her higher command of her name change. An individual unit commander "could choose to require" his or her permission for women to marry. If a woman in the European Theater got married, she "was immediately transferred to a distant station within the command or out of the theater." Only pregnant women could marry in the China-Burma-India Theater, and the woman would be sent home and discharged.

#### Navy:

- At the beginning of the war, women in the Navy Reserves (WAVES) could not marry military men, and marriage was banned while they were in training. The policy changed in 1942 to allow women in the WAVES to marry servicemen except those in the Navy, but that restriction was lifted the following year. WAVES still had to get permission to marry if they were in a special training program.
- Navy nurses could not marry, and the penalty was immediate discharge. In January 1945, this regulation was suspended, but it was reinstated in November 1945.

#### Marines:

- Both single and married women could serve in the Marines, but women could not be married to another Marine. Later on, wives of enlisted Marines could also join the Marines.

#### Coast Guard (SPARS):

- Single women could not marry until after completing their training.
- Married women could join the Coast Guard as long as they were not married to another Coast Guardsman.<sup>1</sup>

Theodore and Evelyn (Parker) Erickson of La Crosse were a married couple who both served in the Navy during World War II.

Theodore Clair Erickson was born on September 19, 1910, in Vernon County, Wisconsin.<sup>2</sup> His parents were Erick and Iva (Moore) Erickson, and the area where he was born was known as Jug Creek in the Vernon County town of Stark.<sup>3</sup> Erick Erickson was a carpenter and worked at Camp McCoy for four years.<sup>4</sup>

Erickson graduated from La Farge High School in 1929. Then he attended [Waldorf College](#) in Forest City, Iowa, where he graduated in 1931.<sup>5</sup>

After his two years at Waldorf, Erickson worked at Nuzum Lumber Company in Viroqua.<sup>6</sup>

By the time he was 26 years old, Erickson's mother was thinking her oldest son would be a lifelong bachelor. But he surprised the whole family by going away to get married without telling anyone what he was going to do.<sup>7</sup>

On October 9, 1936, Theodore Erickson was married at Galena, Illinois.<sup>8</sup> His bride was Evelyn Parker. She was also 26 years old (born November 17, 1910), so her family also probably thought she was destined

for spinsterhood. Her parents were Francis P. and Nora (Evans) Parker.<sup>9</sup> Francis Parker was a blacksmith in La Farge. He and his wife had two daughters younger than Evelyn.<sup>10</sup>

By October 1940, Theodore and Evelyn were living at 812 North Street, in La Crosse. He was working at the Seeman Lumber Company at the corner of Gillette and Caledonia streets in La Crosse.<sup>11</sup> Evelyn worked in the office at Northern Engraving Company for three years.<sup>12</sup>

Theodore Erickson was drafted into the Navy in May 1943. They were living at 1338 1/2 George Street at that time.<sup>13</sup>

After basic recruit training, Erickson spent seven months training at the University of Chicago.<sup>14</sup> Evelyn followed him by getting an office job at the University of Chicago.<sup>15</sup> Theodore completed his training as a radio operator by early 1944.<sup>16</sup>

Theodore Erickson also had two brothers in the armed forces in 1944. Private First Class Mervin Erickson, 22, was an infantryman in the Army. Harold Erickson, 27, was an aviation cadet with the Army Air Force.<sup>17</sup>

The number of the Erickson family members in the armed forces was about to increase with a somewhat surprising addition. With her husband shipping out to the Pacific, Evelyn Erickson left her job at the University of Chicago. She returned to La Crosse in the summer of 1944 and lived at 1212 Logan Street with her parents. Evelyn Erickson then enlisted in the United States Naval Reserve (Women's Reserve) or Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service ([WAVES](#)). She left La Crosse on August 10, 1944, to report for training at [Hunter College](#).<sup>18</sup>



WAVES summer white dress uniform  
(University of North Carolina-Greensboro)

The boot camp for female naval personnel was the Bronx campus of Hunter College. The Navy spent \$1 million per year to rent the entire campus for WAVES training. Every two weeks, a new group of 1,600 to 1,700 women would start a new training cycle. More than 104,000 women joined the WAVES during World War II, and, by 1945, 86,000 WAVES were on shore duty. Women were 18 percent of the naval personnel not stationed on ships.<sup>19</sup>



WAVES on the parade ground at Hunter College, 1944

(University of North Carolina-Greensboro)

After completing her training at Hunter College, Evelyn Erickson was assigned to the Naval Bureau of Supplies and Accounts in Cleveland. Her job in the family allowance division was handling allowances and allotments for Navy wives and families. She lived in one of the two large hotels taken over by the Navy to house 1,200 WAVES in Cleveland.<sup>20</sup> The Bureau of Supplies and Accounts occupied five floors of one building, and three of those floors were devoted to family allowance accounts. That division sent out a monthly check to about 1.5 million families who had a family member in the Navy.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, Theodore Erickson, Radioman, Third Class, had shipped out to the Pacific in April 1944.<sup>22</sup> His ship participated in the battles for [Saipan](#), [Guam](#), [Palau](#), and [Morotai](#). Erickson was one of five radiomen working in the radio room of the ship. On October 1, 1944, while on night patrol near Mindanao in the Philippines, his destroyer was strafed by Japanese night fighters, killing some members of the crew and damaging the ship so severely that it had to return to the United States for repairs.<sup>23</sup>

His ship docked in the United States on October 25, and Theodore Erickson was back in La Crosse on November 18 as part of an 18-day leave. Evelyn Erickson managed to get an eight-day leave to spend some time with her husband. He then accompanied her back to Cleveland before he had to return to his ship.<sup>24</sup> While they were in La Crosse, Theodore and Evelyn were the honored guests at a party of the [Knights of Pythias](#) and [Pythian Sisters](#) lodge of which they were members.<sup>25</sup>



Radio room of a Navy destroyer, late 1940s-early 1950s

([Western Historic Radio Museum](#))

Theodore Erickson's ship returned to action in the Pacific where it was part of the liberation of the Philippines, Borneo, and the final naval campaign against Japan.<sup>26</sup>

After the war ended, he was discharged on October 19, 1945. Theodore made his way to Cleveland to be with his wife. Evelyn's commander gave her every afternoon off to spend with her husband until she was discharged from the Navy on November 2, 1945.<sup>27</sup>

Theodore and Evelyn Erickson returned to La Crosse to resume their civilian lives. They adopted three children.<sup>28</sup>



Sadly, the couple that had served together did not stay together. They separated--- Evelyn lived at 1347 1/2 Charles Street and Theodore lived at 302 North 8th Street---and they were divorced in November 1953 in La Crosse.<sup>29</sup>

Theodore worked as a union business agent in Colorado and Iowa. His second wife was Beverly Erickson. After he retired in June 1972, Erickson moved back to his hometown of La Farge. Erickson served as village president for three years until he resigned from that position in 1978. He was the grand master-at-arms for the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin Knights of Pythias, a member of Knights of Pythias Local 159, the La Farge Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 9075, the Rockton Lodge 209 of Free and Accepted Masons, and the Shriners.<sup>30</sup>

Theodore Erickson was a resident of the Bethany-St. Joseph Nursing Home in La Crosse when he died on June 5, 1982, at the age of 71. Funeral services were at the United Methodist Church in La Farge, and his burial was at the Bear Creek Cemetery near La Farge.<sup>31</sup>

Evelyn Erickson outlived two husbands.

Her second husband was Kenneth G. Johnson. Born in 1909, Kenneth Johnson died on July 16, 1969. He was buried at the Green Mound Cemetery near Holmen.<sup>32</sup>

Evelyn D. (Parker) Erickson Johnson lived to be 97 years old. She died on June 18, 2008, at the Onalaska Care Center. She was a member of the Pythias Sisters, the American Legion Post Auxiliary Post 52, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. She is buried with her second husband, Kenneth Johnson, in the Green Mound Cemetery near Holmen.<sup>33</sup>

At their funerals, both Theodore Erickson and Evelyn Erickson Johnson received the military honors that they had earned by serving at home and on the battlefield.

About 350,000 American women served in the United States Armed Forces during World War II. As of early 2020, 14,500 of them were still alive.<sup>34</sup>

As of 2018, about 84,000 service members were married to another member of the military.<sup>35</sup> When we civilians feel stress over managing the balance between job and marriage, we might do well to think about the unique challenges faced by dual-military families as they serve our country.

Jeff Rand

Adult Services Librarian

La Crosse Public Library

[jrand@lacrosselibrary.org](mailto:jrand@lacrosselibrary.org)

## Sources & Notes:

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