

Doris Ellen Pierce Towne, West Newbury's Classic Girl Goes to War

Doris Ellen Pierce, one of the few West Newbury women soldiers in WWII, was born on November 19, 1919, in Gloucester. She was the second child and only daughter of [Lester Ward Pierce, Sr.](#), who worked in the offices of Beverly's United Shoe Machine Co. and had served in WWI as a 1st Lieutenant in the aviation corps, and Florence Elizabeth Thompson, a West Newbury native. Before she turned five, the family returned to West Newbury, [where her parents had married](#) and lived as newlyweds.

Pierce grew up at the family's homes on Main Street and then River Road, graduating with honors from the [Central School](#) in 1937. She left Town for college at [Iowa State University](#). After graduation, she taught for a [short time in the Midwest](#) before returning to the area to serve as a [teacher in Sudbury](#) and New London, CT.

Tightly woven into the Town's social fabric, the Pierce family joined in civic, religious, and collegial activities. Florence Pierce was a leader in the [Garden Club](#), All Saints [Women's Guild](#), and the [Woman's Club](#). Among other things, Lester Pierce, Sr., chaired the [School Committee](#) and served as an officer of the [Carr Post](#). Doris Pierce participated in [Laurel Grange](#), All Saints [Women's Guild](#), and served on the [Junior Community Club's](#) executive committee. The [Newburyport Daily News](#) reported that Pierce literally went the extra mile: at 9 pm on February 28, 1939, the Pierces realized the house next door on River Road was ablaze, taking their shared party line out of service. "Miss Doris Pierce ran a mile to the nearest telephone to put in a call for the fire department."

When America entered WWII in [December 1941](#) the Pierces galvanized. By January 1942, Pierce's mother had become an [air raid warden](#) and her father represented the [local military police](#) on the Town safety committee. In April, her older brother, [Lester, Jr.](#), entered Army officers' training school. By July of 1942, Lester, Sr. had become a [Captain in the Massachusetts State Guard](#), reviewing new members drilling in Georgetown. Tragedy struck the family in the following month, when Pierce's father [died unexpectedly](#) of a heart attack before his 50th birthday. The Carr Post arranged [his funeral](#)—one of the largest

in recent West Newbury memory—assisted by the local State Guard Reserves. At the time, Pierce was at home, [studying at Salem State](#).

Perhaps in honor of her father's service in the WWI aviation corps, on June 26, 1943, Pierce enlisted in the Women's Army Corps (WAC), serving in the Army Air Forces (AAF), the [most favorable command](#) in treatment of women. In addition to clerical work, AAF WACs served as control tower operators, aerial photographers, weather observers, radio operators, mechanics, flight clerks, radio operators, and air crew members. Pierce's assignments in the [Air Transport Command](#) (ATC) took her to [Nashville's Berry Field](#), where the 4th Ferrying Group flew planes and goods all over the world; on to Great Falls, MT, where the [7th Ferrying Group](#) moved aircraft to Alaska for delivery to the Soviet Union; and then to [Grenier Field](#) (now Manchester Airport), where thousands of aircraft were shipped to Europe and Africa. Leaving nearby NH, Pierce became one of the [few WACs posted abroad](#). In 1945 Pierce sailed across the world to [Karachi, British India](#)—the western hub of the [India-China route](#), where the ATC received planes from the Middle East and Africa and transported supplies throughout the China-Burma-India Theater. After six months in Karachi, Pierce returned home at war's end to be discharged in December 1945. She was by then a [sergeant, decorated with Asiatic-Pacific Service, WWII Victory, and Good Conduct medals](#).

Upon her homecoming, Pierce (along with others including her younger brother [Willard](#), who had joined the Navy in 1943) was honored at [Laurel Grange](#) for her war service. She was the only woman in the group. She remained active in the [WAC reserves](#), and (with her mother) in the Town's [American Legion Auxiliary](#). She served for many years as a clerk in West Newbury's Post Office. In 1957 Pierce married Amesbury native [Robert Winston Towne](#), also a WWII vet, at All Saints Church. The couple lived in West Newbury until 1978, when they retired to Texas, where Pierce's mother and brothers had settled.

Widowed and elderly, Doris Pierce Towne entered a veterans' [retirement home in Washington, DC](#), where she died on October 29, 1998. She is buried at Fort Bliss cemetery in El Paso, as a navy veteran's wife.

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Source Left: Ancestry.com



Source Left: WACS History

Source Below: West Newbury News 11/25/1998

Doris Pierce Towne

West Newbury - Word has been received of the recent death in Washington, D.C., of former West Newbury resident Doris Pierce Towne.

The daughter of the late Florence and Lester W. Pierce, Sr., she was a graduate of West Newbury High School in the Class of 1937 and Iowa State College. She taught school in the mid-west for a short time, then returned to West Newbury. During World War II she served with the Women's Army Corps in India.

Following discharge she was employed as a clerk in the West Newbury Post Office for many years, then moved to El Paso, Texas, where she and her husband, the late Robert W. Towne, made their home. After his death she moved to Washington, D.C., to live in a retirement home for military personnel.

Burial was in El paso, Texas. She leaves a brother, Willard Pierce, in Ft. Worth, Texas. Her other brother, Lester W. Pierce, Jr., died a number of years ago.

Source Below: Wikipedia

First Parish

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With the Rev. Elbert B. Holmes, chaplain, voicing the Grange's gratitude that 26 veterans of World War II returned home unharmed, W. Gordon Austin, master of Laurel Grange, P. of H. presented gifts to the 11 veterans who attended the meeting Friday night. Honored were Joshua Newhall, Willard Pierce, Miss Doris Pierce, Leonard Swasey, Samuel Ordway, Harold Adams, Jack Guthro, Roscoe Noyes, Richard Melville, Bruce Melville and Hazen Brown.

At the business session it was voted to send the lecturer-elect, Norman Brown, to the forthcoming state lec-

Source Above: Newburyport Daily News 11/25/1946

