

Donald Stephen
Chandler
British Evacuee
Child
Oronsay
August 19, 1940



As a former British child war evacuee who came to Canada under the auspices of the Children's Overseas Reception Board (CORB#1350), and later as a Landed Immigrant, I passed through Pier 21 in 1940, 1945 and 1948. After being evacuated within England (Framlingham, Suffolk) from September 1, 1939 until the evacuation of Dunkirk, my parents applied for my younger sister, Dorothy, and me to be evacuated to Canada under the CORB plan. In due course we were selected and in early August 1940 were accompanied to an initial assembly place at Avery Hill College (now part of Greenwich University) near Eltham, Kent.

Our group traveled by train from Eltham to Liverpool, staying one night in a school gymnasium, where conditions were decidedly "Spartan". At that time Liverpool Docks endured almost nightly bombings, and, although we were well away from the dock area, the bombs seemed to be falling as close as the next street. Late the following day, along with 351 other CORB evacuees, we embarked in the Orient Line's SS "Oronsay". At about the same time two other large groups of "Corbies" embarked in Canadian Pacific's liner "Duchess of York" and SS "Antonia". The following morning found us at sea as part of a fast 15-knot convoy, commanded and controlled from the Battle Cruiser HMS "Revenge" and screened by six destroyers. It was learned after the destroyers had detached in mid-Atlantic, that one of the ships developed engine problems causing a reduction in the convoy's speed. Apart from daily life-boat drills, organized games, entertainment, meals, and the odd bout of mal-de-mer, the children were allowed to roam fairly freely enabling us to find some interesting places to play hide-and-go-seek.

On the final day of our nine day voyage, since we were among those not "nominated" to go to pre-arranged foster homes, we were assembled to discuss where we would like to be located in Canada. Dorothy and I enthusiastically opted to go "to a farm by the sea", if possible, where indeed we found ourselves a week later. While many of my recollections of arriving at Pier 21 (August 19, 1940) are dim, I vividly recall the friendly and hectic, yet efficient, welcome we received amidst an almost festive atmosphere. We entrained later the same day with 30 other evacuees designated for Sackville, New Brunswick with a smaller group

bound for Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island who changed to the "Island" train in Sackville. Hence, our first night in Canada was spent at Mount Allison University, where we stayed for almost a week until we were delivered into the loving care of, now the late, Della and Carl Allen of "Four Winds Farm" Upper Cape, N.B., on Baie Verte some 30 miles from Sackville. Our arrival in Upper Cape coincided with the local United Church's annual picnic, which proved a suitable opportunity to introduce Dorothy and me to "Aunt Della and Uncle Carl's" relatives, neighbors and friends from adjoining communities. Indeed we found all the "minor celebrity" attention rather overwhelming - and, in our opinion, undeserved.

To be able to condense the subsequent five years (1940-45) of experiences, learning, impressions, reflections and emotions on a few pages is a practical impossibility. Suffice it to observe, however, that it was a period of profound transition in our lives; during which, we developed a deep and abiding love, respect and admiration for Canada and Canadians, resulting in a firm resolve to make it our chosen home, opportunity permitting. On, or about July 16, 1945, Dorothy and I passed once more through Pier 21 to join numerous other evacuees who sailed on board the French liner "Ile de France" enroute to Greenock, Scotland and reunion with their dimly remembered families. One of the most popular songs at the time was "Sentimental Journey" which I still believe, aptly described that voyage. We were met at London's Euston Station by our family which had grown during our absence to include a sister-in-law and an infant niece. Our mother, who recognized Dorothy instantly, walked past me so that I had to grasp her by the arm and introduce myself - somewhat more than a little changed from the small red-head of eleven she had bid farewell five years earlier.

After serving as an Air Mechanic in the Royal Navy (Fleet AirArm) as a "Hostilities Only" entrant, from 1945 to 1948, I was granted prospective "Landed Immigrant" status and embarked in Cunard Lines' "RMS Aquitania" at Southampton and, consequently, passed through Pier 21 for the third time in eight years, on August 3, 1948. In the following year all the members of my immediate family also became "Landed Immigrants", including our 60 year old father, all of whom entered through Pier 21 and in time became Canadian Citizens. Later, I found it a distinct honour and privilege to serve in many places as a naval aviator in the Royal Canadian Navy and to wear its uniform bearing "CANADA" shoulder insignia.

Finally, it is also a pleasure to record that a fiftieth anniversary reunion of former CORB evacuees was held in Halifax in September 1990, including a nostalgic visit to Pier 21. On that occasion a brass plaque was unveiled, now on permanent display at the Maritime Museum of the

Atlantic, recording, "Our unbounded gratitude". The plaque may be viewed on the Museum's upper deck where it is housed with the scale model of SS "Nova Scotia".