

Dr. Geoffrey Robinson
English Veteran of WWII
and English Immigrant
August 1941 and
Summer 1953



Date of Arrival: August 1941; (date of departure: June or July 1942);
Summer 1953

Pier 21 and the Robinson Family

Perhaps the connections between us and Pier 21 should be committed to paper. Although sadly with the passage of time, the details have become obscure. Nevertheless, we feel that even a minimal record for posterity is better than nothing.

In the early days of the Second World War, Geoffrey Edward Robinson of Ludlow in Shropshire was a private soldier, still at school. (4035248, d.o.b. 18.2.1922) First in the King's Shropshire Light Infantry, 4th Btn. (T.A.) and after mobilization at the outbreak of war, was transferred to 429 searchlight regiment at Ixworth, Suffolk. After about 18 months of throwing a beam of light not very successfully over East Anglia, life became humdrum with the reduction of German flights over England at night.

He transferred to the R.A.F. as Under Training Air Crew and after a brief indoctrination of drill and morale boosting we were scheduled for flying training overseas. There was no training available in England - all air space there was intimately connected with actual aerial operations.

The alternative places for training were Canada and Southern Rhodesia. The United States was just accepting the Marshal Plan and they carried out a covert scheme of training pilots temporarily discharged from the R.A.F.! I cannot remember whether we had any choice but I was slated for North America.

We had a short embarkation leave, probably August 1941, warned about secrecy and then re-assembled and somewhere before several hundred of us were embarked at Geenock. Our transport was the French ship Louis Pasteur and the regulations aboard were very strict to prevent submarine attacks. All lights were extinguished and smoking on deck was not permitted. We left originally in convoy, but after about four days, the ship took off like a scalded cat, having passed through the most dangerous area. There were unconfirmed tales circulating at times of

submarines in the area, but we saw or heard no action. There were numerous life-boat drills. Not having very good sea legs, I did not utilize my bunk below, slept roughly on deck. The food was the secondary consideration - getting us safely across was what mattered. I have no recollections of what was available in the food line. In spite of repeated crossings of the Atlantic with troops, the condition of the ship below was not clean, but was also not filthy.

After about 5 or 6 days we were sailing up Halifax Harbour and her cargo was spewed out on the dockside of Pier 21. We each carried all our possessions in our kitbag, and after a short walk, were put aboard a troop train which was parked not too far from the ship. The reception was indeed a military operation with many military police around but no volunteer services that were so abundant when the war was over.

After training as an R.A.F. Navigator, I returned to England on a much smaller vessel, the Winnipeg 2, in June or July 1942. Leaving Halifax through Pier 21, we sailed under the same conditions as on the Pasteur and landed in Liverpool with no problems en route.

My next association with Pier 21 came in 1953. During my service in the R.A.F., I had met and married a W.A.A.F. 2093953 Dorothy Robinson, nee Holgate, of Wirksworth, Derbyshire. From our first meeting, there was an understanding that I felt that Canada would provide a much better environment and prospects for a good living. I had been impressed by the wide open spaces and what I thought was a much more free society.

First I had to get an education, sadly interrupted by the war. I had been slated to start at Saint Mary's Hospital Medical School in 1939, but turned this down at the outbreak of war. By this time I was married, but this made me all the more determined to get a qualification that would earn me a reasonable living. With the help of a post war student grant and considerable help from my wife who took in other students to make extra living expenses, I qualified M.R.C.S. (England, L.R.C.P (London) and M.B., B.S. (London) in 1951.

I had always wanted to be independent and competent in a rural solo practice but this necessitated some post-graduate training. I did thirty months circulating residencies at Saint Mary's Hospital, Portsmouth. During this time my wife and I were adjusting ourselves to what life would be like in rural Canada. My choice was Prince Edward Island where I had done my air-crew training.

In 1953, with the problems developing in the National Health Services, I felt it was time to move. By now, we had two young children but that did not deter us.

We made plans to move in the summer of 1953. Both families were supportive but somewhat anxious. We sold many items of our larger furniture which we regretted later. This was chiefly because we did not realize ship transport was so cheap, and there was always the concern of storage in what might be small accommodation.

The remainder of our belongings were packed in several suitcases and about three tea chests. We were 'taking off' with minimal and small possessions but I would not part with our feather bed which came originally from Downtown and must have been at least 150 years old then. All these goods which would not be cabin baggage was sent on ahead from Portsmouth on board a commercial road carrier who helped us with the packing. Having disposed of this, we went as a family to say goodbye - first to Ludlow and then to Wirksworth. All this was accompanied free of any serious emotion and tears, although I suppose everyone must have felt a little anxious.

We left Wirksworth early one morning to board the Georgic in Southampton. All arrangements worked out very well and we were soon allotted a cabin for the family. I'm afraid I don't remember much about the trip except we had the pleasure of sailing out past the enormous fleet of warships from countries all over the world assembled to celebrate the coronation of Elizabeth II.

The voyage was much different to the war-time crossings. No escort, no fear of submarines and plenty of lights.

When we reached Pier 21, we disembarked and were met by a greeting committee of several religions, all looking for their members. No military police or uniforms. We had railway passes right through to Hunter River which came with the boat tickets but we learned we were unable to board a train for the Island until the next day. We were recommended accommodation in one of the boarding houses close to the exit from the railway station, and we stayed overnight until we took the train early next morning. We had landed in Canada with not much more than we had in a couple of suitcases and two tea-chests, and about \$1,000.00 in cash, but we had with us an enormously valuable piece of paper saying I was a licensed physician and could practice in most provinces of Canada.

The family unit consisted of: Born D.O.B.
Geoffrey Edward Robinson - Ludlow 18.2.1922

Dorothy Mary Robinson (nee Holgate) Ludlow 22.9.1922
Alan Edward Robinson - London 4.9.1946
Nigel William Robinson - London 7.5.1951