

Alf Cassidy
WWII Veteran
Ile de France
1942 and 1945



I remember my first arrival
at Pier 21 in October, 1942.

It was by troop train and in the darkness of the blackout. We made our way from the train along the dimly lit dock and into the bowels of the troopship called The Sterling Castle. We left the harbour the following morning. Upon arriving in Liverpool several days later, we debarked in darkness and marched through the black-out streets to the railway station to board another troop train. Our destination was the RCAF transit depot in Bournemouth.

After a few days in Bournemouth, I was soon on my way to my first radar station in North Wales. Both my wife, who was a Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) radar operator there, and I remember my arrival quite clearly. I had left Bournemouth very early in the morning by train, this time with just a fellow airman, and burdened with all my kit. We arrived at our destination, Llandudno, three trains later, late in the afternoon. Unfortunately, there was no RAF transport available to pick us up and we were told to hoof it to the radar station which was on the top of a 600ft high rock jutting out into the Irish Sea like the rock of Gibraltar! There was only one road up and we couldn't miss it or get lost. By the time we made it to the top of the rock, or the Great Orme's Head as it was called, some time later and walked into the common room, we were two very bushed and tired airmen.

There were several WAAF's and airmen sitting around and my wife to be was one of them. She often reminds me that I did not make a very good first impression. However as fate would have it, I did overcome that first impression and almost three years later, in June of 1945, we were married. Shortly after that, in October, I was on the Ile de France and back to Pier 21.

When my ship was coming up to the Pier, all several thousand troops aboard moved to the pier side of the ship with the result that it listed to that side. As I recall it was the port side. The list was so bad that the ship couldn't dock and an announcement came over the tannoy for some of us to move to other side. But no one wanted to move and miss the action and excitement of seeing Canada for the first time in many years. Eventually, the list was corrected, we docked and were soon on our way.

My wife arrived at Pier 21 on the Letitia on the 26th of April, 1946, and arrived in Calgary on the 1st of May. She had boarded the Letitia in England at the beginning of April so it had been a long and tiring journey for her.

Calgary was not a very big city at that time and quite different from the London area where she was born and raised. It certainly was a culture shock for her and most of the other war brides, but with a stout heart and a sense of humor she managed through that very difficult time of homesickness.

As I write this, it is difficult to realize that it was so many years ago and so much has happened since we both passed through Pier 21. On the 18th of June, we will be celebrating our 55th anniversary.