

L. Helen Peck
WWII Veteran
Ile de France



1939, when World War two began I was a young girl on the Old Gray Farm on Prince

Edward Island. I was born there and grew up longing the Country. As soon as Canada declared War, my brother Everett joined the Army, then a few days later, his twin brother Stewart joined up, Stewart went to Charlottetown as he was over six feet tall and said, "I've got to go and look after my little twin."

There was only World War One, old uniforms to try and fit these new soldiers. Stewart looked strange with sleeves and pant legs too short for him.

They trained at Petawawa in Ontario, both brothers got married and both wives were expecting when the twins were shipped overseas.

Then, my brother David also joined the Army in the Engineers branch. He trained in Alberta, before he too was shipped overseas.

Our Prime Minister Mackenzie King passed into law conscription, and so my brother William was called to join up too.

On the morning he was to report down at Charlottetown, my mother said, "Helen go upstairs and tell William to get up." My poor mother watched three sons volunteer to join now they were taking William too.

I went upstairs and found my brother in bed with tears running down his cheek. He said, "Helen, I don't want to go, Everett and Stewart have got guts - I don't". However he had no choice, he had to go, and after quick training he was sent overseas and was soon driving transport trucks around England in the Blackouts.

Next, my boyfriend, who had asked me to marry him before he was sent overseas, sent a letter to me to tell me he had married an English girl!

I was broken hearted and decided I was going to join the Army too. I wanted to go overseas and hoped that one of those bombs would fall on me that would end the heartache.

Mother consented if both my sister Ruth and I could join together, how difficult it must have been for Mother. How many prayers she must have said for her six children all doing their bit for King and country.

In Halifax I was a switchboard operator at the old Fortress beside Citadel Hill.

I loved my life, sharing billets with other Canadian girls who had volunteered in the Canadian Women's Army Camps. While in Halifax, my brother William was sent home from overseas on the hospital ship Lady Nelson. He had an operation at Camp Hill Hospital to remove one of his kidneys. After he was well enough he was sent back home to Prince Edward Island to be discharged and he was happy as the war was over for him.

One day I was called into the Captains Office, and I wondered, "what have I done wrong?" However, it turned out my Captain told me, "Gray, you are on draft to go overseas!"

A quick leave home to P.E.I. and I was at Pier 21 walking up the gangplank to board the ship Ile de France.

In London, England I operated a switchboard at Canadian Military Headquarters. I was there when the first German 'doodle bugs' Pilotless planes, with a bomb on board were sent across the channel simed at London, and later the V2 bombs.

After about two years the war in Europe was over. My brothers were all able to return home; we were so fortunate, all fine of us that went overseas returned home again.

I could not go home until January 1946 because as a telephone operator, our jobs were necessary until all administration was taken care of.

I never regretted my years in the service, my return across the Atlantic Ocean at the end of January was on the same Lle de France ship, and so Pier 21 means a lot to me.

Then I visited there I bought a picture of the old Lle de France ship in Wartime, and I will treasure it along with all my scrapbook items.

2005

I am 82 years old now; only my brother Everett and my sister Ruth are still living from my large family (nine of us).

C.W.A.C. Wellington Barracks
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Rolled up in my blanket nice and cozy,
dreaming of the days that used to be.
When out of the dawn comes the bugle,
and I wake to hear him play Reveille.
Sleepily out of my bunk I roll,
to dress as quick as I can,
and with my 'silver' go to breakfast,
of bacon, eggs, coffee, bread and jam.

Out of the barracks then we go,
with a smile for the guard at the gate,
and patiently we wait for a streetcar,
maybe we will have to take an 'eight'.
Finally, it comes around the corner,
if you can get a seat it is grand,
then it only takes a few minutes,
to get to headquarters Atlantic command.

Then down to the telephone exchange I go,
to sit there plugging all day long,
I say "Atlantic command! Number please?"
"Thank you, it's busy, will you hold?"
Often we go on night shift,
but I really don't mind at all,
you see, I've taken a man's place,
since I joined up, a year ago last fall.

I love my life in the Army,
I'm proud to be a C.W.A.C.
and I want to help all I can,
to bring my brothers back to me.

The "twins" joined when war was declared,
and soon they were sent overseas,
another one is out in Alberta,
and my sister is in it with me.

Another brother was called in the Army,
he was sent overseas right away,
but got sick and went to the hospital,
now he is back in Canada to stay.
But he did his best over there,
and is now awaiting the day,

when he can leave the Camphill Hospital,
and go back home to stay.

We come from that 'little' province,
the smallest one of them all,
but it has the greatest record,
our boys answered Canada's call.
So these boys from up in Ontario,
and those that come from out West,
can brag all they like about "Canada",
we "Islanders" still love P.E.I. the best!