

Lilian DeSavigny nee Burton
English War Bride
Nea Hellas
April, 1945



I was the 7th of 9 children, 6 brothers and 2 sisters. I grew up in Kennington (London) England. I was 15 when the war started. It



wasn't bad at first, but as the war progressed, the bombing became worse. We never went into a bomb shelter, my Dad always said "If your name was on a bomb you'd get it no matter where you were!"

Three brothers served in the navy, 1 in the air force and 2 in the army. They all came home safely.

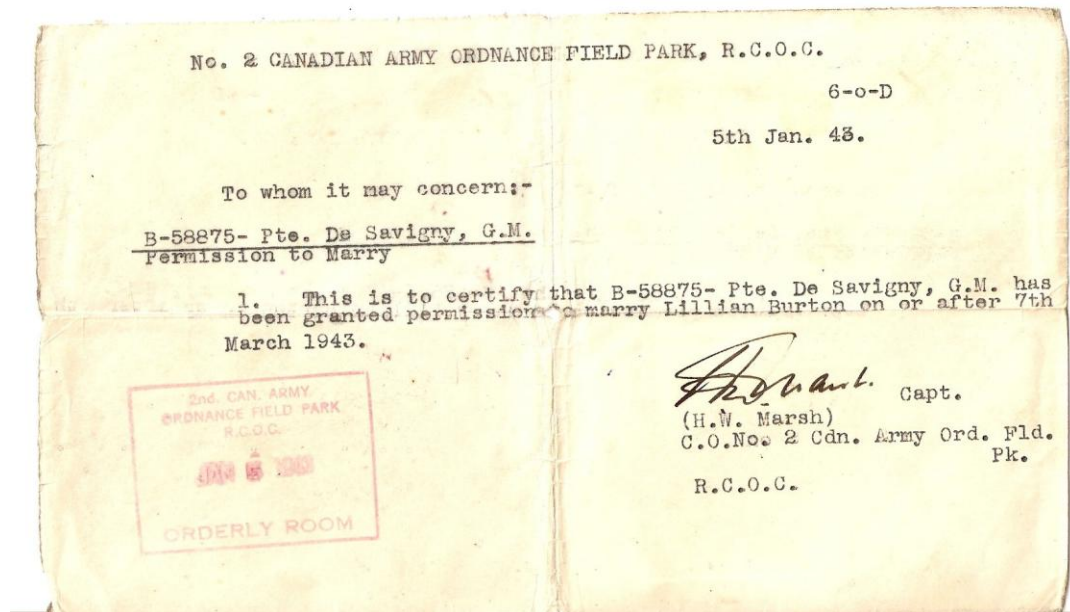
My sister and I decided we would do some war work. We both worked in an aircraft factory making parts. It was a long day, we took the train from Waterloo Station. We left at 7 a.m. and got home at 6 p.m. at night. I'll always remember the night I walked off the train on the wrong side—the platform was on the other side! Mum said, "I don't care if we win the war—you're not going back".

I later worked for NAAFI (Navy, Army, Air Force Institute) in the accounting department.

Covent Garden Opera House had an all girl orchestra. All the troops came on their 48-hour pass. I met my Canadian husband-to-be (Pte. Gordon deSavigny, B-058875, 3rd Division Army Intelligence Corps) in 1942 at a dance.

In September 1942 we decided we'd get married in December. In those days you had a three month waiting period. All of our papers were lost so we had to wait for another three months, until March 7, 1943. We were married in Old Lambeth Church. My wedding dress was velvet on the top, with a lace bottom (because lace wasn't on coupons). I had to

wear my sister's evening dress as a slip. The material was bought in Petti-coat Lane.



Gordon stayed in England for the entire war. He hoped to be sent overseas after being trained for the Ordnance Corps. Finding himself not being transferred once more, he joined the REME (Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers). He was on stand-by to go to Italy twice, but didn't go.

Our first son David was born in England on December 4, 1943.

Living in England became more dangerous, so we decided David and I would move to Canada. We took the train to Grenich, Scotland for our departure. I remember my Dad saying, with tears in his eyes "If they weren't good to me he'd bring me home". The Nea Hellas left on April 3, 1945, part of a convoy carrying evacuees, wounded and long serving soldiers. It was very slow going because it had to criss-cross the Atlantic. We arrived in Halifax, at Pier 21 April 20, 1945. As passengers we were under army regulations, we had boat drills every day and depth charges were dropped every day.

We travelled by train to Regina, Saskatchewan to meet Gordon's family. Coming through on the train I thought what a huge country Canada was. It was April and there was still snow on the ground in Northern Ontario. Going across the prairies was like being on the ocean. The train ride and the food were lovely. Seven other war brides got off the train in Regina too.

I was treated “just like a daughter by my in-laws”. Gordon returned to Canada in October 1945, and spent his leave in Regina. I celebrated my 21st birthday in Regina. Because his job was waiting for him in Toronto, we moved there in December 1945.

Our first accommodations were rooms on the second floor of a house. Back then that was all you could get. I remember, the only bathroom in the house was downstairs and you had to walk through the landlord’s bedroom!

David and I travelled back to England in May 1952 and stayed with family. I had purchased a one-way fare thinking a return booking wouldn’t be difficult. When I tried to book my return passage, nothing was available, so we had to wait until the end of September to return home.

We finally got our own house in Toronto. Three more sons followed, Don, Bill and Gordon.

Gordon took early retirement from International Harvester and the family moved to Mallorytown, where we lived on a 100-acre farm.

Family was a major part of our lives. We raised 4 sons, and have 8 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren.

We moved to Brockville in 1981. Gordon passed away August 29, 1994.

I returned to Pier 21 in Halifax August 2007 on one of our War-Bride excursions. It brought back lots of memories.

Note:

In November 2006, the Year of the War Bride, a small group was formed in Brockville to bring War-Brides in the area together. We meet a few times a year. I met Lilian at our first get-together and asked her to share her story for Pier 21. J.Bell

