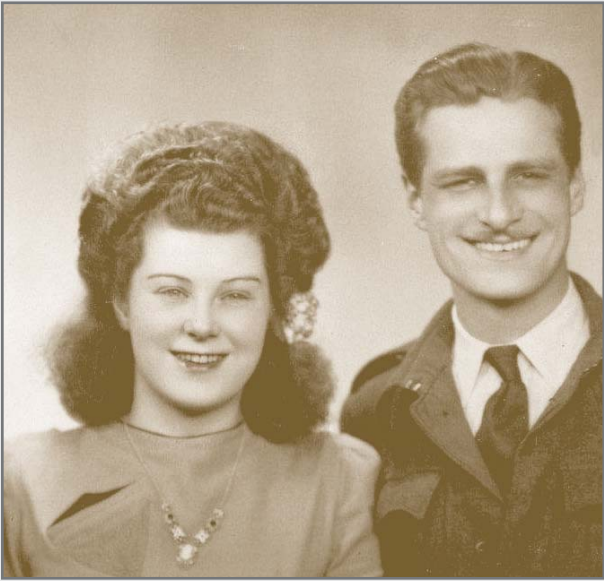


HOMELAND MINUTES



Pat and Gerald LeVac

War Bride Pat LaVac: Journey's End in Lovers' Meetingⁱ

Then my call up came, as it did to every healthy young woman sometime after reaching her 18th birthday. I was quite excited to receive a notice to report on May 5, 1942 to an air field somewhere in Kent

Why Me Lord?: a grateful memoir, Pat LaVac

From a diary that she kept religiously, Pat Taylor from Arundel, a village near Brighton in the south of England, pieced together her WWII years and the fateful meeting with a tall, dark and handsome Air Gunner who would take her to a new life in Canada. As a 15 year-old in 1939 Pat had helped settle London's child war guests into their new country surroundings. In 1942 after a dire bout with Scarlet Fever Pat trained for six months to be an electrician at a technical college in blacked-out north London to qualify for British Air Ministry work. Finally in early 1943 Pat boarded a train that passed through Robin Hood country in Nottinghamshire en route to the small village of Norwell where she stayed during her stint as an electrician at the aerodrome, nearby RAF Ossington. In June 1943, the base was transferred to the RCAF as #82 Operational Training Unit and the Canadians arrived.

The fateful lovers' meeting took place early one morning when Pat was ordered to find out why the Tannoyⁱⁱ communication system at No. 1 site was down.

Cycling through blooming hedge roses near a row of Nissenⁱⁱⁱ huts she surprised an airman sleepily headed to the urinals. The embarrassing incident led to a first date at the Chicken Coop, a dance hall rigged up on the second floor of a barn where a gramophone played the Dorsey Brothers and Glenn Miller. On a second date Pat noted in her memoirs that they skipped the dancing and went for a walk by the Trent River in Newark. "A beautiful summer night in August with just a slip of a new moon overhead and a sky full of glittering stars, well that is how I remember it, with the ripple of the water in the background; I was lost."

The lovers' journey had just begun. Although her beloved Gerry had been legally separated from his Canadian wife for almost three years, he had to start the paperwork for a divorce (which his wife eagerly awaited). One set of papers had to be redone when the ship it was on was torpedoed. Finally the divorce N.I.S.I. documents arrived but the Decree Absolute was not in time for Pat and Gerry to marry in England before he went back to Canada on the very last withdrawal of Canadian Aircrew from England. When the papers came through they completed the application for Pat to go to Canada as a War Bride. Passage was on the third sailing of the *Queen Elizabeth* which had been refurbished from a troop ship to transport War Brides and their children. After tearful goodbyes in Arundel with her mother who was in hospital with a broken hip and her father who saw her off to the bus, Pat said good-bye to her sister in Southampton, the port from which the *Queen Elizabeth* sailed. "... she was the last one to see me off to Canada starting a new life, a journey into the unknown but at the end of which I knew Gerry would be waiting and at last everything would be right."

Pat never saw her parents again, but, she was happily married to former Warrant Officer Gerald LaVac (1916–2000) for 56 years.

ⁱ From the poem "Carpe Diem" by William Shakespeare

ⁱⁱ An electronic amplification system, usually a 5.1 channel PA. used to hook together all parts of a base

ⁱⁱⁱ A prefabricated half-cylindrical corrugated steel structure