

Stella Rosalia Spergel  
nee Halfin  
English War Bride  
Andes  
November 18, 1944



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At age 75, Stella Spergel completed a Masters of History at the University of Toronto. A War Bride herself, she researched the experiences of the other women who undertook this unique voyage. Please enjoy these excerpts:

#### Fraternization

Fraternization, except for formal greetings and harmless "small talk" could be very tempting for the young and foolish especially those travelling without children. When Peggy Turnbull and I were aboard the Andes in November, 1944, travelling after P.C./6422 came into effect, there were rumours among the brides concerning one of our party getting "caught"

with a fellow passenger, a Canadian airman. The general assumption was that it was nothing but idle gossip until, being curious why a soldier was standing guard outside one of the cabins, a crew member confirmed that what we thought to be rumour was indeed, fact. The culprit had to remain inside that cabin for the rest of the trip and would be sent back to England probably on the ship's return voyage. My friend, Frances Thompson, travelling with a much larger party in the early summer of 1945, recalls the scandal aboard ship when four brides were going to have to return to England for the crime of fraternization. The

Government had no intention of paying the costs of transportation to Canada for a bride who was not "respectable."

Even Frances had to prove respectability before being given permission to stop over in Toronto to spend a week with me. She had given my Aunt Tilly's address as her place of residence while in Toronto. (Aunt Tilly was one of my mother's sisters, a resident of Toronto since 1922). The records showed that Frances had no relatives anywhere in Canada, so "who was this mysterious Aunt Tilly?" Frances remembers being put through what she calls "a real 'third degree' " because suspicion was aroused that she must be arranging a liaison with a boy friend. Eventually, Aunt Tilly was checked out to make sure she really existed, and Frances was given grudging permission to stop off and visit with me. It was to be another nineteen years before we saw each other again.

### The Voyage

I travelled overnight by train from London with a fairly large party which had convened at a pleasant club (I don't remember exactly where) and given light refreshments before being taken by bus to the train station. It was an uncomfortable trip in a blacked-out train but in wartime no one expected any better. Once aboard the Andes where my fourteen-month old daughter and I were comfortably settled, the miserable night journey from London was soon forgotten. It was an uneventful voyage in spite of a submarine scare but nobody seemed particularly worried. All of us, especially the Londoners, had been through so much already, what with the Blitz, the V.1 rockets (more familiarly called "buzz bombs") and at the time of leaving England, the V.2 rockets which were really frightening because no warning could be given - that we were able to take a submarine threat in our stride.



Disembarkation at Halifax went very smoothly. I appreciated being met on board by my very own soldier escort (as were all the mothers) who carried my daughter and my hand luggage to the Red Cross nursery, where she was deposited while I looked after the business of customs,

immigration and train tickets before being directed to the lounge for light refreshments.

Peggy and I, travelling under the new regulations, found every one most solicitous of us. The two-day train ride to Toronto was tearful every time the train stopped to let someone off. We would peer out of the windows waving, "Goodbye, good luck," and watch to see who would be there to greet the newcomer. Some of those stations were so desolate and so bleak.

No newcomer to Canada should arrive in November. The train ride seemed interminable, though I found it exciting to be able to identify the St.

Lawrence River and Lake Ontario. We knew Canada was big, after all we had taken Geography at school, but this big! And we were only travelling as far as Toronto. Those going across the country had left us at Montreal. Their journey would be made even longer than usual because the train would have to stop at every out-of-the-way place if that was where a bride was being met.

I remember very little about the arrival at Toronto except being terrified at the prospect of meeting my mother-in-law. We had originally thought my husband would be in Canada ahead of me his having accumulated the required number of "points" to make him eligible for early repatriation. As it happened, it was to be another year before he was back in Canada.

Peggy gave me a copy of the Toronto Daily Star's column reporting our arrival at Union Station. From it, I learned that sixty-five brides accompanied by "forty sturdy children," arrived the previous evening and that at the Red Cross reception centre a huge delighted cry went up, "Home for Christmas." Neither Peggy nor I remember that huge cry. We agree that it must have been a case of journalistic licence.