

Dilys Dolores McDonald nee Davies

Dilys Dolores Davies, my Aunty Dil, was born in Sawston on Thursday 25th July 1924 the first born child of Edgar Royston Davies and Madge Lillian Challis. She was christened in St Mary's church on 12th October 1924 the very same day as my step father Norman David Lane, just the two of them that day. They were not very far apart after all only a few weeks between their births and even fewer doors between their homes, he living at 41 High Street and she at 47. Dilys grew up in the village along with her younger sisters Moyra and Valerie and later their younger brother Jeremy.



She started her education at the village junior school, which was really

just across the road from where she lived. The Victorian buildings of this school are now being converted into several houses. During this growing up time she enjoyed playing with her sisters in their garden and the various village events held through the year.



Her secondary education was conducted at Sawston Village College the first of a new concept in education founded by Henry Morris in 1930. In simple terms the idea was to provide an education for the community in which the school was based and so the subjects of cookery and needlework for girls, woodwork and metalwork for boys and gardening, horticulture and farming for both found a place in the timetable. We will see in her later life some direct effects of this education. However along with the end of her secondary school education came the beginning of World War 2 and everything began to change.

Quite early on Dilys developed a very strong admiration for her grandfather William Challis which remained with her throughout her life.

He was a man who made his own way from quite humble beginnings and by the time she came to know him he had already established several successful



local businesses and owned various properties. He lived close by at 43, High Street which was both The Commander in Chief, one of the villages 13 public houses and a general grocery shop.



Looking South along the High Street first on the left the old thatched cottage No 39 then the Lane's house at 41, then The Commander in Chief No 43 then the two houses 45 & 47 slightly recessed.

There is little doubt that this grocery shop as well as the extensive orchard and vegetable garden that he maintained assisted the whole family through some difficult times. That was the hallmark of William Challis while he had the determination and initiative to succeed in business his primary concern was always the health and welfare of his family, family friends and the wider community. One great example of this I believe is that while he owned and ran a public house he was constantly trying to persuade people not to drink or at least not to drink as much. Those characteristics of hard work, determination and an overriding concern for the health and welfare of family, family friends

and the wider community were carried on by Dilys and displayed throughout her life.

The war brought with it a whole host of changes and new conditions not least of which arose from the proximity to Duxford. The summer of 1943 saw a massive change with the arrival of units of the United States Army and its Eighth Air Force 66th Fighter Wing (their story [HERE](#)) which was to establish its headquarters at Sawston Hall. The village had for some time played host to some of Duxfords Headquarters as the airfield itself was too vulnerable but the arrival of the Americans was a little different. The quip of comedians at the time "Overpaid, oversexed and over here!" whilst said in jest carried with it some truth. I have little doubt that the relative affluence of the American troops helped to lighten the darkness war had brought until it ended on 8th May when a new agenda took over.

Dilys met one of those visiting soldiers Fay Kelly McDonald a 23 year old Corporal, they fell in love and married in St Marys Church on June 4th 1945.



I was at the wedding, although I must confess I cannot really remember the occasion now, I was only 15 months old at the time but you can see from the photograph and the expression on my face and the others in the group that it was a very happy occasion indeed.



**Valerie, James Gaskin, Kelly or Mac as we called him, Dilys and Moyra
Edgar, Jeremy, Nigel and Madge**

Now that the European war was over it was at first thought that the American units might be re assigned to the far east where the war with Japan still raged. The Japanese surrender on 15th August however ended this speculation and instead over a period of time they returned to the USA and in the case of the 66th Fighter Wing this happened through September and October. Dilys was not alone in marrying a G.I. in fact she was but one of 50,000 women in the UK alone and so

arrangements had to be made to transport these newly wed wives so they could join their husbands in the United States of America.

In April 1946 Dilys travelled with her new born son Martin to Tidworth Camp on Salisbury Plain where they were housed while awaiting a ship to take them to the USA as part of the US Army's "Operation War Bride". Again she was not alone in this as the following extract explains:

Wiltshire Community History

Tidworth Concise History

Another consequence of such occasions became apparent in 1946, when Tidworth and Perham Down were used as transit camps for 640 'GI brides' and their 176 babies, on their way to America.

Conditions were not ideal and one woman described the camp as "A *black hole in Salisbury Plain*" and Salisbury Plain can be pretty bleak at times. Dilys made the best of things and wrote a letter home only part of which remains and is quoted below:

"...us well as everything else its enough to drive us crazy. Everyone is well looked after and I'm with a very nice crowd of girls, so there's no worry in that respect but it is so tiring having to carry the babies around everywhere we go its such a big camp and spread all over the place that we have to walk miles in the course of a day.

Martin has cried more the last two days than he has ever done before I expect he's a little upset here so what with one thing and another. I'll be glad when we're on the boat (it is the "Alexander" by the way) (At the moment Martin is laying on the bed kicking but I'd better "... " as there's no telling how long that will last)

In a few minutes we are going over to the "Red Cross" and I'll try and phone Val from there, not that I know anything about sailing but I know Mum will be worrying about us if I don't ring to say we're okay.

Apparently the Army authorities and Red Cross will cable Mac, but I think I'll cable him to be on the safe side.

I had my "hold" luggage checked this morning and the pram will be crated up so it should get there quite safe thank goodness, I wouldn't like it to get knocked about.

I'll post this on my way to the Red Cross, but I'll write again later just as soon as I know when we go, just one thing more, I know it's no good telling Mum not to worry but try not to worry anymore than...."

Reading this today you might think that Valerie had a telephone but no one in the family had such a thing for several years to come. Valerie of course worked in the village telephone exchange and every call into or out of the village had to be manually plugged through that switchboard.

Dilys did indeed sail on the "ALEXANDER", as the listing below indicates, together with Martin who was only 11 weeks old at the time.

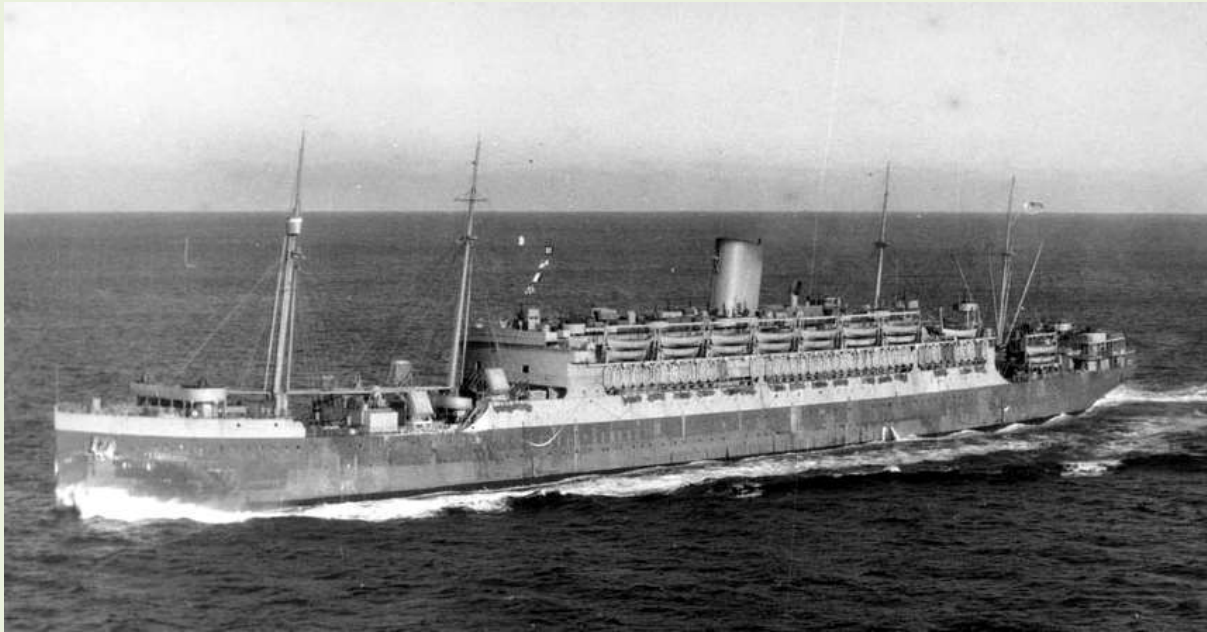
LONDON AREA TRANSPORTATION OFFICE
WESTERN BASE SECTION
U.S. FORCES, EUROPEAN THEATER
APO 413

SHIP: "ALEXANDER"
APPROX. SAILING DATE: 23 APRIL 1946

GROUP 34 - A

<u>NAME</u>	<u>AGE</u>	<u>SEX</u>	<u>PP NO</u>	<u>NAT'LTY</u>	<u>U.K. ADDRESS</u>
23. McDONALD, Dilys D	21	F	76540	Br.	47 High Street, Sawston, Cambs.
24. McDONALD, Martin K	11 wks	M		Am Civ	Same

Dependents of: Cpl. F.K. McDonald, ASN 18109189, U.S. Army
Box 377, Old Longview Road, Gladewater, Texas.



The "ALEXANDER"

Charges to pay
s. d.
RECEIVED

POST OFFICE
TELEGRAM

No. OFFICE STAMP
CAMBRIDGE

Prefix. Time handed in. Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words.

From *Am. Mack. 571. New York 16* *21 5/27* *To*

LC Mrs Davie 47 High St. Sawston

*Arrived safely today well
cable from Gladewater.
Love Dilys*

21 567 For free repetition of doubtful words telephone "TELEGRAMS ENQUIRY" or call, with this form, at office of delivery. Other enquiries should be accompanied by this form and, if possible, the envelope

Then they were gone!

The Texas story

Dilys sailed by the Statue of Liberty in New York City. Her voyage with other women and their infants had been challenging. She said many times that she had been thankful that neither she nor Martin was seasick, so she took care of many babies during that time for indisposed mothers. Dilys spent as much time on the deck as possible. In New York, she and her son boarded a train for Texas.

Once Dilys made it to East Texas, she was greeted by a new extended family including a mother-in-law, father-in-law, and sister-in-law. She was a stranger to the family, a foreigner to Texas, and a newcomer to motherhood. Kelly's family welcomed her and loved her, but Dilys experienced disillusionment.



She was now living in the front room of Kelly's parent's farmhouse on a track of land in the country. After seeing a photo of Dilys with her new family in front of the structure, Nan (Madge) observed that it looked as if her daughter was living in a "chicken coop". There were no close

neighbors, no pavement in which to use the carefully packed pram, no markets to visit without advanced planning, and no privacy. Despite all of the disorienting newness, Dilys used her prior knowledge of homemaking that she learned at school and growing up as the eldest as well as the cooking and housekeeping books her grandfather had bought for her. She made the best of it.



Martin with Grand parents

Eventually, Kelly, Dilys and Martin moved out of the country and into town. Kelly's sister, Olivia, would visit their apartment after school, and share some delicious potatoes that Dilys would be cooking for supper. Around this time, Kelly's Aunt Mott gave Dilys a quilt featuring squares with airplanes which had the name of each member in Kelly's unit. As thoughtful as the gesture was, the quilt didn't exemplify Dilys in any way other than her name which was slightly misspelled in the middle square.

Because of Kelly's job, they were transferred to many places in Texas. Two more sons, Curtis and Gordon, were both born in different towns, but in the proximity of East Texas. One of their final moves was to southern Texas to a growing town called Alvin. Here, they owned a dachshund dog, Miss Tish, which Dilys loved. She got her first Texas

driver's license while in Alvin, and Kelly coached a baseball team. Dilys had happy memories of this time.

The family's final major move was to Deer Park, Texas. They lived a small home with three teenage boys. Graduations, marriages, as well as the birth of her first grandchild were celebrated here. Then, they moved within Deer Park to Dilys's dream home. This house was the epitome of a good, modern American home. They were proud of this space and the lives they cultivated within it. Dilys had a sewing room that looked out on the backyard, Kelly had a meticulously kept toolshed, and there was a formal living room and dining area for entertaining.



While living in Deer Park, Dilys studied and received her U.S. Citizenship.

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

No. 8927648

CERTIFICATE OF NATURALIZATION

• ORIGINAL •

Petition No. 15,571

Personal description of holder as of date of naturalization: Date of birth JULY 25, 1924 sex FEMALE
 complexion FAIR color of eyes HAZEL color of hair DK/BROWN height 5 feet 3 inches
 weight 135 pounds visible distinctive marks NONE
 Marital status MARRIED Country of former nationality GREAT BRITAIN

I certify that the description above given is true, and that the photograph affixed hereto is a likeness of me.

Dilys Dolores McDonald
 (Complete and true signature of holder)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
 SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS

Be it known that at a term of the DISTRICT Court of
 THE UNITED STATES FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
 held pursuant to law at HOUSTON, TEXAS
 on AUGUST 5, 1966 the Court having found that
 DILYS DOLORES McDONALD
 then residing at 501 Arbor Drive, Deer Park, Texas
 intends to reside permanently in the United States (when so required by the
 Naturalization laws of the United States) had in all other respects complied with
 the applicable provisions of such naturalization laws, and was entitled to be
 admitted to citizenship, thereupon entered that such person be and (she was)
 admitted as a citizen of the United States of America.

In testimony whereof the seal of the court is hereunto affixed this 5th
 day of August in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and
 Sixty-Six.

V. BAILEY THOMAS
 Clerk of the U.S. DISTRICT Court
 By Lois Wiech Deputy Clerk

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

IT IS A VIOLATION OF THE U. S. SMITH LAW PUNISHABLE AS SUCH TO
 COPY PRINT, PHOTOGRAPH, OR OTHERWISE ILLICITLY USE THIS CERTIFICATE.

She battled cancer and won. Then she started working outside the home for the Deer Park Independent School District in a school cafeteria.

Through the years there, she took pride in her accomplishments. She took classes at San Jacinto Junior College in nutrition, management, and accounting and went on to be the manager of the food service. She helped plan and execute school luncheons and meetings, and people depended on her assistance and expertise. Even though she had done a good job of being a wife and mother, she enjoyed furthering her education and impacting people and the community.



"NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH WEEK" PROCLAIMED IN DEER PARK -- Mrs. Wilma Rogers, Chairman of National School Lunch Week in Deer Park and Mrs. Dailys McDonald, President of the Deer Park School Food Service were on hand Thursday, Sept. 28 to witness the signature of Mayor W. E. Black on a proclamation proclaiming Oct. 8 through Oct. 14 as "National School Lunch Week" in Deer Park. In the proclamation the mayor calls upon all citizens to give full consideration to, and appreciation for, school lunches.

Publication:

The Deer Park Progress, (Thursday, September 7, 1972)

In the cafeteria, the manager. Mrs. Dilyls McDonald, welcomed lunch pupils with her usual lovely variety of decorations and posters. Flowers in an array of vases top the dividing wall, just as in long-ago gardens. this year we are especially proud of Dilyls McDonald and Nadins Hasty, for they have been elected President and Treasurer of our Deer Park School Food Service Association. These two also attended the state

convention in Houston in June. Dilys spent part of her summer attending college, taking a course in Nutrition and Management so as to keep abreast of advances in food services to help serve pupils better.



After Kelly retired, they road tripped around the U.S. in all directions. Dilys wrote a log on each journey and all the miles they traveled. They went to New Mexico, Colorado, and even saw the Mount Rushmore National Park in South Dakota. From Deer Park straight to Mt Rushmore is 1,300 miles alone. That's the equivalent of driving from London to Naples. She loved seeing the scenery, the animals, and shopping at the stops along the way.



By now, Kelly and Dilys had many grandchildren to spend time with and spoil. Dilys kept cards, drawings, letters, and notes from all of them in separate boxes with each grandchild's picture on the front. Kelly enjoyed photography, and so there were also many boxes filled with neatly labeled photos of each child and his/her family. Kelli (granddaughter) remembers, "She made my favorite Halloween costumes – an orange cat and a Care Bear, ironically, with the American flag. During Christmas, she always decorated the tree in unique ways, like completely in black and white, and wrote our names in calligraphy on our pristine packages." Dilys also made other grandchildren's costumes, sewed her own clothes, knitted blankets, and crocheted. Her many and varied talents were enjoyed by the family.

Dilys balanced many identities: British, American, woman, wife, mother, school district employee, teacher, churchgoer, and "Mema" as her grandchildren called her. She led an interesting life and passed on stories and memories of her family and growing up in Sawston that she wanted to be kept alive. The heirlooms she gave family members were given with a wish to cherish them as much as she did. She was a strong

person who looked up to her forever hero, Winston Churchill, and pulled strength from her faith and upbringing.

After Kelly passed away, she planned on spending half of the year in Texas and half in Sawston, but fate didn't allow that plan. Dilys missed England and always talked about "home" and her family there. Yet, she never made her Texan family feel as if she didn't want to be there either. Granddaughter Kelli remembers, " Her face lit up when we walked along the streets of Sawston. She clearly had two homes all along."

