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Between Us

The Perley and Rideau Veterans' Health Centre Foundation • OTTAWA, ONTARIO

A Lifetime Together

By Peter McKinnon

The latest chapter in the remarkable lives of Louise and Charlie Beddoe began earlier this year with a move into the Perley and Rideau Veterans' Health Centre. Although they didn't go far – their home was on the street immediately north of the Perley Rideau campus – it was their first move in 58 years.

Louise Mona Fitzgerald arrived in the world in 1926 in Quebec City. Like many in her family, she worked in the business founded by her maternal grandfather, Henry Ross. In the 1890s, Ross employed residents of a nearby First Nation band in the production of moccasins, snowshoes and canoes. As a young woman, Louise worked as bookkeeper. In the summer of 1954, Louise was invited by an aunt to visit her at her home in the Gatineau Hills. There, Louise met Charlie, who proposed within a few days.

"I think we were both a little desperate," jokes Charlie. "Louise was 28 and I was 34. "She was an Anglican living in a predominantly Catholic community at a time when mixed marriages were troublesome."

They married the following year and celebrated their 62nd wedding anniversary in 2017.

Born Charles Emile Beddoe in Ottawa in 1920, Charlie has enjoyed a storied life. As a seven year-old, his father took him to see Charles Lindberg, who launched his international Spirit of St. Louis tour in Ottawa. For 25 cents, spectators could take a short ride in a biplane – a double-cockpit Avro Avian. Charlie still remembers the thrill of flying while seated on his father's knee.

Alan Beddoe, Charlie's father, served in World War I and was held in prisoner-of-war camps for more than two years. Alan's wartime service inspired Charlie to join the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War. For the next five years, Charlie travelled from Trinidad to Murmansk and served in a variety of roles, including Combat Cameraman. On the morning of D-Day, he filmed the assault by Canadian troops tensely heading for Juno Beach.

"My wartime service wasn't so exciting at the start" recalls Charlie. "My first assignment was delivering messages to senior staff at headquarters. To pass the time, I studied photography. This caught the eye of some senior officers, who told me photography would be increasingly important to the



Charles Beddoe,
combat cameraman

war effort."

After his time at HQ, Charlie served as a gunner and ship's photographer aboard HMCS *Prince David* before training at RCAF Photo School. One of his assignments was to take an early-morning photograph of Intelligence Section's large wall map of Atlantic operations. The top-secret map showed the current position of every ship, convoy, Nazi submarine and sinking. He would process the negative and destroy it after making two prints, which he delivered personally to Admiral

Nelles, Chief of Naval Staff, and to Captain Brand, Director of Naval Intelligence.

As the war continued, Charlie's assignments became more dangerous. While posted in London, he experienced Nazi bombing raids, and later narrowly missed falling victim to V1 buzz and V2 rocket bombs. In April 1944, Charlie was off the French coast aboard HMCS Haida during an attack on two Nazi destroyers trying to slip the Allied blockade. It was the middle of the night and too dark to capture much on film. Although one Nazi ship was destroyed, Charlie watched helplessly as the HMCS exploded and sank, claiming more than 100 lives.

"Four of us from London planned to be on the Athabascan, but two of us had volunteered to transfer to the Haida," recalls Charlie. "I've been lucky to dodge death a few times."

A few days after D-Day, Charlie was in the stern of a landing craft when a mine exploded and sent him flying, with camera in hand. He landed on his feet, but



Charles and Louise Beddoe at the Perley Rideau

the skipper broke his ankle in the incident. An unusual twist was that the craft was Canadian ferrying American soldiers to Omaha Beach.

Just weeks before war's end, Charlie was aboard HMCS Huron escorting a convoy to Murmansk, on the Soviet Union's northwest coast. During the return voyage, he was again at the stern when he spotted a torpedo flash by. The bridge was alerted, and the

ship took evasive action. Another vessel – an unlucky British escort ship – was hit and disabled. To keep the vessel out of enemy hands, it was scuttled after the crew had been evacuated.

When the armistice was reached a few days later, the Huron was ordered to Trondheim, Norway. The British officer in charge wanted photographs of the Nazi submarine pen, but Charlie had only a movie camera. The officer got the Nazis to provide film and a camera – a Leica, among the world's finest – and Charlie completed the assignment.

"Part of what makes the incident unique is that the submarine that had attacked us a week earlier had likely been based in Trondheim," recalls Charlie. "I was really tempted to keep the camera, but I returned it."

After the war, Charlie continued to work in film. He was a cinematographer with the National Film Board for a couple of years, worked for two federal departments and also served a brief stint in the private sector.



Charles Beddoe (far right) poses with his father Alan, who served in World War I, and his sister Patricia, who served in the Women's Royal Navy Service.

In the late 1950s, Charlie was part of a small delegation that met with the Chairman and Chief Planner of the Federal District Commission (now the National Capital Commission) to propose developing a hamlet east of Ottawa. The meeting led to the creation of Blackburn Hamlet.

To help limit urban sprawl, Charlie was asked to run for municipal council in Gloucester, a city amalgamated into Ottawa in 2001. In retrospect, he's glad he wasn't elected. "I lost the battle but won the war" he muses. "They eventually formed a planning committee and I didn't have to sit through a couple of years of council meetings."

Charlie and Louise had four children, although one died in infancy. Each summer, the family spent at least two weeks at Skycroft Camp, near Chaffey's Locks swimming, hiking, boating and exploring. At first, they slept in a tent; later, Charlie bought a trailer. Louise got a job with Canadian National Institute for the Blind, where she worked for 20 years. The children grew into adults; Charlie and Louise now have four grandchildren.

When plans were announced to create the Perley and Rideau Veterans' Health Centre in the mid-1990s, Charlie volunteered to serve on the Perley's Community Liaison Committee. He left the Committee only a few years ago. He and Louise are long-time supporters of the Perley Rideau



Louise Beddoe with daughter Margaret

Foundation; for years they played Scrabble for money and donated the proceeds.

When Louise's health began to fail, Charlie served as primary caregiver. After a bout of ill health, Charlie moved into the Perley Rideau and Louise followed soon afterwards. They now live

in separate rooms, just down the hall from one another. Charlie regularly attends exercise classes and trivia night, and takes Louise to the craft studio.

"This is a wonderful place for us now," says Charlie. "I like to be with my husband," says Louise. **BU**

The Perley and Rideau Veterans' Health Centre is home of 450 residents, including 250 Canadian Veterans, most of whom served in either the Second World War or the Korean War. The Government of Canada provides additional funding for the care of Veterans, but donations to the Perley Rideau Foundation improve their quality of life in direct and significant ways. In May 2017, Veterans Affairs Canada, the province of Ontario, and the Perley and Rideau Veterans' Health Centre celebrated the announcement of 25 Specialized Veterans beds for Veterans who served in Canada for a minimum of 365 days and are income qualified, as well as to Canadian Armed Forces and Allied Veterans.

We appreciate your support in making a donation at www.perleyrideaufoundation.ca.

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