

South Wales **GI** Brides Magazine

Number One November 2010

GI bride flies the flag for Wales



GI BRIDE: Frances Spencer with local historian Glenn Booker.

MR GLENN Booker, the historian who has researched the subject of the GI Brides of South Wales, is seen here with one of them at her home in

Yakima, Washington State, USA.

She is Mrs Frances Spencer, who married Roy Spencer who was with the SeeBees, the US sailors

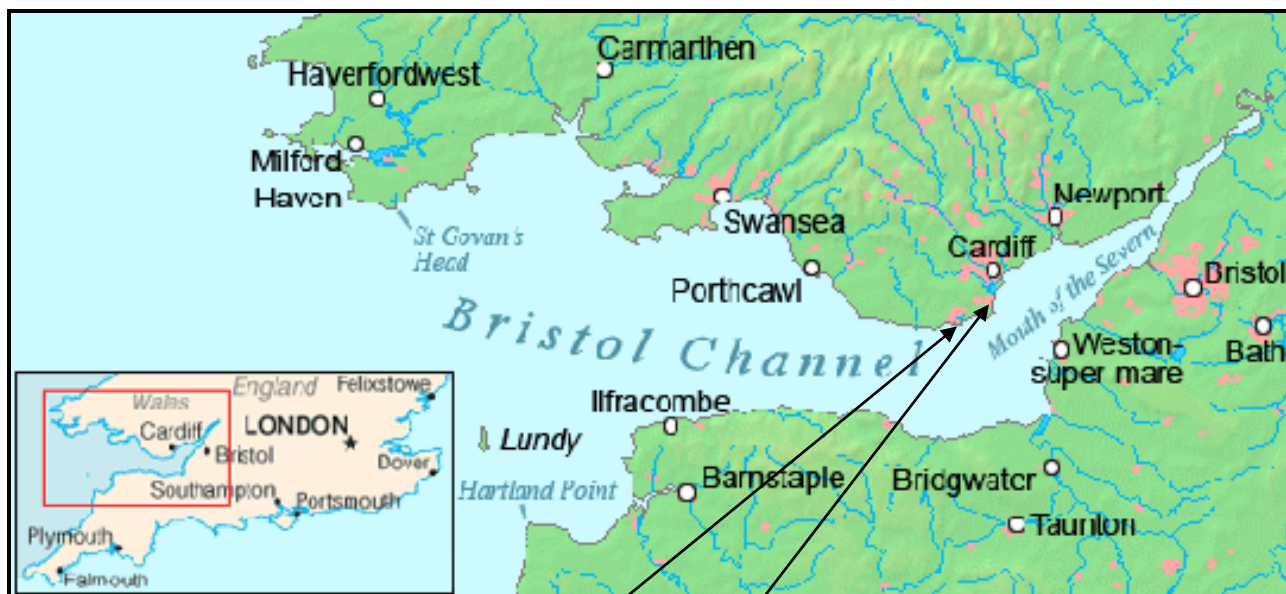
who worked in Penarth during the war, building a hospital in what is now the grounds of Stanwell School. She met her future husband when her mother

invited some sailors to their home at Christmas a short while before D-Day. She was formerly Frances Edwards, of Cawnpore Street, Cogan.

Welcome to South Wales GI Brides Magazine Number One!

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Without forgetting the town of **Barry** it is time to move on and record some of the stories of women from further a-field who married Americans and moved overseas to the USA. From Newport to Pontypridd to Cardiff to Swansea and Milford Haven **hundreds** of women from south Wales became GI Brides...

The picture on the **front page** comes from the Penarth Times. In 2006 it was my great privilege to meet Frances Spencer in Washington State. I can bear witness that she has NOT lost her Cardiff-Penarth-south Wales accent!

Mrs Frances Spencer (now sadly widowed, Roy having died September 23rd, 1987) now lives in Moses Lake, Washington State, USA. She used to live in Cawnpore Street, in the town of **Penarth**, next door to Cardiff, south Wales, United Kingdom.

Here is some of Frances's story in her own words...



Frances and Roy Spencer

THE WAR YEARS

“I was a schoolgirl at the start of the Second World War. (The war began in 1939 for the United Kingdom). As for the war years – well, they were bad. Our playing field was bombed and also nearby places. Being up all night during an air raid was NO excuse for being late for work or school. We were heavily rationed and there were long lines (queues) for food; we had clothing coupons and were only allowed to buy things we really needed. We worked six days and many times seven days a week as the trains were always running with troops etc. (*Frances’ father worked for the Great Western Railways.*)

In **January 1941** we were bombed out of our house by a landmine that the Germans sent down on a parachute. The “All clear” sign had gone and we all thought we were safe. The mine floated down and landed on soft ground and then exploded – all our back windows plus a foot of brick were blown inwards. We four girls were put in the closet under the stairs as a “safe place” and my parents tended to neighbours as they were both **Air Raid Wardens** (Civil Defence).



1944: Bomb damage just down the street

My father worked in a railway signal box and a bomb was dropped nearby – he had shrapnel wounds in his arm and chest and was in a serious condition at the hospital for a long time. There were frequent air raids, bombs and firebombs (incendiaries). But all that slackened off a lot when the Americans came over.

In **1943** my mother and father invited three American sailors to spend Christmas day with us – the weekly paper, the Penarth Times, had asked families to make them welcome. The three “boys” were stationed in Penarth, south Wales, with **81st Naval Construction Battalion (a.k.a. the SeaBees.)** I worked in a railway ticket office and met them there at 11pm when I got off work.

My future husband, Roy Spencer, was in a large house (*Northcliffe House*) overlooking Penarth Docks, where he worked. They constructed buildings to be used in case of an invasion – emergency hospitals, command posts etc. I believe he came to Penarth from Scotland about September 1943 and left for Falmouth, England, about April 1944 to be prepared for D-Day. He went out on the second wave of troops and landed at Omaha Beach. **(Roy never talked of his time in combat.)**

Roy and I started dating and planned on marrying in June – but he was sent to Europe with the Invasion. We were married in Plymouth, England, in **October 1944**. Roy had to get permission from his commanding officer to get married. Then a chaplain interviewed me and a check was made to see if I had ever broken the law!



Thursday December 2nd, 1943

Women's Voluntary Services for Civil Defence

OUR AMERICAN GUESTS

We are told by their officers that many of the US Navy men now stationed in this neighbourhood would be grateful for local hospitality to enable them to make friends here and spend some of their free time in a real home. They do not need meals, as their food is ample and excellent, but would greatly appreciate opportunities of getting to know people in a simple, homely^{1*} manner.

Will anyone willing to invite one or two men to spend an evening with them please send along particulars as times, numbers etc to this office. We would then pass these on to the proper quarter at once.

¹ "Homely" had/has a more... **attractive, positive** meaning in the UK than it did/does in the US!

Penarth Times
TEL. PENARTH. 67

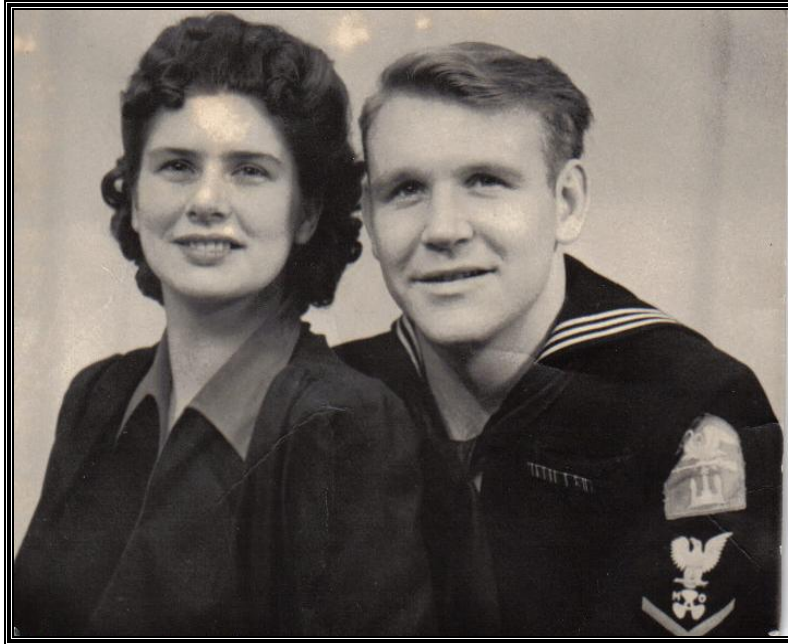
Thursday December 30th, 1943

HAVE YOU HEARD?

THAT a goodly number of local residents entertained our American visitors over the Christmas?



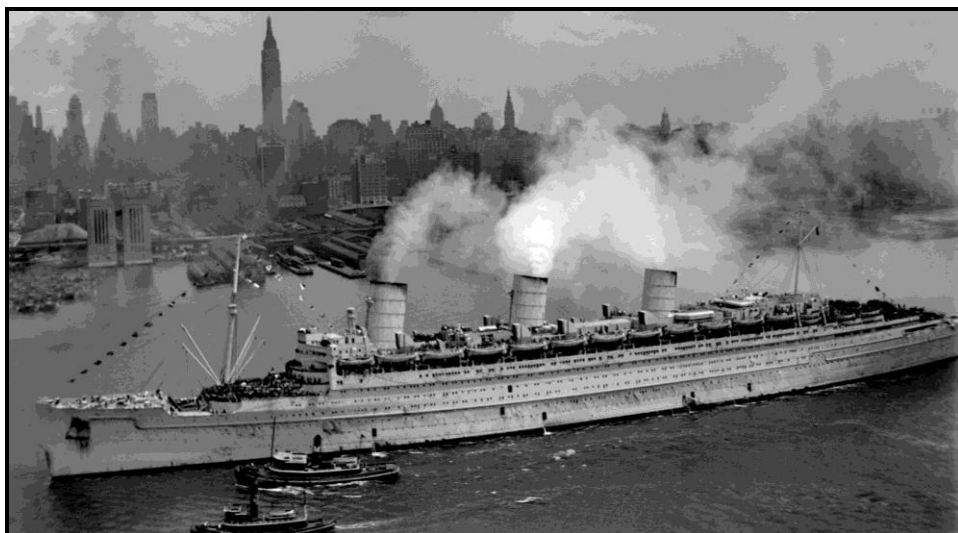
1944: Elsie Edwards, Roy Spencer, Frances Edwards



1944: Frances and Roy

AFTER THE WAR

I came over with the second shipload on the **Queen Mary**. We were in a camp at Tidworth near Southampton a week prior to sailing – we had health check-ups and a legal check-up. (German Prisoners of War worked at the camp, cooking and cleaning.)





Thursday January 31st, 1946

PENARTH'S GI BRIDES TO SAIL IN QUEEN MARY

Throughout the country British wives of Americans are leaving their homes to join their husbands in the USA, and on Monday morning two brides from Penarth left to take up their new lives in America.

One was **Mrs Frances Spencer**, third daughter of Mr and Mrs Ernest Edwards, of 5, Cawnpore Street, Cogan. Mrs Spencer met her husband when her mother invited three Americans to spend Christmas Day 1943... They were married the following October, and Mrs Spencer was able to join her husband until he went to France on D-Day. Mrs Spencer's new home will be at Yakima, Washington

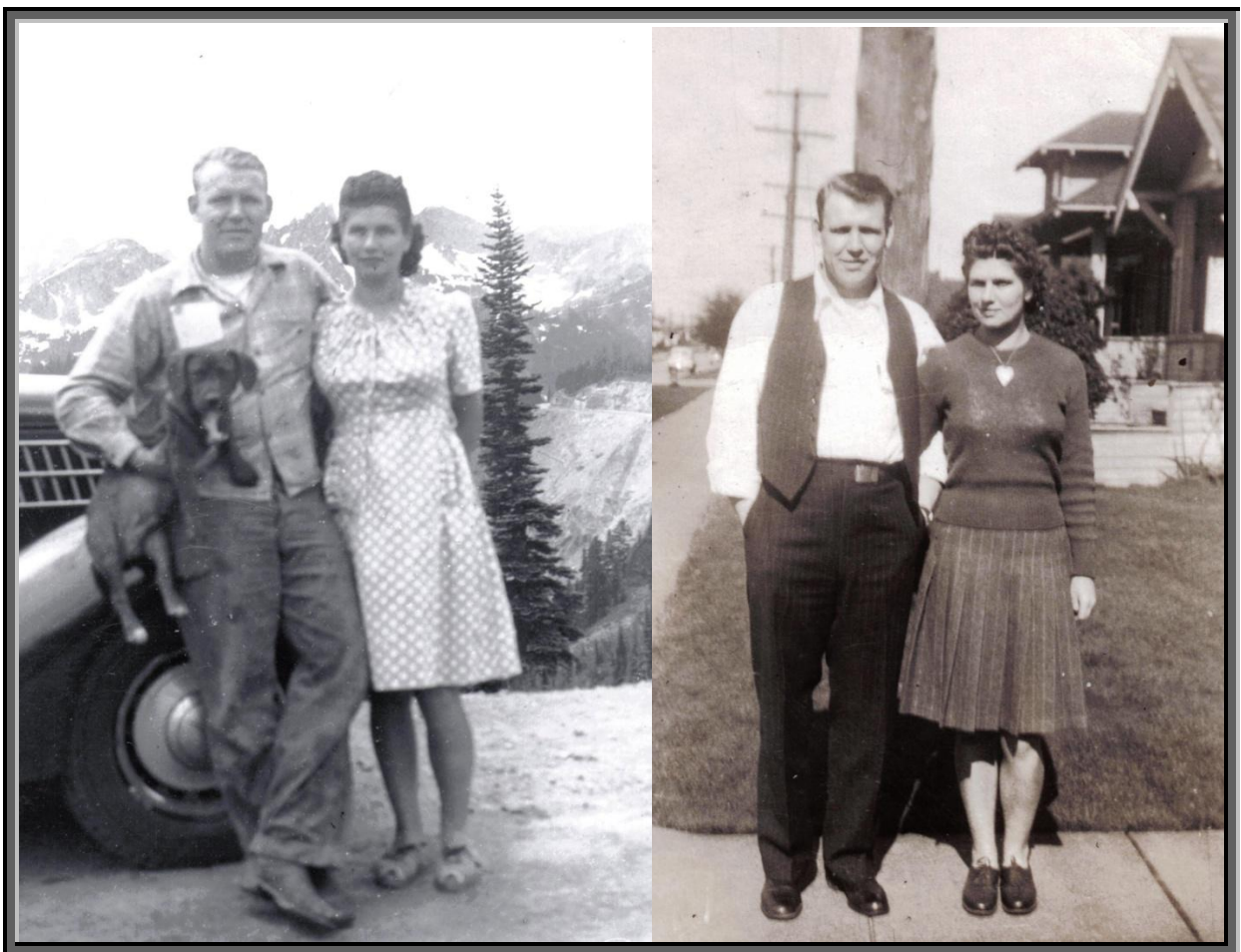
The other GI bride is **Mrs Nancy Mullins**, formerly **Miss Schultz**, of Maughan Terrace. She was married two years ago. Her husband, who she met in Penarth, was in the US Navy, and lives in West Virginia. Mrs Mullins is hoping to arrive in America in time to spend her 22nd birthday in New York.

Both Mrs Spencer and Mrs Mullins will spend a few days in Salisbury at the transportation camp before sailing to America. They hope to leave England on February 3rd in the Queen Mary.

THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY

My husband came from a poor family but was a very hard worker – we raised four children and owned four homes and owned our own vending business from **1966 – 87**, until retirement. Our home was on 8 ½ acres and we had a three-acre vineyard.

This is the land of opportunity – I know we'd not have done as well in south Wales."



1946: Snoqualmie Pass, Washington State 1945: Somewhere in Wisconsin

Where to find out about GI Brides and their Grooms?

Mainly in the old newspapers: notices of weddings, engagements, birth announcements and eventually anniversaries were put in the papers so a slender but invaluable record was created.

Here is a pre-D-Day wedding picture and all...

CARDIFF TIMES

Saturday March 11th, 1944



TINSLEY – WILLIAMS

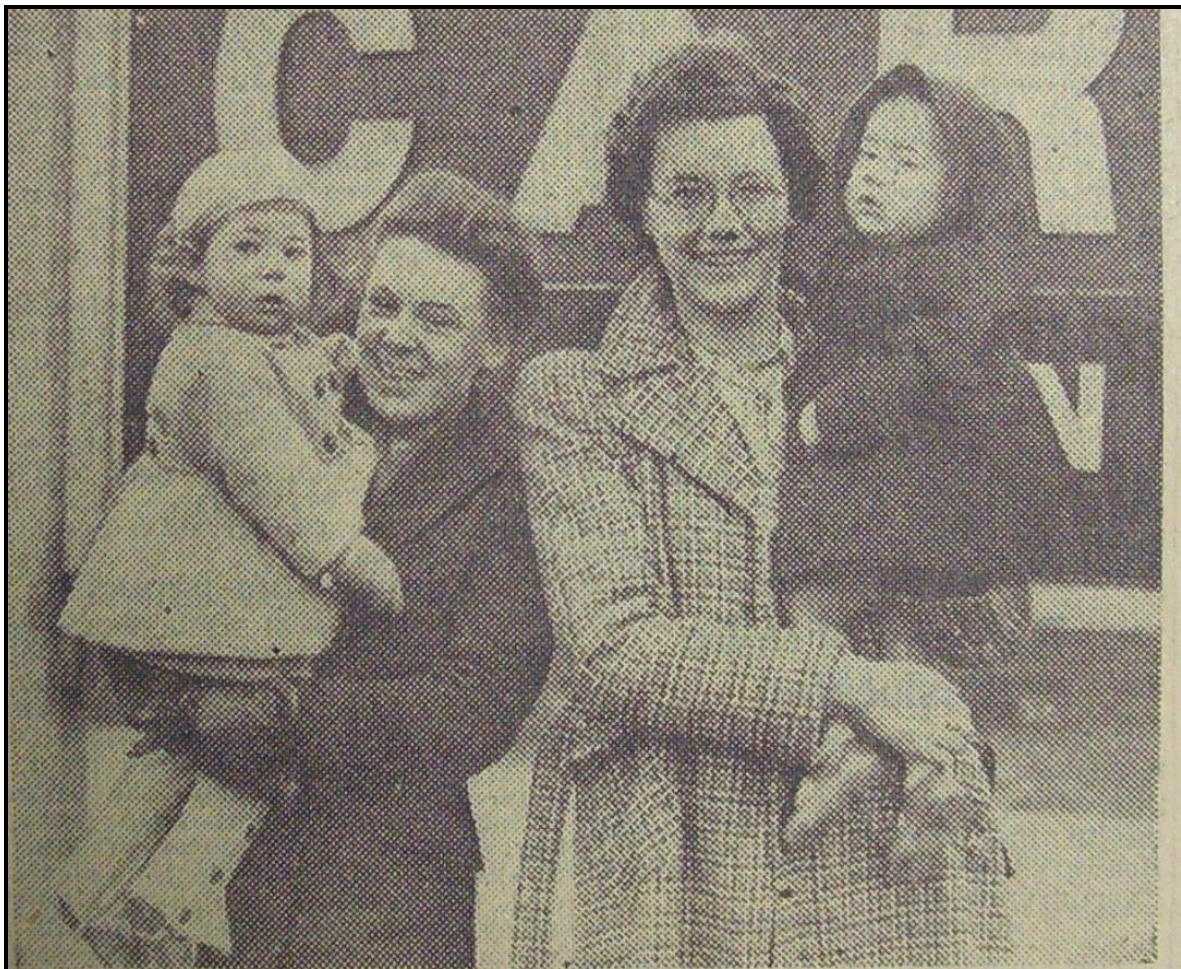
Sergeant James H Tinsley, US Forces, of Kimberlin Heights, Tennessee, and his bride, **Miss Gwyneth Mair Williams** daughter of Mr and Mrs James Emlyn Williams (*British Legion Club, Womanby Street*) with their attendants after their wedding at St John's Church, Cardiff. **Staff Sergeant Willie Davies** of Georgia, USA was best man.

After the end of the war more and more photos appeared in the press, especially when the Brides began to leave for the USA. I quite like this one:

CARDIFF TIMES

Saturday February 2nd, 1946

DORIS FLETCHER & NANCY MULLENS



TWO G.I. BRIDES (Mrs. Doris Fletcher and Mrs. Nancy Mullens) and their babies photographed at Cardiff Railway Station when leaving to join their husbands.

Here's a happy reunion "Over There:" from Newport to New York:

SOUTH WALES ARGUS

March 7th, 1945

MCKEON – DWYER

On March 5th at St Mary's Roman Catholic Church...**Edwin**...Brooklyn, New York, USA, to **Kathleen (Kay)** only daughter of Mr and Mrs T R Dwyer, Cefn, Rogerstone.

June 5th, 1946

FIRST TO LAND FROM BRIDE SHIP

First to land in New York from the G.I. bride ship, James. Parker, was the former Miss Kathleen Dwyer, of Rogerstone. At the foot of the gang-



Mrs. Edwin McKeon

plank she was met by her husband, Mr. Edwin McKeon, of Brooklyn, New York.

The couple were married at St. Mary's R.C. Church, Newport, in March, 1945, when the husband was a staff-sergeant in the U.S. Army. Mrs. McKeon is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. T. R. Dwyer, of 2, Woodland Terrace, Cefn, Rogerstone.

HOW MANY GI BRIDES FROM SOUTH WALES WERE THERE?

Hundreds! How many hundreds? I am still counting and collating!

That's all 'til next month, folks!