



## Couple united by twist of fate

United by chance six decades ago, a Menifee couple are still in love

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By JOHN WELSH / The Press-Enterprise

MENIFEE - February 14, 1943.

The English girl waited.

Her date never showed. She'd find out why later.

Just as Doris Hardingham readied to leave the Valentine's Day dance, a uniformed Yank, as she called him, popped into the White Horse Hotel.

Just passing through. Looking to enjoy an ale or two with his fellow soldiers. George Crow discovered the 17-year-old sitting alone. Asked her if she cared for a drink. No, thank you. But she did allow him to walk her home.

It's a boy-meets-girl-who-was-waiting-for-someone-else tale.

Sixty years later, it's a story that continues in Menifee, far from Ipswich, England, and many happy decades removed from those days of uncertainty, of ration lines for butter and cheese, of young boys going to war and never coming back, of Anderson air-raid shelters and bombs falling from the sky.

"All my life I had this dream to sail off and see the world, to travel," Doris Crow said over coffee and cookies at her home overlooking the Menifee Lakes Country Club golf course. "When George was put into my life, I thought it was God's way; he was part of the plan."

### 'From There, It's History'

Doris, 79, does most of the talking, and George, 86, listens. Sometimes Doris reaches for George's left arm as she recalls a memory and smiles. It's straight out of those couple-snapshot scenes in the movie "When Harry Met Sally."

George's hearing aid is bothering him, and it's keeping him a bit out of the conversation. But Doris said George was always a shy, humble man.

"I don't know how he plucked up enough courage to come talk to me," Doris said.

She saw something in him, but agreed to meet him the night after the Valentine's Day dance only if he would stop by to meet her parents for a cup of tea.



Frank Bellino / The Press-Enterprise

George and Doris Crow hold photos from the 1940s. They were married in 1945, on a Friday the 13th in July.

"They liked him," Doris said. "They fell in love with him. And from there, it's history."

She would never hear from John, her Valentine's date and a great childhood friend. It's still such a painful memory that she declined to give John's last name.

"The next day I heard John had been shot down," Doris said. "He was a Spitfire pilot."

Doris reflected on the sacrifices of so many. She's visited the World War II Cambridge American Cemetery and Memorial near Cambridge, England. The grave markers emphasized what she already knew.

"Nineteen, 20 - so young," Doris said. "They didn't get a chance to live, did they?"

George Crow's military career landed him briefly at then-March Air Force Base before finally shipping out of New Jersey's Fort Dix, bound for England. The USS Uruguay zigzagged the Atlantic on a 14-day trek that ended at Swansea on Aug. 19, 1942.

He helped build the Raydon Air Force Base near the Suffolk County city of Ipswich. Ipswich faced the North Sea and often got hit with whatever leftovers Nazi bombers didn't drop on nearby London. Air sirens buzzed daily. War. Doris had been living with it since age 13.

British townfolk grew optimistic, Doris Crow said, as the American presence grew leading up to the D-Day invasion.

"The Yanks looked so sharp in their uniforms," Doris said.

George Crow said he couldn't remember exactly what he told Doris the day he strolled into the White Horse Hotel. Probably asked her what she was doing, George recalled. Asked her if she was waiting for someone.

### **A Frightening Time**

Crow, formerly of Sullivan, Mo., worked with the 833rd Engineer Aviation Battalion. He and his unit hopscotched around England building air bases before D-Day and then into Europe as the front lines pushed forward. Some of the earliest images he recalled. Burning tanks and parachutes in the trees. One of his immediate thoughts: "Well, I got it easy."

Doris said George, who ran his own pest-control business after he was honorably discharged from the service, only started talking about the war in his later years.

"I got homesick for the Army," George Crow said. "I think if I hadn't gotten married, I would have rejoined. You knew what you had to do -- because somebody was going to tell you."

During his 14-month tour, Doris wrote him daily. George's letters arrived sporadically.

"It was a frightening time for all of us," Doris said. "We didn't know if we'd be alive the next day."

The couple married on July 13, 1945, a Friday the 13th -- bad luck, folks said. But, it was the only day the couple could get when George managed to get a week's leave.

All these years later, the couple have three grown sons, six grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

"They've always been there for their children," said their youngest son, David Crow, 54, who lives in Beaumont. "They're good role models."

He's told his own children of their grandparents' Valentine's Day chance meeting.

"It's a beautiful story," David Crow said.

Doris and George Crow moved to Menifee about four years ago from Lawndale near Torrance. But the Inland region had always had a hold on them. The family spent many weekends at a home they owned near the shores of Lake Elsinore.

Doris Crow's love advice is simple: "Have faith that it will work. If you're in love, it should work. I was raised that when you got married, it was forever."

Of course, so many women married during those troubled years. War brides, they were called. Skeptics muttered that such unions between heroes and hometown girls steeped in the passions of World War II would not endure.

"Sixty years later," Doris said, "I got the big laugh."

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