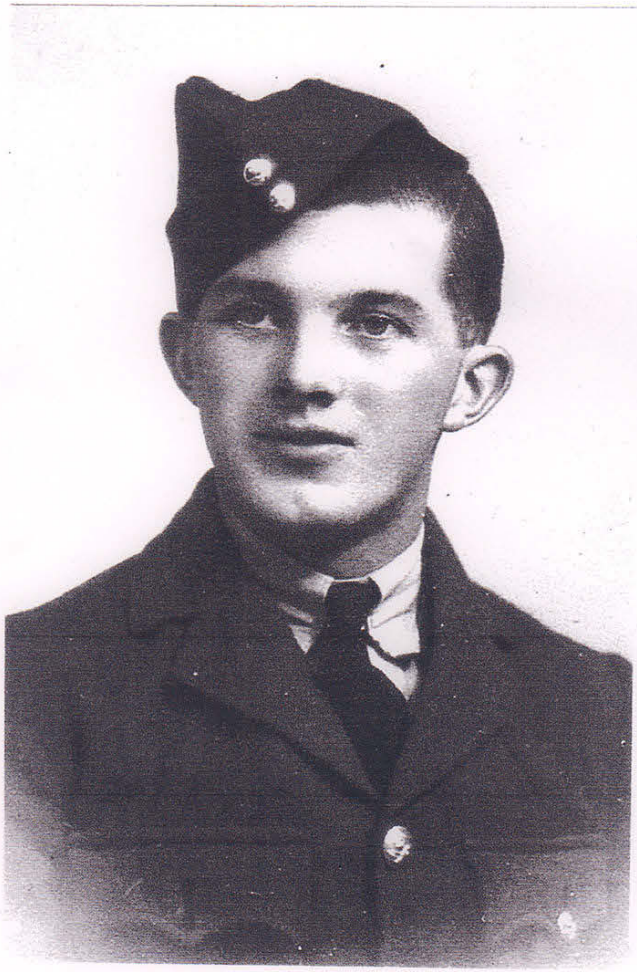
THE
WAR MEMOIRS
OF
1096366 Cpl. T. WALLER MID.



15-5-1941 to 15-6-1946

In March 1936, my family moved from Hull to West Leyes Road in Swanland where we lived at West Lodge, which had formed part of Reckit's walled kitchen garden before the demolition of the manor in 1935, but unfortunately the garden was sold in 1944, so in March of that year we to moved to Cottingham.

I worked for J. Waites and Son at their grocer's shop in Main Street Swanland, which today has been modernised and converted into a mini-market, and on Wednesdays I had a half day off.
When in Hull in April 1940, at the age of 18, I had the impulse to go to the recruiting office and volunteer for the Royal Air Force, hoping for training as a transport driver. I duly signed on the dotted line and then returned home and explained to my mother what I had done, to which she responded "What did you do that for, you'll never pass the medical".

In due course a letter arrived informing me that I had to attend the medical examination, which I did, and passed as A1 (fit for active service). When I arrived home I told my mother what had transpired, to which she replied "But you can't have!" so I responded saying "Well I have", but to this day I never found out the reasons behind her remark.

Not long after, I received the papers telling me that I had been accepted for service in the RAF and to report to the assessment centre at Cardington, which I did, only to be told that I would be trained as an armourer and not a driver as I'd hoped.
It was disappointing, however I returned home as I had been given a week to sort things out prior to starting my enlistment. When I arrived home my eldest brother was there on leave, he was already a mechanic in the RAF, and I told him that I was soon to begin training as an armourer. He told me that this would involve 'bombing-up' and servicing aircraft guns, but he also went on to say that many experienced armourers had been re-assigned to act as air-gunners, in Fairy Battle aircraft, during the evacuation of the BEF from Dunkirk. Unfortunately many of them were killed in action, creating a shortage of skilled armourers, and that is why I had been assigned for this training.

I said my goodbyes and left the following week as I had to report to Blackpool for kitting-out with uniforms, cutlery, etc, and I also had a vaccination and inoculations, before starting basic training. This was followed by a day trip to the Derby Road baths and then a week of various lectures before being sent to Morcombe. It was there that military training (including square bashing) commenced, this being carried out on the seafront promenade and down the side streets which provided a great spectacle for the local residents and tourists alike.
Next it was out into the fields to practice bayonet drill which involved attacking straw filled sacks suspended between wooden frames. Following the command to fix bayonet the drill went something like this, 'on guard – rifled poised', 'thrust – stick the bayonet into the sack', twist bayonet and 'pull it out' and so it went on.

I and some of my fellow trainees were billeted in a large house with two attic rooms which were used by the owner's sons when on leave from the Royal Navy. The owner and his family were the kindest people you could wish to meet, providing us with good food, comfortable accommodation and they also allowed the married men to have their wives stay over for weekends, this made it a home-from-home for us all.

If any of us were feeling off-colour we would be pampered and well looked after, as one of the daughters was a nurse at the local hospital, and if you happened to mention that you had heard the latest record they would have it, within a few days, for you to play on the radiogram.
After the war my sister, brother, his fiancée and I had a lovely holiday with the family as they had re-opened as a guest house again.

After Morcombe it was a posting to Kirkham in Lancashire and this was where the work really started with the commencement of the armourer's course. It was found to be nose to the grindstone however I and many of the other trainees didn't really want to be there, for various personal reasons, therefore when it came to filing-down metal for gun parts we would file the metal in the wrong way. When the instructor came round and saw what we were doing he retorted "You can stop that lark! None of you are getting off this course but if you put your backs into it you can do it". After that we had no choice but to knuckle down and get stuck in, which we did, and eventually we found that we were beginning to enjoy it, that coupled with the fact that it was quite easy to get to Blackpool, this made life better.
We managed to venture into Blackpool on several occasions and enjoyed some of the variuos shows at the Opera House, we also found a nice pie shop near the bus station and on the bus journey back to camp it would be a raucous sing-song, what a life!
Once the course was completed we all had to line-up outside the armoury, an officer then came along and said "When your name is called, step forward", my name was eventually called and I duly stepped forward. As selected minions, the chosen few, we were informed that we had been posted to Credonhill, in Herefordshire, for further training as fitter-armourers we had to go there was no choice.

Down to Credonhill we went and began the new course, which again was nose to the grindstone, however after getting stuck-in the work became enjoyable and the effort paid off as we passed with flying colours.
It was there, in the September of 1942, that I celebrated my 21st birthday although I was all alone in the billet listening to classical music and from that time on I became hooked on that type of music.
Whilst there we were fortunate in that we could visit Hereford at the weekends, with its fine cathedral, canteen and the river Ouse which gave us a chance to relax and go boating, so I would say that on the whole our stay there was not too bad.

Seven day leave followed which meant a taste of civilian life again and a semblance of normality, that is to say no sergeant bawling at you to come at the double, your own bed to sleep in and a private bathroom with no one making rude comments about your appendage, but alas it was over all too soon.

My first operational deployment came in late 1941 with a posting to Stradishall, (now High Point prison), to 138 Squadron, which was part of the SOE (**S**pecial **O**perations **E**xecutive), and I remained there until March 1942 at which time I should have been transferred to Wyton.
At this point it is worth noting a few details about 138 Squadron and its work as it operated for three and a half years, ranging over Europe from Norway it the north, at times deep into Poland and to Yugoslavia in the south, transporting agents and dropping supplies to the various resistance movement throughout these countries.

Operation aircraft included the venerable Lysander, affectionately known as the 'Lizzie', and the Whitley bomber, both of which were originally based at Stradishall before being transferred to Tempsford in March 1942.

Our job was to pack cylindrical supply canisters with whatever was needed, such as arms; ammunition; explosives; radio sets and other vital equipment and supplies, and then load them into the Whitley bomber's bomb bay. The bomber then delivered the canisters to saboteurs and resistance movements in the various countries, dropping them by parachute into rendezvous points where a reception committee of local underground members would be waiting to receive them.

The agents were usually flown to and from their destinations by the squadron's Lysanders, which were quiet aircraft, capable of landing and taking off from rough short unprepared airstrips, only staying on the ground for very short periods. You never knew the agent's identity, due to the secret nature of operations, and to preserve their anonymity a telescopic cover was used, extending from the rear of the transport vehicle to the aircraft. Very few people knew in advance of these flights so in winter it was not unusual to be called out in the middle of the night to clear snow from the runway to enable the aircraft to take off or land.

My first leave from Stradishall was quite an experience as the train station at Haverhill was well over a mile from the camp and I arrived there just as the train was about to depart, this was when it all started. The station porter asked "Do you want this train?" so I said "Yes", but as there was little time he suggested that I obtain my ticket at the other end and virtually pushed me into a carriage. As we approached Hull the ticket collector came round, I had my railway warrant but no valid ticket therefore he more or less accused me of trying to get away without paying. A dear old soul got up, who I thought was going to hit him with her umbrella, and she said "This lad is fighting for our country" to which I responded "Don't start another war we have enough with this one against Hitler". Once in Hull's Paragon station I was taken to the station master's office where the ticket collector explained that he thought I had tried to get away without paying, so I told my side of the story and said "If you don't believe me ring Haverhill station and they will confirm what I have said", I eventually got my return ticket.

Not long after returning to Stradishall, 138 Squadron was transferred to Tempsford and I was issued with a travel warrant to go to Upper Heyford in Northhants. On arrival I reported to the guard room to present myself and they directed me to the orderly room where, after a while, an officer entered and asked "Where have you come from?", "Stradishall" I replied. The office then informed me that I was not supposed to be there and said "We will find you a bed until we can ascertain where you should be". I was then taken to the cookhouse for a well deserved meal before being shown to my temporary billet.

Whilst at Stradishall I had written home to let the family know that I was being transferred to another camp and would write again when I got there.

I was at Upper Heyford for about a week before being informed that I should have been transferred to Wyton in Huntingdonshire, so you can imagine my mothers surprise when the police came to her house to see if I was there, as I had not arrived at my designated camp on time.

After a while I was told to collect my belongings and that an Anson aircraft would fly me to Wyton, 'Good' I thought 'my first flight', so off I went to the orderly room where I was surprised to find out that the aircraft had developed a fault and that I would now have to travel by train. I was issued with a railway warrant to Huntingdon, which happened to be the nearest station to the camp, and then driven to the station where I was seen onto the train and off I went, thinking that they were glad to get rid of me.

I eventually arrived at Wyton in late 1942, to join 109 Squadron of the Pathfinder Force, only to face a Court of Enquiry over the fiasco of my transfer and in simple terms it went something like this – Where have you been?, your telling us that you passed through Kings Cross station and were not stopped although we have had the MPs (**M**ilitary **P**olice) looking for you, they were puzzled! Following my explanation a called was placed to Upper Heyford to verify that I had been telling the truth.
I then settled into my new billet which was occupied by other armourers and when I told them what had happened they all had a good laugh, they knew a new armourer had arrived.
My first order of business was to write a letter home to let them known that I had arrived, give them my new address and an idea of what had happened to accounted for the delay in writing.

When I arrived home on my next leave my mother was in a very agitated state as she wanted to know where I had been and why the MPs were looking for me. I explained what had transpired and that it was the fault of the orderly room at Stradishall, as they had sent me to the wrong RAF camp, she was pleased that her son hadn't gone AWOL (**A**bsent **W**ith**O**ut **L**eave) as was first thought.

Following my return to camp the work really started with my first job on an aircraft being to fit a new cartridge chute in the rear turret of a Wellington bomber, affectionately known as the 'Wimpy', which had been brought into the hanger for inspection. It was then taken out onto the runway apron so that the engines could be 'run-up' before it was taken to the dispersal point and knowing I could get a lift back to the hanger I went with the aircraft to check that the turret operated correctly. While onboard I thought that the pilot was revving the engines up as a test however when I looked out through the rear turret I saw the runway moving away, we were airborne, and it was at this point that panic set in as I didn't have a parachute. I then made my way unsteadily up the fuselage and said to one of the Bods, our name for airmen, "I haven't got a parachute" to which he calmly replied "Don't worry, none of us have". That was reassuring up to a point, so I made my way back to the rear turret and climbed in to enjoy the tail-end Charlie's (rear gunner) view of the countryside. Once we had landed one of the lads asked "Have you flown before?" to which I replied "No that was my first flight", he was surprised and remarked "You're the first one I've seen that was capable of walking in a straight line after his first flight".

Once while working on the front turret of a 'Wimpy' I looked out and saw the Commanding Officer and the Duke of Kent standing on the tarmac.

Wyton was a nice location being handy for the Huntingdon headquarters of 8 Group Pathfinder Force and I also found out that Oliver Cromwell had attended the grammar school in Huntingdon.
My elder brother was medically exempt from service so he and his future wife came down for a holiday at Godmanchester, which was just down the road from Huntingdon, making it possible for me to visit them twice while they were there.

Professor Cox, the inventor of the Target Indicator Bomb and Barometric fuze, came to work at the base and it was the duty of my mate and I to assist him to perfect these, this resulted in us being exempt from postings for three years. The problem we had to overcome was the fact that when the bomb was dropped from an aircraft only half of the 'candles' would burn and it took many attempts before we overcame the problem and got all the 'candles' to burn. On each attempt the bombs were loaded onto a Lancaster bomber which then

flew over Thetford forest where an area had been designated onto which the bombs could be dropped. After each bombing run we would travel to the forest, in RAF transport, so that we could check the results of the drop, first hand.

Another project we had was to redesign the bomb's tail fins so that four could be carried in the small bomb bay of the Mosquito bomber, as it was their task to mark targets for the main bomber streams.

We also made a device known as a 'screamer' which drove the aerodrome mad with its noise.

The professor received £20,000 for his inventions, which was in great part due to my mate and my self helping him to perfect them.

On one occasion the professor put some pieces of 'candle' on a work bench in the armoury and ignited them, talk about technicolour. It also produced a thick black smoke that billowed through the hanger, housing Lancaster and Mosquito bombers, causing someone to call the fire brigade thinking that the hanger was on fire. Following this incident we could have been brought up on charges but fortunately the blame fell on the professor who received a serious dressing down for his antics.

Whilst at Wyton I unfortunately contracted oil dermatitis and was hospitalised for quite a while during which time my face was regularly painted with a violet liquid however it didn't do much to help the condition but it did stop it spreading. When the senior Medical Officer went on leave a junior Medical Officer asked "Will you be a guinea pig for me?" and as I had nothing to loose said "Yes". He later came back with a pot of cream, he had concocted it himself, which he then smeared onto my face and miraculously by the end of the week all that was left on my face were red blotches. When the senior Medical Officer returned from leave he found out what had happened and the junior Medical Officer and I got it in the neck however I pointed out to him that the dermatitis had cleared up and with that he stormed off. Some while later the junior Medical Officer came back to see me and apologised for getting me in to hot water, he had brought me another jar of his cream but fortunately I didn't need to use it again. I was given a week's sick leave and hoped that the junior Medical Officer would make his fortune after the war.

It was a lovely walk from Wyton to St. Ives, passing through Houghton, across the meadow to Houghton water mill, along the river bank and through a bird sanctuary where on a summers evening bird songs could be heard. On the way we would stop off at Hemmingford Grey which had a good canteen and from here, as in St. Ives, you could go boating. One Sunday my mate and I went to an evening service in St. Ives after which the minister invited us back to the vicarage for supper and this was followed by a game of bowls, on a lovely lawn.

Wyton was the only base I was stationed at that had a bomb dump across the road from the camp, the road being the one from Huntingdon to Warboys, fortunately in those days there was very little traffic about.

In early 1943, 156 Squadron, the second on the base, moved to Warboys which was just down the road from Wyton therefore it was still handy for a cycle ride into Huntingdon.

Our billets were nissen huts dispersed throughout the woods however if you were in them when all the aircraft took-off the huts would vibrate however to me the noise of the aircraft was a lovely sound.

One evening my mate and I went for a cycle ride and came into a small village called Benwick where we stopped at the local pub for a drink. We wandered out to the back of the pub where we met a lovely family

with whom we started chatting and they asked if we would like a game of bowls, we said that we hadn't played before and they told us it was easy. Off we went to a well kept bowling green for our match and we won as my bowls rolled into the right place, to which they remarked "You must have played before, you have the knack for it and got the bias right", "No" I replied "Beginners luck". They invited us back to their home for supper and said we were welcome to visit whenever we had any spare time. When we were going on leave they would asked us to come over if we had the time and they would give us eggs and sometime a chicken to take home.

They had two small sons and a little 18 month old daughter for whom I made a dolls bed, which she still has, and after the war I spent a holiday with them, including a day trip to Hunstanton. Unfortunately the daughter is now the only member of the family left however we still keep in touch regularly and I send flowers on her birthday and at Christmas, this is the least I can do after all the family's kindness shown to us during the war.

While stationed at Warboys I got engaged to a WAAF who worked in the telephone exchange, where I worked the switchboard once or twice, and here they used to cook for themselves so if they got any kidney when I was going on leave they would give me it to take home, as they didn't like it, this made a tasty treat for my family.

When an aircraft came into the hanger for servicing I would ask the pilot if he was going up on a test flight and if he was I would ask his permission to go up with him, under the pretext of testing the turrets, etc. These were exciting trips as the pilot would hedge-hop the plane, flying low over the meadows and at times you would see a train almost level with you. Near the coast was a farm house and if there was any washing hung out the pilot would fly low over the house and then nose-up so that the washing would blow off the line, if it was not pegged tightly onto it, by which time we would be out over the Wash.

On my second flight in a Lancaster the pilot knew I was going up with him and I positioned myself in the mid-upper gunner's turret to enjoy the view. After a while I began to feel really light headed when suddenly there was a tug on my leg from one of the crew, he asked "How long have you been up there" to which I replied "Ever since take-off", "Hell" he retorted "Quick, plug this in to the intercom so that I can speak to the pilot", he then gave me a mask to put on and told me to plug it into the oxygen system. There was no wonder I was feeling light headed and exhilarated as we were flying at a fairly high altitude which meant that I had begun to suffering from a lack of oxygen and if we had descended quickly it would have damaged my ears.

I soon recovered and once out over the Wash I tested the guns and began to traverse the hydraulic turret, it stopped working and I thought what's wrong now, so I started to traverse the turret manually. At that point I noticed we were flying on one engine and once again panic set in as I wasn't wearing a parachute but fortunately the other engines started up and we were flying on all four engines again. Once on the ground the pilot came up to me and said "Sorry about that, I forgot you had come along, it was a good job one of the crew found you when he did otherwise I could have done you a lot of damage". I then asked him about flying on one engine and he responded "We often do that because the Lancaster can fly on one engine". That was a flight I will never forget and I later read a book by Wing Commander Guy Gibson in which he mentioned flying his aircraft on one engine.

As armourers we were an ingenious bunch so in our dinner breaks we would fabricate cigarette lighter out of 0.303" and 0.5" calibre 'rounds' and other odds and ends. Firstly the bullet was removed from the cartridge case and the propellant charge (cordite) tipped out, next came the dangerous part, the end of a file was

placed on the percussion cap, in the base of the casing, and then wrapped in a large wad of rags before the file was hit with a hammer, which would detonate the percussion cap with a bang, but unfortunately my mate lost a finger doing this as he didn't use enough rag wadding. We also fashioned Spitfires from halfpenny pieces, these looked nice when polished, and crafted model planes from pieces of clear perspex. Another profitable business was making Dutchess Sets using square and oblong frames into which nails were fixed every half inch and silk threads criss-crossed between them and knotted, they made lovely presents.
I made my nephew a fort out of old ammunition boxes which I took home in pieces, it was that solid you could stand on it, and I also managed to obtain an old parachute for my mother, who being a seamstress made good use of it.
Another perk of the job came when a new Lancaster arrived on base as it had thermos flasks, so it was a mad rush to be one of the first to the dispersal point to grab one, which I managed to do.

While serving at Warboys I was promoted to corporal and asked if I would like to go back to school to learn about bombs and fuzes as this would mean another promotion to sergeant and an increase in pay. At that time I was a fitter armourer (guns) and already involved with bombing-up and de-bombing plus having worked with Professor Cox I already knew a great deal about the Target Indicator Bomb and the Barometric fuze therefore I declined the offer. I thought to myself that money wasn't ever thing but good mates were, especially at the height of the war, and anyway it would be a waste of my time plus it meant moving into the sergeant's mess.

March 1944 156 Squadron moved to Upwood however my mate and I were still able to visit our friends at Benwick.
One day on camp, while aircraft were being bombed-up for an operation, there was a terrible accident as a bomb exploded with horrendous force, creating a massive crater and the intense shock wave that followed rippled the structure of three Lancasters making them look as if they had been made from corrugated iron. Fortunately I was in the guard room, having just returned from leave, as the force of the explosion hurled debris over the building. They following day the crater was searched but nothing was found and we never really knew what had happened, although one train of thought was that someone had accidentally knocked a barometric fuze causing it to detonate the bomb.
Following this incident the billet was a very sombre place with so many empty beds, so many mates lost, and there was only one funeral from the camp, that of a WAAF driver who was buried in Upwood church cemetery.

When at Upwood it was possible for me to go to Ramsey and board a train for Peterborough, which connected to the main line, and at that time this journey cost around two shillings which in today's money would be around ten pence. From Peterborough I caught a train for York and then one to Cottingham station, but it was late at night when I arrived and there was no one on duty.
The next day I though I could get back to Ramsey cheaply so I got a single rail ticket from Hull to Brough and was on my way, or so I thought, because just as I was about to board the train I got a tap on the shoulder, it was an inspector and at this point panic set in. He asked "Why are you catching this train" and with a bit of quick thinking I replied "Argyle Street was bombed last night and my boss brought me home to make sure everything was OK and I have to be back on duty by 12.30". The inspector then asked "Which side of the train will you get off at Brough" and as I had local knowledge I replied "That side", pointing to the opposite

side of the train, he then let me get on. Once onboard I went right down the train and hid it the toilet until the train departed, just in case the inspector had got on. I managed to get all the way back to Ramsey on that ticket and it was fortunate that there was no one at the other end to check it however all the way back my nerves were on edge in case a conductor came round and asked to see my ticket, needless to say I never did that again, once was enough.

One date of note was the 10th of February 1944 as this was when King George VI and Queen Elizabeth visited the base and it was a bitterly cold frosty morning. The armoury was opposite the officer's mess, outside which the guard of honour had formed-up and because it was so cold the officer in charge decided to take them for a run up the road, to keep warm. However just as they turned back the royal party came into view so they had to make a hasty dash back, at the double, to be in place for the royal salute and as we had a great vantage point it gave us a good laugh.
There was a lot of hard work prior to the visit as we painted the curbing stone white, painting them black again after the visit, cleaned the inside of a Lancaster, which was due on ops that night, and washed a hanger floor with petrol, all this for a royal visit, it would have been better for them to have seen it as it was. Somehow what we had done made the papers and we were all confined to camp for a week.

On the 6th June 1944 all the armourers were called out at first light to refit the front turret back into all our Lancasters. We had removed the turrets some months earlier, which gave the aircraft a 25mph increased in air speed, however the Germans had caught-onto this and began attacking the aircraft from the front because the mid-upper turret guns could not be depressed enough to give adequate frontal covering fire.
The turrets had to be fitted as quickly as possible during that day as the aircraft were needed for ops that night. Cranes were used to lift the complete turret but as we had no scaffolding the only way to fit then was for us to go in through the pilot's escape hatch and out onto the front of the fuselage to guide the turrets into position, no health and safety rules to follow in those day which meant that one slip and you would end up head first on the concrete. Once a turret was in position it was a fairly straight forward job to connect up the hydraulic lines, fit the covers and check its operation however due to the urgency of the job we had to work without normal breaks so our food was brought out to us and surprisingly we completed the task in time.
I remember it was a cold day with light drizzle however our spirits were lifted when we saw the sky fill with aircraft of all types, some towing gliders, we all shouted "D-Day has started", and I thought it was the most magnificent sight I had ever seen. Due to that days hard work all our aircraft took off on ops that night and we were given the following day off, which we needed as we were bone weary and very wet.

On the 1st January 1945 the New Years Honours List came out and I was surprised to see that I had been mentioned in despatches, quite an honour, and much to my mother's delight.

At the end of the war, if I had been serving on a permanent aerodrome I would have remained in the RAF, the service that I loved, but unfortunately I was posted to a satellite aerodrome at Stour-on-the-Wold near Stratford-upon-Avon. Here life became tedious with nothing to do but look after 52 rifles in the armoury, a dummy 4,000lb bomb in the bomb dump, there was no paperwork to do and nobody seemed to know what was going on. Somebody delivered a further 20 rifles to the armoury and I asked him "Why have you brought them here" to which he replied "We don't want them" and off he went, this was now the nature of the job.

Later when demob came I was glad to leave, so off I went to Cardington where I was given a medical and a demob suit together with my discharge papers, a book of money orders to cover demob leave and a rail warrant home. After several weeks of demob leave I once again became a civilian, back to a so called normal life.

In late 1946 I returned to my job at Waite's grocery shop, then in early 1947 I broke off my engagement with the WAAF girl, who was a Londoner, and later started dating a local girl called Lucy Ann Baitson, who also worked in Waite's shop. She lived at Mill Lane in Swanland and we eventually got married at All Saints church in North Ferriby in 1949, but tragically she died in 1979.
After a long and varied career I finished my working life as chief storeman at Everthorpe borstal.

Just a note about Wing Commander Don Bennet, a great man, who unfortunately never received the recognition or honour, that he deserved for his efforts during war. On the 27th April 1942 he became the Commanding Officer of 10 Squadron and while flying a Halifax bomber on a raid over Norway, to bomb the German battleship 'Tirpitz' in Trodhiam fjord, he was shot down. Fortunately he managed to escape capture and reached Sweden from where he returned to England, via the BOAC Courier Service, ensconced in the bomb bay of a Mosquito bomber. On his return to duty Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur 'Bomber' Harris made him the Commanding Officer of 8 Group Pathfinder Force and later after his death his ashes were interred under the RAF Memorial on Plymouth Hoe.

Now, nearly 70 years on, having been ignored after the war by Winston Churchill, the man who said "We had to bomb Dresden" a remark which many still remember today, our brave bomber crews have finally been given the recognition they readily deserve. In Green Park, London a splendid permanent memorial has been erected, consisting of a sculpture depicting a bomber crew mounted on a large plinth and housed in a grand stone built structure, open on two sides, complete with a dedication to those men.

Having spent the war years serving with bomber squadrons and in hind sight I am now of the opinion that these heroic men should have received the military's highest awards for what they had to endure. Going out night after night on bombing missions over mainland Europe, particularly Germany, knowing that they would face the ferocity of the German flak guns, night fighters and search lights. I saw first hand the severe damaged inflicted on a lot of those aircraft returning from missions, unfortunately many planes and crews never did return and to be honest I don't know how they did it.

" WE WILL REMEMBER THEM "