Harry's Tale

This is Harold Walker speaking, I used to live down Fountain Road, Hull, 9 Northumberland Villas to be precise, alongside Barmston Drain, and these are my earliest thoughts and memories, as a youth.

We lived in a small two up two down house, in it my father, mother and my elder brother Bill and my two sisters Dorothy and Chris lived. Here I worked as an errand boy for a small shop at the corner of the terrace, delivering groceries to the Almshouses or old peoples homes down at the end of Little Northumberland Avenue. This was to help bring money into the house, three and sixpence per week, every evening after school and Saturday morning.

I was originally at the Northumberland Avenue boy's school, coming through from the infants, to the juniors, then to the seniors, but whilst being in the seniors the war was declared and we were transferred to Lincoln Street School to continue with our education. The reason being, as far as I know, was the school was partially used for other war purposes .At Lincoln Street we had quite a lot of trouble with mixing with the Lincoln Street lads, particularly a very little short, very bossy teacher with glasses, thinking he could do what he liked with us, but unfortunately he found out, we could also take a dislike to him, and the prank we did on him, was to pick his car up, 6 of us, a little tiny ford and put it in-between two posts, where the shelter was for us to take shelter from the weather. He had the embarrassment of having to go back to the other teachers to help him lift his car out.

Later on in years, many years later, as a Normandy Veteran, I did actually meet one of the same lads who were in the same prank with me, which was rather amazing.

When the war started, I can remember it very, very vividly, and things all changed. The first thing that happened was all lights being put out at night time, the blackout being imposed on every house, so they did not shine any light. All the lights in the street going out and the gas light being turned out, and this in itself was a danger to everyone because when you were able to look around you knew where the posts were and the telegraph polls- I personally did walk into one later on, which I knocked myself out completely, as there was a fog at the time.

This was slightly later when living down Blenheim Street. Now back to my youth.

With the war the whole attitude to everything changed We were out on a few occasions when the aircraft, the enemy aircraft came over, the sirens began to wail, the guns used to open up and afterwards we went looking for shrapnel. This was one of the things many, many people did. Unfortunately, as time passed we actually finished up in an air raid, which used to happen with enemy aircraft over practically every night flying out somewhere into the country and coming back over the Humber, back to Germany. Looking outside, the aircraft flew above the railway line, the Hull and Barnsley line, which brought coal from Barnsley and goods. They went out of Hull onto the main line to Doncaster.

As the bombs came down, we all ducked, fortunately we lived to survive, but quite a number of my friends died. My father decided to see a chap called Sammy Allon who had a little green grocery wagon and pony, which he sold groceries from. Father asked him if he would move us to a home which he had found down Blenheim Street, which was 150 Blenheim Street .The reason for his choice, was that there was a concrete block air raid shelter in the garden which my father had a gas pipe put through the middle section of the concrete. Having put the gas pipe through, from one side to the other, he put wooden framing on top and this became our home, even when I went into the services .The top half was for my brother, myself and 2 sisters and my father and mother slept at the bottom .On the front, into the concrete shelter, two half doors, a top half and a bottom half, here we were going to have to spend many, many nights, listening to air aid sirens, bombs being dropped, fires starting, people being killed and also people being injured .

It may sound strange to you, hearing this, but this is war unfortunately, and as time passed and we saw our friends being killed and injured.

While I was living there I joined the ATC, 152 Squadron (1)which was then down Park Street where we learnt our drills on what was the Corporation Fields, and this is now being built on, to the best of my knowledge. The training I got there helped me a great deal, at a later date, when I joined up myself.

This was on my 18th birthday, I volunteered, at what was then above the post office down Jameson Street, which later became the Radio Humberside Studios.

When I volunteered at 18,as I went through my medical, where you had to strip off all your clothes and went from one little cubicle into another, as I came out I was told by the officer that I had passed my medical. He then said to me 'you are very lucky you have been accepted into the air force but in the very near future all the people who would normally be called up would be going down into the mines'-these later became known as Bevin Boys, and to me, I always felt guilty of going into the air force and them going down the mines, to me the mines were more dangerous than being in the air force.

So off I go, I received my calling up papers, duly at 18(2), but before I went, I went to my Auntie Kath who was at Trustthorpe in Lincolnshire and had a fortnight with them doing harvesting. Every evening there, I was made fully aware of what the air force was doing because huge masses of bombers were to take off every evening from all the airfields there, and go out to Germany or whatever the target was, to come back later, some, but only the lucky ones .We felt that we would be able to do some good in the air force, I went, and where was it? To Padgate (3).

My journey to Padgate was quite interesting. As I got into the carriage at Paragon Station, there were three quite handy lads who came in with me and it turned out they were ex-fishermen from the trawlers, but had been called up. When they looked at me they asked me where I was going, I said "to Padgate", and the reply from one chap was "can you swear?" I said 'no', he said, "well we'll have to alter that", he said, "Can you drink?" I said "no", he said "well, we'll have to alter that as well", he said " anyway you need looking after, we'll look after you, we'll tell you this now, we will not be staying with you because we are sure they will be asking for us to be recalled to go back on the trawlers, going minesweeping!"

I have not met them since, but I was very grateful to them, they taught me about the adult life and how to swear and how to drink, which held me in good stead.

That is a introduction to me going to Padgate where my whole attitude of life changed -anyone who has been in the services will know, the difference between thinking for yourself and being told what to do by someone else.

At Padgate, we very soon learnt about discipline. One of the first instances was when we all fell out onto the parade ground for inspection. The sergeant in charge told us to remove our headgear. He proceeded down the line, pulling everyone's

hair and told us that we had to have it all removed and come back on parade in an hour's time. Having dismissed us we all trouped off to the barbers to have it cut. Each in turn had his hair cut off .One or two tried bribing the barbers not to cut too much off, the barbers took their money and the men, in turn returned back on to parade .The sergeant again came round, felt at the back of the head and if he could get hold of your hair, it was too long .The result was everybody who had bribed the barbers to have a little bit left on, had to go back to the barbers and have it removed. This happened two or three times but in the end we all finished up the same, all of us with bald heads and when we were told to put our caps back on again, they slipped anywhere but where we put them!

In due course and time, we did get used to it but this was the first lesson we received about discipline and do as you're told and not think for yourself. From then it was a matter of square bashing and more square bashing!

Fortunately for me, being in the ATC, I knew most of the orders that the Corporal gave .The result were that I, and a few more lads, knew what to do when being shouted at. Those that had never had any experience of service, were going everywhere except where they should do. Whereupon, there was much screaming and yelling at them, but during all these occasions, no swearing, it was pure dressing down about being stupid, thick headed and 'where do you think you come from, your in the services now!'

This was the way they gradually taught, and changed us, into a disciplined unit.

Towards the end of our square bashing, we finished up going onto the armoury section. Here we were taught how to use a rifle and a bayonet, charging, sticking a bayonet through a sack. From this section we moved on to actually preparing the rifle. This involved a 10-mile march down to the range. At the range we used ordinary ammunition in the rifles. It was in three stages, different distances, finishing up to about 1,000 yards.

Having completed my square bashing it was time to say cheerio to all the people who had been on the square bashing course and as it turned out, the fishing lads did get recalled and they did go back to Hull, or wherever they were told to go. Many times I have wondered how they coped with their lives afterwards.

My next posting. This time I ended up at the 35 Maintenance Unit, Heywood, Lancashire .To the best of my knowledge this was near to a place called Bury

.The maintenance unit was basically a holding unit before posting you to your station .Our job was to supply and fill trucks with different items which we were told to pick up and put in the trucks for despatches .In actual fact, a very boring situation, the one thing about it, was once again discipline.
Here we had a Flight Sergeant, who was known as Flight Sergeant Todd. Now Flight Sergeant Todd was an old fashioned RAF Flight Sergeant .We all came to respect him in due course but the first meeting was very, very strict. The first morning on parade, to my bewilderment, was a full dress parade, this involved, raising of the standard on the parade ground- a small piece of land made into a parade ground. Here, the flight sergeant was in charge.
In due course, officers turned up, full dress, cap and sword dangling at the waist. Next point was the Flight Sergeant, he brought us all to attention and split us all into separate units, so that every officer had a squad of his own. In each case, each squad was then ordered to attention, whilst the officer drew his sword and faced the standard. In due course, every unit on parade faced the standard, with an officer and sword drawn saluting to the standard. Then the station master and station commander came on parade took the salute from the officers and each officer lead on making a circuit so that each unit followed on, so we all passed the senior officer and marched out.
When we came away from the parade ground, we once again were given orders by the recruiting officers and dismissed. Whereupon, they moved off and then we were marched down to the maintenance unit, to carry on doing our jobs. This was rather boring to us but having looked back, every officer must have had to do the same thing, when they first took their commission.
For me, Heywood was ‘Toddy’s Air force’; he was in charge of all the new recruits that came in and all the new officers.
I was posted away from Heywood and was sent out to the School Of Technical Training at Halton. I had no idea where it was. Having travelled with my little chitty, down to London, from London back to Buckinghamshire and then to Halton, where a coach was waiting for all the new recruits .It turned out I was only one of a whole unit of new recruits. Here at Halton, I first came into contact with even more discipline.

Today, Halton is still training new recruits into the services, both male and female. When I first arrived there, there were no females, and whilst I was there, they appeared-this caused quite a lot of trouble in the time I was there, separating the girls from the boys. But as time went on, things settled down, and we started proper technical training on aircraft engines. Once again, my Park Street training on the Rolls Royce engine, which they had there, was in front of me again. I knew parts of it, where the other chaps had no idea what they were.
Our training was very strict again; once again a mistake and you could have a serious accident. As time went by, it was Christmas(4) .The first Christmas away from home, knew nobody, nowhere to go. Here I palled up with two other chaps, both called Harry, and my name Harold was then changed to Harry, so we became known as the three Harrys, 1,2 and 3.Where one was you found the other two and all the time we were at Halton we stuck together, going down into the town where we enjoyed our company, our drink, laughs, going to the dances and what have you.
The Station Commander had a Christmas dance, one of the lads, Harry, bet me I dare not dance with the CO's wife, he made a mistake! , I walked across the dance hall on my own, everybody watching me, and asked the CO's wife for a dance .The CO, being the Group Captain of the station, acknowledged my request, so we lead off the dance at that moment. Having survived it, I came back to the lads, I hadn't known what I would do or if I'd had the guts to do it, but I proved to myself that if I set myself, then I could do it. Once again the challenge was overcome, from everyone else I got respect, and admiration from the other two Harry's, which was a great deal of help to me because, we were still only young trainee recruits being shouted at on parade every morning.
Coming to the parade, at Halton, there are two parades, one with a brass band and one with a pipe band, doing alternative weeks. On parade every morning, a big Billy goat with his medals on, and his coat over his back with the Halton mascot on it. This Billy goat had its horns and hooves polished every day.
When I was posted from Halton, having completed my Flight Mechanics course, I was then posted to Coltishall, in Norfolk. This was a fighter aerodrome where I came to my first real aircraft-the squadron being 64th squadron, or technically known as 6064.

64 squadron, I learnt later, had been stood down from the fighting on the channel coast. What brought this home to me was the fact that we only had 6 Spitfires and 6 Hurricanes. These I was to learn were new training aircraft for the pilots, or should I say, re-training the pilots, who were replacing those that were lost down at the channel.
The Hurricane fighters were actually covered in fabric and not metal .If there was any damage on the fabric, all it needed was a gun patch, over the split or hole, whichever it may be. Whereas, with a Spitfire, they were metal and riveted.
The thing that I became aware of here was speed. Our Commanding Officer, I can't remember his name, he had us all filing all the round-headed rivets on the aircraft pod, which we wondered why. Later we found out that aircrafts had flat rivets on the metal bodies. When we had finished this, having repainted and remarked the aircraft, the Commanding Officer went up into the aircraft and tried it, to see what the speed was. To my knowledge, or what I was told, the aircraft gained 5-10mph. This doesn't sound a lot but when in combat, I could well imagine it did make a lot of difference!

At Coltishall, I learnt about rescue, the first lesson being on working with petrol, having not had any use for petrol prior to going into the services. This petrol was of a higher octane than that used in the ordinary motorcar. When the aircraft came back in, both the airplane lads and myself as engine crew, all mucked in to get the flaps off the covers of the petrol tanks, and help them to refill as soon as possible. This was done on a regular basis.
On this particular day that I would like to mention, was we had a squadron stood by. We were put onto what was known as '20 minute readinesses. In the process of checking the aircraft; we had to top up all the aircraft petrol tanks. This involved bringing the petrol tanker close to the aircraft-the back of the tanker had a little engine, ordinary petrol engine, and on this occasion, it had run out of petrol .One bright spark, decided to fill it up with the aircraft petrol. He squirted it out of the large nozzle into the small-necked tank. What happened next was really amazing. Upon putting the handle in to wind the engine up at the rear, there was one big flash and a bang. This was caused by the fact that some of the petrol had sunk into the well, where the flywheel was. There should have been a hole there,

but it was blocked up, so a pool of petrol had got there instead. With the petrol flying up on the flywheel, it went straight to the spark plug at the side of the cylinder. The result was one almighty big bang and the whole of the rear of the tanker was a blaze. Full credit to the person who jumped onto the tractor, and started pulling the tanker into the middle of the airfield out of harms way. Alarm bells rang and in the process, the fire brigade went out, and fortunately, they did get the fire out and kept it away from the full petrol storage tank. This, as I say, was my first lesson in petrol.

A little later on we had an incident .One of the Spitfire's had been attacked by a German fighter, having chased him, the Spitfire dived and hit the sea .The German pilot seeing all the spray go up, veered away and cleared off home. Amazingly enough, the pilot had managed to pull the aircraft back up off the waves and started heading for home, complaining of an unstable engine! . At the station, two aircraft were scrambled immediately, one with the Commanding Officer and they went out to meet him and escorted him back to our dispersal .On stopping his engine, and having complained about a rough engine, we looked at the aircraft, all the yellow tips at the end of the three propeller blades were missing. Having hit the water so hard, he had broken them all off, one of the props was slightly split but otherwise, in tact. No wonder he complained about it being a rough engine! It had brought him back home, we were all amazed, and the pilot was very lucky to have survived.

The next instance I would like to mention about the petrol, was concerning myself. All the aircraft were at full readiness, we had filled the tanks, wiped the wings down, and stood by .As we walked back, and I went into the hut, a wooden hut, to see the lads. I was walking near the fire, a wood/coal cinder fire, which had a flap in the front at the top and a flap at the bottom, to let the draft in and a pipe up into the roof. As I walked past it, there was a flash, and I was in flames from top to bottom. With that, I headed out of the hut, and rolled on the floor in the grass, and fortunately for me, the lads knew the drill and threw the fire blanker over the top of me. When I came out, I found I had no eyebrows and no whiskers, and very little hair on my head –I had been very fortunate to get away with such minor injuries. This was my final warning about petrol –never take it for granted, you can't see it but it is there and it can go up in a flash. On these

occasions, as I say, all went well.
Coltishall was a nice place with Norwich in the distance. It was here I actually ended up in jail, strangely enough. Having been posted from Halton and being told to go to Coltishall, I was sent back into London again and came back to catch the train, for Coltishall. On arriving, it was that late that the service bus to the station had already returned so, being a good airman, I reported to the police station. They told me to wait, while they rang the station. Having done this, there was no way I could return to Coltishall, so the only option was to put me into a prison cell, where I slept the night. I received a cup of tea and a sandwich from the Sergeant in charge at Norwich Police Station. This is the only time I have been in prison, but at least I can say I have spent a night in a cell! The following morning of course, they came and picked me up and I returned to Coltishall, where I had many pleasant memories.
My next posting was to a place called Hurn. Once again, not knowing England, it was like a place somewhere in the wilderness. As it turned out, it was on the south coast, looking across the channel. I was dispersed to a place known as Stoney Cross. What you have to remember, at this time, was that signposts were very deceptive; they didn't always tell you the truth, as to where you were. This was just in case of an enemy invasion.
I found Stoney Cross, was posted there, and it was in the middle of the New Forest –this is as much as I can tell you about it. What I do know was that there were many, many people, airmen of all descriptions, being posted there. In due course and time, as I found out many moons afterwards, this was the beginning of the Second Tactical Air force.
Here they formed the first three squadrons of Typhoons, with rockets, and they were 181,182 and 247 Squadron. We all had to learn to gel together, listen to each other, and learn our trades from the lads that were already working on these aircrafts. As an engine fitter, I was used to the Rolls Royce engines with 12 cylinders. These I found to my horror had 24, and when told to change the plugs on the engine, resulted in 48 sparkplugs! As you can imagine, this is a lot of sparkplugs to change and replace, then put back together again, but it was a part of the job, so we accepted it.
The engines were so large that they could not be started with the old-fashioned

electric starter motors which were wired from the batteries on the trolleys-these were pulled to the aircraft to start them up. The means of starting them up was with a cartridge. When wired up, the prop moved about a third, and in that time you had to actually start the engine. It took considerable skill to do this, but gradually we all acquired it. There was considerable pride, and competition, between us as to who could start the engine the quickest, and with the least cartridges. We all got to the point where we could start the engine on the first or second cartridge.

The problem with the Typhoon was its large engine; it also had a huge air intake plus cooling system. If you over primed them you could finish up with a backfire and everything would go up in flames. It was the flight mechanics job to start the engine up and the Airframe lads, who stood by with a fire extinguisher .A visible signal that we made to show that we were not going to fire any more cartridges, was to lift our hands up into the air. In the event of a fire, the rigger went in and put it out. This could be a very scary situation, especially in later days, on the continent. Here, there were no lights, -but ultimate trust that we knew each other well enough, not to have an accident.

These aircraft were armed with 4 x 20mm guns, 8 rockets with 60lbs warheads on. The warheads were slid down onto the rocket rails, which could be fired by the pilot either as a pair, 2 pairs or the whole lot in one go. When going into service later on, these were devastating in the continental fighting.

As we were all getting used to each other, once again, I received another posting. This time I was to be posted to Manston. The reason for this, as I found out later was, that in the invasion, only three squadrons were going over initially. This was due to the fact that the aerodrome or landing strips would only have sufficient room for those aircraft. When they went, I don't know, but later on I joined them. From this point I was posted to 137 Squadron(5,6). Having once again been sent around, I finally found Manston, it is in Kent, very close to the coast. Ramsgate became our local place for relaxation.

At Manston I learnt about operational aircraft in its true meaning. I soon found out that on operational duties it was totally different from the training systems .I had learnt at Hurn basic necessities to do my job, but at Manston it was operational.

One of the first things I noticed, was that here everything had to run smoothly. We had a Nissan hut where we had a Flight Sergeant who was in charge of all the different working units, including the armourers, the fitters, the riggers, the radio operators and all other people .My first job was to meet the lads, whom I was going to join to look after the Typhoons .The job was quite similar to what I had learnt at Hurn, but on this occasion, the planes were operational and had rockets on.

The process of fitting the rockets was to the armourer's job, they also had the four cannons to attend to, plus a camera that was alongside the actual body of the aircraft. The reason for the camera was that anybody who said they had shot an aircraft, a train, or a tank, could then have it verified by the film. This was aligned, so it followed the tracer down to the ground, or followed the rockets to their target. Having seen some of these films, on the TV, they are absolutely fantastic.

I soon got into the way of making sure I did the right thing at the right time. This involved seeing the pilot when the scramble was on, meeting him, helping him up into the cockpit, having his straps ready over his parachute so he could soon put them on and jumping off and standing by, ready for him to start the engine. Later on, I used to start the engine before the pilot was in the aircraft –this way gave them a quicker start, and could taxi off onto the runway.

Manston has a huge runway, I believe that it was the number one crash aerodrome, for all the lads struggling to get back having been on raids on the coast. Many of the crashes I did see come in, although spectacular, were very distressing, as they were our lads in the aircraft-this happened quite regularly.

When I first arrived at Manston, there was a Naval unit there. They had the old fashioned Swordfish aircraft, with a torpedo slung underneath its body-these really did worry us, but typical Navy, they had armed guards in each corner of their patch of ground, which I thought was very unusual, but being the Navy, we respected them. Having been with the lads at Manston for awhile, we all got to know the aircraft, each one had its own peculiarities, and the trick was to learn quick, so that they could be started without the danger of a fire occurring, which could happen.

Just after I got there, the problem with doodlebugs started. These were automatic

self-propelling, jet engines with a bomb underneath. They came over quite regularly, fired either around local areas or they headed straight to London.
The Commanding Officer, or he may have been the Flight Commanding Officer, was a Polish chap. Part of his training for our pilots, was to send them up in pairs and if any of the doodlebugs were flying in our direction, providing they were well away from anywhere, they were allowed to open fire. They did this by going over to the French coast, as at that point, the aircrafts were travelling at a far less speed. One of the problems was, the Typhoon had to go down and shoot the doodlebug in order to destroy it. Upon impact, the doodlebug gave off a the ball of flames, which the pilot had to avoid going through-I'm not too sure what the liquid inside of them was, but it was very volatile. One pilot unfortunately did go through the ball of fire, on arriving back at dispersal, as his aircraft came in, we were all astonished to see that it was soot from the propeller to the tail unit. The pilot who was handling the aircraft stood up on his feet and working his pedals to direct it. Upon stopping it, in the middle of our dispersal, the Commanding Officer came out and was not very happy with the pilots actions – to teach this particular pilot a lesson, he had him wash the aircraft, with old-fashioned 'gunk', and we were not allowed to help him. In my opinion, it was very rough justice for him, we were all hoping we could go, but the Commanding Officer said 'No'. I don't think that pilot ever made the mistake of getting too near again! I have no idea who he was, as I was still a new larker here and had not got to know all the pilots.
On another occasion, we had a new aircraft come in, it went into the dispersal area, in-between our line of aircraft, and the pilot went. We all mucked in, had a look at it, checked it over and, on this occasion we were putting 60lb rockets on to the rails under the wings, ready for action .A part of the procedure was to connect a wire from the rocket unit, which had to be plugged in to the aircraft to fire the rockets. The chap, who was looking after this aircraft, got back into the aircraft to start it up, in order to check how the engine was. Upon going through the start up procedure, somehow, and I don't know how, he ended up actually firing the rockets off-this caused considerable damage!
I flew from Manston to Colombe(7), where I rejoined the 124 wing, they were already established at Colombe. Our digs there were tents, which we lived and

slept in. They were large standard ones, the meals had to be cooked in the open and our tables and chairs were collapsible ones. We had rejoined the other three squadrons, who were flying all the time. We in turn joined in with 137 Squadron. Whilst there, we had many incidents of aircraft being attacked.

My first memory of Colombe itself was of an old lady. First thing in the morning she took a large mallet into the field adjacent to us, and there was a cow fastened up to a peg on a chain .She would take the peg out, move the chain forward one pace, then hammer the peg back in again. This way, the cow could then proceed to eat the extra area of grass that it could reach.

I was doing all the jobs that I had done at Manston, reloading the aircraft with rockets, looking after the engines, and checking their serviceability. This had to be done regularly.

One evening I went out for a walk, just outside the farm, down a lane. As I walked down the lane, I became aware that on either side, there were people who had died; their bodies were part buried along the roadside. You could see their boots sticking out of the soil, and at the foot of their boots, was their rifle and helmet .The helmet stood on the butt of the gun –this really brought home to me what the war was really about .As I walked further down this lane, the whole length of it, there were more and more bodies, head to toe, just underneath the verge.

I continued further down the lane and I found a small chapel. I went inside, to relax my mind and contemplate what I had just seen. This was a side to the war I had not seen before.

Inside this chapel, and to my amazement, I saw what looked like a tapestry. As I studied it closer, I realised that it was the Bayeux Tapestry. I walked around looking at it-I found the part that depicted the fight that took place. After a while I found the materiel with Harold there, with the arrow in his forehead. It made me think, where was I going?

I came out, and in a strange way, I felt much better in myself.

The next move, I don’t know where we went, we just jumped into a truck, the trucks moved off to the next landing strip. Here, the routine continued, looking after myself, looking after the engines and all the others doing their jobs. This happened each time we moved forward. In due course and time, we came to a

place called Melsbroek, which was just outside of Brussels.
In Brussels, my friend, and I, had some spare time where we could catch the tram and travel down into Brussels. On our first visit, we were amazed to see all the different types of ice cream in the shops, which we duly indulged ourselves by having some! The Belgians were very pleased to receive our English liberation money. We then went into the 'Roxy Cinema'(8), and lo and behold, there was Errol Flynn in the 'Charge of the Light Brigade' doing his stuff. My pal and I, light up a cigarette in the cinema. The next thing we knew, people were coming at us from all angles, telling us to put them out. The reason being, you were not allowed to smoke in the cinema. So we abandoned the 'Charge Of The Light Brigade' and came out, and went for a walk round.
We returned back to the camp on a tram. At the back of the tram there was a chap who blew a hunting horn to signal that the tram was about to move off. We made this trip on several occasions.
It was here that I began to realise how far we had moved forward. To my amazement, when looking around, I noticed many large houses, which were on the side of the road. Previously, I understand, they were hangers that had been used for maintenance or whatever by the Germans. Whilst there, a film unit passed, who they were or where they went, I do not know.
The next time we went on a short break into Brussels, I found myself in a situation, which I hope I never have to experience again.
As we walked along, a person, who was one of the liberation forces civilians, he mistook my friend and I, as Germans. He pushed an automatic machine gun under my chin and screeched words, which I did not understand. Fortunately for us, there was a person on the opposite side of the road who instantly recognised us for who we were. Fortunately he spoke English and he came across and spoke to the chap with the gun, and told him that we were English airmen. He then told him to look at our caps; we had two brass buttons, which indicated that we were British, and the Germans only had one. With this, the irate chap, backed off, and left us with this stranger. To this day, I do not know the strangers name.
What followed, is very interesting. He took us to his home, a very large house(9,10), and we went in. The first thing he did was to offer us a drink, which we were grateful for. This was the first time we felt relaxed for a long time. To

our surprise, he asked both of us could we sing ‘Lilly Of Laguna’, this being an old fashioned tune. Both of us said “yes”, and with that, he asked us to go along with him to another house.

This may all sound very strange, but this is what happened. We went into this other house, went inside and there he spoke to the owner and the request he made to us was can you sing ‘Lilly of Laguna’-which once again we replied “yes”. We both started singing it, here’s a little bit of it, ‘She’s my lady love, she is my love, my turtle dove, she no girl for sitting down to dream, she is the only girl Laguna knows. I know she likes me, because she said so, she is my Lilly of Laguna, she is my Lilly and my rose’. That’s my version of it, the words may not be quite correct! Having sung this, to our amazement, the walled panel in front of us began to move. To say we were astonished would be an understatement. As it moved, from behind it came people, I do know how many, I know there was a lady, and other adults, possibly children, but my mind is a blank as to who else came out. I do know that there was a mother and her sons, they each gave us a hug and that was the last I ever saw of them.

The stranger, who had taken us, then returned us back to his own home where he had wine glasses(11) out and ready. I remember on the sides of the glasses were 3 stages of pigs, a little pig at the bottom, medium pig in the middle and a big pig at the top. With that, he filled them full to the top; he said, “You’ve done a marvellous job, and thank you”. From him, I understand, that they were a Jewish family, and had lived up in the attic all the time that the Germans had been in Brussels. I was utterly amazed, and still am to this day. To think they must have lived in such fear that one wrong move, they would all have been shot.

With that, the stranger(12) asked us if we could inform the son of the lady we had seen –of course, we instantly said “yes”. Whereupon he gave me an address, and after a nice bath, some food we then said cheerio and returned back to camp. On our return, I contacted one of the Pilot Officers and told him about our experience. He said the best thing we could do was to wait until he had a word. Whoever he spoke to said that we could forward the details to the address, in the least number of words, to the effect that this lady and family had come out of hiding. This I did, prior to sending it back to England. Initially I had to forward it to the Commanding Officer, who checked it out and the bare details were

authorised. I in turn, posted it to my mother in Hull(13), whom I asked, would she forward the details to the son in London and inform him that his mother and brothers were safe. I did eventually receive a letter(14) back from the son, to say how relieved he was that the rest of his family were safe.

This was the highlight of my contribution to the war. To see this family, who had been in hiding and threatened, with death and fear showing on their faces, is very difficult to describe, but I had made a difference, I had done my bit.

From that time on, I met the stranger on one or two occasions. He enjoyed his cigarettes, and there was a shortage of cigarettes, we were able to supply them. This gave us a little bit more Belgian money, which gave us more to spend in addition to our 'issue' money. Our money was British made, which the continental people would do anything to get hold of, this was to them, real money.

I still have some of this money(15,16,17,18) and I think a great deal of it. This may sound crazy to you, but even to this day, I find it difficult to appreciate how bad it was for them. I hope you have been able to understand this story.

On returning back to our camp, I informed the Commanding Officer, who had to be kept informed at all times, just in case there was something wrong. We eventually left Melsbroek and moved forward again. As we advanced, at one point, we came into full contact with the German Tank Brigade. This was known as 'Falaise' and at Falaise; we proved our ability to destroy tiger tanks, or any other German tank.

Since the war, I have learnt, that a great deal of tanks were destroyed by the Typhoons and when the German tank brigades saw Typhoons above, they got out their tanks and ran! I was told by one of the pilots, which having heard and seen tapes since, it is easy to understand why. The Germans were less than happy to encounter the Typhoons! Part of the strategy was for the British Armies and tanks to move forward, under the cover of the Typhoons.

I was then moved onto eventually Eindhoven. Christmas had come around again, and we had a little Christmas dinner, served by the officers. This is a tradition in the Air force. After the meal, we were given the menu, printed in English and in Dutch, which I have kept(19,20).

The snow started falling, the temperature dropped, and things turned bitterly cold.

I believe it was around minus 20, which was very cold! . Having said that, it was noticeable that the cold here did not seem to have the ‘bite’ that we were used to, off the North Sea.
We carried on, following our routines(21,22,23,24), carrying on our duties, and attacking areas, so that the Army could move forwards. I am unable to recall if we were in Arnham just before Christmas or just after, but there, I saw the whole of the sky filled with Dakota aircraft towing gliders, towards Arnham.
As we watched, we could see what was going on. All our aircraft were grounded, with the result that there were many casualties. Unfortunately the Tiger Tanks were in amongst our troops. We had to wait, we were not allowed to fly-although I do not know if all the pilots(25) obeyed this.
New Years day arrived, and this was a day I shall never forget. We were all in the hut, when all hell let loose. The German air force struck the whole of the continent, all the air force bases from Holland through to France. The actual damage I will not go into, but I know from reading accounts since, that there was total chaos on every aerodrome or landing strip on the continent.
Many people were killed, service people, pilots and aircrafts were destroyed .On our Squadron alone, we lost our Flight Sergeant, and one of my mates. I just escaped death, when a 20 mm cannon shell exploded, just a matter of a foot away from me. At the time, I was directing people out of the service hut, into hiding behind a brick wall-how to explain this is very difficult, you do not have time to think, you react. What I do know though is that I survived, I was one of the lucky ones-, and that’s as much as I can say.
The RAF regiment opened up fire all around the surrounding area, and I understand that they managed to destroy some of the enemy aircraft. I have heard many tales since the war, and read many various accounts of this.
If you wish to find out more on this, the book I would recommend is ‘The Battle Of The Airfields, Operation Bodenplatte, First Of January 1945’ the author is Norman Franks. I fully recommend this. Another very good book is by ‘Wing Leader Johnny Johnson’ this is his account of being on the continent-he was a top fighter pilot ace, and he was based on our landing strip, as a Spitfire Ace.
After the raids on January 1st,I was sent to the Medical Section to have a check on my hearing as I was having trouble with it. The reason for this was as I later

found out, that my eardrum had been burst. This meant I could no longer work on the aircraft so was sent away from the typhoons and all my friends before I was able to say cheerio to all of them. I finished up working away from the landing strip building up jettison tanks. These were huge cylindrical tanks were hung on either side underneath the wings; this extended the range of the typhoon. How effective they were, I do not know but this was what I was doing. The snow was then about two foot in depth in places and the tanks were covered in snow, which meant it was a very cold job and I was pleased to get away from having to do it. I was posted away down to the coast here we were to be held at Ostend until transport was available to bring me back to England. To our amazement, Ostend was absolutely full in all the hotels on the front. The reason for this was the condition of the sea, the waves were very large and it was difficult for ships and tank landing craft to come into harbour. Unfortunately the ship that I was told I would be going on hit a free floating mine, which must have come adrift with the huge waves, it sank with all the people on board, who were lost. To me, this was not very encouraging- to think that we would be sailing soon. We were later told that we would be sailing across about a week later in a tank landing craft. These are flat-bodied transporters with very little in the way of comfort.

The next morning, we arrived at Tilbury, here were checked out to see if we had brought any illegal goods into the country-mainly money. Having checked my pay book, against the money I had in my pockets, I was let through to proceed home, or so I thought. I actually ended up at Bramcote. Here I was on the Wellington medium bombers; they had radial engines, which I had not worked on before. My main basic job was running around doing various bits and bobs, so I was pleased when I was reposted.

This time it was to a place called Portreath, which is down in Corwall; this was a far nicer place to be. The actual aerodrome was the furthest out towards the Atlantic and here I started working again with aircraft. The actual aerodrome was perched right on the top of a hill with Redruth down in the valley. The runway was straight over the cliff edge so whoever took off, had the one chance, which meant they either took off or ended up in the sea. Whilst I was there, no one ended up in the sea.

The main reason for me at Portreath, was that they were fetching aircraft from all

different areas, all different types, Mosquito's, Spitfires etc. and these were being made into groups to be flown out to the Far East, where the war was still going on with the Japanese.

I enjoyed being at Portreath. One day a gale warning was issued which could be as high as 100 mph. This was a new experience to me. All the aircraft that we had were 'double picketed'-this means, cross screwed wires into the ground with a rope tied underneath the wing, one at either side, and the tail lashed down as well. The next thing we were told was each one of us would have to sit in the cockpit of an aircraft, to control it in the high winds. I finished up in a Spitfire. As the wind gradually increased, so the propellers started to turn round, then the aircraft began to shake. First on my feet, then through the joystick. Then I realised the aircraft was 'flying' in the wind –a very funny feeling knowing that you were flying but stood still! Having had to sit there through the night, along with all the other chaps; we were all very pleased that in the morning the wind had subsided and things returned to normal. At this point someone asked where was the Commanding Officers Tiger Moth, everyone looked at each other, and we then realised it wasn't there. It was found all in crumpled heap away off the aerodrome. This to my knowledge was the only casualty.

Staying at Portreath was one of my most pleasant experiences whilst in the forces. The countryside is absolutely beautiful and the people were marvellous. We went into the local pubs and listened to the stories from the locals, we made many friends here. On one occasion, we were asked if we would like to volunteer to go and talk to some R.A.F pilots. When asked, little had I realised that these people turned out to be pilots and aircrews who had been involved in accidents whilst flying. Having passed the afternoon with them, I could only but admire the 'guts' of these people, some were half burnt figures with burnt hands and faces. I really did enjoy their company and I'm sure they enjoyed ours. Afterwards, I walked up into the hills and admired the views of the Cornish coast.

Eventually the war ceased in England but in the Far East the war carried on. On many occasions I went down into Redruth, the nearest large village, and as the aircraft ceased to go out as frequently, I then became a gardener. Unfortunately this did not last that long, as again I was posted on.

This time it was to Cosford, this was the Second School Of Technical Training.

Here I went through my old routine of training again. Having completed the training, I came out as a qualified fitter, which gave me far more responsibility for the aircraft engines than I had previously had. It was a pleasant experience; once again I saw all the different types of aircrafts and how they worked. This time, I learnt far more about them.

Having completed the course as a qualified fitter, I was posted to Oakington, onto 4242 Squadron. These were York aircraft. Now the York aircraft had four engines, a very square bodied frame and was the latest type of transport aircraft. I was quite happy with the old Merlins .The people who had been on bomber aircraft during the war were now being retrained onto civilian types of aircraft. These York aircraft mainly were used to transport goods and personnel. I had my own crew of flight mechanics and my job was the responsibility for removing and replacing props, as and when required along with replacing engines when their flying time had been completed.

On one occasion, which I remember very well, we were detailed on the Saturday dinner time, just before we were due to go on weekend leave, that an aircraft was coming in and it would be required to go out again on the Monday morning to the Far East to bring some of the lads back from the Japanese area of the war. These were ex Prisoners Of War of the Japanese and were unable to return by sea. I asked my crew for volunteers to get this aircraft ready, so it could go to bring the lads back home. I had a full crew volunteer, so we proceeded. We removed two propellers, two engines, replaced the engines with new ones and replaced the props. I had to check these procedures at all points, as I was responsible for all this. The aircraft was fully checked and I signed it off as ready to fly. I reported in to my Commanding Officer and to my surprise, he in formed me that a crew would be coming straight out to fly the aircraft-I would be required to go with them.

My role was to go with the crew on a full circuit, to make sure that the aircraft engines and props were fully functional. We took off and went up into the air. As we flew along, I was waiting to be told that I would be dropped off, but as time passed, and as I looked out of the window, I realised that we were flying north and heading towards Scotland. We did in fact go to Scotland, where upon I went up to the door, into the front compartment and knocked. The aircrew looked at me

with astonishment, that I was in the back-they had forgotten all about me going with them! They had gone off into a training flight for a new aircrew .As it was impossible to do anything about it, the only thing I could do was to sit tight and wait until they had finished. Eventually, as we were over Scotland, I was asked to go into the cabin and the pilot apologised to me for forgetting me. To compensate me, he asked if I would like to sit in the other seat and watch from the front. I said, “yes” as I had never flown in the cockpit of one of these aircraft before-fighter aircraft only have one seat. As I sat there, the pilot asked me if I would like to take over the controls. I said “yes” and he turned the aircraft from being over Glasgow to heading towards Edinburgh. I then took full control, putting my two feet into the steering compartments for the rudder and took the steering joystick. The pilot told me to keep it at 27,000 feet and follow the road down below. This was the main road from Glasgow to Edinburgh-he then apologised for the long flight, when I should be at home getting some sleep! As we carried on, we eventually flew over Edinburgh and I returned to the back of the aircraft. Prior to my return, the pilot asked me where I lived, I told him Hull on the River Humber-he smiled, and said he would let me know when we were approaching and I could go forward and have a look. When we arrived over the Humber, the pilot called me forward and apologised-low cloud had totally blocked the view of the Humber, he did show me three orange rings in the clouds, these were from the blast furnaces in Lincolnshire. That was the best he could do for me. I was quite happy though, I knew I was over Hull and it gave me a nice feeling.

We eventually returned to the aerodrome. I was very tired and hungry but it had been worth it. I went into the cookhouse to see what was on offer, all that was available was a tray of cold fried eggs-I tried one – but gave up and went back to my billet. I was very tired but had the knowledge that the aircraft was airworthy and it would soon be on its way to bring the lads back from the war. The reason they were to return by plane was due to the serious condition they were in. These flights continued for a number of weeks and again I was posted-this time to back to Henlow.

Henlow had a mixture of male and female mechanics, which gave me problems in teaching them engineering terms about aircraft engines, but we managed to overcome it. It was here that I first saw the new jet engine on a Meteor; this had

one, which had actually exploded on the test beds. Today, this tiny engine has devolved into a massive engine, which is used on modern aircraft all over the world.
Personally, I was happy with the Merlin engine, this I knew so well and this is what I taught others about.
The problem I had at this time, was not the recruits, it was the weather. Christmas was here once again. This year it snowed and snowed, the whole of the country froze, which meant that any leave for me was practically impossible. The result was that over Christmas, the majority of the people on the camp were sent home, except myself and one or two other instructors who had the job, along with the last entry of recruits, to keep the camp as free as possible from the frost. This was no easy job but we did it the best we could. With the freezing temperatures, we spent most of our time wandering around with blowlamps, keeping things as free as possible. Our huts were absolutely freezing at night though!
As time passed, my turn eventually came to be demobbed. By then, all the recruits were back in training, learning about Merlin engines and all the other engines.
Looking back at it all, I had my highlights and I enjoyed it and I had my low times. To come out of it all, this I now looked forward to(26).
I finished up going back to Kirkham near Blackpool. This was the demob place and in due course, I received my demob suit, which was a blue one with big stripes in. I received a ‘cheerio’ from the chap who was organising the suits, and he wished me good luck coming back into ‘Civvy Street’.

What a change it was-but that’s another story!

This is my story; I hope you have enjoyed it. As you will appreciate, I have had to leave some things out, but these are some of my memories that I have shared with you.
For my sons Martin and Andrew, along with my grand children, you now have a brief idea of what your Grandad did during the war, which along with many, many others, helped to keep this country going.