

Chapter 31

Husbands Bosworth

I had only been at Upper Heyford for five months when the move to Husbands Bosworth came about. A fortnight later I was promoted to Flying Officer. Husbands Bosworth airfield was constructed on the estate of Lord Paget, who vacated his mansion, which became a school. The set up in some ways was the same ie. Wing Commander in charge, ex Navy, Squadron Leader, ex Apprentice, Flight Lieutenant, ex Apprentice and two Flying Officers. The other one was ex University and was the Technical Adjutant. I ran the flight's workshop etc. and a Warrant Officer ran the Inspection Hangar. There was a much better spirit here however. As usual there were no Routine Orders so, from memory, I got things going concerning pre flight checks. I wrote them down and the Flight Sergeant saw that they were done.

One of the first problems to solve was to find somewhere to live. To do this I walked round the estate and asked all of Lord Paget's ex staff if they had rooms. In the end the ex cook and ex butler duly obliged. They were nice people and had one son much older than John. The man worked on munitions so we didn't see a lot of him. The Lodge had no convenience, the toilet being outside as was the water pump. Looking back I don't know how Betty coped, but she did. I was able to show John around the base to see the Wellington aircraft, parachute room and Air Sea Rescue equipment. He wasn't very old so couldn't take it all in. The men made a lot of fuss of him and one of them made him a lovely model of a Thames fishing boat which he had for a long time. The Officer's Mess was well run with no divisions so all ranks mixed well and got to like and respect each other. From time to time, Betty and John went back to Chatham for a break, which I could well understand. I stayed in the Lodge whilst they were away.

After about six weeks, I went to Hereford on a Safety Equipment Course for three weeks. Among other things I learned to pack parachutes of various types. I looked round Hereford and found that no accommodation was available. All the hotels had been taken over by Army, RAF or ATS. There were three Flying Officers on the course and I got friendly with one in particular. From then on, with no responsibility to worry about, we proceeded to make a holiday out of it, pubbing, dancing and Mess parties. The weather was lovely and Hereford Camp was covered in roses. Seemingly, in Hereford, there was no war although the place teemed with Service personnel. The atmosphere seemed unreal.

This was not my finest hour. I got friendly with a married girl at a dance and escorted her to her parent's home which became open house to me. Her father was a Sea Captain. The problem lay in the possibility of becoming too friendly. She was really looking for a reason to separate from her Army husband. At the end it got farcical when she told me that the solution was for us to take ship with her father and go to Buenos Aires! When I got home to Betty, I found her upset because I had not sent her the usual number of letters and sensed that something was wrong. I told her the whole story and, bless her heart, she understood and took me in her arms. A telephone call ended that chapter in my life. The film "Brief Encounter" outlines the gist of the whole episode. Somehow, the experience strengthened our love; I think that we had weathered a storm together and come through stronger than ever. I suppose that, by today's standards, it was all quite innocent.

Life went on and one evening Betty and I were invited to the Sergeant's Mess to a dance. We had a smashing time and they made a great fuss of Betty. One chap in particular I remember. His name was Moon and he made up a drink for her called "Moon" Cocktail. Goodness knows what was in it but she got quite merry.

The Wing Commander suggested that I opened the Workshops in the evening for anyone to use for making toys etc., which is how I came to make a Pedal Engine for John. The Wing Commander asked who had made it because he thought it was jolly good. He was quite embarrassed when I said that I had. He wasn't given to dealing out personal compliments. One day he took a couple of us to another OTU. The Wing Commander there was a chap called Robinson who was my first Flight Sergeant back in 1933 with 41 Squadron. He was the chap who I, as a brand new LAC, told how to get the oxygen bottle out of a Bulldog without taking the wireless out. They had been unnecessarily taking out radios for years.



**John & Engine at Palmerston Road,
Chatham**

Another day, the Squadron Leader took me to another unit to see how they did things saying that we would get lunch on the way. He was always talking about the posh meals he had on the trips so I thought that I would be onto a good thing. Not so, we stopped at a Transport Café and, while I had some sort of dinner, he had a cup of coffee. What a come down!

The other thing that I did was to create a vegetable garden outside the Nissen hut which served as my office. I grew lettuce and radishes etc. The Wing Commander quite liked my radishes. One final thing; I ordered a Flight Sergeant to take some men and bring a complete Nissen hut from somewhere across the airfield to the area where the other huts were. The thing was that I told him to move it in one piece! He put it on heavy duty skates and got it to within 50 yards of its destination before it bogged down. We finally got it into position - mad but happy days.

In the meantime, we had found a little cottage with a garden in Welford. It was fully furnished and we moved in and stayed there until we went to Silverstone. It was a lot better. Before I left for Silverstone, I was able to get out of an overseas posting to start another OTU in the Middle East. It was a silly idea anyway. Husbands Bosworth was about to close down after only a year and we were being administered by Market Harborough. In return, I had to agree to being the Technical Adjutant.