



John D. Bones

John Bones spent the last week of August 1939, at a boys Sunday school camp on Southwold Common. The boys were well aware of the threat of war and cheered and waved at an RAF aeroplane patrolling low along the coast. However, they were to return home if there were any further developments.

Rev. Hayward spent a long time trying to arrange a lorry, I think ours had been commandeered for the army. In the morning we heard that Hitler had invaded Poland so we piled everything into the lorry the Rev. Hayward had managed to acquire. I don't remember being worried about the journey home and the weather was glorious, hot and sunny... Some of the parents were waiting for us at the church when we did eventually get back. People honestly thought that towns and cities would be obliterated by bombing in a day.



John Bones, Flight Sgt in No. 308 Squadron, Air Training Corps, Colchester. The white flash on his forage cap indicates acceptance into the RAF for aircrew training.

On Friday 1st September 1939, John and his classmates went to help at the evacuees' reception centre, which had opened at the local primary school. His schoolmaster was an evacuee reception officer and was to co-ordinate the arrival of evacuees arriving by train from London's East End and their departure by bus to the Essex countryside. His class was to distribute carrier bags of food for the travellers. Each contained a tin of corned beef, a tin of milk, a packet of biscuits and a quarter pound of Cadbury's chocolate.

I had been poor for most of my life, but the poverty I witnessed then with these poor mothers and babies plucked from the slums of the East End of London, horrified me. I remember some poor little girl tripped and fell in the hall and I saw that she was naked under her thin cotton frock.

There were no trains expected on Sunday. John and his parents waited for Neville Chamberlain's broadcast at 11 o'clock.

John left school in December 1939 and became an apprentice compositor in January 1940, just after his 14th birthday. Living in Colchester, he sometimes saw fleets of German bombers, in perfect square formation, flying towards London.

We heard at work one day that a German bomber had been shot down just outside Clacton and we apprentices decided to cycle there after work to see it. There was quite a crowd around this pile of smouldering wreckage. It was the first aircraft shot down locally and a novelty, but we didn't bother after that... Another day I was out delivering parcels when a Heinkel bomber dived out of the clouds and machine-gunned shoppers in Head Street, I was a couple of blocks away at the time. That



caused quite a stir in the town, everyone went to look at the bullet marks in the main post office building.

Each company was responsible for supplying an employee for fire watching duties and John took his turn each week.

One night when I was on firewatching duty the Germans dropped thousands of incendiary bombs on the town. We searched our printing works and the builders merchants next door, as we had a mutual arrangement with them, and then, taking our stirrup pump headed for the fires.

There were several fires around the vicinity of St Butolphs' railway station and John was pleased to assist the fire service during the course of the evening.

At 16, he joined the Air Training Corps. There were drills and two or three parades each week on the tennis courts of the local technical college and lessons in the classrooms. They studied navigation, astro-navigation, Morse code and developed literacy and numeracy skills.



The first course at ATC Gliding School at Shrub End, Colchester. John is the third cadet from left. The glider is a Slingsby Cadet with a 40 foot wingspan - bigger than a spitfire.

As senior members were called up, John was promoted to corporal, sergeant and eventually flight sergeant, in charge of 'C Flight' No 308 squadron. As a member of the Social Committee, he enjoyed arranging various functions,

I organised the squadron Christmas Parties and dances. It all seemed to come together easily; I had help from all directions, with cadets working in all sorts of businesses. We got bread and cakes from the Co-op because we had a cadet working there. Ice cream was unheard of in the middle of the war, but we had some for a Christmas party as a cadet worked in a posh hotel.

As soon as he was old enough, John volunteered to join the Royal Air Force as air crew and during his time as a reserve, the Colchester Wing of the ATC accepted him as one of their first trainees at their newly formed gliding school. This consisted of a small hangar, a Fordson truck with a towing winch on the back, one RAF staff car and a Slingsby Cadet glider so took this as an opportunity to apply for a driving licence and drove the Vauxhall staff car on official business.

When the war ended nothing had been prepared, the whole country was concentrating on winning, nothing could be spared for a celebration... I went to the Town Hall, in the High Street, that night and there were crowds milling about, but after a while I just went home.

As the war drew to a close, John served his apprenticeship as a compositor and became a gliding instructor and a Warrant Officer in the ATC.