



the mess! As President of the Mess Committee, he enlisted Betty's help with the accounts books. They sat up late one night trying to sort out a very confused accounts system whereby officers settled their bills at the end of the month. Walter eventually asked her out although she had to wear "civvies" as he was not supposed to escort anyone of a lower rank!

After further training at the Army School of Cookery in Aldershot, Betty spent a short time at Bulford, near Salisbury, at the men's training centre where she had to cook breakfast for 400, very early each morning on a very old range in non too hygienic conditions! Then onto the ATS Recruiting Centre at Aldermaston. This consisted, in those days, of a big old house where the recruits stayed, and the dilapidated stables where the staff, including Betty, had to sleep. These were unheated and had many broken windows. The year was 1940 - one of the worst winters on record!

A flu epidemic claimed Betty as one of its victims. She was put in the local village hall which was being used as a sick bay. She recalls the bed was next to the plush, but very dusty curtains. There were no cooking facilities other than a kettle to make a hot drink and the food, which was foul smelling, was brought in from the base in metal containers.

Walter had a chance to visit her from where he was stationed in another part of the country. He was horrified at the conditions in which she was living and complained to the War Office. He then phoned Betty's mother and suggested she came to collect her as she was so ill. Eventually, while still at home, she was discharged from the ATS and soon became engaged, her father reluctantly giving his consent!

The young couple married and set up home in a rented bungalow a mile or two out in the country near Bentley Priory, HQ of Fighter Command, where Walter was stationed. Later they rented the Green Keeper's Cottage at Hartsbourne Manor. Although this was in better condition than the bungalow, it was unfurnished so there was quite a struggle to beg and borrow items of furniture from kind relatives and friends (new furniture was decidedly in short supply during the war).

Their daughters, Audrey, Beryl and Carol, were all born between 1941 and 1944. Early in 1946 Walter was sent to Singapore to be Chief Signals Officer. Before they married, Walter had told his fiancée that she must never ask what he did in the RAF as it was top secret. In fact he had worked on the very first RADAR testing, long before the war started. This was obviously a very specialised field which was most important during the war.

Betty made plans to take the three girls to join her husband in Singapore. She terminated their lease on the house and gave away all the children's winter clothes! Ten days before the date of sailing, Walter was posted home, in order to install RADAR at London airport. They were allowed to stay in the house for the time being, but always lived under threat of eviction until they were able to buy a house. With some financial help from Betty's father, they chose a house in Hatch End, Middlesex, and Derek, their son, was born shortly afterwards.

Walter was still with the RAF and worked in this country for several years until in 1954 he was sent to the USA for six



months and once more his wife found herself coping with the family alone. On his return, Walter took his family to Germany where he was to take up the position of Air Officer, Administration. For the three and a half years they were there, they had the use of a lovely house with servants. The children joined them for the holidays from their English boarding schools. Betty recalls that in those days, officers were not given any financial assistance with the education of their children so they were glad to accept help from her father. A Parliamentary Delegation, headed by Sir Stafford Cripps, visited Germany. Walter took the opportunity of discussing the situation with him. Eventually the government decided to give an allowance to officers serving abroad for the education of children.

In 1959, the family moved back to their house in Hatch End, which had been let out in their absence. It had not been left in a very good state by their tenants. Such a contrast to their lovely German home. (Betty recalls how they coined the phrase "From sink to mink and then from mink to sink".) Her husband became the Commander in Chief of Signals Command at Medmenham, near Marlow, on the Thames. They moved into their official residence which was like a castle! It was beautifully furnished, complete with servants, and eventually they sold their house in Hatch End.

It was while Walter was at Signals Command he was knighted. His last job was as Deputy Chief of Staff to Lord Mountbatten and Betty met him on several occasions and had lunch with him. The family was most upset when he was so tragically killed. Walter had received earlier decorations: twice mentioned in Despatches; the OBE in 1942; the CBE in 1950; CB in 1957 and then in 1962 the KBE. The various visits to the Palace were enjoyed by members of the family who took their turn in accompanying their parents into the presence of the monarch.

Sir Walter Philip George Pretty retired from the RAF in 1966. He then took positions in the commercial world and travelled to Persia, Mexico and South Africa. He eventually retired completely in 1972 and he and Betty enjoyed three precious years in their house in Cobham which they had bought when he retired from the RAF. He enjoyed being at home and loved gardening, fishing and painting in water colours. Those three years came to an end when Walter became ill and died of cancer in January 1975. She decided to move to Milford as her youngest daughter, Carol, was living in Elstead at the time.

Christianity has always played an important part in Betty's life. Her three daughters also enjoyed a convent education. They all feel strongly about their faith and are bringing up their children to be good Christians. She has also entered into and invigorated the life of her local church. In Germany she ran the Mothers' Union as well as being interested in a number of voluntary organisations. As a family, they always attended church regularly and Betty recalls the ecumenical activities that took place while they were in Germany, in particular the opening of three new churches. Cardinal Heenan arrived to dedicate the RC church, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Fisher, came to dedicate the C of E church, while the church used by the Free churches was also opened at this time. Sir Walter was in charge of organising these visits and built up good relationships with the clergy from all the denominations, especially with John Roche, the Catholic priest with whom he enjoyed a game of golf.