

Transcript of 80-year-old Mr. Brian Billingham of Cradley Heath, West Midlands in conversation with Dr. John Goodyear (University of Birmingham / Kulturgenossenschaft Globe e.G.) on Sunday 1 July 2018, 4:00pm (GMT)

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A: Interviewer Dr. John Goodyear (37, DOB: 06.09.1980)

B: Globe patron Mr. Brian Billingham (80, DOB: 07.04.1938)

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A: And I am joined here today, erm in Cradley Heath, by?

B: Brian Billingham

A: Hello, Brian!

B: Hello!

A: Brian, first of all, could you tell us what your date of birth is?

B: Second of April 1938

A: Second of April 1938. And erm where were you born exactly?

B: In North Street, Netherton, Dudley. North Street changed its name later to Northcote Road.

A: OK! And you went to school locally?

B: I went to school at Netherton Infants School, Netherton Church of England Primary School and Dudley Intermediate School.

A: And after school, you left school – I left school – at the age of 15.

B: I left school at 15 and went to work at Clydesdale Stamping Company, worked there for three years and I – when I was called up for National Service.

A: And are you called up for National Service? What happens?

B&A: Depending on your date of birth, in the local press, it told you what date you'd got and go and register at the local employment office; and you used to have to go and register and from then, you had to have a medical, which we had to have at Five Ways, Birmingham. Hmhm. Parsons Street, I think it was, but I may be wrong on that. And also some tests to make sure that mentally as well as physically. And from then, you waited till your papers came and your train ticket was in there, and where to go and what time, things like that.

A: And where did you have to go then, Brian?

B: I, I, I had to go, get a train. I had to get to Wolverhampton station and catch a train to Gabowen, where we were met by a lorry, which transferred us to the Park Hall Camp at Oswestry.

A: And what can you remember at Park Hall? What did you have to do?

- B&A: A lot of hard work. *[Laughter]* Bulling brasses, bulling *[verb to clean]* boots, erm, learning how to march, erm, and looking back, that was the hardest fortnight of my army life.
- A: How many people were there in Gabowen doing the same thing you were doing, Brian?
- B&A: Well, I won't say Gabowen because there'd be quite a lot on that train, but there was trains coming from elsewhere, so all, all of us who came at the same time, we were in D troop. "And never forget it," those are the words. There was a big white stone with D troop. "D troop and never forget it!" *[Laughter]* That would be the first, the first order in the army. *[Laughter]*
- A: So, you spent your two weeks there in ... erm ...
- B: Spent two weeks from October ... the end of October 1956 and then I was sent to Kimmell Park Camp in Rhyl, north Wales.
- A: What did you do there?
- B&A: Square bashing, *hmhm*, errr, lectures on how to be a signaller, going out into the wilds of Wales laying signal wires and building, you know, make sure that they were up over the roads so that lorries won't take them down, and learning how to use the radio, yeah, yeah.
- A: What was, then, your capacity in the army during your National Service? Do you ... were you given a special title?
- B: Yeah, in the artillery, err, the lowest rank was a Gunner. They were called gunners, then Lance Bombardier, Bombardier, Sergeant and so on up. Yeah.
- A: And your role? Your rank?
- B&A: I was a gunner at, all the while I was training. When I worked in, in the office because ... overrunning my tale .... When I did me signal training, I was ... I was posted to Germany, to Oldenburg, then I was on the square, they called out all the names for the one battery and everybody went. They called all the names for the secondary battery; everybody went. They called out the names for the third battery and everybody went. And it left me, on the square, on me own. I was designated as a Clerk *[Laughter]* *[Laughter]*, which I had never done in my life, but I was sent back to Woolwich to train as a Clerk. And *[Chuckle]*, which was a waste of tax payers' money from a signalling point of view. *[Laughter]*
- A: So, you were there in Rhyl, you then got, did you get transferred immediately to Oldenburg or did – were there? Yeah, yeah, or yeah, or yeah, a few stations in between?
- B: Yeah, yeah, only at Woolwich as a, a full embarkation. Embarkation leave. I was only there one night, and one night when I came back, and then off to Oldenburg we went.
- A: Yeah, so that means that you were in Oldenburg then twice in that respect. So, you were there once with the parade ground.

- B&A: Yeah, I was there, I was there from, say, first of March, **yes**, first of March until the end of September when they sent me on a Clerks' course to Woolwich. And then from the end of, well, from middle of October to when it finished in February 1958.
- A: **OK**
- B: Yeah.
- A: **And during this time on the camp, let's just rewind a bit beforehand, how did you get to Oldenburg in the first place? Can you describe the journey?**
- B: Yeah. Err, from Woolwich by train to Liverpool Street Station in London, from Liverpool Street Station to Harwich, and then by boat overnight to the Hook of Holland, then by train to, erm, I think it was Oldenburg station the first time. But after that, we travelled from, to and from Bremen.
- A: **Can you remember this journey you went on; what sort of feelings you had? In this, probably your first time away from home.**
- B&A: Yeah. First time abroad. **Hmhm**. A bit of apprehension. Didn't know what you were going into; what sort of reception you're going to meet. Erm.
- A: **What about the people travelling with you, Brian? How were they erm? Were they talking to you? Or were they quite quiet?**
- B&A: Oh yeah, because we had all been together **hmm**. There was quite a group of us erm together from Oswestry and Rhyl and then we met some who'd been at Tonfanau and different training places around the country. All travelling in the same direction. But we were talking, but when I was on me own, I didn't know a soul, **yes, of course**, in the regimental headquarters, just on me own. Yeah.
- A: **So, you arrived in Oldenburg. Do you know the date, approximately, when you arrived? First time?**
- B: Probably the second of March 1957.
- A: **OK, and then you were taken from this train station to the barracks? The barracks, yeah. What were your first impressions of the barracks after you presumably by truck, you got off a truck?**
- B&A: Yeah, yeah, **hmm**, I thought it looked quite impressive, quite an impressive camp. Erm, and then when, when I was eventually put into regimental headquarters, they found me a bed. **Hmhm**, which wasn't with the clerks; that was with the signallers. *[Laughter]* *[Laughter]*. Because the chief clerk who wanted me was on leave, *[Laughter]*, so, so, and then they put me in the signalling stores with a chap from the regiment, the Signals Regiment, Signalmen King his name. And he could tell jokes *[Clicks fingers]* like, rip them off, rip them off, rip them off. Oh, he was brilliant, he was. He was from London. He was brilliant, he was. **Yes**. Yeah. Yes, we was.
- A: **Can you remember erm the buildings on the camp and what they looked like?**
- B: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

A: Could you describe them for us?

B&A: Err, they seemed to be the gable end, seemed to be like staircases. *[Laughter]* *[Laughter]*. Yeah, you know, they did; and erm, when I think, six beds, six beds to a room. And I ... was there a little, a little office in each room? I can't remember. I can't remember. Something tells me that there is a little office in the room. But I might be wrong about that. Erm, but I think that there was six beds; and there was a chap from Wales, a chap from Dover, ... me, I can't remember the other three. I can't remember the other three at all.

A: So they were in this room? So, you shared the room yeah, yeah with six people.

B: Yes, with five others, yes.

A: OK, so with five others, so six altogether. Yeah. And then erm you would have this quite regimented timetable? Oh yeah, yeah. Would you?

B: Oh yes, yeah, yeah.

A: So could you describe an army day on the barracks in Donnerschwee?

B: Well, erm, first of all, we must have set our own alarms because I can't remember been woke up. When we were in training at Rhyl, they used to come in and threw the bucket down the room, you know, to wake you up. But I can't remember been woke up in Germany, so I think we set our own alarms to get up, have a wash, and I think that we used to make our own way to breakfast

A: Where did you have breakfast, Brian?

B&A: In, in, in the other rank's mess, mess; and I got an idea as you went through the main gate, hmhm, the quarters there, square in front, I got an idea it was the other end of the square, OK, you know, the other end. And we used to have to go there. And we'd got plates. And there'd be the cooks, the catering corps who done it, and people if they'd done something wrong, they were, they were put on fatigues. And, but, if they had not done anything wrong, you used to have to go in and take your turns to go in and help wash up and things like that, and dish out, and they'd used to say: and one would be on the cabbage, someone would be on the potatoes, and all the way along, pile it on your plate. And, and then you got your mug, and you get the tea out the old boiler. And yeah, and that's the way it went. And then, ... I can't remember: we must have had to gone on parade. We must have gone on parade first thing on a morning, after breakfast. Hmhm. We must, and then, they'd say "fall out" and then when you knew what you'd got to do, you just went to do what you had got to do.

A: I see. Talking of about breakfast and food, did you have good food Oh yes, provisions there?

B: Food's brilliant. Yes? It was. Yes? I couldn't grumble at all. Yes.

A&B: Because these stories in army about this terrible food *[interlocutor agrees with "yes"]*. No, it wasn't the case.

B: Food was great. Great, it was.

- A&B: So you had a good breakfast, good lunch, good dinner [*interlocutor agrees with "yes"*].
- B: Yes, yes, oh yeah.
- A: Very good. What was your role in the barracks? What did you have to do on a day-to-day basis then, Brian?
- B&A: Well, first of all, I say, I was in the signalling stores with this Signalmen King. And then, and then, for then, we used to wear denims, like overalls, erm, and then somebody came and says: "you're wanted in the regimental office". Can't remember doing anything wrong, like, you know, and I went down and the Chief Clerk said: "Ah, Billingham," "Sir". He said: "When this intake came in, I wanted a clerk," he says, "but apparently there was no clerks". He said: "For some unknown reason, he looked at your record and you'd seem to be the one who would make the best clerk." He says: "So, go back up to your room, take off those denims, and put on your battledress, and then come down here. Went down, belt and beret. "Now take your beret off, take your belt off, sit there" and then, he put me with Lance Bombardier Tunney from Wolverhampton on filing. And that's how, that's how I started, yes. And every day after that **hmhm** was in the office.
- A: So what was your role then with these files? What did you have to do?
- B: Every letter that came in had a different heading, you know, it could be to do with sports; could be to do with regimental policy, regimental general stuff. All sorts, all sorts of things, but it all had its own filing system, you, which you got, I've ... having never worked in an office, you soon picked it up, like, you know.
- A&B: Talking about the files erm that you get, did you think you get anything from oh, erm ... **organisations** ...?
- B&A: Oh, we, we had to sign the, have the Official Secrets Act. **Oh, did you really?** Yeah, they came round to where I lived in Netherton, and asking people: the local vicars and ministers, thing like that. And then I had to go and sign the Official Secrets Act.
- A: So, you signed that Act and then were checked out by the authorities.
- B&A: Checked out before I signed it? **Oh really?** Yeah, I was allowed to handle stuff up to top secret. **So, you were handling documents** ... yes, yes, yes, **up to top secret**. Yeah, yeah, yeah
- A: Impressive stuff, err, Brian. Let's talk a little bit about your free time on the, on the site. You mentioned earlier, you went to ... out into town.
- B&A: Yeah, that was after we'd finished. Yeah, yeah, at night. I can't remember what time we finished. It must have been about half-past four, I should have thought. And then you go and have your tea, change into civvies, **hmhm**, and have a walk around the town, doing what ever you wanted to do, if the shops are still open. We used to go and buy mock turtle soup, the bratwursts, erm, go to the toilet where there were women cleaners. [*Laughter*]. **Oh really?** Oh yeah, yeah. Erm, we used to go in ... "No, come on in" [*Laughter*]. Yeah, yeah.

- A: Can you remember any specific features of the town of Oldenburg? I remember ... that you can remember very well?
- B&A: Woolworths. **Hmhm**. And there was another big stores similar to Debenhams, you know, that sort of, but I can't remember the name, but I think it began with the letter R, but I can't remember the name, but I remember the store. It was a high-class store, a department store and then, as I say, the railway, the canal, erm, ... and oh, I remember, I remember there was one part, if a boat was coming in, the, the footpath went up. Is, **yeah**, that still there? **Yeah, it is still there. Yes, that's the ...** it went up and you crossed the bridge [*Stutters*] [*Laughter*]. When I been there, there was about three or four of us and they all went for this ... I said: "Come on", but the boat, and we went up, but the boat had gone. **Laughter** [*Laughter*]
- A: That is still there, Brian. Yeah, yeah, yeah. That is still there.
- B&A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it is ... the footpath does go up, doesn't it? **Yes**. That's right. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. **It is amazing that you remember these things. That's right**, yeah, yeah.
- A: Can you remember any of the main buildings in Oldenburg?
- B: No, not really. No.
- A: **No, it was** – it was just this, this bridge - **just this shopping centre mainly** and the shopping centre.
- A&B: **Did you go around the town on your own when you were in civvies? Or did you I think ... go around with people?**
- B: ... on Saturday afternoon, on a Saturday afternoon, we used, I used to go on my own, but, if, any other time, it was usually with one or two or three more, yeah.
- A: Can you remember any other people from Oldenburg who you might have had contact with during your time there?
- B: Only these two sisters who, who, who we went out with them two or three times, like.
- A: **And where did they live?**
- B&A: Breslauerstraße. **OK**, yeah, yeah.
- A: **So, what ...**
- B: Number fifty-two.
- A: **I will see if it is still there: Number 52 Breslauerstraße.** [*Laughter*] **Can you remember their names?**
- B&A: Well, I, I couldn't quite get my head around it, but, whether the one girl was Waltraud Schillinger, **hmhm**, and the other was Monika Wilhelms. They was half-sisters, obviously, but I don't know where the half came in. **OK**. But they lived in the same house and they were half-sisters and had got different surnames. **Right**. Yeah.

- A: So, you used to go and visit them?
- B: Yeah, well, no, because the father used to ... [Laughter]. It's ... Simmons, he went up once. I'm gonna kill him. [Laughter]. I never went up. I used to wait outside the gate. Yeah, yeah.
- A: Good times?
- B: Oh, yes, yes, yes, yeah.
- A: Coming back to any other people, any other German people that you can remember, who whether they lived outside or perhaps even they worked inside or outside the camp?
- B&A: There was an Ernst, who ran some sort of a gift shop inside the camp. And there was the erm ladies, there was some ladies, I think, they worked in the officers' mess. They worked in the officers' mess, I think, you know, serving or cooking. Yeah, OK. I remember one or two, but don't remember them by name. There was only that Ernst, who I knew by name.
- A: Any what can you say about Ernst? Was he a good man?
- B&A: He was a good man, yes? he was a friendly man. You know, he would laugh and have a joke with you. When he, when he bought a pair of shoes, he used to try and break them in half and if they broke in half, he hadn't used to buy them. [Laughter] [Laughter]. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.
- A: Ernst, you spoke to Ernst in English?
- B: Oh yes, he could speak perfect English. Yeah? Yes, yes.
- A: What about the other German people that you knew, for instance, these ladies that you knew?
- B&A: They, we sort of err ... got by because I always said: "the best way to learn a language is to speak to a lady". [Laughter]. Very good. You know, we used to get by. She'd speak broken English, and broken German. Like a canal boat. I used to say: "ein kleiner Schiff", so she'd knew what I was on about, you know. It was bad. Oh, and another thing: when, when we were clerks, the office had to always have somebody in it, and, erm, so at night, your bed had to go in the office, you used to sleep there, in the case the phone rang. And, we used to have German lady cleaners. So, I used to ... wherever the keys was, they used to have to come in of the morning and get the keys, so I put a notice on the key board, and said: "Wecken Sie mich um halb sieben, bitte!". And, she, she woke me up. [Groans]. So, it was your alarm clock? [Laughter] And she'd say: "Nichts gut Deutsch!" And I said: "Why? What is the matter with it?" [Laughter]. "Wecken Sie mich bitte [Laughter] um halb sieben!" Oh. [Laughter]. So, I put that every time after. [Laughter]. yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.
- A&B: Very good, very good, Brian. Brian, let's talk a little bit about your time with the Globe, which you know as AKC. AKC. AKC. Coming back to what you said earlier, do you think that you had any documents that you had sent to you from the AKC? No. Probably not. No, no, no.

B&A: We just used to, as I say, the films must have been advertised outside the cinema or somebody would tell you about, word of mouth, what was on that night. **Hmhm**. And we just used to go, queue, get the ticket, go and see it, the films. We saw Elvis Presley, which was paid for by the army staff on the camp.

A: Can you remember the title of the programme or the film that you saw, Elvis Presley?

B&A: *Loving you*, but I also saw him in *Love Me Tender* as well. **At the cinema?** At the Globe, yes. We saw *Bridge on the River Kwai*. **Hmhm**. Erm, lots of cowboys. Lot of war films. Err, because, we seemed to be there a lot. We seem well ... you're either in the NAAFI [*Navy, Army and Air Forces Institute*]. But if you was in NAAFI, you'd gotta keep spending; we hadn't got a lot. But if you went to the cinema, you only spent once, **Yeah OK**, you know. **Hmhm**.

A: So, how often did they run these films, can you remember, Brian?

B&A: I think that they must have changed every, every two nights. Yeah, I would say that they were on for two nights. And then change. And then, because it wouldn't have opened on a Sunday, I shouldn't have thought. I wouldn't have thought it would have opened on a Sunday. **So, Monday to Saturday?** Yes, I would say it would have been Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, **yes**, – would be with different films, **yes**. Somebody might correct me on that, but that is the impression that I've got. We seemed to go a lot and see different films.

A&B: **So, thinking about just entering, it would be a long queue. Because there was 400-seater capacity. Yeah. That's right, yeah. And that means 400 men, they couldn't fit in the foyer. Yeah, that's right. I'm not saying it was full every night. Yes. You know what I mean. But err, there used to be quite a few in. OK. They used to be quite a few in. And going in, can you remember people smoking?**

B: I think they must have done; they must have done. I mean, cigarettes were only five pence for twenty. They must have smoked. They must have smoked. They'd got to; they'd go to.

A&B: **And in those days, it would have been allowed – yeah - as well in the pictures, wouldn't it? Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, you are watching these films. There was an orchestra pit and large stage. Can you remember any sort of productions or performances?**

B: Yeah, I remember two or three productions. One in particular was Lita Rosa. She had just left the Ted Heath dance band; and she came, she came and performed for us. And there was two others, but I, there was a tall woman, so tall she could, she could wrap her arms round her back, and virtually grab her hands. You know, she did it. Blow me! Yeah! [*Laughter*]. But I, and, and she was well known, but I can't remember her name.

A: **What sort of performance was this? Was this comedy performance?**

B&A: That was comedy. That was comedy. **OK**. Lita Roza sang. But that was a comedy, comedy thing. But, you know – [*Mutters*] – but she sang as well because she sang *All of Me*. Because that is where *All of Me*, "All of Me, why not take all of me, take my arms" and that is where she did that. **Ah, OK**.

Yeah. I can't, I can't. I know I should know her name, but it just won't come. We can find that out for you. Yeah, yeah, eventually, Brian. So you saw this, erm, this lady with the arms [Laughter]. Yeah. [Laughter]. Lita Roza. Lita Roza And was there a male bandleader with her? Or not. No, no, she just, she just sang. Ah. There was obviously a band there, but not the Ted Heath band 'cause she had left by then. Erm ...

A&B: Did you come into contact with Lita ... No. ... Roza?

B&A: No. I didn't personally. No, no. No? No. But it was a good show she put on. She put a good show on. Yeah? And what presumably, it would have been almost full or, if not, full to capacity. Yeah, it would be, it would be, yeah, yeah, Were there any spec...? because it was only a one-night thing; it wouldn't be two nights.

A: So, would that, in terms of tickets, be: you would get advanced tickets, do you think, or would you be paying for those on the night?

B&A: I don't know. I should imagine they'd be advanced, but I am not sure, I am not sure about that. I am not sure. OK.

A: Can you remember inside the building, Brian? What sort of seats were you sitting on? Were they comfortable; were they uncomfortable?

B&A: I think they were comfortable. Yeah? Erm, we went too many times for them to be uncomfortable. [Laughter]. [Laughter]. That's true. [Laughter]. [Laughter]. Erm, yes, I think they were, they were comfortable. But I can't, I can't remember much about them, whether they were wooden or upholstered or what.

A: Yeah. And erm, the interior of the building?

B: No, no.

A: Presumably, it might ... with the lighting, it would have been quite dark, wouldn't it?

B: That's right. It would be dark, yeah.

A: So you would just have what ever is on the screen.

B: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

A&B: Good, so you saw those films; you saw those err two or three productions, yes, yes, comedy, music, yes, yes, and that would be the entertainment for the evening. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So you would retire to your err quarters presumably, yeah, yeah, yeah, get a good night's sleep

B&A: Get ready for bed, read, yes oh, there was always a lot of reading. Erm, I used to read a lot of Agatha Christie books, I think I read them all actually. Really? Oh yeah. [Laughter]. Yeah, yeah.

A: And where would you get them from?

B: From ... probably the WVS shop.

- A: Could you explain what the WVS [*Women's Voluntary Service*] shop is?
- B&A: No, *sighs*, there seemed to be a place. I remember going to the NAAFI and, if you were still hungry, you could buy cakes, *hmhm* cream cakes and things like that, and chocolate cakes, Cadbury's chocolate, I should imagine, things like that. And also, I should imagine, I think we could buy books there as well. But the WVS place, they used to play gramophone records. And if you weren't quick, this chap from the Royal Signals used to have Bach and Beethoven playing every night. [*Laughter*] [*Laughter*]. It used to drive the other blokes mad. [*Laughter*]. So, you had Bach and Beethoven, on the site, being played? Yeah, oh yeah, yeah.
- A: So, how would you get these gramophone records? Would you have to buy them or lend them?
- B&A: No, no, they had got some sort of a library. Ah. And also, they ran erm Interflora. You could send flowers home from, from the WVS, they used to do it for you.
- A&B: Really? Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Did you ever send flowers?
- B&A: Yes, I sent some, yeah. Who to? To this girl, I knew from Cradley Heath. I think it was ten shilling. That would 50 pence, yeah. A bouquet of flowers.
- A: Fabulous!
- B: [*Laughter*], oh yeah. Did you ... Because you know about the Armed Services vouchers, don't ya?
- A: Yes.
- B: You know, the paper money. I mean that, that was funny stuff. But when you went down town, you had to have marks. And as I say, twelve marks to the pound then. Well, twelve marks to the pound and two-and-a-half pence in today's money. Yeah.
- A&B: Incredible stuff. Yeah, yeah. We have got some photos here, err, Brian. Obviously, what we'll do is put them up on the, on the screen.
- B: That one is Todendorf, so that is up on the Baltic Sea, so that don't really pertain.
- A: Oh, so you were at Todendorf.
- B&A: Yeah, for three weeks, yes. Right. All, all, they used to leave a skeleton staff, but apart from that, all the regiment had to go on the Baltic Sea to Todendorf.
- A: Can you remember when you went?
- B: Voiced pause. Probably May or June of 1957.
- A&B: And on the back of this photo, we actually have the name of the company. It says here Foto-Kniep, Oldenburg, i.O, Kurwickstrasse 31. Ha, ha, So, this is

at a photo shop? Yeah, yeah. Called ... Probably where he brought that camera from. Whose this 'he'?

B&A: This, this, this, him *[points to gentleman]* Ah. Him. Right, the next photo we have You see, somebody has taken this because he is not on it, OK but he took that with that camera and the other dark one ...

A: Right, so, these pictures, erm, so first of all, we have got yourself and your friend here. What was his name?

B: Jeff Simmons from Plymouth.

A&B: OK, so this is Jeff Simmons from Plymouth, then he bought this camera at Foto-Kniep; in fact, it is on the back of this photo as well. In fact, it is on the back of all of them. *[Laughter]*. And, err it is stamped here very nicely. Oh, that's got a number. Do you remember this Mrs. Kniep?

B&A: Yes, she, well, if she, whether she was just a lady who worked in there. But she's, she's, I seem to remember her being a very large lady. She was very helpful, very helpful. She was explaining different cameras and that. Yes, of course, because it was a good camera that he bought. It was pretty expensive for a soldier. Really? Yes, but he hadn't quite mastered the art when he took that one.

A&B: Yes, some of them are a bit dark *[Laughter]*, aren't they? So, these pictures are of you?

B: Yeah, yeah.

A&B: And this one here is presumably of Oldenburg city centre. Yeah, yeah. With the cobbled streets. Yes, that's right, that's right. Yes. And this one here looks as if it is on the erm ... on the *Hafen*. Yeah, you can see here the boats yeah; and that building is still there; and to the right at the moment, they actually have, what they call, the *Theaterhafen*, yeah, yeah, the theatre, yeah, yeah, is based there at the moment. And the next pictures, these are very interesting, because these are pictures of the camp. Yeah. What do you see on these pictures here, Brian?

B&A: Well, I am sure it's, it's the Queen's birthday parade, which would be in June 1957. And they have got the families there as well. Yeah and even some children, yeah, yeah, there, you can see. Yeah.

A: So, there would have been families and children living on the barracks?

B&A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I, it couldn't have been, the married folks, they couldn't have been far away 'cause Jeff used to babysit and we hadn't used to walk far. Hadn't used to be far, but I can't remember where exactly they were. And they'd got, they'd got a record player and we used to play *King and I*, and things like that, yeah, yeah. Oh, I saw *The King and I*. I saw *The King and I* at the pictures. Oh did you? At that picture house, yes I did. Yeah, because we saw it and they had got the record these, this married couple and we used to play it stupidly, this *King and I* record.

- A&B: Oh brilliant. Yeah, yeah, yeah. That is fantastic that you remember this. Very good So, you also saw *The King and I*.
- B: I also saw Carrie Grant, Cary Grant, Deborah Kerr, they was going to meet up the – what's the Tower in New York?
- A: The err ... Empire State Building.
- B&A: The Empire State Building. Hmhm. And they, they'd meet and get married and she was going and she got run over and was crippled. And, and, I forget what the picture was called, but I saw that film there. Yeah. [Film title here: *An Affair to Remember*]
- A: Yeah, I saw a lot of films there.
- B: I saw a stack of films, a stack of films. Yes? No doubt about it, yes.
- A: There was good entertainment for you.
- B&A: And I actually went to the pictures in Oldenburg ... with this girl. Really? I saw *Baby Doll*, which girl was this one, because there were two that you mentioned? I don't know. I don't know. Oh, one of the two. I was only led. [Laughter]. I was only led there. But it was *Baby Doll* in German. Erm. And they showed the trailer for Anthony Quinn in the *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, that showed ... that was on the next week, and they were speaking and dubbed it in German. Yeah, which is quite normal. Yeah, yeah.
- A: But all of the films you were seeing and watching at the Globe were all in English.
- B: All in English, yeah, yeah.
- A: Erm, talking about that and linking it with the Queen's parade, there is said to be a tradition of the National Anthem at the Globe.
- B&A: Oh yes, yeah. Erm, it could have been played at the beginning. It could have been played at the end. I am getting mixed up here because around here when they was playing the National Anthem, it was always at the end. It could very well have been at the beginning at the Globe. Yes, but it was definitely played? Yes, definitely played. What would happen then? Would everyone have to ... Everyone would stand up. Yes? Did you have to salute or ... no, just stand up, just stand, just stand because we were in civvies. Right. Yeah, yeah. Oh, so you were in civvies in the Globe? Oh, yes, yeah, yeah. We used to change into civvies. I should imagine that some might have gone in battledress, but most of the time, it was in civvies, yes.
- A: Err, you said once in our conversation that you were err ... invited once by the officers.
- B: Yes, one Christmas. Erm.
- A: That would be, what? Christmas 1957.

B: Because we were in the throes of closing. Overruling me tale, my mother brought a television in 1956, could never get a good picture because there was a factory in the next street with large chimney stacks and they said that that interfered. She could never get a good picture. And when I came on leave in August 1957, this girl at Cradley Heath, her mother had just bought a television and they had put it on her sideboard and he put a piece of wire in the back and hooked it on the picture holder and it was the best picture I ever saw on a television screen. And, as it came on, the 1 o'clock news came on and it was Richard Baker. And he said: "The Ministry of Defence have just announced that the 72<sup>nd</sup> Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment is to disband. I said: "That's mine". That television was put, wired up, turned on and he'd announced that my regiment had gone and been disbanded. *[Laughter]*. That is unbelievable... and when I went back, the ... I might have been on leave when them Germans came.

A: Oh, in August, August the sixth and seventh, ah, OK.

B: Yeah, yeah, because when I went back, it has started winding down.

A: Yes.

B: And then, that Christmas, the officers paid for all the other ranks to go and see Elvis Presley at the pictures in *Loving You*. Yeah.

A&B: Incredible! Yeah, yeah. Can you remember it winding down? Was life very different there, Brian?

B: Yeah, yeah. Because, then, working in the office, you could see the strength getting less and less. Hmm. Some would, some would be ... there was a chap who was always in trouble. They sent him to 35<sup>th</sup> Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, somewhere else in Germany; he went; they looked at his record and sent him back. *[Laughter]*. *[Laughter]*. *[Laughter]*. I don't know what happened.

A: *[Laughter]*. Where was he from? Can you remember?

B&A: No, I can't. *[Laughter]*. Err, and then, you'd see people. They'd be going, erm. Funnily enough, when my posting came through, for the Fourth RHA, two days later, see, the British Army on the Rhine sent that posting. Two days later, another posting came for me to go to Larkhill, Salisbury. Ah, that's where the military archives are. Yes, yeah, yeah. But the BAOR overrode it, and so I had to stay in Germany.

A: So, you were there actually when the camp wound down and was officially handed over?

B&A: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Can you remember the preparations in erm ...? Not the actual handing over. I know we had to learn a new manoeuvre, and the Serge ... I remember the Sergeant Major, he had to look it up in a book because we, you know when you are marching along, and then you halt, we had to form a hollow square because the commanding officer had to address us. So, we had to ... don't ask me how we did it, but we had to work it ourselves. You was in a line like that and you had to come in on three sides of a square. OK. And he addressed us and come back onto your lines and march away. And that's when we were on the page of the newspaper. That parade.

A: So, and you were on the front cover, you think?

B: Front page of the newspaper, yeah, yeah.

A: What were your memories of this handing over, the day it handed over? [Sighs]. Was it very sad? Or was it a quite joyous occasion?

B&A: Tell you, I don't think we'd thought much about it. You knew you'd got your posting; you knew you'd got to go. And 'course, everybody had to have a travel, a travel warrant to get you there and also the travel details on how to get there. Like mine was, Oldenburg, get up at such and such a time, the lorry would take me to Bremen station; certain train from Bremen to so and so; from some ... and I'd finished up in one place in Soltau. That is when the couple **hmm** carried the, carried the kit for me. And then, I had to get to a certain place; and phone me new regiment; and the lorry came and picked me up from this phone box. Yes, yeah. And it took all day, It did take all day. From 5 o'clock in the morning until about 5 o'clock at night. Yes. **Incredible**. Yes, yes. **What about most** ... but a lot of that was waiting for trains. **Yeah**, I wasn't on the move all the while. Oh, you get to a station, and I'd got to wait an hour, things like that.

A: What about the, the families? So, if the men had been posted elsewhere, and there were families living on the camp, what would happen to the wives and the children?

B&A: They, they, they would still be there, they would still be there. **OK**. And then they had ... I'd always feel sorry for the wives because they had to organise all this, the moving. I don't know whether they had any help from the Army, but they seemed to have all the dealings with the furniture and moving it to where ever they were going to. Yeah. 'Cause the soldiers had gone by then, you see.

A&B: **Fantastic**. Yeah, yeah. So, we have got, erm, one more picture, I think, to look at and that's this picture here.

B&A: Yes, yes, now, that is in a room of two. **Right**. Because me and Jeff Simmons shared that one. And we'd got ... it must have been around Christmas because we have got a bottle of beer on the lockers, look. **OK**. It would have been around about Christmas 1957. So, ... I had a tie on, look.

A: You are looking very smart!

B&A: I know. We, we, we are going off the subject: when, sort of, my father went to the seaside, they always went in waistcoats and ties and the best suit. Sat on the beach with the best clothes on. And that is sort of a throw-off **yeah** because we wore ties.

A: Did you think that you would stand out when walking around Oldenburg in this ... ?

B: No, I don't think so.

- A: ... was that sort of what people were generally wearing?
- B: Yeah, yeah. I remember once, because here, when the traffic lights are on red, you cross over. There, you are not supposed to, are you? You know, it was on red, and I crossed over, and the policeman waving his baton. Keep out of his way a bit. *[Laughter]*.
- A: What were your impress ... looking back over sixty (years), what were your impressions of Oldenburg, looking back at it today as an eighty-year-old, Brian?
- B&A: I, I thought it was a lovely place and I wish that I had gone back and had a look at it. I am too old now. I am not going back now, but I wished I'd gone back and had a look, you know. See how it had changed, like, because the next place I went to, it was more desolate. **Hmm**. You know, as I say, Bergen Belsen camp, Belsen, Bergen and then that was it, there was nothing else.
- A: And in terms of your err understanding of what's going to happen to the Globe now, what do you think about the Globe being rescued from complete ...?
- B: I think, I think, it ought to be rescued, yes. **Yes?** Would it stay where it is in situ?
- A&B: **Yes, yes, it will stay where it is.** Yes, I think it is a good idea. **And the hopefully, it will all be reactivated.** Yeah, yeah. **And the kinds of things you were watching, yeah, yeah, people of the future can watch.** Yeah, yeah, that's true, yeah. **Brian, and on that note, thank you very much.**
- B: Thank you, John.



*Fig. 1. Brian Billingham in one of the offices at Crerar Barracks, with beer bottles on the table, dated by Brian as December 1957*



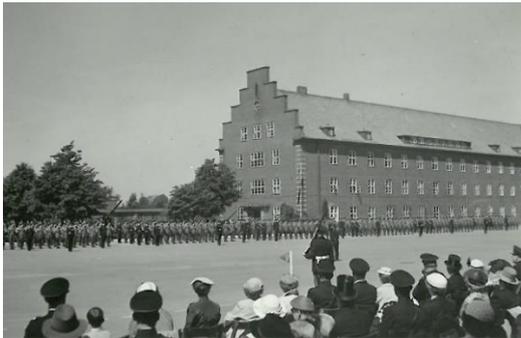
*Fig. 2. Brian Billingham in the centre of Oldenburg in 1957*



*Fig. 3. Brian Billingham with fellow soldier friend, Jeff Simmons from Plymouth, taken in 1957*



*Fig. 4. Reverse of this photo shows a stamp from the photo shop Foto-Kniep, Kurwickstr. 31, Oldenburg*



*Fig. 5. Picture of Queen's Parade at the Donnerschwee Barracks (Crerar Barracks) in Oldenburg, June 1957*



*Fig. 6. Picture of Queen's Parade with marching soldiers at the Donnerschwee Barracks (Crerar Barracks) in Oldenburg, June 1957*



*Fig. 7. Picture taken from audience seating area, capturing wives and children watching the Queen's Parade at the Donnerschwee Barracks (Crerar Barracks) in Oldenburg, June 1957*



*Fig. 8. Photo of Brian Billingham taken at his home in Cradley Heath, July 2018*