

Transcript of 81-year-old Mr. Andrew MacTavish of Buckinghamshire in conversation with Dr. John Goodyear (University of Birmingham / Kulturgenossenschaft Globe e.G.) on Sunday 20 January 2019, 4:30pm (GMT)

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A: Interviewer Dr. John Goodyear (38, DOB: 06.09.1980)  
B: Globe patron Mr. Andrew MacTavish (81, DOB: 28.07.1937)

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A: Hello and a very good afternoon. My name is John Goodyear and I am joined here today by Andrew MacTavish in the county of Buckinghamshire. Hello, Andrew!

B: Hello John!

A: Erm, Andrew, we'll start off erm by looking at what we have got in front of us which is actually a programme of the Globe Cinema Oldenburg, Crerar Barracks, which you supplied to the Globe Trust some months ago. Could you give us a bit of an insight into your experiences with the Globe?

B: Well, the Globe Cinema was absolutely critical to life when I was in 44 HAA (*Heavy Anti-Aircraft*) Regiment. I was in 46 Talavera Battery. And there was very little to do in the evenings in Germany. The NAAFI had a small games room. Occasionally, there were sporting events, but, of course, this was winter, so it got dark fairly quickly. Most of my time there was from November 1956 to May 1957 and, incidentally, it was an extremely cold winter. Our barrack rooms were warm; outside was very cold. The NAAFI, as I said, had a small games room, and we didn't have much money. We were paid 28 shillings a day [*later corrected by the speaker to 28 shillings per week*]. Err, in, the most important thing, I suppose, for most person, was cigarettes, which were a shilling for twenty and we were allowed twenty a day. But, on the whole, there was not much to do. Oldenburg was a fair way away, or a fair walk down the road, err, very few people had a command of German; very few people had the money; and there was still, at the time, some suspicion – this was just after Hungary – and the Germans had thought we should take our guns and charge down to Hungary and start a Third World War. We did not have much to do in the evenings. Err, the cinema was critically important to life. I think everybody had a programme for the cinema at all times. The one I have got in front of me is probably the last one ever, from January 1957. Every night, films were on at 6 o'clock in the evening and 8:30 in the evening. And, there was a change of programme every second day. Err, so, for the sake of argument, Monday 7<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> January, the *Indian Fighter* was on, a single film. Then it changed on Wednesday and Thursday to *An Alligator Named Daisy*, and by the time you get to Friday, you have got two films, err, Friday and Saturday, you have a film and then Sunday, a single film on Sunday, so you could, in the course of the week, go to the cinema four times and erm, to see different films. The cinema cost three shillings, two shillings, one-and-six or six-pence. And, bearing in mind, as I said, we had twenty-eight shilling a day [*later corrected by the speaker to 28 shillings per week*], that was pretty reasonable. Don't forget we were smoking, as I said, twenty cigarettes a day, too, but it was very normal to go to the cinema. It seated about 400, and on a number of occasions, I found it full. I remember one particular occasion I wanted to see a film – I can't remember which one it was – but I went along at 5:30 to find the door was closed and the cinema was full, so I pottered back to my barrack room and came back rather early or the later

performance and got in. But it was not uncommon this. Erm, on the whole, of course, the gunners and the junior ranks went to the front of the cinema and the officers went to the back of the cinema because they had more money than we did. It was, as I said, absolutely critical. You would arrive; there would be a queue outside of people booking in; we would pay our, in my case, normally six-pence or a shilling, more likely six-pence; and we would go into the cinema and would be directed to our seats by ushers. Erm, I can not remember whether they were soldiers. I believe they were totally separate from the artillery, but we were shown to our seats. I am not sure, to this day, whether we smoked or not, but I think we were allowed to. Err, it was all very, very orderly. One film took the usual sort of, about 90 minutes, films were in those days, erm, and we didn't have the long ones we had now. There were normally shown: the news. And I do remember the news being shown because it has come back to me that one of the news items was Elvis Presley. He was recruited into the American army for his service during the time I was over there. He did his basic training in America and this was considered a very good thing by everybody because many of the stars of the pop world managed to get out somehow or another, but Elvis decided he was going to do his bit. Err, he was conscripted into the infantry and he came over. The thing I do, the reason why I remember this news item of Elvis coming over to Germany was that it showed him in uniform with three medals or the three medal ribbons which were greeted with jeers and hoots of laughter because in the British army, you only get a medal if you have done something really very significant, but one of his medals was the fact that he was a trained machine gunner. We hesitated what the other two could have been. I think you got a medal for just arriving in Germany. But, of course, he was well up, well up the hit parade there. Every time we went into the NAAFI, it was normally one of Elvis's Blue Suede Shoes or one of the other ones.

A: Thank you very much, Andrew. Let's turn to the Globe and its uses for other things. Do you recall the Globe being used for other purposes or other functions?

B: On one occasion, we were paraded and we marched to the Globe – normally, of course, we just went as individuals – but we were marched to the Globe and we were filed in to the seats, and we were given a lecture. Unfortunately, I can not remember anything about the lecture except it was, it was a military lecture and we were taken to the Globe as the best place to give this address. But I am sorry, I can't remember what it was about, but all my battery were marched in.

A: And, final question now, Andrew, to round off: what do you think to the actual project itself: first of all that this building is still in existence and still standing and a group of people has come together as volunteers, not just to save it but to bring it into public use?

B: I think it is a quite wonderful idea. As you've gathered, I spent a lot of time while I was over there. It was a bit of a lifesaver in a way as there wasn't, as I have said, very much to do apart from going to the cinema. I look back on it with the most fond memories. And, erm, I am delighted, first, first of all, and amazed that it is in its present condition, and I am delighted that it, and delighted that it is being restored and will have a public use in the future. Wonderful.

A: Thank you very much, Andrew.



Fig. 1. Picture of Andrew MacTavish at the Crerar Barracks in Oldenburg 1957

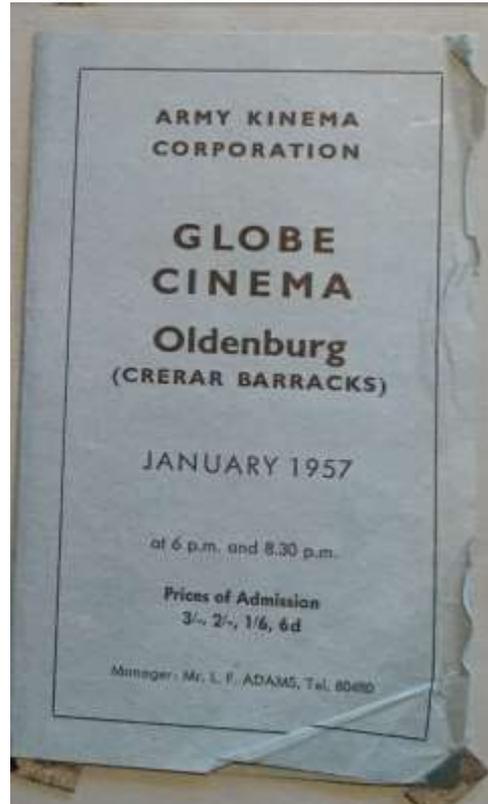


Fig. 2. Raw photo of Globe Cinema programme stuck in Andrew's scrapbook. The programme is dated January 1957



Fig. 3. Christmas Dinner Menu for soldiers stationed on Crerar Barracks, December 1956

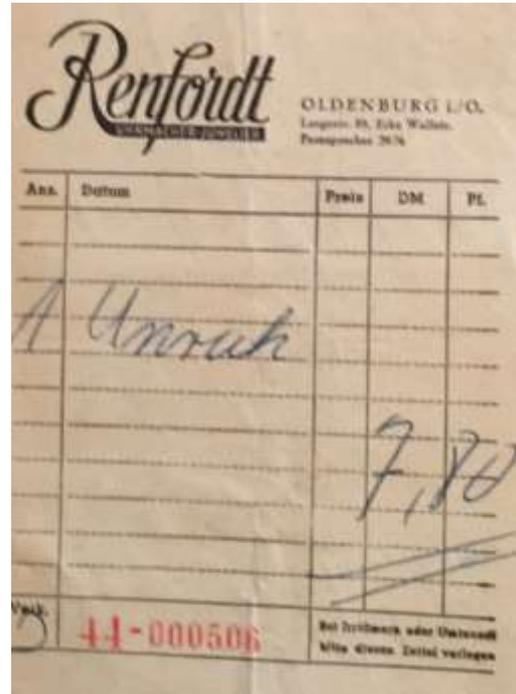


Fig. 4. Receipt for watch repair in Oldenburg

Oldenburg,  
the town in which you are stationed at present as part of H.M. Forces in Europe, is the Capital of the former Grand Duchy of Oldenburg. The town first achieved the status of a City in 1345, but has been mentioned in the documents as far back as 1108, when the first Count of Oldenburg is said to have erected a fortress as protection against his aggressive neighbours. That fortress was situated on exactly the same site that the Castle or "Schloss" (as it is known in German), stands to-day. The most notable personality in the History of Oldenburg, the Count Anton Guenther, was the ruler of this strip of land during the 30years War in the 17th Century. He managed to keep his County out of that War. When he died, Oldenburg came under the rule of Denmark until 1773. A portrait of that gentleman can be found on the wall of an inn in the very heart of the City. In 1676 a great fire, kindled by one stroke of lightning, destroyed the whole town except but a few houses. This explains why there are no really old buildings still standing in Oldenburg. - If you are interested in historical relics, you should visit the Museum, situated in the Castle; you also ought to pay a visit to the Lappan, the spire in Lange Strasse, which belonged to a former Chapel of the Holy Spirit. Another place well worth seeing is the Gertruden Cemetery, situated in the fork between Alexander and Nadorster Strasse, with its old tombstones and tiny chapel, whose murals are a fine and rare example of mediaeval art. You will find rest and quiet in the Schlossgarten opposite the Castle, on the border of the River Hunte - and if you are ever looking for good books or fine offenders, please do re-visit Rudolf Ebel's Bookshop in Schuettingstrasse, where this leaflet was written for you, and where you will be served politely at any hour of the day.

Fig. 5.: Information leaflet handed out to new arrivals to familiarise themselves with Oldenburg, stuck in Andrew MacTavish's scrapbook

Station..... BAOR 25 Date 18-3-1957

\* Insert the designation of the Officer making the payment.

RECEIVED of\* 125 h/B MacTavish

the sum of..... TWO SHILLINGS

in respect of..... SPORTS KIT HIRE CHARGES

£ 2 : 0 : 0

Signature of Recipient.....  
Andrew MacTavish  
for P.R.I.  
Signature of Paying Officer.....

†To be countersigned and dated when the payment is made to a soldier.

Army Book 57;

Date..... 18-3-57

Fig. 6.: Receipt issued to Andrew MacTavish for sports kit hire charges, dated 18 March 1957 at the BAOR 25 station

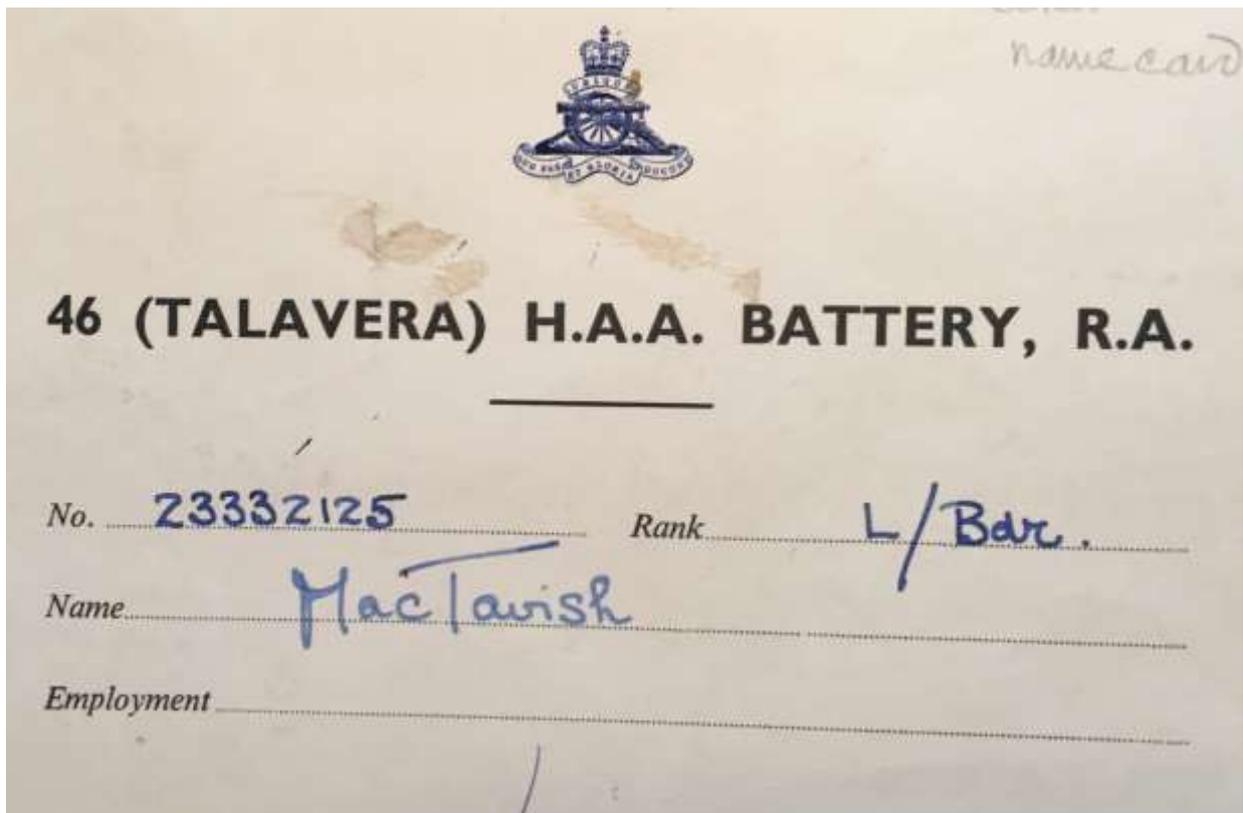


Fig. 7.: Label for Andrew MacTavish's locker in his quarters in Crerar Barracks, Oldenburg



Fig. 8.: Front cover of HAA Regimental Sports 1957, held at Marschweg stadium with Andrew MacTavish competing in one of the sports events

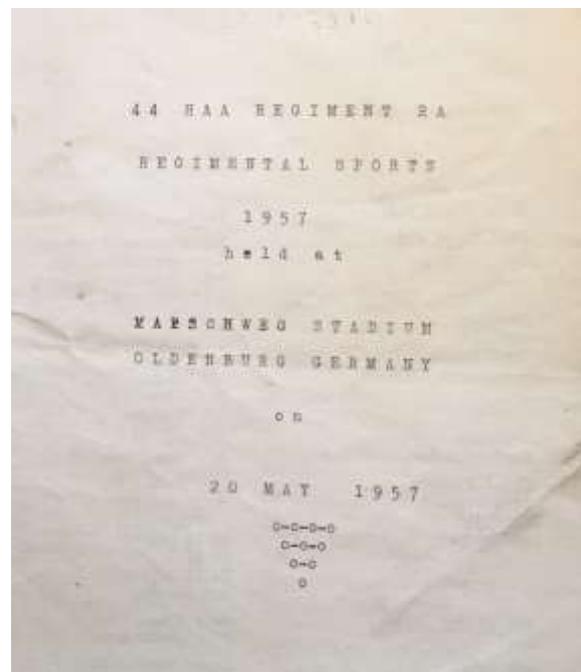


Fig. 9.: Second page of HAA Regimental Sports 1957, held at Marschweg stadium, dating the Sports Day on 20 May 1957



Fig. 10.: Cigarette coupon handed to soldiers for cashing in at the NAAFI in exchange for 80 cigarettes



Fig. 11.: Oldenburg colours

Fig. 12 (below): Account by Andrew MacTavish entitled *Life as a Gunnar in Crerar Barracks – December 1956 and May 1957*

The garrison at Crerar Barracks, Oldenburg, was large. It consisted of two Royal Artillery regiments, a REME workshops, a RAEC unit, an RMP detachment, a RADC section and other minor units. It is extremely difficult to estimate the total number of soldiers on the base. It is even difficult to guess the number of gunners in one HAA Regiment. Two methods of estimation have come up with the figure of 500 men, but this may be wildly wrong.

Why is it so difficult to remember? Our world was tiny. We were individuals living in our own bed spaces. The one place which was “ours” was not a house or a room: it was a 2’6” bed and a 6’ free-standing steel locker. We had no pictures on the wall; we had no personal items on display. Each bed and locker was identical to the next, save for the label on the locker door “Number 23332125. Rank: Lance Bombardier Name: MacTavish A.J.”. When we were in our room, we were sitting or lying on our beds. These were our own, private world. No one else sat on our beds. No one would go to our lockers. Everyone had his own, private, invisible capsule. Larger rooms of 4 to 6 men had a ‘table, barrack room, 5” – plain, wooden, with metal folding legs – and a couple of chairs. A loudspeaker played Radio Bremerhaven all day from Reveille at 6 a.m. to Lights out at 10 p.m.

We were roused at 0600 hrs.. by the Battery Orderly NCO (the ‘Bonco’). We took our sponge bags to the washroom at the end of the corridor and washed and shaved. We went with our roommates the 250 yards over to the cookhouse and had breakfast, returned, swept the room and made our beds, we paraded in our Battery and trained on our equipment in our small groups by Troops. We had our NAAFI breaks, we had our lunches, we returned to our rooms. The six of us on the radar equipment stayed together more or less; we didn’t mix much with our gun detachments. It wasn’t a conscious separation, but we were on the technical side while they were rather more robust. Both parties got on with each other without closeness, or arrogance, or aggression. Our National Service experience taught us all – them and us – to respect other people had different backgrounds and interests, and to be happy to let them get on with them.

I knew and lived with a very small group of people. I did not know the majority of my own Troop, ‘B’ Troop of 46 (Talavera) Battery. I rarely entered other rooms. People who wandered around would be objects of suspicion, and I had no reason to wander. I might speak to others in the washroom or cookhouse, but rarely more than a passing comment. ‘B’ Troop occupied the top floor of the block. I did not know the men of ‘A’ Troop on the middle floor. I did become friends with two members of HQ Troop, two clerks, on the ground floor, but no others. I did not know anyone from the other two Batteries who lived in different blocks. The members of other units might well have been in other countries. 12 LAA Regiment who lived on the other side of

the square and who paraded on the same square might have been Martians for all I knew. And my experience did not differ from that of others.

The army did not arrange much in the way of social or sporting events. At the end of the working day, nothing was laid on. People read magazines, played cards and mouth organs, brewed their own drinks in army mugs with miniature immersion heaters. There was cleaning too: belts and gaiters had to be blanched, berets brushed and cap badges shined, boots polished. There were Duties too, usually once each week: guard duties, cookhouse fatigues, gardening work. These and other instructions were detailed in Daily Part II Orders, posted in the barrack block at 1700 hrs. each day and essential reading.

We were paid 28/0d each week, usually with a standard deduction for 'barrack damages'. Cigarettes were 1/0d for 20 and we were allowed 20 per day. Everyone smoked, so that was 7/0d. of pay. Tea in the NAAFI was 2d per cup with similar prices for other snacks. The cheapest seat in the Globe was 6d. Yes, you could survive financially – but just. And the Globe was a life saver. It transported you away from the daily routine and the orders and the clatter of steel shod boots on concrete floors. Sunday night was especially popular – they had a separate film for Sundays, and Sundays were otherwise excruciatingly boring. You were allowed to go into the town, but few did. To start with, you had to dress in battledress smartly and be viewed at the Guard Room. (Yes, you wore BD to the Globe but you could be less smart and not wear your blanched belt). Then you didn't have much money, you were unlikely to speak German, and most gunners were somewhat wary of the Germans. They had been bought up in the war and many came from bombed areas. Come to that, the majority of older soldiers wore Second World War medal ribbons. The Germans were 'Krauts'. And the Germans were suspicious of the young soldiers, as civilians are the world over: Kipling says: "Oh it's Tommy this, and Tommy that, and kick him out, the brute!" You felt conspicuous in the town. The German army was just being re-formed at the time. At Todendorf Firing Camp, we heard a marching song and a squad of the new German army came marching through the morning mist. "Bloody hell," cried someone. "They're off again!". We were told that "BAOR" now meant "British Army OF the Rhine" rather than "British Army in OCCUPATION of the Rhine". But the shadow remained.

There may have been boredom. Life may have dragged with the only light being the end of one's two years. But there was an ever-present ominous cloud. We were in Germany to offset the Russian threat. If war had been declared, the Heavy Anti- Aircraft units would have been seriously involved. When the Russians went into Hungary in 1956, there was some very real concern that the matter might escalate. It is easy to forget the fears of a nuclear war now. The voluntary Civil Defence organisation ran from 1948 to 1968, teaching civilians how to face nuclear bombing, and magazine articles gave advice ('In the event of a nuclear strike when out in a small boat, get into the water on the opposite side from the detonation and duck under the water. If in a ploughed field, lie between the furrows'). These thoughts were at the back of our minds. Also there were conflicts taking place elsewhere. National Servicemen were dying in the Malayan Emergency and in the fight against the Cypriot EOKA terrorists. Some of us knew people involved. One comfort to us was that it was very unlikely that a Heavy Anti Aircraft unit would be sent to either theatre. Bored we might be, but at least it was likely that we would see our release date coming up.

As far as I was concerned, my six months at Crerar was an immensely valuable experience. I learnt much about my fellow men, and much about good and bad leadership. And then I was sent to Officer Cadet School ...