

Interviewee(s): J. Bruce Cunningham (JBC)	Interviewer(s): Janis Macdonald (JM) Different children asking questions (Child)
Date of Interview:	Ref: EL11-13-1-2
REGION	East Lothian
COUNTY	Haddington
TOWN	Haddington

Running time: 00:00

[Starts mid sentence; noise of children in the classroom in the background]

JBC: ...and of course I soon realised but I didn't realise it was going to take six years to finish, so I never forgot that we lived at the top floor it was Two Brown Street the door was round the corner it's above Shop Smart if you know where that is? I'd parents of course and I had three brothers and a sister, and the sister was related to somebody in this class, called [J.D.].

Unknown contributor: You're a celebrity [J.D.]!

JBC: Anyway I used to have to take her to school because I was a year older I had to take her to school in the old Knox anyway that's where we lived and when War started lots of things changed right away one of the first things that changed was a blackout have you ever heard what a blackout is?

Children: Yeah.

JBC: Tell me?

Child: It's where you have to turn off all your lights 'cause if you have one on the Nazis can see you.

Child: And they'd probably throw bombs at you.

JBC: Well that was to stop people seeing where the bombs would go you see and when that was introduced everything was in darkness no street lighting the cars had to have special lights that were very very dim and only short distance and in the house where I lived there was big shutters because it's an old house and the light was kept completely away and just to make sure there were wardens about not traffic wardens there was air raid wardens an' if they saw any lights shining [?] otherwise the German planes that were flying over [at times] could see where the lights were, probably [?] bombs but one of the theories is

Running time: 02:00

that when they dropped the bombs in Haddington that the troops who were [aiming at] at Amisfield Park were a bit careless and they were heading to drop bombs near there [?] back at sea.

Child: Was your dad in the War?

JBC: My dad was in the fire service and he was on duty virtually every night in Haddington [to be] called out when there was a siren above the county buildings that went whenever there was a raid very very shrill and it went again when it was all clear my dad was in the fire service.

Child: What did you play?

JBC: What did I play?

Child: When you were younger.

JBC: Oh you know I'll come on to I'll tell you about football but when I played football it was a heavy ball and it was big boots and the leather [weighs everything up] and if you headed the ball you got a sore head and the other thing you couldn't do because of the boots you couldn't do what the players do nowadays you couldn't put a curve on it because it was a plastic ball, I'll tell you more about that in a little while anyway another thing after the blackout what happened was food was rationed so everyone was issued with a ration book and you had to go to the shops and get food every week to keep you going, it helped if you were at school 'cause you'd be able to take school lunches that made a difference so that was the other thing that happened with that the other thing was coming to school everyone was issued with a gas mask and you got a little box there was no backpacks then and you had this little box and it was actually it was cardboard but it was painted so the rain didn't affect it and you got that and it was three types of gas mask the one that was worn by children and adults had a thing on the bottom that the air came through purified

Running time: 04:00

it to make it able to breathe you got another one that was a bit smaller with a little piece where you could blow out and the really special one was [about] this size it was for an infant a baby was lying in a cot you could put this baby inside the gas mask so they'd three types o' gas mask and the reason for that was in the First World War Germans used a lot of gas in France and the people weren't sure if [they] were going to get gas dropped so that was it and the thing about being in Haddington was that virtually every night there was bombers crossing Haddington to go to Rosyth dockyard or to Clydebank to bomb the ships and they even tried to bomb the Forth Bridge but they missed it fortunately that's a railway bridge and when they went over the siren went and when they came back it also went but when that happened where I lived in Brown Street there was a stair up and the bottom section of the stair was stone so it couldn't burn it was safe and also it was very substantially built big stones and very often you'll see nowadays when buildings collapse people go in and they try to find out if there's people alive underneath well they've got much more sophisticated

equipment now [they're listening] for sounds they didn't have them then now what we did was the four children my mother went down underneath the stone stair at the bottom no other children in the block and we had a mattress and we went inside and were there for the night until the all clear went and it was like a cave [?] it never occurred to me at the time that it would be safe for anything dropping you but you might never be found again! But that's what we did and that's what caused

Running time: 06:00

me one day to go to school because I'd been awake all night and in the afternoon [quite busy] the teacher asked us to sit with folded arms and I did that and the sun was shining through the window and it was so hot that I fell asleep! Because I'd been awake not only did I fall asleep it was a sound sleep because the next thing I knew the rest of the children had gone to a little session in the gym hall and I still slept so they wakened me up to go home! Anyway I tried to get more sleep after that that was the bombing what happened with the bombing was when the bombers came back from Clydebank I think they must have seen some light because they dropped bombs in Haddington right down Market Street somebody said six and the first one was Greggs Bakers right in the middle of the street in a cobbled street and I can remember seeing the hole big hole an' the little shop at the top of [the lane] near Gibson's shop must have been a cluster of two [?] it was [?] as well and then further down above the chip shop there was a chip shop there there was what was called an incendiary bomb does anybody know what an incendiary bomb is? It's one that doesn't explode into a big bang it -

Child: It causes a little bang it just explodes a little bit.

JBC: What else does it do?

Child: It flames up so it like gets little pieces of fire onto every little bit.

JBC: It sets everything on fire and this bomb went right through the roof of that house and the person in the house in the house heard it and he thought I'd better go and see what that noise was and fortunately it didn't alight or explode and he stepped over it at the door of his house before realising

Running time: 08:00

it was there so it had to be safely removed which it was an' the next bomb was down at the top of Brown Street but I think is it Seventh Restaurant?

JM: Near the Restaurant Number Seven?

JBC: Restaurant Number Seven an' it again was right in the centre of the street an' then the last one was at the corner of [Park Gate] where there's a canopy now with some cars underneath and the whole building on that corner just collapsed and the person in the

house next door because the house next door [?] that flat up the stair but the stair was in that part of the building that was demolished and the person in that house again was very lucky because he went to see what the noise was and he nearly stepped out of his house door onto the stair but the stair wasn't there so [he] was very lucky so that was another bomb that happened, in all of that there was only one, well the story at the time I remember there was one person who was killed and he happened to be on the street he shouldn't have been out really but he got struck by something that was flying from the explosion.

Child: Was he going to get fish and chips?!

JBC: No I don't think so no he wouldn't be allowed, if you were in the fish and chip shop when the siren went you had to stay in the fish and chip shop, not eating fish and chips but stay there!

Child: And did you know a person who went to get fish and chips and he got bombed?

JBC: No.

Child: Where were you when the first bomb hit?

JBC: I was under the stair, I was telling you about the bomb that landed at the top of Brown Street was only eighty yards from the part under the stair where we were sheltering, we didn't hear it because it was all big stones it was well insulated the noise so we didn't know about the danger until we got the all

Running time: 10:00

clear.

Child: What was the most frightening thing you saw?

[...]

JBC: Well somebody said I'll tell you about football, somebody asked about football.

Child: Me.

JBC: Right well this was a month or two after the War started I was playing with some friends in Neilson Park [just the same] where the rugby pitch is now and we were playing football in Neilson Park maybe about a dozen of us with a leather ball with a heavy ball and we heard this noise like an aeroplane and we looked up and we saw this aeroplane coming over from the direction of the school and it wasn't flying very high and it was a German bomber called a Heinkel, but a Heinkel is not as big as the bombers now it was big enough because it would fly to Scotland and brought home -

Child: It only need room for one person.

JBC: Well I think there was more than one they'd have somebody to drop the bomb, the navigator probably anyway the point about the Heinkel was it was being pursued by three planes called Spitfires. You know why they're called Spitfires don't you? 'Cause they spit fire they were firing these all around and we stopped and we looked up and we watched them for ten minutes and then eventually it flew off towards Gifford and we carried on with the football! And it got to the Lammermuir Hills and it was shot down and I think the pilot survived actually, the followin' day which was a Sunday I think most of Haddington and probably

Running time: 12:00

on bicycles cycled away up there to see where it had come down probably trying to get a souvenir.

Child: Has anyone died in your family?

JBC: Died in my family?

Unknown contributor: Do you mean during the War?

JBC: No well no. No we were very lucky. I had uncles in the army two uncles, I had an uncle who was taken prisoner in North Africa and because in North Africa there was two or three campaigns across Libya and [back] and what happened was he was taken prisoner by Germans and Italians and 'cause they were moving about all the time he managed to see in Libya it's such a big country and you got the end of where the line was where they were advancing and [?] he hid under some big empty petrol drums and because [they were] very busy he nearly died because he was dehydrated and burning with the sun and when they pulled away and then the British soldiers came forward he was able to come out he was very ill and had to go to a hospital [injured] to survive but he didn't so we were very lucky.

JM: You were going to speak about ration books as well.

JBC: I mentioned that earlier on the thing about the ration books was at that time there was no supermarket they were all the local shops, the butcher's the baker's they were all busy and they were all people that were well known to the local people and you also had to get something for clothing if you wanted clothing there was an allocation for clothing,

Running time: 14:00

and that was another thing that was rationed anyway but that was the fairest way to do it 'cause there was a shortage an' I can remember the whole of the War I never saw a banana, never saw a banana the whole War, never came in they couldn't get them in too dangerous for the ships.

JM: Did you get any sweeties?

JBC: Well I wasn't worried about the sweets.

JM: *[Laughs]*

JBC: You could get sweets, [if] I got sweets I just gave them to someone. Anyway the other thing was in Haddington there were troops came and they were billeted and the first lot came from Nottingham, course they were called the Sherwood Foresters and they were billeted in the old part of the Knox school where the John Knox statue is and they were here for weeks training and when I was I child my mother used to say because they were away from home she used to say to us, if you pop downstairs in the High Street if there's any young soldiers on their own ask them if they would like to come up and have some supper, which was nice lots of people did that and we made friends that way in fact we then got some who came back after the War to see us which was very nice but one of the sad things about the troops that came here was there was Polish troops came later on and the Polish troops were part of the D-Day invasion of France later but they were based in Haddington and they had two of them were very good footballers they were the best people Haddington Junior had at the time, Peter and John we just called them very very good and the sad thing was that when they were in

Running time: 16:00

Normandy with the invasion they got so far ahead of the others and then - you've heard the term 'friendly fire'? Do you know what friendly fire is?

Children: No.

JBC: Well friendly fire they got so far ahead and the RAF came along thinking they were Germans because they were so far ahead and they dropped bombs and there was lots of them killed which was very very sad, and it still happens that was Polish in Haddington, mostly Amisfield Park.

Child: What was the name of one of your friends?

JBC: Well I remember there was one called Sam [Haiton] he came from somewhere near Nottingham and he and his wife came back to see us after the War actually, another one was called [Armstrong] they were just in the High Street in Haddington talking and I went up to them and said, mum said would you like to come and have supper, and they did.

JM: The High Street would be very different then though because there weren't cars were there because you would play in the High Street? You don't play in the High Street now do you? No you wouldn't dream of it.

JBC: And I'll tell you I played in the High Street because in the cobbles and this was very naughty because of the traffic you got little bits of tar [?] between the cobbles and I used to sit, probably younger than you, and take the tar and make it into a ball and of course [?] my mother used to complain because you had to use [solvent] butter to get it off you rubbed butter and got the tar off that way but it was very very different, the whole High Street was different

Running time: 18:00

the whole town was different, everything was much quieter. I see some hands up, what are you asking? I'm wandering a bit here!

Child: When did the War started for you?

JBC: When did the War - ?

JM: Start for you.

JBC: I lived in the same house in the High Street when the War started and was there I lived there after the War as well. Is that what you were asking?

Child: Where was your dad when the third bomb hit?

JBC: Dad was out on duty with the fire people and he'd be out with the crew 'cause they were called out because of these bombs they were called out and it was more than one crew and he used to the fire station at that time was down Church Street where the old fire engine used to be kept and they had an HQ where they got told where to go and what to do so he would be in one of the [?] we didn't see him because we were under the stair we were in the cave you see? We didn't know anything about it.

[Muffled conversation]

Child: Was there any parks that you played in?

JBC: Well I played in Neilson Park, football that's where [you played] football.

JM: Was Neilson Park dug up for farming

Running time: 20:00

or anything.

JBC: No it's never been dug up and it was the same as it is now it had a slope in it we played football right on the top of it where the rugby pitch is, they had the same small pavilion.

Child: Was the tennis court there?

JBC: That was before the tennis courts I think the tennis courts we played in were up at a place called [?] Terrace away up past Tesco and there was also a tennis court at the West Mill near the football pitch and I think the one in Neilson Park was later on, I know where you mean the side of the pavilion.

Child: Was it scary or anything?

JBC: Scary?

Child: Yeah.

JBC: I was too young to be scared, I wasn't scared I mean after I was thinking about it afterwards I thought if that German in the Heinkel bomber had been in trouble because you've heard of this often they've often got to get down very quickly and I've heard of pilots who are very brave I'm not saying this is what happened here they're very brave and they see a place like this park where they can get down and if they see children playing they won't do it they sacrifice themselves pilots sometimes to avoid causing hazard to other people but I never at the time we were just interested in the Spitfires and the Heinkel and the noise we wanted to see if they could bring it down!

Child: Was your mum a pilot?

JBC: Nobody in our house was a pilot in the RAF, there were places round in East Lothian where - Macmerry and Drem where there was Spitfires and things where it would take off when there was an air raid but none of my family were in it, sorry!

Running time: 22:00

Child: What did you eat in the War?

JBC: What did I eat?

JM: We know you had no bananas!

JBC: You see the thing about being in a family of seven [with] two adults was you got food you could share and you were very restricted in [that you were keen on meat you'd find it very difficult] but generally what happened was my mother would maybe make mince you know lamb mince so you would get that but you wouldn't get things like chops [?] the butcher meat I mean if you went into the butcher it was like being royalty you went to the butcher's shop you've seen it on *Dad's Army* you know he's got some favourites in the butcher shop I think they might have been [that] we never starved we ate well you could always get fish and chips! [?]

JM: How about somebody at the back would you like to ask a question?

JM: Did you miss any days of school [?]?

JBC: At least the half day I fell asleep! But no I don't think so I mean I may have had a cold or something but not because of anything to do with the War.

JM: Did you ever have any air raids when you were actually in school?

JBC: Oh there must have been.

JM: You don't remember what happened?

JBC: You just had to well you got to the stage where you heard a siren [go] and it was very shrill you could hear [?] and generally speaking

Running time: 24:00

apart from that one incident they weren't going to bomb here they were bombing somewhere else, they were crossing it was part of the route you see so we began to think they [they're not going to] bomb here anyway but we just carried on that was the best thing I mean if you would do what you were normally doin' [?] different.

JM: [?] a question at the back, loud voice!

Child: Where did you sleep if your house got bombed?

Unknown contributor: So you mean the houses that got damaged, where did those people go?

JBC: We were under this stone stair but when you go round the corner of Brown Street there's a door and if you go in there there's a stair goes up with a bend in it and that was the stone stair the rest of the building was wood it would have burned or it would have collapsed and because it bent there was an area underneath you could go and get sheltered in and because it was on a curve the whole thing was supported it wouldn't collapse so that's where we were that's where we were when the bomb dropped up at Seven Restaurant did you say?

JM: Number Seven Restaurant yeah.

JBC: I was only eighty yards away but we didn't even hear it because of where we were. Everybody stayed in except that one person I told you that was killed, you knew well just to keep under cover because if a bomb dropped the stones and the bricks and things fly anywhere.

JM: Okay do you want to ask a question?

Child: Do you know any people that worked on the railway?

JBC: Yeah, of course Haddington railway I can't remember when it closed but people worked the railway [?] nearly everybody worked on the railway,

Running time: 26:00

we used to go down to Longniddry [?] but I don't know about anything [?]. No bombs on the actual railway, they wouldn't have any reason to do that.

JM: I think we've maybe just got time for one last question and then [J.D's] class'll need to go back for home time!

JBC: See we were talking about bombing right, see nowadays they've got precision instruments they're very precise you can target a building and you can take it out in these days you couldn't do that you just looked for lights [you had to calculate your speed] altitude and drop the bomb so nobody really knows where the bomb had landed and if they were really trying to bomb Haddington or they were aiming for Amisfield Park, but we were very fortunate.

Mr. Whiteside: [?] you've got a good question, I heard.

Child: Which school did you go to?

JBC: I went to school in Haddington until I left school actually I went to Knox Academy as well but at the time that I went to school I went to primary six at the old building and then you went across at that time to the new school it was built about Nineteen thirty-six so I went to the Knox, played rugby for the Knox, knew all the teachers at the Knox and the teachers at that time nearly all the pupils walked to school because the traffic wasn't [there] it was safer and all the teachers at that time too tended to either walk or cycle the teachers who lived in Haddington cycled but what you found with the teachers was because it was wartime in the primary school they were nearly all female

Running time: 28:00

teachers and in the secondary school the few males there were were all senior males because all the young males were away fighting in the army and I remember there was one actually killed.

JM: Mr. Whiteside am I right in thinking that we'll have to - ?

Mr. Whiteside: We'll have to go back Mr. Cunningham and get our bags and coats on.

End Time: 28:27