

Interviewee(s): Robert Cowe (RC)	Interviewer(s): Shirley Swinton (SS)
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REGION	East Lothian
TOWN/VILLAGE	Macmerry; Kilduff; Ormiston

SUMMARY	<i>Shirley Swinton interviews her brother, Robert Cow, about his life. They discuss his background and the various places he lived after he was born, including Neuhaus in west Germany, Kilduff farm in East Lothian, Scotland, and finally moving to Haddington. They then talk about primary school in Haddington and the various teachers and buildings this involved. After moving on to Knox Academy, Robert talks about being put in the technical class and the lack of information about O-Levels at school. They then discuss leaving school and Robert's apprenticeships as a television engineer and an agricultural engineer, before joining the Royal Marines. Robert discusses the training and selection process of the Royal Marines and the intensity of said training.</i>
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Keywords: Background; Residences; The Army; The Police; Moving to Haddington; Primary School; Knox Academy; The Technical Class; The Eleven-plus; Careers; Leaving School; Apprentice TV Engineer; Apprentice Agricultural Engineer; Joining the Royal Marines; Swimming.

Background – 0h 00m 00s

SS: This is Shirley Swinton, it's Tuesday the 10th of September, 2019. Today I'm interviewing Robert Cow, who is my brother, in his house in [REDACTED], Ormiston. Robert, would you like to start by introducing yourself: date of birth, age, and tell me any places that you've lived in?

RC: Em, my name is Robert Ian Cow, as we've said. I'm sixty-four years old – my sixty-fifth birthday is next month. I've lived in Germany, where I was born, west Germany... And then East Lothian most of my life. Stayed in Penicuik for a short time which is in Midlothian but returned back to East Lothian. I was born in Germany in October 1954 and at that time Germany was still classed as a British-occupied country and there was still rationing involved. And my mum and dad, who were living in Germany at the time, because my dad was a sergeant in the 16th/5th Lancers at the time and my mum was staying in married quarters. Not in the camp though because he was a senior NCO, he was allowed to live off camp.

SS: Mm? Didn't know that.

RC: So, they lived in a flat in Neuhaus, Number 11 Kaiser Wilhelm Strasse in Neuhaus which is near Paderborn, I believe. I was born in Rinteln which was a small town but it had the British Military Hospital there, so.

Residences – 0h 02m 08s

SS: So, were you born in the-?

RC: I was born in the British Military Hospital and apparently, we stayed there for two and a half years, mebbe. I don't have any recollection at all... Em, of there. The furthest back I remember is we went to live with my dad's auntie and her husband.

SS: And who was that?

RC: In a farm cottage in Kilduff in East Lothian.

SS: Who- who was the auntie?

RC: Beanie.

SS: Auntie Beanie?

RC: Auntie Beanie. Auntie Robena.

SS: And Pim?

RC: Pim.

SS: So, you stayed with them in Kilduff?

RC: Aye.

SS: And where is Kilduff?

RC: Kilduff is between- it's on the backroad between Haddington and Athelstaneford. It's on the left-hand side driving towards Athelstaneford and it was owned by quite a famous farmer, Mr Miller. It's quite famous.

SS: Mm. So, was that the farm?

RC: That was the farm. So, we stayed there because...

SS: So, was Dad still in the army?

RC: No.

SS: Or had he left?

RC: He had left- I think he had left the army.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And I can't remember if he was- or he had applied to join the police and was waiting for, obviously, to join and then obviously get a- hopefully get a police house.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And because of that they wouldnae automatically get a council house.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: In Haddington, where they wanted. He may have still been in the army at that time but after that we moved to Buckhaven in Fife.

0h 04m 06s

SS: Mmhm? So, before we move to Buckhaven, can I just ask you a couple things?

RC: Yeah.

SS: You said Athel-stan-ford?

RC: Yeah.

SS: How do local people say that?

RC: Ail-shin-ford.

SS: Ail-shin-ford.

RC: Yeah, Ail-shin-ford.

SS: Yeah.

RC: And my granny and granddad stayed in Athelstaneford.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Which is mebbe a couple o miles along the road from the farm.

SS: Uhuh, and I believe they were newly built council houses-

RC: They were.

SS: -that they moved into in Glebe...?

RC: Crescent.

SS: Crescent.

RC: That's right, and they had stayed in what was known as 'the Huts'.

SS: Mmhm?

RC: On the outskirts of Athelstaneford. Now, I believe these were old army huts from the time that there was a naval air station at Drem. It was a naval air station. There was a RAF Station at Fenton Barns and I think most of the personnel lived in the old-style army barracks.

SS: Right.

RC: Still. And they had been converted intae, or divided up intae, houses.

SS: Houses.

RC: And they had, I think, had stayed there.

SS: Yeah.

RC: Before they moved into Athelstaneford.

SS: I think I've seen something that was- that had Dad's address on it and it was, I think it was Number 7 The Huts.

RC: Yeah.

SS: Yeah, uhuh.

RC: Aye. I don't- I don't know why, I don't know where they stayed before. My dad was born in Dunbar, or should I say our dad was born in Dunbar, and- but I'm not sure where he lived or how long they lived there and why they went to Athelstaneford.

0h 06m 02s

SS: Mmhm.

RC: I know that, em... My granddad had worked with Thomas Sherriff and companies in Dunbar and he was actually the agricultural engineering foreman.

SS: Mmhm, is that John Cow?

RC: John Cow. He had stayed there- he had worked there but I don't know, ye know, where they lived between Dunbar and then getting the house at Athelstaneford.

SS: Ok. So... They're an established East Lothian family?

RC: Yes.

SS: They stayed in East Lothian. And you've moved back with Mum and Dad, stayed at Kilduff Farm, awaiting news that Dad joined the police-

RC: Police.

SS: -and then you moved to Buckhaven.

RC: Yeah. They- apparently, he had wanted to join the police in East Lothian.

SS: Mmhm?

RC: And- but the system they worked in those days were that people from East Lothian who joined the police were sent to work in West Lothian.

SS: Right.

RC: And people who joined the police in West Lothian were sent to work in East Lothian. The reason being, apparently, was, obviously, they would go were they were needed but they would work outwith areas where people knew them.

SS: Ok. Right, I understand that.

RC: I think that was the main reason.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And at the time, that Dad wanted to join the police in East Lothian, there were no vacancies in Lothians and Peebles constabulary when he wanted to join the police. So, his next option was he joined Fife constabulary. I'm no sure- quite sure o the date.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: But it has to be round about late 1955.

SS: Yeah, that's- you were born in 1954.

The Army – 0h 08m 00s

RC: 1954, aye. Well, two- well, no two years- no, that would be wrong. It would be if I was born in 1955, it would have to be 1956.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And I always remember him saying that his... His application to join the police was slightly delayed because of the Suez crisis.

SS: Oh, right.

RC: Because he said that he had information that he might have been recalled to the colours.

SS: Oh right.

RC: For the Suez crisis.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And being a senior NCO, he fully expected to go back-

SS: Right.

RC: -into the army but however, he didn't because Suez was over very quickly.

SS: Mmhm, because Dad didn't do national service.

RC: No.

SS: He voluntarily joined the army.

RC: He voluntarily joined. He voluntarily joined, I think, when he was seventeen.

SS: Right.

RC: And I think at that time national service started when you were eighteen. It could be delayed up until you were mebbe, say, twenty if you were in higher education or learning a trade. But he opted to go when he was seventeen because I think most of the work- there wasnae much work in East Lothian at that time apart from farm work, some factory work and I don't think he really wanted to go into factory work. So, he volunteered when he was seventeen and he joined an English regiment for some reason because he wanted to join the Royal Scots Greys, which was a Scottish cavalry regiment but there was no vacancies.

SS: Och, not much luck wi the vacancies.

RC: No, no.

SS: I remember Mum told me and I don't- it was just a story she told me that he didn't want- well, that he didn't want to wear a kilt.

RC: Aye. Well-

SS: But I don't know, that was just something that she said.

RC: Yeah, that's highly possible because I have never, ever seen ma dad in a kilt.

The Police – 0h 10m 02s

SS: No.

RC: Never. And I would probably say that would be right. And if he was in the recruiting office and they said 'yes, Royal Scots Greys, yes, there's a place for you. Now, ye go through there and get measured for yer kilt', he wouldav said no *[laughter]*.

SS: So, you're in Buckhaven.

RC: So, we're in Buckhaven. That was his first police posting and we stayed in a one-bedroom flat above a pub in Buckhaven, near the- near the seaside. I remember the seaside and trains, steam trains, passing by the house or the flat, down the bottom at the sort of yard.

SS: Mmhm?

RC: And he- or he worked in Buckhaven which was quite a rough mining area at the time.

SS: Right.

RC: And he was waiting to get a police house and... One o the reasons why he left the police is because the police house never materialised.

SS: Ahh.

RC: He kept getting promised...

SS: Uhuh?

RC: A police house in Kirkcaldy, or to work in the single-man station in either in Cupar or St Andrews.

SS: Gosh.

RC: And it never ever came and the reason why he left is one, it had very poor wages, the police at that time.

SS: Mmhm, mmhm.

RC: And because he stayed up above a pub, anytime there was trouble, they came up the stairs to get Dad to show them out the pub. And he says, 'this cannae go on, ken, I'm working twenty hours a day' but he was expected to do that by his senior officers.

SS: Yeah, mmhm.

RC: And they refused to move him and he just... He just got fed up wi it and incidentally, I mean, one of the men who he joined the police with and who he was on the beat with, Dad later became the chief constable of.

0h 12m 15s

SS: Mmhm. Mr...

RC + SS: Moody.

RC: Mm.

SS: Yeah, I remember him talking about that.

RC: Aye.

SS: One of the things that Mum told me... That he also left the police because, you mentioned, they didn't get paid enough.

RC: Aye.

SS: That there was a poor wage and some people were actually taking jobs on the side...

RC: Yeah.

SS: Which they weren't supposed to do but it was to earn more money, and she was pregnant with me.

RC: That's right. Yeah.

SS: So, they felt that they couldn't cope...

RC: Aye, that's right.

SS: Basically.

RC: I can vaguely remember ma uncle Henry coming through with auntie Alice. Cannae remember John at the time but I can remember uncle Henry coming through and...

SS: And that's Dad's brother, Henry Cow?

RC: Yeah. He got him a job wi Dalkeith Transport as a lorry driver.

SS: Right, ok.

RC: Now, that would have to be roond about late 1958, early 1959 because you weren't born then.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: But the- driving a long-distance lorry from sort of Scotland to London was sometimes three times the wages of a police officer at the time.

SS: Wow.

RC: And it wasnae until the 1960 Royal Commission that the police... Got the wages that they deserved.

SS: So, can you remember- can you remember... He's got this job with Dalkeith Transport so he must've moved-

RC: Yeah.

SS: To where?

RC: ...Sidegate.

SS: In Haddington?

RC: In Haddington. He moved to Sidegate in Haddington with my mum's- or our mum's mother and father, and they had a two-bedroom flat... And we moved in there and we stayed in the big bedroom at the front.

Moving to Haddington – 0h 14m 14s

SS: So, that was along from the Recky? The Recreational Club?

RC: From the Recky, the Recreational Club.

SS: In Haddington.

RC: That's right.

SS: Right, ok.

RC: It was Number 30.

SS: Oh, that's- that rings a bell, yeah.

RC: Uhuh. And Dad travelled. I remember Dad travelled from... Haddington to Dalkeith. He had an old matchless 350 motorcycle that he drove there and back. And then I remember- the other thing I remember about Sidegate is my nana taking me to- up to the Vert Hospital.

SS: Oh right.

RC: To see Mum.

SS: Uhuh?

RC: And you.

SS: Oh.

RC: But we werenae allowed in but we stood across the A1 on the grass verge and Mum came to the window with you and waved.

SS: So, why weren't you allowed in?

RC: I don't know.

SS: Oh.

RC: I don't know. I don't know. And although, I mean I would be about, what four and a half?

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Four and a half.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: I remember having to walk from Sidegate aw the way up to the Vert Hospital every other day to see Mum and you at the window.

SS: So, that would be quite a walk from Sidegate, up the High Street...

RC: Up the High Street.

SS: Up Aber-

RC: Aberlady-

SS: Court Street, Aberlady Road.

RC: Aye, right up.

SS: To the Vert.

RC: To the Vert.

SS: Which is now flats.

RC: Aye, and back down again.

SS: Wow.

RC: I can remember that because... I just didnae understand at the time who I was waving tae [laughter]... 'There's yer mum, ken', ye know? Oh aye, right. And then, shortly thereafter you arrived in the bedroom...

Primary School – 0h 16m 06s

SS: Aw, right.

RC: And we couldnae get to sleep.

SS: [laughter] Ah, sorry. So, it'd be a bit crowded.

RC: Aye.

SS: So, what happened after that?

RC: I'm no very sure how long we stayed there but ma mum and dad got a flat- a house, a council house in Carlyle Gardens.

SS: Was that a flat? I think you're right; it was a flat. I remember that.

RC: It was a flat, aye. It was a block o four.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: We were lower right.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: Number 28.

SS: Wow, that's an amazing memory you have.

RC: 28 Carlyle Gardens.

SS: And that's, eh... Still there?

RC: That's still there.

SS: That's at Sidegate, of course.

RC: Aye, yeah, it's still there. We stayed there, em... For a few years, cause I started school from there.

SS: Mmhm?

RC: And... It sounds silly at this time but Mum took me a couple of times to the school.

SS: Mmhm?

RC: And then after that I went myself.

SS: You walked yourself, oh yeah?

RC: Which seems to be what everybody done then.

SS: Absolutely, yep. This is where the school is and Carlyle Gardens is quite a distance from...

RC: It is.

SS: That would be Haddington... Well, what was it?

RC: It was the old... No, no it was-

SS: What was primary one?

RC: It was- primary one was in-

SS: The new building.

RC: -the old Knox.

SS: The old Knox Institute?

RC: No, no, the... Aye. At the front bit, right?

SS: Where the retirement homes are now?

RC: Aye, well, the front of that, you know where the wooden classroom in the middle o the playground was?

SS: Right, that's the public school.

RC: Aye. Public school.

SS: Right, uhuh.

RC: Round the corner frae there, primary one and two were in that side on- where the social work building is.

0h 18m 05s

SS: Social work building? Where- which is now Peartree Nursery?

RC: Aye, well...

SS: Right. So, what you're actually talking about is Haddington Public School-

RC: School.

SS: -which is at the back of the Knox Institute.

RC: Knox Institute, yeah.

SS: So, there.

RC: I went there first.

SS: So, I'm just drawing a quick diagram-

RC: Aye.

SS: -so we know we're talking about the same place.

RC: Aye.

SS: So, there's Meadowpark.

RC: Uhuh.

SS: As you travelled south on Meadowpark, heading towards the Tyne direction...

RC: Uhuh, uhuh.

SS: The- there was a small house...

RC: Yeah.

SS: On the left.

RC: The left, yeah.

SS: Which was social work building.

RC: Yeah.

SS: Which is now the Peartree Nursery.

RC: Peartree Nursery.

SS: And then you're talking about, there was a path...

RC: There was a path along there, it took you into the...

SS: Into the primary one?

RC: Primary one and primary two. Although, you could go right round the whole school.

SS: Yes.

RC: But we weren't allowed to.

SS: The playgrounds were connected?

RC: Yes, aye.

SS: Oh, right. Yeah.

RC: And then after primary one, we moved across to what would be a new school then. It was Haddington Infants, I think.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: And we moved from, I think, primary one or two there and then in primary three we went intae... It's the one ye see from the road.

SS: Uhuh, it's referred to... Or latterly referred to as 'the Annex' but it was the infant school.

RC: School.

SS: -it became the infant school.

RC: Infant school.

SS: That modern- well, we would call it a modern brick building.

RC: Aye.

SS: Nineteen- sort of...

RC: Aye, it would be nineteen...

SS: Well, has to be the late fifties.

RC: Aye, well, the houses on Carlyle- the houses on...

SS: One, two...

RC: Caponflat Crescent then, we moved intae in 1960 were built in 1955 or '56.

SS: Yeah.

RC: So, possibly that school would've been built along the same time.

0h 20m 02s

SS: So, you're in there, you're in the old building for primary one-

RC: Yeah.

SS: -and primary two-

RC: Primary two.

SS: -you move across to the new brick building wi the big glass windows.

RC: Yeah, glass windows.

SS: For primary three.

RC: That was primary three. And then, after primary three, we moved back to across the road.

SS: Right. Ok. Back to this building here-

RC: Yeah.

SS: -which was Haddington Public School.

RC: Public School.

SS: So, later when King's Meadow was built, Haddington Public School and Haddington Infant School became Haddington Infant School.

RC: School, right.

SS: And the P4s went to King's Meadow.

RC: Aye.

SS: But... You would've gone to primary seven in the Knox Institute.

RC: Aye, in the Knox Institute, yeah. Well, we stayed-

SS: Or maybe even primary six, as well.

RC: Well, we went to primary four, we stayed in the same classroom two years.

SS: Mmhm?

RC: Ken, four, five was across further along the school in the corner was Miss Miller's classroom.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: We had Doris Young, Miss Young, for primary four and five... No, four, and then Miss Miller for primary five and then six and seven was Doris Young, two classes in the- where she was wi Miss Cardinal... Was it Miss Cardinal?

SS: I don't know. I remember Doris Young but not from primary school because interestingly she began- became a French teacher at the Knox.

RC: Oh really? Did she?

SS: Uhuh, yeah, yeah. So, who was your first teacher? Can you remember your first teacher?

RC: Miss Montgomery.

SS: Miss Montgomery? She was also my first teacher.

RC: Was she really?

SS: Uhuh.

RC: Aye, I didnae know that.

SS: Uhuh, yeah.

RC: Miss Montgomery, I'm sure Miss Montgomery, we had her twice, primary one and two.

0h 22m 03s

SS: Oh right.

RC: I think. And then I cannae remember who it was in primary three... When we moved to the Annexe, I cannae remember who that was.

SS: Can you remember who the headteacher was?

RC: ...No.

SS: When I started school in, I think it'd be 1963 or '64, it'd be Mr Murdie, was the head... Well, no, it was Miss Petrie.

RC: It was Miss Petrie and I'll tell ye, Miss Petrie, at the time... When we were in one and two Miss Montgomery was there and then Miss Petrie was next door.

SS: Right.

RC: And then Miss Stead was further down the corridor.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And I cannae mind anything else. So, Mr Murdie didnae appear until we were in probably primary- well, I would be in primary, ooh... Five, or six.

SS: Yeah.

RC: Five, which that would be about right cause you'd be-

SS: Start school, cause she was the headteacher of the infant school and when I went to the Haddington Public School...

RC: Mmhm.

SS: Mr Murdie was the headteacher.

RC: Mmhm.

SS: And Mr Bruce, there was a Mr Bruce-

RC: Yes, Ken Bruce.

SS: -who was the depute.

RC: Aye, Ken Bruce.

SS: Mm.

RC: He stayed up...

SS: Aberlady Road?

RC: Aberlady Road.

SS: Yeah, cause you used to see him walking down.

RC: Walking down, aye.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: That's right.

SS: Right. So, school.

RC: Uhuh.

SS: Any other memories of school?

RC: Em, I quite liked school.

SS: Did ye?

RC: I did, I liked school.

SS: What did ye do at lunchtime?

RC: Well, it was a combination... Sometimes I had school dinners.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Now, I think I had school dinners but I cannae remember you being there at school dinners.

0h 24m 08s

SS: Uhuh.

RC: Right, so, I don't know if you were at the school then when we had school dinners.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: School dinners werenae bad. They were awright. Em, cause on a Monday morning, ye had to take... It was... I took seven and six pence.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Right? Three half-crowns because it was five shillings for the dinners.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And the other two and six went intae a bank book that the teacher had.

SS: *[laughter]* I remember that.

RC: And I didnae ken what happened to that book.

SS: What, to the money *[laughter]*?

RC: To the money *[laughter]*. I've never seen that bank book since, so I don't know what happened to that.

SS: I can remember it was a TSB.

RC: Aye, it was.

SS: Because there was a- it had a cover and it had- it was a sort of buffy colour and there was a wee boy or girl and walking across stepping stones-

RC: That's right, aye.

SS: -and the stepping stones were coins.

RC: Aye, that's right and I can remember we got to fill the money in and count it up.

SS: Wow. Oh, that's quite responsible. We just gave it to the teacher.

RC: Aye, no it's-

SS: I can just remember primary one.

RC: It was- I can remember doing that wi Miss Miller and I remember that distinctly wi Miss Miller... Because she would hand the pile oot to each row o desks.

SS: Uhuh?

RC: And they were handed back and you had to check you got the right one... And then, how much are you putting in? Some people put more in and there were some families there who didn't put any in.

SS: Well, I was just wondering about that because I suppose it's an assumption that you make as a child that you think that everybody's doing that.

RC: Aye, everybody-

SS: And you think, what a good system but then...

RC: I remember there was two or three kids who sat round about me who didn't have a bank book.

SS: Aw, yeah, that's quite hard.

Knox Academy – 0h 26m 00s

RC: But I didnae think...

SS: You wouldn't know.

RC: Naw, I didnae think why, at the time.

SS: No, no, no.

RC: But I remember that you had tae fill it in and count it up and it's old pounds, shillings and pence. And when it went back up the front, Miss Miller would sit and check them all while she were doing your work and it would get thrown back at you cause it was wrong.

SS: *[laughter]* Can you imagine that? Wow. Aw, there's a memory. So, you're at school, you enjoy school.

RC: Uhuh. I did, I enjoyed school. Em...

SS: Where did ye go after primary after school?

RC: After primary school, I went to the Knox Academy across the road and went into T1, the classroom was called. Wasnae quite good enough to get into the B class but I was too clever to go into C class.

SS: *[laughter]* Oh well, there ye go.

RC: Aye, but it was technical class.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: You were expected to take technical subjects.

SS: So-

RC: That's why it was T.

SS: Is that from first year?

RC: Yeah.

SS: And was that boys and girls?

RC: Boys and girls.

SS: Oh right.

RC: But the technical things that the girls got-

SS: Uhuh?

RC: -was... Cooking- em, cooking... I can't... Home economics, I think, is what they called it.

SS: Mhm.

RC: Cooking, home economics. I can remember distinctly on the ground floor in one of the buildings at the Knox Academy, there was a living room.

SS: Yes.

RC: And a kitchen.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: And we used to see the- no, if we're... Not in the classroom for some reason, but ye used to see the girls Hoovering and tidying up and thinking, ken, 'ugh, what a cushy number' [laughter].

SS: [laughter] You could've said that and suggested a swap. So, I remember that. It was still there but- when I went to Knox but I didn't use it. Clearly [laughter]. But it was-

The Technical Class – 0h 28m 06s

RC: No, no. No, I mean, I think the girls hated it.

SS: Ah?

RC: Aye, aw the girls hated it. A lot of them wanted to, ken, used to say they wished they could come to woodworking. Ken, learn how to use a saw and hit nails wi a hammer or... I mean, we got taught welding and cutting, em... Cutting bits o metal up and making stools and things, and it's almost like as if we were part of a production line of- to go into the local factories because...

SS: Ahh, right.

RC: The guys were taught – no the guys, I'm saying – the boys, we were taught tae use big mechanical saws, drills. I remember Tommy Wood who was in our class, he had long hair, he was one of the few kids that had long, long hair, and he leaned over a pillar drill... Drilling a [laughter]... Drilling a [laughter]... hole... And the drill grabbed a hold [laughter]...

SS: Oh no.

RC: [laughter] The drill- it grabbed a hold of him and it ripped the biggest lump of hair and scalp.

SS: That's horrible.

RC: Aye, absolutely. And of course, there's no proper safety guards, as you would find in even the basics nowadays and it was Mr Crombie who was the woodwork teacher... Trying to think who the... The metalwork teacher was. But anyway, a massive scream went out and Tommy's lying on the floor, and honestly, the blood was everywhere.

SS: Aww.

RC: And what I remember is... This big lump o hair still spinning round in the drill... And it still spun round and he's lying on the ground absolutely screaming. The blood was everywhere. And we got ushered out, everybody out into the playground and they obviously had to get an ambulance to take him away.

0h 30m 12s

SS: Aw, dear.

RC: And I... You know, I was a friend of Tommy for many, many years and we often spoke about that in later years.

SS: So, right, so, the girls are in the homecraft flat-

RC: Yeah, yeah.

SS: -learning how to Hoover or learning how to cook.

RC: Aye.

SS: The boys are in technical classes-

RC: Yeah.

SS: -learning how to saw and drill and metal-

RC: Saw and and weld and drill, and later on it actually felt like possibly- coming time o year, I was quite lucky because I done well in the technical class, I got moved up into the B class.

SS: Mmhm?

RC: And worked pretty hard and I got first in the class in the B class and I was getting moved into an A class...

SS: Uhuh?

RC: But the opportunity to leave school came.

SS: Right. Well, just before you leave school, can I ask you when you were learning all this practical stuff, in the technical class were you- what was the rest of the curriculum like? Were you still learning writing, reading...?

RC: Aw, yeah, aye yeah. This- this is...

SS: Geography?

RC: Yeah, yeah, we got- it was just normal except the technical subjects were in place of foreign languages... Because in the B class – a few of my friends were in the B class, I had a couple in the A class as well – but they got taught French and German.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: And the periods that they were getting taught French and German-

SS: Ah, right, ok.

RC: -we were away doing technical drawing, making stools.

SS: So... Right, ok. So, that's how it was but how was it decided that you'd be in a T class? What kind of assessment-?

The Eleven-plus – 0h 32m 04s

RC: The Eleven-plus.

SS: Oh, the Eleven-plus, ok.

RC: The Eleven-plus, apparently.

SS: Right.

RC: I remember the Eleven-plus being- it was held on a particular day and everybody in the whole- everybody who was going to the high school was getting-

SS: That'd be in primary seven, then?

RC: Primary seven.

SS: Right, ok.

RC: So, there was two primary sevens. Like there was two primary fives, two primary sixes and two classes in primary seven. Doris Young, as we've spoke about and Miss Cardinal, her name was. So, Miss Cardinal's class was a sorta clever primary sevens, where Doris Young had the some were clever, and some no so clever and some in between.

SS: So, even in primary seven you were aware that, you know, there's a clever class and a not so clever class?

RC: Aye, yeah.

SS: Aw.

RC: Aye.

SS: How did that do for people's self-esteem, I wonder?

RC: Em...

SS: Or did they know? Well, you must've known cause you're saying it.

RC: Well, we, aye, did know because I mean, there was likes of Norma Lyle, Sandra Hastie whose dad had a farm, Fiona Kerr, they were in- no, Fiona Kerr was in my class but Sandra Hastie, a farmer's daughter, was in the other class and two or three others who... How can- how would you class them? How would you say you thought... You thought they were cleverer than you, put it that way.

SS: Right, uhuh.

RC: Because it turned out some o them werenae. Some o them werenae [*laughter*].

SS: Well [*laughter*].

RC: But there was a definite distinct 'they're destined to go to the As and Bs class'.

0h 34m 00s

SS: Oh right.

RC: And Doris Young's class is going to be the Ts, the Cs and the Ds.

SS: Wow.

RC: And a couple of kids from Doris Young's class, my class, did go straight into the B class from the Eleven-plus. My marks, apparently, I remember my mum said 'ye should've, ye only needed a- so-many more marks and you'd have been in the B class... [*laughter*] And you could've been getting taught French or German' and... It didnae bother us at the time because we were quite excited because we had already been round the school.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: Saw the workshops which, ye know, yer talking about an eleven-year-old kid looking at these huge saws, drills, welding [*laughter*]... Forge fires. They're actually going to let us, ken, ye know, loose...

SS: Play.

RC: Play, aye, play wi the stuff. Aye, loose with it.

SS: Learn, sorry.

RC: Aye, aye. But, I mean, it was the same with the chemistry.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: I mean, when I moved- I didn't get much chemistry, we got basic biology for being in the T class.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Em, basic biology... Physics and chemistry were just, meh, you're there.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: There's a Bunsen burner, ken, hold that, burn that, see how that went blue. But when we moved into the- or when I moved into the B class, it suddenly became a bit more, mm, I suppose serious you could say because a huge amount of more homework.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: A lot of experimentation in the chemistry and, ken, having to actually go to the school library and find out things for yourself or go to the library in Haddington because they were asking you things that... Ye know, I couldnae imagine going home and asking my mum or my dad, ye know, what's the composition of, ken, sulphuric acid?

0h 36m 04s

SS: Uhuh. Can you help me with the periodic table, please?

RC: Aye, aye. And find out why, ye know, magnesium burns so high.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: So, ye had to go away and find it yourself. (I'll need to open the window a bit.)

SS: It's quite hot, yeah.

RC: It is. That... I was lucky...

[dog barking]

He's likely barking cause o this, I think. But luckily, Mum, my mum, or our mum, was a great reader.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And to ask to go to the library was great.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Because, I suppose, if it hadnae been for her love of books, I don't think I would've had the love of reading.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And the love of actually going to a library and looking something up.

SS: And finding out.

RC: And finding out.

SS: Oh, well that's good.

RC: And then, aye, I mean, aye, school was- it was fine. It was nothing... Nothing dramatic really about it. The only thing it... I look back on it now, I remember just before I got first in the class for being in B class and I was going to get moved up to the A class and they were talking, or the teachers, the form teachers at the time, were talking about what you're gonna take next year for O Levels.

SS: Mmhm, O Grades.

RC: O Grades.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And, at the same time, the careers... Em, ye know, when ye got the careers teacher there and then there was people coming in. The jobs that were available for somebody like me...

SS: Uhuh?

RC: Ye know, a sorta fourteen, fifteen-year-old taking an apprenticeship in anything, there was so many jobs. There was jobs for men in Kilspindie, the woollen mill.

Careers / Leaving School – 0h 38m 08s

SS: Right, ok. In Market Street, yeah?

RC: In Market Street, yeah. The Bermaline Mill, engineers there. Lots and lots o different jobs in Ranco's which the factory-

SS: Which is Lemac's now.

RC: And which is Lemac's now.

SS: Up Hospital Road.

RC: Yeah. You could go there and take... You would take a test there and they would tell you if you were going to be a winder or a machinist or something. But I mean, the opportunities to get jobs were... And the same, a lot o boys and girls in my year both the T and the B class-

SS: Uhuh?

RC: -left school.

SS: Right.

RC: Because there was a chance-

SS: That there were jobs, yeah.

RC: There were jobs there.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: And there was a chance of earning money.

SS: Right.

RC: Nobody really... Sorta explained what significance getting O Levels would have done.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: Nobody said that.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: Aw that was said was if ye take an O Level in- well, I loved history and geography, em, really, I still do love history. Em, I was pretty rubbish at maths but I would have to- I think I probably would've scraped through. English, mm, well, I was- it was hard because it was... I think it was because who the teacher was; she made it really hard [*laughter*]. That was Miss Lyle.

SS: Oh, I remember Miss Lyle.

RC: Wee Jeanie Lyle, aye.

SS: Jeanie Lyle, uhuh.

RC: Aye. Although, at the time possibly, ken, we were thinking she made it hard, it was probably us just being thick.

SS: Well, mebbe not, mebbe not, that's...

RC: But there was no significance placed on the need for O Levels.

SS: What are these for?

RC: Yes.

SS: Aye, what are they for?

RC: Nobody said. What I do remember them saying as the people who want to be, eh... Doctors, pilots...

0h 40m 06s

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Dentists, architects...

SS: Mmhm, highfliers.

RC: Highfliers. You'll have to get O Levels or you won't get these jobs.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Yous lot [*laughter*]... You've got a job, away ye go [*laughter*]. And that's how it felt like but we were quite happy at that bit. Later on in life, I'd thought I wish somebody had actually explained that to me.

SS: Yeah, I think that comes down to Mum and Dad, we were working class people-

RC: Aye, aye.

SS: -and Mum and Dad's attitude was: ye work.

RC: Ye work.

SS: Ye work.

RC: Absolutely.

SS: And they didn't have anything to do with an academic life, ye know.

RC: No, no.

SS: They were workers and...

RC: Aye.

SS: And perhaps having parents that were academic-

RC: Academic.

SS: -or were professional-

RC: Aye.

SS: -they're able to talk about that with their children.

RC: Aye.

SS: Whereas, working class people...

RC: Aye. No, I mean, em... I... I wouldnae say I regret, and I never try to say regret, but I wish somebody had actually said, look, if ye get these O Levels ye might be able tae- ye'll need to stay on at school. Nobody once ever mentioned university.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Not once. Not once did anybody say. Or college.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Never mentioned to me until I was left school.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: Right? And I think that was... I don't know if that was the system at the time, or if it was a combination of because you're not asking at the school, because your parents werenae telling you ye need to get O Levels if ye want tae do this.

SS: Yeah.

RC: Or, ye know, if ye want to go and do something, be an officer in any of the services-

SS: Yeah.

RC: -you will need O Levels.

SS: Yeah. Ye don't know what ye don't know.

RC: Aye.

SS: And...

RC: That's right.

0h 42m 00s

SS: And that's it. It's outwith your experience.

RC: Aye. Ye know, I sometimes said to mysel, ye know, if ye could go back and say... Look, you're probably enjoying yersel and yer metalwork and woodwork and yer techy drawing class but ye'd really be better staying on and getting some O Levels because the opportunities that could've been opened up for me because I know that because I havenae got any O Levels, I don't feel stupid.

SS: No.

RC: I know what my... My capabilities are, or were but it's just a pity. That's one thing I didnae like about the school.

SS: Yeah.

RC: I didnae think we got the proper opportunity at the end. I think because there was so many Glasgow overspill kids there...

SS: Of course, uhuh.

RC: Right. It was like they were filling the factory. They came to fill the factories.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: Right? They built loads and loads o new houses in Haddington for the Glasgow overspill. Now, ye know, most o the people in my class- most o the kids in the school were from Glasgow and the surrounding area, which nobody bothered because, aw, they said their houses were getting knocked down because they were so bad.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Right. But- and there was no work but there was two or three factories in Haddington working.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Plus the agricultural industry right round East Lothian.

SS: Yeah, yeah, uhuh.

RC: Em, I didnae think I ever met anybody who didnae have a job.

SS: Mmhm. Right, ok. So, you're leaving school?

RC: I'm leaving school.

SS: At the age of?

RC: Fifteen.

SS: Fifteen?

RC: Yeah, I think I was fifteen... Aye, I'd be fifteen, aye. And it was- I was looking in the local paper, The Courier.

SS: Uhuh?

RC: And Knox and Noon...

SS: Right?

RC: Who was a local television engineer in the High Street in Haddington was advertising for an apprentice TV engineer and I thought now, there's a job for me.

Apprentice TV Engineer – 0h 44m 08s

SS: Because ye liked television?

RC: Because I liked television, aye [*laughter*]. I would be able to build mysel a television and put it in my room. But anyway, I went doon there with Mum.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: And went, asked him if the job was still open and he said 'still open, would you like to have an interview?' and I said 'yes, aye' and 'right, come back tomorrow cause your mum will have to tell you what to do'. 'Aw, right ok. Awright'. So, went back and then Mum said he'll just ask you questions. Just be honest, tell them what you want, why you want to do it. So, I went back the next day, got an interview and got told there and then, you've got the job and I felt delighted because I was gon tae earn two pounds, five and six.

SS: Wow.

RC: Wow. But it didnae turn out to be a... As good a job as I thought it would be because number one: I didnae mind making tea for the men, not at all, cause I knew that was gonna happen cause Mum and Dad said you'll be making tea, you'll be sweeping up, running messages, getting cigarettes, getting papers. That's fine. But at the same time, a friend of mine had left school and he went to work with Amis.

SS: Which was another...

RC: Which was another TV engineer shop in Market Street.

SS: In Market Street, right.

RC: And his name was Sandy Gordon.

SS: Oh right, uhuh.

RC: He went to work there and I found that Sandy was spending his time in the workshops, taking TVs to bits and putting them back up again.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Whilst I was oot finding mysel at fifteen on roofs at Dunbar High Street putting an aerial up mysel [*laughter*]... After carrying a ladder, a big ladder, up the stairs. Sometimes, I think there's, what, five flights o stairs, six flights o stairs.

0h 46m 14s

SS: Mmhm?

RC: To a tiny wee attic window.

SS: Uhuh?

RC: Above the stairs, ye know, right doon, putting the wooden ladder through and go up and put the ladder up, right, and it had a- like a hook on it that hooked onto the apex o the roof and lay over and I had to put that between the skylight, the ladder and then the chimney where I was going to put

the... The aerial on. And then I had to climb back doon again, aw the way doon the stairs, to the van and make up an aerial kit which was consisted of strong wire and plates to sit on the corner, a couple o spanners and ye had to put the wire round the chimney.

SS: Uhuh?

RC: Right? And of course, there's chimney pots and aerials already there. So, I was leaning over, ken, a sheer, straight drop to the street. I thought, this is very dangerous for a fifteen-year-old. It's raining and it's really windy [*laughter*]... And I thought this is- this cannae be right and I kept asking to get- ye know, 'when am I going to get stuff in the workshops?' 'Aye, that'll be coming soon when you start going to college', which I did do, they sent me. Telford-

SS: What college? Telford College.

RC: Telford College in Edinburgh.

SS: Was that one day a week or-?

RC: One day a week. I think it was a Wednesday.

SS: Mm.

RC: And I had to get up really, really early because the bus took... Nearly an hour and twenty minutes to drive from Haddington intae Edinburgh because it stopped at every single bus stop, whether there was somebody there or not. And then I had to get off and then... Run down the street a bit and then at York Place I had to get on a number nineteen and go to the...

0h 48m 03s

SS: Oh right, yes, the number nineteen.

RC: Go up to Telford...

SS: Uhuh?

RC: Go up to Telford College, where we started to get taught electronics.

SS: Mm.

RC: Mm. That was... And I actually got... A City & Guild's in electronics.

SS: Well done.

RC: Mmhm. But it was the continual going out, putting aerials up, because obviously TVs were in great demand and colour TVs were just starting to come in.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: So, I was spending most of my time on roofs, no learning anything about TVs.

SS: That's a separate job, really.

RC: That's a separate job, aye. And I really got fed up wi it because the TV engineer who was employed there was a man called Mr [Sanouk?].

SS: Oh right, mmhm.

RC: And he had been a prisoner of war.

SS: Mmhm?

RC: And obviously he was- obviously, properly vetted and nationalised but, em... He was the engineer in the shop and the guy, Ian Noon, who co-owned the shop and the guy Knox, Mr Knox, put up the aerials along with me...

SS: Right.

RC: And Mr Noon and Mr [Sanouk?], they repaired and installed the TVs.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And I thought I was- I'm just getting used as a donkey.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And...

SS: So, what did ye do about it?

RC: I left.

SS: Right.

RC: Aye. I left. But I mean, I left because also, some days I'd be left in charge of the shop and at that time there was people coming in wanting hoovers repaired, wanting elements put in their kettle, elements put in their irons... They were even bringing in table lamps, wanting plugs changed and that was my job and I had to have them aw sorted, plus serving in the shop [*laughter*], selling records, radios and...

0h 50m 08s

SS: Aw, did they sell records?

RC: Aye, they sold records. Aye, some records, wee radios, batteries, washers for kettles, elements for kettles... Hundreds of them, because people repaired their own stuff.

SS: I was just thinking about that. It's- how environmentally friendly: I'll make do, I'll repair and reuse.

RC: Aye. Aye, we sold them, ken. They'd come in, 'have ye got a, ye know, an element for a Swann kettle?' and show you the old one and you would go up to the shelf and go 'no, I've not got one' or 'yes, I have got one'. Right, and they would ... pay for it and for, I think, it was an extra ten shillings, I put it on for them. And I actually got fed up wi it-

SS: Yeah.

RC: -because I thought, this is no what I'm learning to be and then I had a long blether wi Mr [Sanouk?] who was quite an interesting guy – which he popped up later on in lifetime as well-

SS: Uhuh, uhuh.

RC: -because he had been a camp guard at Riga concentration camp.

SS: Oh gosh.

RC: And... Some of the stories that, ye know, he would tell me of what he saw and what he did in the war-

SS: Mmhm, mmhm.

RC: Some of it was quite frightening.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: But I wasnae scared of him.

SS: No, no, no.

RC: No, but I was frightened to think, ken, ye know, here's- he had been in...

SS: Uhuh.

RC: The Latvian military police.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: And their camp had got taken over by the Germans during the... The war but during the attack intae- Operation Barbarossa intae Russia and they were all put on the parade square in their Latvian military police uniforms and they were given a choice: join the SS and if ye didn't, they got shot.

0h 52m 08s

SS: Mm.

RC: So, I think he quite rightly joined the SS.

SS: So... So, and he ends up in Haddington?

RC: And he ends up in Haddington because there was a prisoner of war camp.

SS: Oh.

RC: In Haddington.

SS: Uhuh. So, what did ye do once ye...?

RC: I went and-

SS: Did ye have a job to go to or a plan or-?

RC: Yes, I did. Naw, I had a job to go tae. I went to... Ach, I cannae- I think it was Dad that probably said they're looking for apprentice engineers at Sheriff's in Dunbar.

SS: So, they were an agricultural engineer?

RC: Agricultural engineers and, em... I'm just trying to think the chap's name. The foreman stayed in Haddington and I think he knew Dad.

SS: Mmhm?

RC: Bobby... His name'll come to me, I was thinking aboot him the other night, but anyway he stayed in Haddington and... I got an interview, similar thing, and then started on the Monday morning; new pairy overalls. And I had to meet this- the foreman and another chap who... would be waiting outside McCulloch's, the paper shop.

SS: Mmhm? Which is in the High Street, in Haddington.

RC: Which is in the High Street and I had tae, well, ye know, come from- well, by that time we had moved to Caponflat Crescent in about 1961 anyway, 1961. So, I had to walk doon, doon the street and then meet the foreman and the other guy, the other engineer, and- at half past seven.

SS: To take ye to-?

RC: To take me to West Barns and Dunbar.

SS: So, where was it in West Barns and Dunbar?

Apprentice Agricultural Engineer – 0h 54m 01s

RC: It was behind the hall that John Leslie used as the accordion hall.

SS: Right, so there's a village hall in West Barns-

RC: Barns. It's on the right-hand side, as ye go in.

SS: Right. So, it's behind...

RC: Just over the wee bridge as ye go in.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: There's a wee road and immediately-

SS: Aw, is it called Implement Road?

RC: That's- aye, Implement Road.

SS: There's a road called Implement Road; I've noticed that. Yeah.

RC: That's why. It was a big yard. There was a- huge big workshops.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: And huge stores and... And it repaired tractors, combines, ploughs, bulldozers, trailers, everything. Everything agricultural it repaired. And I worked there probably for about, I don't know, eighteen months. [*laughter*] I worked there for, aye, about eighteen months. It was good because you were actually learning a trade and ye were given work to do, strip an engine down, ye know. I mean, tractor engine's no just like a car engine, it's massive.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: Huge. But then I got the opportunity to- they opened a workshop in Haddington.

SS: Right.

RC: Where Tyre Services is now on Dunbar Road.

SS: Oh right, ok.

RC: So, they opened a wee workshop there and asked if I wanted to go there, and I said I would because I could just walk around from the house rather than be away tae West Barns. And anyway, ken that sometimes, ye know, I would be late for my work at West Barns because when the foreman said be there at half past seven, ye had to be there at half past seven and... There were at least five times, maybe more times, I was actually within feet of the car and because it was past half past seven and I wasnae in the car, they drove away [*laughter*]. They drove.

SS: Well, there's a lesson there.

RC: There is a lesson there, aye. And then I ended up having to get the bus, which was ten minutes later.

SS: Mm.

RC: And it would take me there, I would be ten minutes late for my work and of course, as soon as ye walked in, ye got rollicked up and ye got shouted at, things thrown at ye [*laughter*]. So, aye, there was a lesson there: dinnae miss the car in the morning.

SS: So, ye stayed there for eighteen months, you're now in Haddington.

RC: Aye, and probably stayed there for about another eighteen months and... It was great, really enjoyed it. I ended up being the senior apprentice, so there was apprentices below me.

SS: Oh, wow. A hierarchy.

RC: [*laughter*] There was a hierarchy, aye. They had to do the sweeping up. My job was put the urn on, and fill the [*Salamander?*], it was a- basically a paraffin heater that had a big round bowl in it at the bottom, which was a tank which was filled- supposedly, supposed to be filled with paraffin.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And then, there was mebbe a metal chimneystack stuck in the middle o it.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Which would be about five feet tall, and there was a couple o wee doors and a pressure switch and... In the wintertime, my job was tae light this Salamander.

SS: Was that in the workshop?

RC: In the workshops. And everything went intae it: paraffin, diesel, petrol, some old oil and invariably this thing would blow up. It would literally explode... Once... Ye know... Because ye didnae know what the guys were putting in it.

Joining the Royal Marines – 0h 58m 02s

SS: Oh dear.

RC: And there were many times, ye know, ye have to light it, ye know, pump a wee bit, turn the pressure up and it would pressurise it a bit. There was a wee door, ye had to get an oily rag or a wet... A rag soaked in diesel or petrol, and throw it in to set this thing on fire, to get the heat. Once it was going, I mean, the whole chimney went red-hot.

SS: Good grief.

RC: You could feel the heat, ken, at the top o the workshop. Aye, it was a horrible thing. I hated that thing. But it would blow up. Every now and again it would just explode. Health and safety? No. And then after that, I mean, I actually left and done a stupid thing and well, I thought it was a stupid thing. I went away and thought I'll join the Royal Marines. Away I went.

SS: [*laughter*] And where was that?

RC: That was in, em, first of all I went to Deal in Kent.

SS: Oh right. I remember that, yeah.

RC: Aye, I went to Deal in Kent which at that time was... It was the intake station for new recruits for the Royal Marines.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And spent... Two weeks there, and there must've been about six hundred guys on this intake.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And you... It was nothing like the army, what Dad said it was going to be. It was nothing like it, ye know, nothing like it at all.

SS: How?

RC: Well, when Dad was saying when he went away and joined the army, ye arrived at yer intake station, ye were divided up intae, ye know, platoons, sections, squads – whatever. Went away to the stores, get your clothes...

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And then that's you, ken, sign the papers, swear your oath: that's you.

SS: Mmhm?

01h 00m 00s

RC: Then you start learning to march and do this and... That didnae happen in the Marines.

SS: What happened?

RC: The six hundred was gon tae be whittled down to, possibly, fifty.

SS: Ohh, right, uhuh.

RC: So, there was... Murderball fights.

SS: What's that?

RC: Em... You got a thing like an old crash helmet on and ye got a big long stick.

SS: Uhuh?

RC: And on the end of it was things like giant *[laughter]*... Giant boxing gloves.

SS: Right.

RC: Right? And you just went into the middle o the ring and ye pummelled the other guy and if you were left standing, you can stand there and if you were- ye know, if you got knocked doon-

SS: So, was it just a one-on-one?

RC: It was a one-on-one and then after that ye had to build- ye were given oil drums, ropes, tents, planks o wood, hammers – ye know big mash hammers – wee hammers, tent pegs, and ye got told, right, make a tent.

SS: Right.

RC: Ye've got ten minutes [*laughter*]... And again, you were assessed on that and it meant it was- and it just, it was relentless.

SS: Uhuh?

RC: It went on from- you were up at five o'clock in the morning.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: And you were obviously in your uniform and it just went relentless. Run, run, everywhere – you never walked anywhere.

SS: Right.

RC: The only place that you were allowed tae walk was in the mess hall getting your meal-

SS: Uhuh.

RC: -or in the church. Everywhere else ye ran, double time, as fast as you could and I... And then, I mean, it went on: two weeks of intensive testing, in swimming pools... Now, I couldnae swim.

SS: Right.

RC: And I never thought o that, ye know, Royal Marines being-

Swimming – 01h 02m 02s

SS: Sea based [*laughter*].

RC: -Britain's sea soldiers [*laughter*]. I couldnae swim [*laughter*]... But I remember, ken, one day, right, we had been, aw, running constantly it seemed like, all morning. Two hours running round the streets of Deal, right, in a troop. Running, just running.

SS: In uniform?

RC: In uniform, aye, yeah. Ye had a uniform. It was basically boots, trousers, shirt, woolly pulley jumper...

SS: Mhm?

RC: And a cap comforter which was a knitted beret thing.

SS: Right.

RC: Right, that you often see in the old wartime commandos wearing these knitted things. So, ye had one o these on and ye werenae allowed to take it off. Even although you were sweating, that had to stay on and you ran round the streets o Deal, up and doon the streets o Deal. And then after that... You were coming running everywhere and it just got to the stage, I just followed everybody in front cause you could not hear what they were shouting and screaming... And then next I'm running and running and running and I arrive at a swimming pool and I went aw... Oh no. So, we got taken in tae a massive, big swimming pool – probably the biggest swimming pool I've ever seen – and there were- we were told strip down to yer trousers, take yer shirt and jumper off, boots and yer putties which were long, cloth straps which were wrapped roond yer ankles.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: Take them off and then stand in line. Now unfortunately, in a sense, I always suffered because my name, my surname beginning with C, I was always at the front *[laughter]* and... We got put, marched along the side o the swimming pool and me and a chap from...

01h 04m 08s

Eh, he came from Bedford, his name was Vic Corner. Another C, we were at the front. Now, there's a couple o Bs and a couple o As before us but he's asking me 'are we going to have to swim?' Well, I hope not. Now, I can't swim. And they marched us down one side o the pool and, in the pool, right, there was one old Lee-Enfield .303 rifle.

SS: Mmhm?

RC: And-

SS: Where was this?

RC: This was lying at the side o the pool.

SS: Right.

RC: Just one.

SS: Uhuh?

RC: Just one rifle, which was at the guy who was- had the A surname.

SS: Right.

RC: Right. And he was told to pick it up.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: And then march roond the deep end o the pool, climb up the *[laughter]*... Climb up the diving board – and I didnae know- I wouldnae know how high it was, probably fifteen feet off the ground – step oot on the diving board, carrying this rifle and jump into the deep end... And then swim to the side o the pool, put your rifle oot first and climb oot... And, I'm thinking, I cannae swim, right? And I'm thinking should I actually say something, right? And I know you would normally think somebody would usually go 'excuse me, I cannae swim' but *[laughter]*... But this was the Royal Marines, ye dinnae- you do not talk.

SS: Right.

RC: Right. You do not *[laughter]* open your mouth, right? And... I remember one o the- one o the guys in the Bs, he couldnae swim.

SS: Uhuh?

RC: And he got to the top, on the diving board, and then refused to jump – obviously fear.

01h 06m 04s

SS: Uhuh.

RC: So, he was turned about, away ye go, never saw him again.

SS: Mm.

RC: Never saw him again; he was marched away. So, I'm thinking... Mm. And I'm saying to this guy, 'what am I gonna dae? Can you swim?' And he went 'no', right, he says. We had decided that I was going to run as fast as I could right along the diving board and see if I could jump into the shallow end [*laughter*]. That didnae work... Em, and I almost drowned.

SS: Oh.

RC: And actually, one o the instructors and one o the drill instructors had tae jump in and pull me oot because I hit the bottom. I still had a hold o the rifle but-

SS: Good, good.

RC: Aye, I hit the bottom and I was drowning, I was totally drowning... And, em, of course, pulled me oot, made me stand at the other side o the pool along with Vic who had done exactly the same as I had done – jumped in, struggled to get out – and then after about ten people had got pulled out, one o the sergeant instructors shouted 'who can't swim?'

SS: Oh, my word.

RC: Right? 'Who can't swim?' and of course, the hands went up. Ye know, there was about three hundred hands went up... Ye know, 'what the hell are yous doing here, in the Royal Marines, if you can't swim?' So, we were gonna get- well, we did get taught to swim. But it was a constant two weeks o the worst, och, and then after that, you were selected if ye had made it type thing.

SS: Mhm?

RC: So, ye went away and got a medical. Ye got, I think, one o the worst medicals I've ever had. I've never had so many needles jagged intae me. Filled papers in, filled forms in and then got taken tae a great big hall and swore the attestation.

01h 08m 10s

SS: Mhm?

RC: For being in the Royal Navy.

SS: So, that was it?

RC: We got selected, aye, to go and then when we arrived at the commando training which was in Lymptone in Devon, just outside Exmouth, just mebbe fifteen miles from Exeter. Our commando training centre was there. Then, the real pain and the real test started. After about four months I thought I'm- this is- it was sheer hell. But then they gave the opportunity which again, it's one of these things: I wish I hadnae.

SS: Aye.

RC: I wish I had stayed because I thought, ye ken, I could have done that, I could have finished that. It was nae bother. But I mean, it was sheer hell. I have never had so much less sleep... Em, but I can clean a uniform, I can iron, I can bull boots [*laughter*]. I can basically look after myself. That made a big difference to my life cause when I came home, I had to buy mysel oot. I can't mind how much it was but I had to buy mysel oot.

SS: Were you paid when you were training?

RC: Yeah, but it was- it wasnae the... I always remember it said on the bump you got from the careers office which was in George Street in Edinburgh then-

SS: Mmhm.

RC: -and it wasnae a big, flashy shop wi windows, it was just a wee office up the stairs.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: There was a big army careers office, right?

SS: Mmhm.

RC: That was on Shandwick Place.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: But the navy careers office, or the Royal Navy careers office was on George Street.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: And it was just through a door, up intae like an old flat.

SS: Right.

RC: And they- ye got the bump there, they sent it to ye and the wages were supposed to be – I remember – twenty-six pound a week. Right?

01h 10m 05s

SS: Ahh. And how much were ye getting as a mechanical-?

RC: I was- as a mechanical- an agricultural-

SS: -engineer?

RC: An agricultural engineer?

SS: Uhuh, sorry.

RC: I was getting eight pound.

SS: Eight pound a week?

RC: Eight pound a week.

SS: And they were offering twenty-six pounds a week?

RC: Twenty-six pounds.

SS: That's a lot of money.

RC: Aye, it was a lot of money.

SS: Comparatively.

RC: Aye, it was a lot of money.

SS: Mm.

RC: But however, ye didnae get it.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: Well, ye did actually get twenty-six pounds.

SS: Uhuh.

RC: But again, being in the navy and not the army, right?

SS: Uhuh.

RC: In the navy, ye have to pay for your uniform.

SS: Right.

RC: Ye have to pay for so much food that you're eating. Ye had to pay for everything. So, it ended up that I had about three pound left.

SS: And all that pain.

RC: And I thought this is, ye know, three pound. Ye could hardly buy anything because ye had to buy ...liquid- eh, soap liquid, bootlaces – yer always's tearing... Brasso, tins o Brasso.

SS: What for your buttons?

RC: Buttons and buckles and-

SS: [?]

RC: Aye, everything. Everything was brass polished. And I mean, ye would go to the naffy and it was just dear as anything and there was some night, some nights I was just sitting there with nothing.

SS: What's the naffy?

RC: The naffy's like- it's a store, it's like a shop.

SS: Yeah.

RC: Subsidised. Every army camp's got them.

SS: Right, ok.

RC: Ye can buy sweeties and cigarettes and... Brasso.

SS: Brasso [*laughter*].

RC: It's just like a wee, a wee supermarket inside the...

SS: Right.

RC: Inside the camp.

SS: Ok, ok.

RC: I mean, the food was fantastic.

SS: Mm.

RC: Ye can say that.

SS: I mean ye'd get up in the morning and ye had to watch what ye were doing. If ye were starting off at a nine-mile run... Right, if ye were starting off at a nine-mile run, ye didnae want to go and eat the sirloin steaks that ye could get for your breakfast.

01h 12m 01s

SS: Uhuh.

RC: I did that a couple o times but ye do that to yer cost. Is that running oot?

SS: No, no it's fine.

RC: And everywhere it was just running, pain and massive, the biggest assault courses. It's the toughest army training in the world. I can see why. But anyway, I left them, came home, joined the police.

SS: Right. Ok, right. I'm gonna stop there.

RC: Uhuh.

SS: Because you've given me loads and loads of information. I know you want to talk to me about the police-

RC: The polis, aye. Ye've no got time?

SS: And- well, I have got time but it's just a long time.

RC: Aye.

SS: I'm thinking of you. We could do it again and just concentrate on-

RC: The police?

SS: -your career in the police.

RC: The police, aye, and family, aye. And that would be it?

SS: Aye.

RC: Aye. I could tell you loads of funny stories aboot that. Is that still going, aye?

SS: Aye. I'll stop it now.

RC: Right.

SS: Unless there's anything else about your early- what we've just spoken about, that you want to add?

RC: Em, I thought it was a great time in my life, I really did. Em...

SS: As a whole?

RC: As a whole because there was... Now, I have to try and be- I dinnae want to be... I dinnae want to say the wrong things in a sense but... I never saw any bullying at school.

SS: Mmhm, mmhm.

RC: Right? Never saw any bullying at school. There probably was but I didnae see any. Right? But never saw any bullying. The special needs kids were integrated...

SS: Mmhm?

RC: Because there was just one class that had all the kids in.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: But they were integrated in the school.

SS: Mmhm?

RC: ...You could- at night out, ken, away on yer bike, cycle round the Tyne, go anywhere, play football wi your mates... Go to the youth club, we used to go to the youth club on a Friday night.

01h 14m 04s

SS: Where was that?

RC: It was in St Mary's church hall which was just up frae Tesco's.

SS: Aw right, it's a dance school now, just at, em...

RC: Aye.

SS: I can't remember what you call that.

RC: Fortune Avenue.

SS: Fortune Avenue, that's right.

RC: Aye, that was- there was a youth club in there, and they played records.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Played snooker... Em, pool, badminton, table tennis... Aw the girls from your class would be there, so you'd be meeting them outwith school type thing.

SS: Socially?

RC: Socially, aye. Em... And there, there was no class distinction, you werenae, ken, you're in the B class, you're in the C class, ye know, just all like... It was like training to be young adults, ken?

SS: Yeah, yeah [*laughter*].

RC: Aye, I really liked it. Could play records, coffee... The coffee was a big thing, ken? They had someone there that would make ye coffee, ken. That was the in thing like, ken, like the coffee bars in London?

SS: Uhuh.

RC: It was like the coffee bar on Fortune Avenue.

SS: Wow [*laughter*].

RC: I mean, aye, I really enjoyed it. I never saw any bullying. Never saw... Mean people.

SS: Uhuh. I suppose that's a different time and-

RC: Different time.

SS: -and, as you say, it might've been happening but you didn't see it or experience it.

RC: Aye, I never saw it.

SS: Aye.

RC: No, there was no... There was no... There was no evidence of drug taking. I think the only drug taking would be a cigarette roond, ye know...

SS: Mmhm.

RC: The back o the bike sheds or something like that.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: There was no evidence of drug taking. Never saw any evidence of excessive alcohol on the streets during the day.

SS: Mmhm?

RC: Never saw that, ever.

SS: That's different.

RC: But now, different times.

SS: Mmhm.

RC: Strange... Strange things happen and it's totally acceptable now.

SS: Aye.

RC: Where, then it wasnae acceptable.

01h 16m 02s

SS: Or you didn't see it.

RC: Or you didnae see it.

SS: Yeah.

RC: Aye.

SS: Ok. Right, we'll stop there.

RC: Aye.

SS: And we'll have another session and you can talk about your career in the police.

RC: Mmhm.