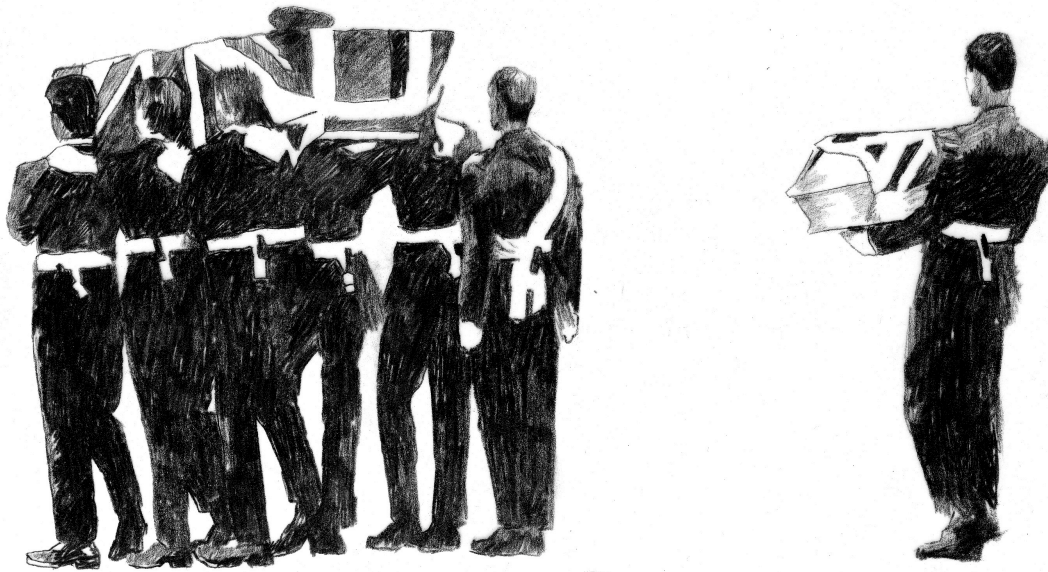


THE I.R.A.
Vs
CORPORAL MAHESHKUMAR ISLANIA
& NIURUTIMAHESH ISLANIA

Craig Coulthard
2005



Corporal Maheshkumar Islania



The coffins of Corporal Maheshkumar Islania and Nivruti Islania are borne by senior aircraftsmen in a ceremony at RAF Northolt, November 1st 1989

THE FACTS

On Thursday October 26th 1989, at 6.55pm, RAF Corporal Maheshkumar Islania, aged 34, and his 6 month old daughter, Niurutimahesh, were shot dead by 2 waiting. The incident occurred in Wildenrath, West Germany, 10 miles west of Monchengladbach, near the border with Holland. Smita Islania, the child's mother, was driving the car in which the victims were shot, but escaped uninjured. The family had stopped their British registered Volkswagen Jetta at a petrol station, when the gunmen fired 11 rounds into the passenger side of the car, which then veered out of control into a garden. The gunmen then fired through the back window of the car, before escaping in a Ford camper van driven by a third man. The father and daughter were killed instantly, the child being shot through the head.

An RAF statement at the time said the Air Force was "outraged and horrified at the senseless killings". The British Defence Secretary, Mr Tom King said he was "deeply shocked by this vicious murder". In a statement issued from Dublin, the IRA said it "profoundly regretted" the death of the child, adding "We are certain that our volunteers were not aware of the child's presence when they opened fire". Mrs Margaret Thatcher, the British Prime Minister was "deeply shocked at yet another cowardly attack". Mr Charles Haughey, the Irish Prime Minister said "All reasonable people must be appalled by this callous attack". Herr Helmut Kohl, the West German Chancellor expressed his "indignation".

The killing of Corporal Islania and his daughter was the latest in a series of attacks by the IRA in West Germany, Holland and Belgium, which began in March 1987¹. From this point, up to and including the deaths in Wildenrath, there were 7 murders and at least 37 people injured in shootings, car bombings and barrack bombings carried out by members of the IRA. Several other attacks were foiled or caused no injuries. The victims included servicemen, on and off duty, and the wives and children of servicemen.

THE AUTHOR'S RECOLLECTIONS

What I remember of events is minimal. I was eight years old at the time. After conducting the following interviews with my family, these memories were put into further doubt. Until this point, my recollection of events was as follows;

I was playing cards with my Dad in the living room. I was sitting opposite him, as he faced out of the room towards the window. There was a noise similar to the popping of bubble wrap. Dad looked up with a concerned expression on his face, and said “that was gunfire”. I remember being concerned as Mum was picking Karen up from dance class on the camp (the air base), and it was a long time before they returned. I don’t remember any events after that, other than there being flowers at the petrol station. I don’t remember the event being spoken about at school, there was no reassurance from teachers, and I don’t recall Mum or Dad telling us about what happened. As far as I was concerned, our Ford Orion always had black and yellow style British plates; I don’t recall them being black and white. I can recall no memorial service or a visit by the Queen. I do remember very clearly the numerous times that the car had to be checked for bombs, but I can’t distinguish between it happening before or after the shooting. I remember feeling anxious during these occasions, hoping that Dad (or Mum) wouldn’t find anything under there. I also remember having to wait in the car every time we went onto camp, as the servicemen at the gate checked over the car. And that’s it.

INTERVIEW WITH
THE AUTHOR'S FATHER
09/10/2005

Craig – Can you remember when it was?

Dad – nut, not exact date

I think it was 27th of October 1989

Right, I really can't remember what date it was but I think it was a Thursday.

It's almost 16 years ago.

Do you know what day of the week it was? I seem to think it was a Thursday. Because...it might even have been a Friday because it led onto a weekend. Because I can remember not talking about it till I went back to work the following week, so I'm sure it was a Friday.

So what can you remember about the time it actually happened? Can you remember what you were doing?

Well I can tell you what, sort of from leaving work and coming home, because um, I cycled...we were always told, if possible to go different routes home and that day I decided that I'd cycle home through the village, past the petrol station, past the guest house and into our block of flats that way. I actually cycled along, straight along the cycle path straight past the garage, along the guest house, where these guys had been hiding in the bush.

What time did you come home? After 5, because it happened about 8 or something?

No, it was before that, I really think it was before 8 o'clock, but I'm not too sure of the time, because I came home and your Mum was still making the dinner, in the kitchen and it was still daylight. So what, did you say it was in October? So it must have been, it must have been before 8 o'clock.

Were Mum and Karen not away when it happened?

No, not at all, because Mum was in the kitchen. I cycled home, in my uniform, with my jacket on top and...put the bike away, went into the house, probably, I don't know, I don't think I would have got changed, but I was chatting to your Mother in the kitchen, in the flat and we heard the shots. And it was like 3 single shots, bang bang bang, small pause, and then bang bang bang again. And I said to your mother "I don't like the sound of that" and I can't remember exactly what happened after that, but not much longer after that, sirens started sounding, and cars were coming down the road, sirens blaring, and an ambulance..

Sirens from the station?

No, nothing. They wouldn't have known, because I mean, it could have been anyone in the car...

The car had British plates on it.²

I think so, yeah. Yeah, I think so. But I mean, the guy could have had...it could have been anything, it could have been an accident, maybe he could have suffered a heart attack or anything at the initial point, because people wouldn't have realised him and his child had been shot.

When did you find out that it was a shooting then?

Well I realised it was gun shots.

So did you think at that time it was like that? Because I mean, there wouldn't have been any other reason?

None at all, nut, somebody, I very quickly realised that someone had been targeted.

And did you think it would have been the IRA?

I couldn't think of anybody else.

Was there not a bombing in Rheindahlen before that?

Yeah, there'd been bombings and there'd been shootings elsewhere, there'd been a shooting up near the ferry port, a chap had stopped at traffic lights and had been shot. I can't remember the exact sequence of who'd been shot, when there'd been bombings and that by timings, but there was a lot going on, there'd been people been shot across the border in Holland as well, some Australians.

I think they actually thought it was the same group of people.³

It's possible. The unfortunate thing is that although I'd cycled past that scene, the guys that did it must have been there before hand, they really must have been. They must have been sitting targeting, and watching things for a week, or at least certainly a few days, because I... I don't know why, but I was in blue uniform, he was actually, he was actually in a training course that day, and he was in greens, so I think it may... in the IRA's mind it may, everybody in greens was actually in the Army.

Right, ok, do you think that mattered to them?

Yeah.

Why, because the Army was actually in Northern Ireland?

Yeah, because the Army was seen...

Because that's an RAF station.

Yeah but half the people in that were actually Army as well.⁴ There was a big, half an Army Regiment stationed at Wildenrath. It must have been... I think it must have got dark by that time. Because I seem to recall him, he'd gone in for petrol, obviously got out of his car, to pay for his petrol, they'd seen him in greens, and said "right its dark enough.." and they hadn't seen the wife and the kiddie in the back seat. Cos he'd just come straight from work, from the course he was on, and picked them up, took them to get petrol, I don't know where they were going, maybe to get shopping.

Did you know the guy at all?

Ehm, only vaguely because he was an admin type clerk, I think..

So when'd you find out, if you didn't have to go to work, how quickly did you actually find out what had happened?

Probably the next day when we went shopping.

So it wasn't in the news or anything like that? Nobody came round to say...

It might have been. No, I really, I can't recall anybody coming round. I mean there was a lot of activity in the village, because the road was blocked, and all the cars were actually diverted down, close to where we were, and then round the back of the village cos they couldn't go through the main road. I'm sure the road was blocked off the next day.

Well, I saw a photo in a paper of the next day, and the car was still in the road.

In the hedge?

Naw, I think it was in a wall.

Right, yeah, he'd actually got in his car to drive out of the garage, and as he'd stopped to look out onto the main road, whoever it was had gone, and gone and shot him then. They think he'd probably stopped to check the traffic before going on and out onto the main road, and that's when they hit him. Uh, and his foot was on the accelerator and he just went straight across the road and into the wall.

So, the next day, did anything change? I mean, was there any sort of reaction from the camp?

What, were you told to do anything, or not do anything after?

Naw, because up to that point, because all the precautions you could possibly take were being taken.

Is that when, were we still checking for bombs and stuff before that?

Yeah, absolutely, we were still doing that under your car...

Were we doing that right from when we went out? (to Germany)

To Wildenrath?....

What reason was there for increased security then?

Because they'd started attacking some of the Army camps in Germany and they'd actually started killing people. It was, the threat had got a lot higher.

So when it happened was it a surprise to you?

Absolutely, yeh, a huge surprise. I suppose the first thing was, "why shoot someone in the RAF?" but then the reasons became clearer as you heard how it had gone ahead, what had happened. The guy was in the wrong kind of uniform, ehm, people didn't realise he was in the Air Force...

In a way, did that increase anger about it, because, I mean, obviously anyone who would have been killed would have been innocent, but did that make it feel even more unjustified, because you weren't actually, you were even less to do with the situation?

I think so... I think it actually made everybody feel a lot more vulnerable, and angry as to why, why that particular individual had been picked on, and it becomes very, very clear that it's not somebody in particular, unless you're a high ranking Officer, or a politician their going for, it's just, it's just anybody, it was just publicity, it was "hey, we're here" it was keeping peoples...making people frightened, and it was an act of terrorism basically.

So what happened when you went to work? Was the base on black alert⁵ or something?

Yeah, it would have gone up I imagine, because it relaxed a little bit, but not much, it was always at quite a high state of security alert. Not a lot happened, not much, because obviously they were still trying to find out what happened. I suppose the fact that they'd been in that area meant that they'd moved off, disappeared, so I suppose people thought that um, it was less likely that they would be targeted. So it was, in one way it was quite frightening, the other one it was, maybe understandable that they weren't going to be there again. So you had to get on with it and it was the same as any kind of terrorist act, if you don't carry on then they've won. So I think the general attitude was that we just carry on doing exactly what we've been doing. You can't do anything else, you can't take anymore precautions because there's so many of you really, it could happen to anybody, anywhere. So it was quite frightening.

Considering the fact you'd cycled past, did you think about the fact it could have been you?

Absolutely, absolutely. I mean, something that sticks in my brain is that for, maybe the night before, I can't remember, or it might even have been that night, as I was cycling past the garage, past the guest house, on one of the balcony's there's a guy leaning over, just leaning over the balcony watching what was going on. I noticed somebody.

Were you suspicious of it?

Well, I was, but it was just a thought afterwards. The place was quite new, and I'd never seen anybody hanging on the balcony watching the world go by, I've no idea. It's just...coincidence,

At that time, was there a fear of something happening? Was there a wariness that something could happen?

Well there was absolutely, every day of the week on the television they were telling you to...

There was always scares wasn't there?

Yeah, but they were telling you how to check your car for bombs and what to be looking out for, and what to be wearing, and that was on the television every night.

Was that just on the services (Television) station?

Yes. Yeh, that was because, the normal German public weren't the targets. It was the British Armed Forces, and in particular the Army. At least, that's what it seemed like.

What I find interesting was that it was in Germany, a lot of the attacks were in Germany, which had nothing to do with anything. Do you have any idea of what people who weren't on the camp, German people thought of it, because there's people coming with guns, killing people, in their country? Was there any kind of reaction from the German side?

It's very very difficult to tell, because your relationship with the German people was as a guest in their country, and I'm sure they saw it as a British military problem. They weren't the ones that were occupying Northern Ireland. It was unfortunate that it was happening in their

area, but they probably felt quite comfortable that they weren't actually going to be the ones who were attacked, it was going to be somebody within the camp boundaries, or someone driving with a British Forces number plate, which left you pretty vulnerable as well.

Did we have British plates?

Yeah. It actually, I think it actually stopped us going certain places. To shop, yeah, because you were out in the open, you know, you were looking under your car for bombs, signs of tampering, and as happened to the people in, the Australians, across the border in Holland, they were seen because they were speaking in English, to be British, in fact they were bloody Australians. So I mean, that was again, wrong place, wrong time. And that was an IRA mistake.

Well, did you ever consider a German car, a car with German plates?

No, because the palaver you had to go through to get German car, and left hand drive, and getting the tax, was just not worthwhile. It was far better when they decided that they would change the black and white BFG⁶ plates to normal British types...you could have been a tourist, cos there were obviously lots of people travelling from the UK, through Germany with normal number plates on, and that was one of the best things they ever did. So that you didn't stand out as definitely being Forces. That was seen as a positive move. But you still had to check your car, and you still had to be careful where you were going, what you were doing.

Did you ever have any worries about checking the car? Did you ever see anything?

No, never, I don't, I never saw anything. Actually, I was quite lucky because I had done a bomb disposal course, I had probably been trained better than other people on what we were looking for. So no, we never ever found anything. There were obviously lots of scares, people thinking they'd found stuff, I'm sure there were some failed attempts. But you just didn't hear about it, because, it was all kept quiet.

When you went back, were peoples routines not changed at all?

I think, it probably made people more aware for a couple of months, and then the next event happened somewhere else in Germany and attitudes, and procedures and peoples awareness just went back to what it had been before.

Do you think that it became like a normal thing?

Yeah, I think it was, it became almost routine, where is the next thing going to happen?

That's what I noticed when I was looking in the library, that it wasn't even on the front page, well, on the front page, but it wasn't the main story, it wasn't even the second main story, it was quite a small thing. Was the press reaction not that great?

No, well the press were there on the night, because for about 3 or 4 hours after the event, as soon as the press world became aware that there had been a shooting, there was press cars and television crews, and radio people in the village, all night.

But in terms of actual, being in the papers, or on the news. Can you remember if it would have been on normal news?

I've no idea, because we didn't get BBC news, well, it was, a small bit about another shooting in Rheindahlen, but, and I think it was actually, probably of a little bit more importance, because there was a baby involved in it as well. And anything to make the IRA seem, maybe more callous, and thugs, and terrorists, was exploited, but you can only use that for a little while. And it was, definitely on the television.

How do you feel about that fact that a child was killed in it, do you think that was an accident?

Absolutely, I think that what happened was, because the mother and the child were in the backseat, in fact, I think the child was in a cot in the back seat, when he shot the driver, the driver obviously took his feet off, or on, or came off the clutch or the accelerator, and the car just went forward in first gear, and maybe two of the bullets that were to be fired at the guy, actually went into the back seat, because the car had jumped forward that little bit. And it was a really, an unfortunate accident, that the kiddie was killed.

How did you feel towards the people who were doing this? In that you can accept that that was an accident? Does the colouring of your opinion, when the news reports make out that they deliberately, or maybe not deliberately, they used that (the child's death) to make, maybe a sort of greater...

Impact?

Yeah.

It didn't make me feel any different to these people who were trying to kill me, or some of our colleagues. Because it could have been anybody, it could have been absolutely anybody who stopped at that garage that night. And some family would have ended up without a son or a daughter or a father or...I just think, ehm, they were fighting a war, but they were fighting a war were you didn't know who the enemy was, so I just thought they were callous murderers. Basically. I've never ever thought about it any other way, and the same with anything else that happened in Northern Ireland, or anywhere else, they were hiding behind civilian clothing and ehm...

How do you feel now, obviously there are people who were in the IRA, or involved with the IRA in the government...?

I think the only way that there's going to be any progress is you've got to speak to people who are at the top, its pointless speaking to those at the bottom or in the middle because the ones at the top are the ones who'll be making the decisions, so these people have...yeh, they've got to be involved, and if you don't involve them, things just won't progress. It doesn't mean to say I agree with it but I'm realistic to realise that it's got to be done that way,

and at some time, you've got to move forward. I still think they're murderers, or they've at some point been involved in organising murders.

What about the fact that now, the IRA is meant to have got rid of all its...(weapons)

Well it hasn't got rid of all of its weapons, there are still weapons out there, they say, for their own protection. They've got at least 300 weapons out there that they've said...

For their own protection?

That's right. Or at least that's the last headline I read in the news, and I'm not stupid enough just to think that they've got rid of absolutely everything. No way. But they've made a move, and they've realised that after 20 odd or 30 odd years of armed struggle, it hasn't moved on, and they're having to, in themselves be realistic. But the emphasis has moved on from attacking the British Army, to attacking their own people, so they're still thugs.

I find it interesting now, that terrorism seems like a "foreign" thing, whether it's Islamic terrorism, even if its people that have come from Britain who are doing it, it seems like a different thing. Ireland just seems like Scotland.

The difference is the terrorist's threat is coming from a group who are classified or identified under the Muslim banner; they were identified under the IRA banner. There's murders and there's killings going on under the...all sorts of banners, even in this country now. So its just somebody else, a different group who are, have got to affiliate themselves to something, and ehm, the protestants were doing just as bad, and we haven't asked them to identify that they've got rid of all their weapons.

When I was looking at it, it didn't seem like this was a big deal in the papers, but if a shooting like that happened now, it would be a massive deal you know?

Um, I suppose I would expect it to take on the same kind of importance as the 3 girls that were shot in New Year 2 years ago⁷....

In Birmingham...

Or Brixton, or wherever that was, and that went on for about a fortnight. I imagine that would be, because, perhaps it was because there was something happening all the time, that was related to the IRA, and then we moved very quickly onto the next incident, and it lost its importance.

And it became more normal?

Yes, it was, it was like "oh that's just another incident". And yeah, the people were very unlucky, lets, you know the next ones maybe a bomb which kills 20 people so...

Did you think the fact that targets were military personnel; do you think people accepted that more because they weren't civilians?

Well, I think so, because you were...

How did that make you feel as a...

Yeh, well as a member of the Armed Forces, you expect to be..

Well you expect to be a target for wars or something but not....

Yeh, but not by somebody walking along the street and just shooting somebody.

What I mean is did it, affect how you see your job, or the occupation that you do?

Nah.

You never thought that it was a dangerous...

Well it's a danger doing all sorts of things in my job anyway, but it was something that everybody in the Armed Forces at that time was probably under pressure from, that they could be a target of the IRA. Same as in Spain, you could be a target of the "Baader Meinhof"⁸ or, something like that. It was just something you had to get on with, and as I said earlier on, if you don't get on with your life, then they've won.

That's what everyone in London is like as well. That's why it didn't surprise me that everyone, after the bombs in London⁹, just had to get on with it, because you can't...what else are you going to do?

Yeah. You've just got to get on with it. If you think that you are going to be the next one, you'd be walking around with bodyguards, and it isn't as certain that you're going to be involved in anything now. Next time, it's not as if you are a Prime Minister or a politician whose involved in that and you are always going to be a target, it's just, I hate to say it but, it's the luck of the draw. It really is. You can't do anything about it at all. You can try, you can make it more difficult, but if someone's going to shoot you, they're going to shoot you when you least expect it.

Have you ever really thought about it again, the actual incident?

Yeah, yeah, I actually have yeah. It's always, I mean, being that close to somebody being shot, and not seeing it, but knowing that that's happened within, what 300 metres of the flat, is quite...thought provoking I would think. Yeah, so I've thought about it before...

So what do you think, "I'm lucky that it's wasn't me" or...

Yeah. I sometimes think that way. It could have been me if I had been on the same kind of course that day and had been cycling home and it hadn't been daylight and it had been half an hour later, and it had been dark. Because they obviously used the dark as a cloak as well.

They had a driver waiting for them as well..

Oh, they must have had. There was definitely two of them, there might have been three of them, I don't know.

I think there was two gunmen and one getaway driver.

Whatever, because the car must have been very very close, it was probably sitting in the guest house car park. And they would have been off and out towards Düsseldorf within 30 seconds of it happening. Gone, dumped the car somewhere, and picked up another car.

Do you know if they ever caught, found the people who did it?

Nut, nah. Never ever, they've got their suspects obviously. But without witness', it was in the dark, how...nobody saw them, who could say who it was? Unless you've got somebody...maybe if there had been more CCTV, within petrol stations, in comparison to today, they might have got something, but they weren't stupid, they were a cell who had done it before, and might have gone on to kill others, and they knew what they were up to.

Was there a service for the guy on camp or anything?

Yes, there was a service, there was a memorial service held in the church, cos he was actually a church-going chappy, but there was a military service when he was brought back to the UK, as far as I can recall.

Can you remember, how or if you explained it us, me and Karen?

I think we did. I really can't recall exactly what we said, but we explained what had happened. And you were watching the same television as us, so you would have, you must have been watching the news. Whether the significance of it registered, I don't know. I doubt if it did. But you were part of what was going on. and you saw us checking the car, and part of the process was you didn't come near the car while I was checking it, or your Mum was checking it, you always stood back so...yeah you were part of that, it probably did register a little bit, but the significance of it wouldn't have been there.

No, I don't remember...it wasn't a big shock of a thing to me, I think because of that, because you had to check the car, and because you heard of other things happening...

I doubt if you would of...it wouldn't have changed your lives. You probably would have talked about it at school, but because you wouldn't have known who the people were...you would have certainly understood that somebody and a child had been shot by the IRA, you probably knew who the IRA were, but no, the implications of it, or anything else was probably the last things on your mind I would have thought.

Can you remember if anyone from home was, did they know about it or...?

From the UK? I imagine so because I'm sure it would have made news on the BBC, we probably got a call from home, because they heard that it was Wildenrath village. Or RAF Wildenrath, and we would have got calls saying, you know, "what's happened?" And we would have told them what we'd heard and where it had happened because both sets of parents had been out at the flat so...yeah we would have got calls from all people, but again, they were probably only interested in our safety rather than what had gone on.

Do you see any similarities between how you may have felt after the occasion, and a feeling that in society it was kinda normal, do you think that's comparable to now, and something like the bombings in London and in Madrid?

Well they same sort of thing had happened in Manchester as has happened in London now. I mean, the city centre of Manchester was blown apart by the IRA and the IRA were putting bombs out in London as well, and Birmingham. I think that there is a little comparison, but

we're actually under a bigger threat these days, because it's worldwide, rather than a small part of Britain. An armed conflict where, the Muslims all over the world who are probably as angry about how they are being treated and what they see as being the enemy, so I think it's a bigger threat these days.

And also, its not just military targets is it?

No. No its not, its anybody, absolutely anybody, and I think a terrorist is a terrorist, and the whole word is quite significantly played, you are a *terrorist* and you are there to terrorise people, and how people go about their daily business so its ehm, it's a bigger problem these days.

How do you think you can fight that then?

How do you fight it?

Yeah, because you hear George Bush talking about, or everyone talking about a war on "terror" but how do you...you can't....

Well you...the war on terror, I think they use the word "war" because it has got to signify how drastic or how important it is to be aware, of what's going on. The...whether it is directly a war or not, I'm not sure. It's a fight against terrorism, you're trying to combat terrorism, you're trying to stop people being killed, innocent people being killed.

Do you see Iraq in the first place as being a fight, or a war against terrorism? Initially? Because it is now.

Absolutely.

It is now, but it is now through...as a result of....

It is yes, but I think that the problem was always there. Iraq has got rid of a significant danger in that part of the world, which was threatening one of the, more than one, of the large oil-producing countries which America, and the Western world relied on for its oil.

You mean in Kuwait?

Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. If he'd (Saddam Hussein) got his hands on them, he would have controlled a huge amount of oil production. Whether he'd have given it to the Americans, or the rest of the Western world, he might not of, he might have given it to the Russians, and that is a ...that is...

Is that a reason to go to war?

Yeah, absolutely. That's why...aw, I'm not saying it's a legitimate reason, but it was used as an excuse to get rid of him.

So how do you feel about the original reasons we had been given?

Um, I think the original reasons were...excuses. For getting rid of him, and getting in there and settling the area down. Settling it down without him in charge and trying to get democratic society running that particular country. Which then relieves the pressure on the immediate, smaller ones around them, because they're not seen as the "Big Bad Wolf". Iran is

the next “Big Bad Wolf”. So it has been successful, in the fact that they have got rid of that governing body of people.

It's only going to be a success though, if in the same way as that people in Northern Ireland are actually talking...

Yeah, and its isn't going to take...well its taken 30 odd years, its taken longer than that in Northern Ireland but... to get...you've got to start somewhere. And you go back to the point you're making, you've got to speak to the people at the top. Now, when, when and who they spoke to within Iraq to get the Iraq government, and the people in charge there to change their mind, and not to be so war mongering, perhaps...and what was being done there to drive the Americans and British and other people to say enough's enough, they ain't going to speak to us, they're never going to speak to us, we need to get them out of there, and get people in who will speak to us and move on. And that's part of.. the same as with the IRA, you've got to deal with some people who were at one point your enemies.

But the difference being that they decided to speak to them, to speak to the British people, or what?

Who the IRA?

Uhuh.

Well yes, but that was only after 30 years of war.

So did they give up then, or not give up but in a sense, they had no other choice or...

They had tried everything, they had tried bombing, killing, and it didn't work, how many people do you bomb and kill before you realise its not making any progress? Because the British Government, if someone's killed, somebody else takes over. Somebody else is put in as Prime Minister; it doesn't go away, so the only way to do it is to have dialogue.

The other thing is that, the difference between then and now is that there was a clear aim, of the IRA, which it still, I guess, exists.

Well, I suppose it is, but it's never spoken about. A separate Ireland and an independent Ireland in total is never mentioned these days.

Which is the reason for... you know, that is why they exist.

Absolutely, that's what they wanted.

But there's no comparable thing to that?

Well, I think what they've decided is that that's never going to be achieved, but if you can govern Northern Ireland through the political system, you actually gain the power anyway, and you get to make the decisions on what happens in Northern Ireland...

And you don't think it matters that its power, but not independent power?

Yeah, you could actually end up being quite independent of the British Government anyway, if you have your own parliament, which is making decisions on behalf of Northern Ireland, because if you're in there and you have influence and you have power and you have majority,

what you want for Northern Ireland will happen, because it's all done democratically. You will end up running Northern Ireland in a way that almost brings independence from Britain, without the bloodshed. And you are actually; you're probably speaking quite closely to your Southern Ireland opposites, and making decisions on the basis on what's good for "Ireland". The whole of Ireland, so...

Do you think they would have got to this point though without the terrorism? Do you think that that happened, and people started to pay attention, and wanted to discuss it more because...

Well I think, I think that for anybody to have any kind of power taken away from them, and we're talking about the British Government having power taken away from what they were deciding for Northern Ireland, they will not give up, that kind of power without a struggle. So, the Irish had fought for many years before the modern IRA took over, to have change, and no change was forthcoming, so it was probably frustration. So there's not a lot more you can do if people stop talking to you.

So does that mean in a sense, that terrorism can be understandable?

Well its tool, it's a tool. It's a drastic tool. And there are, there will always be a point where the people, certain people will become frustrated and say "we're not getting anywhere with discussion" and what else is there, the next step is to take up arms, so...yeah, I think that's what they eventually decided they had to do. And the democracy, the talking, politicians of the IRA, were the ones who weren't being heard, because a faction took over. The armed faction took over. And that was it.

So in a way, it could be said that they got what they wanted, through doing what they did.

Well, they did eventually, they probably will eventually get what they want, cos it isn't finished yet, but instead of taking, for instance, well its different compared with Scotland, but how long did it take Scotland to get their own parliament, once the process was started and discussion, it probably took 10 years, lets say, whereas the had been fighting for 60 years and not getting anywhere. But now we're back to the point where because the arms, the majority of the arms have been destroyed, we're now even talking about the Irish parliament being, recommencing, so, yeah, it worked. It worked to a point, but there was no progress.

Do you think that after September 11th, that America's view on the IRA changed in anyway?

I think so.

And that something had to be done because it was...in the same way as I was saying Ireland just seems like Scotland, that it became like... do you think maybe in America, the IRA was ok, because there were people from Ireland in America, and it was like an acceptable thing. Whereas something in the Middle East was very foreign, and therefore easily recognisable as wrong, but after September 11th, maybe they started to see, well what's this difference between this and this?

Well I think that 9/11 actually brought home to the American people how vulnerable they were even as the major power in the world. That they were just not immune. The people who had been paying in the coffers of the IRA, and supporting the IRA in America, were doing it at distance. They were half-way round the world from where it was happening, so...

So you think they realised just how awful it is? On any scale?

Absolutely, it was brought home to them what terrorism was all about, what they were actually paying for to happen in Northern Ireland and Britain. An armed struggle, but what was the difference between the armed struggle of the IRA and the Muslims who were taking part, you know killed hundreds of their own people? It became very, very clear to them, that they were all part of, they were subject to, anybody could be involved in it, because anybody flying an aeroplane in America, could land it in their city. And it was a big awakening for a lot of people.

You know how you were saying the people in the IRA were murderous thugs, hiding behind not having a uniform, well the people who did September 11th, who actually took part in it, they obviously killed themselves as well, is that a different level of commitment to what they believe in, or what do you think?

No, I just think it's a different way of doing it. I don't know how the IRA recruited its members, I don't know how Al Qaeda, at 9/11 recruited its members, but there's a different ideology. The IRA, I would imagine their ideology was to carry out the atrocity, or the murders or whatever, and live to fight another day. The Muslims who are car bombers or aircraft kidnap bombers, are actually, see their death as part of the process. And it's all to do with their religion, and it's just slightly different. It is different. So yeh, it happens. They're still terrorists; they want to kill people for their own gain.

Cos obviously its martyrdom, and there's a glory in it I guess, the same thing in Northern Ireland, where people paint murals on the end of the houses of course, the guy who was killed is a martyr of sorts, because he was killed for the job he does...

Not really, I don't think he's a martyr, because he's actually a victim, he's not gained anything, his family don't gain anything out of it, whereas a martyr, his family believe that he is gone to heaven, and he's made the ultimate sacrifice. Also the sacrifice to that young lad's family is his job put him in the position where he was vulnerable, without even knowing he was vulnerable.

So I guess he didn't die for his job, but he died because of his job.

Correct.

So after it happened, did you feel that you were more of a target because of your job?

Yeah, I mean, I always thought that we were a target, but the susceptibility and the chance of it happening to you, was now, the odds were reduced even more because it happened right

outside the door. Up to that point it was always something somewhere else, or very close, but certainly not on your doorstep.

It's kind of like a strange sort of security thing in a way.

Yeh, its eh, it was certainly really quite different. Don't know, it's difficult to explain. Very difficult.

Can you remember if there was much in the government or anything talking about it? Can you remember any sort of reaction in terms of policies or ...

There certainly would have been something, a review of everybody's security precautions, but when you're dealing with guys who are there and gone, there is very, very little they can do about it, you're hoping that the intelligence world, because I'm sure these guys, these people, were being, trying to be tracked, they knew there were cells working within Europe, and you hope that they were, the intelligence world were on your side, and trying their hardest but, very, very difficult. I sometimes think that the occasional killing in Germany, maybe worked towards, for the governments benefit anyway, because it brought the IRA back to the front as being the callous kind of people they were, and gave them bad publicity rather than good publicity. You know it's....

Which again leads to that thing about the child, the child being involved as well. Which can be exploited in a way.

Absolutely, I can be exploited, it certainly...

It happens now as well, you know, when schools are blown up...

After the event, there was no official comment that I can recall saying "ha, we got one of your guys" blah blah.

Apparently they accepted responsibility for it, and expressed regret... for the child's...

They would have done, yeh. But there was no, that was I would suggest was bad publicity for them, and worked to undermine their cause, compared to the benefit that the British Government got from, out of it having happened and the IRA admitting that it was them, people go and say "murdering bastards" or whatever. The occasional bombing, the occasional murder, could work for both sides.

I was thinking, because I want to hear everyone's opinions differently, because I want to see how memories come of it, I don't know, do you think you've got quite a good memory?

I think I've got, parts of that...do you mean generally got a good memory?

Well for something significant like that?

Right, well I think, I can remember bits of it, certainly very clearly. Other bits that surrounded it, I really don't recall. Because it really wasn't of any significance, the significant bits were that we heard the shots being fired; maybe I'd seen somebody in the guesthouse beforehand...

Did you tell anyone?

No cos it really didn't, you know I couldn't really have told anyone anything, because it was just a face, and I couldn't even tell you if it was dark or light hair, it was just "somebody". The fact that it happened very closely, close to us, that's about all really. They were the only important bits of it. because we were actually living with it on a daily basis, almost, well we were living with it on a daily basis, cos we were having to check cars, lock things up, don't go wandering round in uniform, don't meet, don't talk about military things when you're out in the village,

Do you think that makes that particular event less significant in your life then, because it wasn't completely out of place at that time? Is it a significant part of your life in Germany?

Yes it is a significant part, because we had to live with the threat everyday. And the threat actually was, happened in our lives, 300 yards away from the house. One of the incidents of the IRA's campaign against the British Government, the British Army, happened within hearing distance, never saw it, but within hearing distance. Yeah, its part of our lives, it's something that happened whilst we where in Germany.

It's quite a hard thing, I guess, to know, but do you think the experience of being that close to it, affected the way you felt about your job, or the campaign itself, or your feelings about the situation, about Northern Ireland, or anything like that, did it become more important to you?

No, because it was actually happening, the majority of things were happening in Northern Ireland, which was an island off the main coast of the UK, the chances of me going there were slightly less than having, going to the middle of a campaign in Germany, it didn't change my attitude towards what was happening. I thought that basically Northern Ireland was a training ground for the British Army, they had a significant number of people out there, and they were being employed to do what they were doing, and they were getting very good training out of it. The British Army used Northern Ireland in my opinion as a huge training ground, to keep their personnel within those army regiments, and well trained.

For other campaigns?

Yeah. Absolutely, they were using the whole of Northern Ireland as a training ground., whereas I was in the Air Force, I was there to fly planes, make aeroplanes fly, it was just a completely different mindset to being in the Army than the Air Force. You weren't, you were not as high a risk. If you were in the UK. But then you were still at risk because that was brought home. So it didn't change it an awful lot. It just, you just got on with what you were doing.

Did it make you think, because of the closeness, because it was a very small detail really, of his uniform that may have marked him out, as the victim, did it make you consider, I don't know, your own death or the fact that life and death could be hinged on such a small thing?

Well you see, its only after information on it was released that you do realise the significance of minor things, and the fact that he had finished a course that day and was dressed in that

matter, because it was dark, but he was standing under the lights of the petrol station because he was refuelling his car, if he'd been in blue uniform, they might have ignored him and waited for the next guy to come in green uniform. They must have decided that that day was the day they were going to carry out, because I really don't think they were there just for one day. So yeah, small points are of significance, but who's to say what the small points are? You just don't know.

Did it make you feel just how fragile life could be or, had other things happened in the past that you already felt that?

Yeah, I've felt that way as well, but the significance of it is that it was just another unusual occurrence, which you would have to take into your daily routine, it just emphasises that part of it a bit more, I don't think it became really any different to making sure when you cross the road there's no cars coming, and lots of other precautions you take, you learn. But just because you do that, isn't to say you're not going to get knocked over. Because you cross the road when the little green mans there, not to say that some idiots not going to come round the corner and ignore the traffic lights.

Which I guess is another reason just to get on with it as well, cos there's nothing you can do about it.

You cannot get into a car and think that you're going to be in an accident. It just isn't how you get on with life; it's just another thing you've got to consider.

Can you remember, you don't think you knew that night?

Well I think we knew that night what happened, I can actually remember saying to your Mum in the kitchen "that was gunfire", I think I remember my actual words to your Mum were "I don't like the sound of that" that's really what I think I said to her.

So were you thinking that night, you must have thought about what had happened?

I remember looking out of... we heard the sirens, we obviously knew something had gone on, and I'm trying to remember if I actually took a walk to the main road, to see if I could see anything, I think I did, because from where our flat was to the main road wasn't very far, and you could actually look down the main road. And I'm sure I actually did that, but my recollection isn't that, absolutely 100 percent. I actually went out, saw the blue flashing lights, and then just came back in and kept out the way. Because, I suppose at the back of my mind, if it had been gunfire whoever had fired the guns, shot, well could still be around, and the police might be looking for somebody. Again you get to the point later on, and you find out what had actually happened, and you think "yeah, well they would have gone", they would have been out of there within, less than a minute.

Do you think at that night, the next day, the incident would have been on your mind a lot?

Oh absolutely, I would say it was probably on everyone's mind, for I would say, about a month afterwards until the next event, til something else happened.

Do you think it is quite, not simple, but it is often that way, that you think about a bad thing until the next bad thing comes to take its place?

Well it depends how close it is to you. I think the general way of mankind is to get on with things, to say ok it's happened, its time to move on, it doesn't mean to say that the length of time that it's in somebody's head is the same for everybody. It's either longer or shorter, so it's not a big deal.

In relation to the fact that I'm doing this now, do you think it is important to go back to things like that, and to study them, or do you think maybe it doesn't need to be thought about because its gone?

Well I think we move on. I really do think that we move on. That it's happened and its really unfortunate that it did happen, but history is, people have got an awful lot of interest in history, there's so much history on the TV and that, but its because people want to understand what happened, rather than say "It's a bad thing" its something that's gone on, its something that's part of where we are now, its an event within, you know a huger number of events that happen in your life.

Well, why I'm interested in going back to it is, for us, it is a huge thing that happened, but that also had a significance on a wider scale, but that doesn't take away the personal aspect of it. Because something bad can happen to you as an individual, and it's still bad, but something bad that happens that effects a lot of people is bad in a big way and still a small way.

Oh yeah, my feelings about it are that it was murder, and that somebody, or two or three people who are still alive and out there, carried out that murder, but then there are murders happening on a daily basis throughout Britain these days, and people are getting away with it.

And do you think there's ...the fact that in their mind they were fighting a cause, is it more, not acceptable, not justified either, cos in my mind its not justified to kill anyone, though we're talking earlier about the fact that if there's no other choice, people are prepared to go to that length....

Its never justified, it can't be justified going out and killing innocent people, because it could have been, if it had been in this country, it could have been someone who got their camouflage jacket out of Army Navy Stores, and had absolutely nothing to do with it. Just because he'd worn it.. It could have been anybody, so I don't think it's justified. The guy and his child had never ever taken up arms against the IRA, they were just part of the machine, which was the target. There's not much you can do about that. Wrong place, wrong time, unfortunate, but it was murder.

I think that'll probably do.

Ok.

INTERVIEW WITH
THE AUTHOR'S SISTER
09/10/2005

Craig - Can you remember when it happened?

Karen - When?

Uhuh

No, I can't remember the specific day, specific month, specific year. No.

Can you remember what time of year it was?

Well it must have been summer, because Dad was wearing a short sleeved shirt. If I remember right.

It was October 27th, '89.

Was it? Really?

16 years ago.

See, cos I can remember what I was doing, where I was.

Ok, so what happened that day?

Well, I went to school, I was at secondary school, it must have been first year, I don't remember what happened at school that day, but I remember I had a massive fight with Cassie.

Why?

I don't know stupid teenage girly stuff. I have no idea why, but we'd fallen out with each other. And then I came home, on the bus and I don't know, I had my tea, but I went to dance class that night.

How did you get to dance class?

Well, I don't specifically remember who it was, but it definitely wasn't Vicky and Wendy that took us, cos I'd remember that, but it was someone else, and their Mum, they come and picked me up, it might have been someone called Clare, picked me up cos we both went to dance class, actually I think it was Clare, took us both, dropped us off, and she went and did something on camp, and then came to pick us up.

Who had?

The Mum.

Their Mum?

Yeah, I think it was Clare's Mum, so she must have been on camp, cos she would never have got off actually. Because she came to pick us up and was like "right girls, we can't get home" we were like "what do you mean we can't get home" "well, something's happened off camp, the IRA have blown up a man and his son."

Blown up?

Blown up. A man and his son, at the petrol station, and I remember thinking "uhh, Dad and Craig. Dad is the Dad, and his son's Craig. Dad and Craig, Dad and Craig" so I thought it might have been you two, but you know...

So she stayed on camp?

Yeah, she dropped us off and stayed on camp, and done whatever, like Mum used to drop us off, she'd go to the thrift shop or else go and do some shopping in the NAAFI¹⁰ or whatever...

So she wouldn't have left the camp?

I don't think so, because if she had, she wouldn't have got back on. So she came and picked us up and was like "look girls, we can't get off the camp, something's happened, we're going to have to go somewhere." And obviously we were going to sit and wait until they let us off the camp. We went to the singlies NAAFI, which was across the road from the big NAAFI, and in there they had those plastic seats round the big tables, and I remember it was on the TV...

It was on the TV?

Yeah, we were watching SSVC¹¹ TV in the singlies NAAFI and some reports of something; you know reports of an explosion or something.

Was it an explosion?

That's how I remember it, but I know it wasn't in the end was it? But that's what it was reported as, if I remember correctly.

That must have been weird seeing it? Was it just a report?

It was SSVC, so they never had a large camera stream, or any of that kinda stuff you have now. There was a person sitting, reading, and maybe a picture of Wildenrath or whatever. But I remember sitting there and she was like "right we'll get you a drink and a chocolate bar out of the machine, and Karen you need to go and phone your Mum and Dad" So I think I must have phoned Mum and Dad, and found out that you were alright, and would have sat and waited for, it must have been hours really, but as a kid it must have seemed even longer, so maybe 2, possibly 3. And then we had to join the queue to get off the camp, because there was a queue to get off camp. And I remember the searchlights, instead of just being on, they were like *all* on..

Searchlights?

Remember the orange lights...

At the front gate?

You know, really orange, and they were checking everyone's car going on and off the camp, got home...

Can you remember how long it was before you phoned Mum and Dad?

Probably about half an hour

Were you worried?

Yeah.

Can you remember feeling worried?

Yeah, uhuh. Course I do, it was like “Man and Son Dead” I just thought “aarrww” ‘specially cos it was near where we lived, but even then, rationally, as a child I remember “there are more than one father and son” but instinctively you think, if you recognise something is bad you’re like “well, who do I know in London” or “who do I know in New York”, you know, so then, we went home and probably found out everyone was alright. Cos we wouldn’t have gone down that road, cos all that road was blocked off, so we come down the back road, past the shop?

The Rewe. The Rewe.

The Rewe. That was what it was called.

Up the hill?

Up the hill at the back, they dropped me off and I got home, and I probably would have been fine, knowing that everyone was alright, so I probably would have had no problem sleeping, because probably wouldn’t completely understood what was going on.

You were 11?

Would have been maybe just 12.

Nah, just 11, ’78 - ’89.

Yeah. But I was secondary school?

Yeah, first year.

So, my understanding of it beyond the immediate would have been minimum. You know what I mean? The way that you see something like that happen now, you understand it in the broader scheme of things.

So you do remember it being a big deal?

What I mean is, what I’m trying to say is I wouldn’t have had any problem sleeping. Would have come home, gone to bed.

Yeah.

You know, but I remember the next day, getting on a bus, I can’t remember, I remember that was the day they started with the armed guard walking round...

In Rheindahlen?

No, no, no, I’m trying to remember, I think, I think, I remember seeing guys with guns walking around the quarters off camp. Cos we were so close to where it was.

Really?

I think, if I remember correctly, cos it seems pointless now, it’s not going to happen again the day after, but...

No, but it’s a security thing, to make you feel...

Because we had to get the bus from Wildenrath to Rheindahlen, so they would have been watching out. We got to Rheindahlen; obviously there was a massive long queue, not only

with that, cos that was on a higher state of alert anyway, cos that was more open than Wildenrath...

Well there was a bombing in Rheindahlen before it.

I thought there was just a bomb warning.

No there was a bombing in a, what you call it? In a, like a barracks.

Really?

In Rheindahlen, yeah.

When? What year?

The same year.

And it had gone off?

I think so, I don't think anyone was killed though.

Really?

Uhuh.

Because I remember Mum saying, because she worked in the NAAFI, remember?

Yeah.

They'd had a bomb warning there.

But there was always bomb warnings...

Yeah, I know. But I remember getting to school the next day, and it took ages to get to school, and everyone was late anyway, but I remember Cassie specifically wanting to wait for me to get off the bus "aww, I'm really sorry, I'm really sorry, stupid stuff, and are you alright?"

Did she think you're argument was not a big deal in comparison to that?

Well, no, no, yeah, that's what I mean. We'd both found out that something bad had happened, and you know...

Was it talked about at school?

Nut, not that I can remember.

Can you remember Mum or Dad talking to us about it?

Nut.

So do you think that it wasn't that out of the ordinary then?

Ppfff, see, my memories of finding things out like that at school, are more about, they had this tannoy system all through the school, the one I specifically remember was when all the Dads had gone to the Gulf, and Mr Price had got on the tannoy and said "Hmmm, there have been reports that a number of British Force members have been blown up in the Gulf" there had been an attack on a tank, which turned out to be Americans blowing up a couple of guys by mistake. And I just remember thinking "why are you coming up and telling a school full people, whose all dads were out there" so that, that I remember more specifically because Dad was out there...

That was two years older though, Dad wasn't out there.

Well Dad was out and away, he wasn't home, I remember thinking "Jesus Christ, I know Dads alright, but everyone else's Dads around me's in the Army"

You would have been 12, 13 then, a bit more...

Yeah, but I remember thinking "bloody hell, why are you telling us that?" so that I remember more, cos that was unresolved if you know what I mean, whereas what had happened when the bomb went off, "the bomb"? See? When they had been shot...

See, that's funny how you still think of it as a bomb, because you're first instinct of it, was this report of a bombing...

Yeah, so they got shot basically, it was resolved as soon as I got home and everyone else was alright, if you know, in terms of my twelve year old eyes or whatever...

You know there was a baby that was shot?

Yeah I know, was it not a guy who had British plates on? Ehm, he was still in his uniform, he was Asian, and there as a, what, 8 month old baby in the back? His son...

18 month I think.

Was it 18 month? In the back, and they had gone in, I think it was a son, they had gone in to get petrol, I think in a Volkswagen Campervan, and a van went past and they blew it up with a grenade gun thing, I don't know. Is that not why the Schnelle (chip shop takeaway place) got rebuilt?

No, no, cos it happened at the petrol station, and it went across the road and hit a guest house, but it, there was two gunmen, who shot into the back of the car, and then the car carried on and hit a wall, and they got taken away in another car by a ...

Who did?

The two gunmen got picked up by somebody else...

Oh, were they waiting across the road?

They were waiting, yeah.

They weren't in the van?

No.

They were specifically waiting for someone?

Yeah. Dad says that he cycled past it an hour or so before...

Jesus Christ. I didn't know that. I do remember the Queen coming or something afterwards...

Yeah?

A memorial service.

Yeah?

I remember the Queen coming over for something, and they landed at Wildenrath, and then they'd taken the bodies back to Britain, I think.

Cos he was British, but his parents came from India.

Yeah. I think eh, I mean I might be very wrong, but I specifically remember going onto camp the day the Queen had landed I think. And again the security, the security issues. So I remember that. So really, they were just sitting waiting across the road?

There was no reassurance from school or...

No.

Cos you know how we had to check for bombs and stuff, do you think that is why, although it was closer, it was kind of not expected, but that kind of stuff was happening anyway...?

I think you kinda; we just got blasé about it. "Oh, there's a bomb warning at school, you're all going to have to stand out in the the..."

But this was something that did happen...

I don't know. See your understanding of how you imagine that is, it would have been ok. "My Dad can protect me from anything" do you know what I mean? Eh, "something's going to happen, but Dads going to stop it". Do you know what I mean?

Yeah. What, like, for example, checking under the car?

Uhuh. Dad, Dad, Dads looking after us all...do you know what I mean?

Do you remember the thing, the TV adverts of the guy saying "remember, check under your car" and they would show you how to do it?

Hahaha!

Remember? Do you not remember that?

No! I do remember them stopping us at Rheindahlen though, stopping in the car queue on the camp, and they were playing that R.E.M. song – "Stand in the place where you were..." do you not remember that?

Yeah.

Waiting because they were using those really long...

Mirrors?

Mirrors, yeah, constantly on every single car that went in and out.

How do you, can you remember how Dad used to check for it?

He used to get down on the ground. He used to, he used to, "huuh, huut" in one go, and then look underneath, didn't he?

Yeah.

He'd just drop himself on the ground, and his arms went like "that" and he'd always look.

Did you ever think that there would be anything under there?

I don't think so.

Cos I've got a little bit of a memory of thinking, maybe each time "I hope there's nothing under there", but I don't know if I'm just making that up now.

I don't think so. I don't think I would of.

So you don't remember it feeling any different afterwards? At school, or anything?

It was just relief I suppose.

Relief it had happened?

No! Relief it wasn't you and Dad.

You weren't frightened of it happening again or anything?

No, I don't think, because again, I didn't understand the reasoning behind it, I didn't understand the position we were in, I didn't understand that people could hate the organisation that Dad worked with so much, and that it could come down to religion, do you know what I mean, I wasn't aware of the reasoning behind it, so I therefore didn't concern myself. Whereas now obviously, if I was the age I was now, and that had happened, and I had kids, God only knows what Mum and Dad were feeling. Especially I suppose, especially even Dad, because he might have been thinking "oh, my family's in danger, potentially and it's because of my job". I can only try and get my head round that because I know, you know, we could have lived on camp, we could have not lived on camp, they made that decision, did they then think "oh God, we've made the wrong decision, we've made the right decision?" Cos I think we probably had a better life living off camp than we would have done on camp. Ehm, you know...but then, we didn't leave straight after that did we?

No it was another 2 years.

Yeah, so then would you then leave because what, someone else is trying to intimidate you into not being in a country, so you know what I mean?

Yeah.

Although even though, that's not the reason why that happened but...you know I think I would have still done the same as they did? Remained there.

You think it just went back to normal then, quite quickly?

Mmhm. All it did was, we got to school a bit later cos, we had to queue to get onto camp.

And being a kid, you don't sort of think about the bigger context.

You don't know I suppose in your head where everything goes, you're very insular at that age.

Do you not think therefore, that looking back that was a big part of your life?

I do, because...

Not in terms of hindsight, looking back, but in terms of an incident, things you remember, I remember that, obviously it's a bad thing...

No, because I've been writing about this kind of stuff as well, but in terms of remembering about the things and experiences when we lived at that part of our life, it's a big part of it. It is hindsight, I can't help, affect how hindsight's going to affect it, but as you get older and you become aware of the reasoning and what and wherefore, before that happening, you start to think "Bloody hell. That was quite a big deal". And I'm glad I was kind of that young, to not have been pondering it, or questioning it, because imagine you were like a 15 year old, and

you think “right, I was across the road from where that happened” you could just become really depressed, and like, consumed by it, do you know what I mean? Its like when kids, it’s a bad example, but when families split up and the Mum or Dads leave, and the kid’s so young they can’t really remember why its such a big or bad deal, that that happened, because you don’t understand, do you know what I mean, whereas if you’re a teenager, and it happened, it would ruin your world kind of. So it’s a similar thing, your brain can’t, your brains not full enough to be able to position it in terms of scaling how important or...

Well, for you at that age, your scale was “is everyone alright?”

Was “is Dad, Craig alright? Right, fine, get on with it”

Do you remember anything happening like a service? Yeah, you remember the Queen coming?

Yeah, I remember the Queen coming to Wildenrath, that’s it. I don’t remember any particular involvement in it, but I don’t know.

So, looking back at it now, how do you feel about, what do you think of the whole thing? What do you think of people’s reasons for doing it, or...

I can understand why they went to Germany.

Why the IRA went to Germany?

Yeah.

Why?

Because they thought people in the Forces stuck out like a sore thumb. They knew where they were, they could kind of assume what their patterns were because, Wildenrath I suppose was easy “ok, they’re going to go off camp, in their uniform still”, even if they weren’t in the uniform still, they’ll know who they are, because of the type of car and the number plates they’ve got. They were sitting... I suppose, I’m not sure how, where the German authorities would have been about such a thing anyway, for them to be caring about people going about with guns and that, I think its pretty shocking. Because the whole thing as well, ok, the IRA will go to Germany to blow someone up, kill someone, sorry, to make a point but they won’t do, or threaten anyone whose a member of that organisation in Scotland, because of Scotland’s history with England.

You mean IRA members in Scotland?

No, they wouldn’t perform an attack...

Oh, in Scotland, on military people in Scotland?

Yeah, because of Scotland, and Scottish peoples history with England. That guy was Indian, you know, Indian people, go back a couple of generations, were suppressed by the English, because its part of the English Empire, it’s the same thing.

But I don’t think they picked on him deliberately.

No, but it can be construed in the same sort of way, so ehm, they won't perform an attack on Scotland, yet most of the members of the Forces in Scotland are English, or other nationalities, they pick and choose whatever they do, if they're going to do it, they're going to do it. You can't stop someone whose gonna want to really do something, they're gonna do it, no matter how well you plan, or try and avert those kind of things happening, they're going to do it.

What do you think about, I don't know how much you know about the IRA or whatever, but ehm, how affective that kind of incident is in terms of getting what they wanted, or getting something to happen?

Nothing. It was a total waste of time and waste of energy. A waste of two peoples lives. Because what did it achieve for them? Nothing. None of us left.

But then, you know, they've got an Assembly, and they've got people who used to be in the IRA, as part of a government.

Put that particular incident didn't achieve anything.

But, then, as a whole, that kind of tactic might have achieved something?

It depends; I'm not in a position where I feel that my liberties have been taken away from me to such an extent that it would drive me to that kind of action. I can't really comment unless I actually felt like that. It's alright being judgemental about it, and saying "oh no, it's terrible, how can you do a violent protest to get your point across?" but people could be driven to that point. For example, people who were trying to blow up Nazi's because they didn't want to be ruled by them, would they then be seen in a similar sort of way, do you know what I mean? Do you understand what I'm talking about?

So it then becomes a view of history then, looking back to see whether or not the perpetrators are fighting against what is assumed to be good or bad?

That's what I'm saying, I'm saying I can't really answer that question because who's to say what's right or wrong, what's good or bad? Because it's all circumstantial, it's all based on beliefs, it's the same with Al Qaeda, or "The Insurgents" at the moment, it depends on so many things that you can't say whether it's right or wrong. If people are threatening your culture, and your lifestyle and your freedom and liberty, well, they're being attacked everyday, by the Government at the moment, who we voted and elected to be in power, so it just depends on what way you think its been, your liberties and your personal space or whatever is being attacked. People are so blind at the moment that...

So do you, so you can, to an extent, understand people being driven to that point? Not in terms of understand it on a personal level, why someone would go out and shoot somebody, but...

It's trying to, I don't know, prove a point isn't it? Do you know what I mean? Trying to get an opinion across, it depends which way you decide to do it, it's not right or wrong really, you'd

like to think they'd be able to do it with words, but some people obviously believe that's not possible. You know what I mean? You know, like, I don't know. But if, if say tomorrow they said "right, anyone whose of Scottish birth, family, origin, whatever, is not allowed to marry, or have family with an Englishman" that's it, I suppose its like apartheid, black or white, I don't know what I'd do, because obviously Olly's English, and I'm Scottish, I don't know what I'd be driven to do, to be with him, you know? You can't really attempt to say what you would do if you were actually put in that position, its like talking about a film or a piece of music "aw, that's rubbish" "have you seen it?" "Eh, no" do you know what I mean, it's the same principle but like...

Yeah, of course, but that's why to an extent for example, something happening like its happening in Iraq, and there's all these terrorist attacks and you think "that's terrible" there is also, they're not absolutely without reason.

Yeah, no, did they ask for the Americans to come and do that? Who gave the Americans, again and the British, the right and the permission to come and totally change their culture and their... you know?

So people can be driven?

Yeah, but I can't pass judgement on, I don't know understand where they're coming from or what they're trying to achieve you know.

So at that time, you weren't worried about it happening again?

No.

Are you worried about things happening now?

Yeah. Well I think it's because it's been bred into me, no matter how much I try to ignore it, and pretend...

What has?

You know, like America, the nation is just a nation living off fear, the way that things are presented to us, the way that the news is right, and the way the papers go...

You mean you can't help but be scared?

Yeah, you kind of can't help but feel apprehensive when say for example, I don't know. I don't know, when you get the train in and out of London you think "bloody hell, the signals going to be bugged" and...I'm a pessimist anyway. I always think if something's happened, how am I going to get out of the situation? You know? It may be a fleeting thought, but it still passes through my head every time I get onto a train, a bus, or a plane if I ever do that again, you know?

Uhuh.

Is there someone on this bus, plane, train whatever, capable of wanting to destroy us all? Probably, yes. Do you know what I mean?

But there's nothing you can do about it.

Nut.

So do you just change the way you do things?

No, I'd never let that happen, cos then it's giving into the whole kind of "breeding of fear". Then we'll all end up like complete and utter Americans, that destroy everything that's not something they know, you know? Which would include everything from being a different colour, different religion, different cultural background, different country. You know? You'd end up being even more insular and you'd never leave your house.

When you look back on it, do you think it made any kind of impact on you, really? Or does it only become an impact when you're old enough to understand the significance of it on a wider scale?

I think so.

Because what I was speaking to Dad about was because he's, well he's older obviously, it was an experience on a personal, and an external way, as in, you know, it was a worldly thing, but maybe for you, at that age, it was just a personal thing.

No I couldn't put it into complete true context so...

So you're context when you look back on it now is changed, because you look back on it without adult knowledge then, but with adult knowledge now.

Definitely. It's different, because its hindsight you know? Your knowledge and your brain or whatever expands when you get older, so that kinda irritates and consumes a twelve year old memory you know, as you get older you think more and more about it and you think "Jesus Christ..." but you know, its that whole thing about being a kid and being fearless as well, you know? Would you do the kind of stuff we were doing as kids now? You wouldn't because you'd be like, well, you know, we were covered in cuts and bruises and scabs and stuff, that's why kids are kids, they don't, it takes a while to learn you know?

So did you ever think about it?

What do you mean?

Like, before I told you I was going to do this?

Yeah, I thought about it a lot, yeah.

You did?

Yeah.

Beforehand?

Sporadically, yeah.

What, would something trigger it, like, for example a terrorist incident?

No.

But you would occasionally think about it?

Yeah, occasionally, like "I wanna know a bit more, is there any point of knowing a bit more?"

Do you think it's important, doing this, do you think it's important to look back at things that have happened?

No, because then you'd end up living your life in a complete circle, you'd be like, ok, what am I? 27, if I started to go through every single thing in my life up to the point I was 27, I'd end up being 58, or 74 by the time I got to that point, do you know what I mean? Its...things...I mean this is a pretty big thing you know? In terms of the scale, in terms of the context, the rest of the world, it's a big thing, because it had ripple effects for everywhere else, I mean we weren't directly involved there but...

But to you it's not a big thing of your life, as an individual, out of your personal experiences?

I don't think so, no. I think it would have been different if I'd of been at home, with you three, I don't know. Of course it would have been different at home with the three of you, but because I was out, I remember that panic, panic for about half an hour, and that easing away obviously when I spoke to Mum on the phone, just relief, and just waiting to get home so I could get to bed, you know?

Uhuh. Well, what I mean is do you think it's eh, what do you think of the fact that I'm doing this to try and get an ehm... I can't really... I describe it as a small view of it, like an individuals view of something significant that happened, in terms of the telling of history, or the telling of an incident, instead of it being newspaper reports or...

Well yeah, it's important if you get as many different opinions about one thing that happened in the past, which inevitably becomes history, if you just take one view like normal historians do, you can't trust that. If you get as many opinions and views of an incident, from so many different angles, you might get a more realistic picture, but again, again you'll never get the whole thing. So if you get, for example, the TV footage or whatever, the TV story, the newspapers, every, opinions from someone who was involved in it, i.e. the IRA, the family of the people who were killed, someone working in the petrol station, all the people who lived around...you get circles of people all around the event, who would all have different knowledge, you would have had all the members of our family, in this country (Scotland) maybe seeing that on the news and thinking "Oh my God" you know? There's bands of it, you know, its like, you know, read a book about the historians writing a book about for example, when Napoleon got killed, you know, the battle involved, he had one person writing the story, but there's thousands of people there, so that person could have been writing anything, whose there to validate it? And that was in history you know, and we're all looking at that and saying its right and going "well actually it might not be". It's like the whole thing with the Bible. About who wrote it, what they put in it, what they left out of it. Its...you're never gonna get what happened. And then who's to say what happened, because what happened was every single persons conception of it.

Exactly, which is why our views, even of this single incident its quite significant, are actually quite different.

Of course they are.

Does it matter to you what happened?

What do you mean? Of course it matters, if it hadn't happened, everything I am now, I am because of everything that's happened in the past, so if that hadn't happened, I can't say what I would have been like.

But, do you think its worthy of looking back at and investigating as a...

Anything is I suppose. Because it was a big thing...I suppose people would question it and say "well, acts of terrorism are relevant now" was it an act of terrorism? I suppose it was...

Do you remember it being on the news much?

No. You maybe should speak to Olly, see if he does because...

Well the thing is there was so many; there were so many incidents, IRA shootings and stuff.

His opinions obviously twisted because I've obviously told him about it and he's going to be affected by what I've said to him.

So you remember talking to Mum and Dad about it, ever?

Nut.

Never?

Nut. Nut. Why? Have they said we did?

Eh, no, I asked Dad if he spoke to us about it, he said he probably explained what happened, but that because we were already part of it you know, the checking of the bombs and stuff, that he probably didn't think it was necessary.

Do you think she wants help in the kitchen?

I don't know, but that's fine.

INTERVIEW WITH
THE AUTHOR'S MOTHER
09/10/2005

Craig - So, what do you, can you remember when it happened?

Mum - Oh, can I not say "Guten tag meinen jungen"?!

If you want!

What do I remember? About what though?

Can you remember when the shooting was? Like, remember the date of it?

No.

Well, it was, I think it was the 27th of October 1989

1989.

So it was 16 years ago.

Ehm...pfff....

Nut? Well, that's when it was.

Was it?

Yeah.

1989?

Uhuh, October 1989, so that was...

Half way through the tour? It must have been.

The tour?

Our tour, 1986 to 1991.

Yeah, it was.

So it's like, halfway through.

Uhuh.

Was that at the garage?

Uhuh.

Right. Yes, I do remember.

So can you remember that night? The night of it happening?

Nope.

Nut?

No, I just remember the morning I think, from what I can recall. Um, I think you're Dad must have had some kind of warning. An alert as to what had happened because, they got told, there was lots of things that happened after it that we couldn't do, and things that we had to do. As in, checking the garage, just making sure everything was secure. We weren't allowed to bring the car out of the garage until it was checked.

In the garage?

Yeah.

Right.

In and out, you had to check it in and out.

What you mean the petrol station garage?

No...

Oh, our own garage?

Yeah. Cos we lived so close by it, ehm, we had to check everything around about us, in the flats, surrounding garages, the cellars...

What, checking it for...just once, one big check or? Did we not have to check the cars before the shooting as well?

They checked cars on and off the camp, from what I recall yeah. I can't recall whether or not, I don't think we were checking the cars outside the house at that point. They checked the cars in and out, definitely at the camp gates. With the mirrors under the car. But then, we had to check them ourselves, before they left our premises. As well, before you got in it, before you got out it, you couldnae, we couldnae go anywhere, like at the weekend, like every weekend we'd take you guys out, we'd go off somewhere, before we'd got in the car, you're Dad had to get on his knees and check underneath the car, all around it, above the tyres, things like that, and underneath the car.

And was that only after the actual shooting?

Yeah, really. Wasn't aware that we were having to do that before it. Although there was some, there was some sort of alert that they were targeting people with BFP (British Forces Personnel) number plates. Because we had number plates...

Black and white ones?

Yeah, yes. They were obvious. That we were military.

But you don't remember the actual night of it happening? Because...

I do think I've got a vague recollection now of maybe sirens and things like that, that I do remember yeah, people going out on their balconies and things like that, but at the time I wasnae aware of what it was that happened.

Cos Dad says that he remembers the two of you being in the kitchen, and that there was the sound of three shots and then a pause and then another couple of shots. And that he thinks he said to you "That wasn't right, that sounded like gun fire" or something.

I cannae remember. I think I do remember noises Craig, and that, and sirens and that, I really cannae remember, I've got a really bad memory Craig.

That's alright.

I only remember the hassle afterwards.

Can you remember Karen was on the base at the time, because she'd been at a dance class?

Nut?

I dinnae remember that either.

Nut?

I told you my memories no so good.

It doesn't matter; we're jogging it a bit now. Cos Karen was at a dance class with a friend, and her friends Mum was to pick them up, drop them off and pick them up, but they couldn't come off the camp, because the camp got shut, and that Karen had to phone, had to phone home to find out if we were alright.

Yeah.

And then she had to stay on the base for a couple of hours or so before she got back.

I cannae remember Craig.

Nut? So do you remember the day after, do you remember finding out what had happened?

I remember finding out that, after it, yeah, what happened. All I know was that it was a shock cos it was so close, and it was a Schnelle, the garage and the takeaway place, that we used regularly ourselves, not only ourselves, but everybody else, kinda on and off camp as well, and all the locals round about. It was just such a shock that it happened so close, it could have been any one of us, or any one of our friends as well.

So do you remember feeling worried about that?

Oh aye, yeah, yeah, cos it kinda brought it home more so, because we'd heard the rumours and things like that before, about terrorists, marking military cars, ehm, and I think, I can't recall if there was another incident in Holland, and an incident in one of the ports as well...

Oh yeah, that's right, Dad said that.

Yeah, and that was a BFG car stopping at traffic lights, they were shot at, and I remember being a wee bitty, actually more frightened at the thought of that, than anything else round about us, until that happened at the garage.

So that, before that it happened at the garage, were you worried because of these other things?

Maybe we were aware, well we knew from the minute that we went to Germany that there were the possibility of things like that going on.

So you knew it could be dangerous?

Yeah, yeah.

But obviously when it did happen there it was more...

You're just more aware, you're double checking everything...

Were you more worried then?

Aye, yeah. But I mean, we were worried, but we did the best we could to keep ourselves safe and you guys safe, that was check everything before we went oot. It affected where we'd go as well, cos we used to go to Venlo I think, on the Dutch border quite a lot, up until that point.

Well Dad mentioned that he thought as well, that it stopped you going places.

Yeah, it stopped us going oot, definitely. In fact, it was quite a while before we went back, and when we went back there were still, from what I can remember, barriers round the station, the tube station and the railway station, in Venlo.

What, to make it difficult to attack?

To keep you far away from certain places, like maybe from their Mayors, or things like that. You know, their centre of town. There were barriers keeping people away from that kind of area, you couldnae park your car close to the railway station, the bus station, because there were concerns that parked cars near those type of areas, like it is now. Parking near busy places, railway stations, with lots of people, you know, could devastate them, people could explode a car, you know what that's like, that's happened recently, that kinda thing. So they'd keep the cars out of the car parks that were closest to the railway station, bus station or the centre of town...

So it wasn't as easy for you...

Wasn't easy to get into the centre of things, but that was quite some months afterwards.

But it was mainly around the car then that safety things were...

Yeah, yeah

You didn't feel, like, walking around or anything like that...

Ehm, yeah, well you would choose where you went there as well, because we didn't go to Holland.

We didn't go to Holland much after that?

Not much, no for a while anyway, then we would of, cos you do, you get a bit, you just forget about, you get a bit, no blasé, but a bit, you need to get back to normal, otherwise we'd all end up indoors wouldn't we?

Yep. Did it take you a while to get back to normal then?

Ehm, I personally didn't think it did. But we did think twice about where we took you guys. What was it? I remember having a row with the couple upstairs.

The German...?

No, no it was Eric and Eileen, because we were very aware of people coming and going in the flat, but the flats were always secure, we were always told to make sure that the doors were locked and everything, we had this, you pressed the button and you had the speakers, and you would only let them in if you knew who they were, so everybody in the flat, there was 6, there was like 6 houses in the one block, everybody in that block had to be aware of it, and we had to try and make sure that everybody shut the door behind them, and things like that. Now there were occasions, when we were on the bottom floor, that you would know when the door was left open, we had to go down and shut the door behind other people, we just put notices up, reminders, "Please for security reasons please keep the doors shut". But as you know, we had rooms, down in the cellar.

Yeah, oh yeah, I forgot about that...

Eileen and Eric had a teenage lad, I would say about the time, probably about 15, and we had started to notice teenagers, German teenagers coming in with him, but they werenae coming

up the stairs, they werenae passing our door, you know, Eileen and Eric lived upstairs, and what would found out, through the grapevine, was she was thinking, starting to convert the cellar room underneath, into like a flat thing for him.

Really?

Yes, yeah. So he could have his pals in and oot, without coming up the stairs, bothering them. And I remember having a row then, though I'd never have done that, had it not been for that time...

You were worried...

Because these were German pals he had, I'm not saying that the Germans were responsible, or they were irresponsible people, but they were people that we didn't really know.

Who weren't aware of the situation in the same way...

We would be living directly above them. So if, for example, I've forgotten the lads name, if he had forgotten to secure the door, when he left with his pals or whatever, or these guys knew how to get in, without him being there, it puts everybody else's...

It's just that fear isn't it, you don't know what else is going on?

That's it. I remember having a bit of a row with them about that, because she, she couldnae see the harm in it, your Dad said to Eric, with his stance in the Air Force, being a Flight Sergeant, he should know better. And he should know about the responsibilities and the security and that, and Eric turned round and he agreed, "No, you're right Donald, you're right" so it all got...but the laddie didnae speak to me for quite some time! But I remember, and that was why I was like that about that, just because of the security. And, easy for somebody to blow somebody up in a petrol station, it's just as easy for somebody to get in and put something in one of the cellars, if he was down there are as a young teenager. He could put everybody else's life at risk, you know?

Do you feel that way just now about anything, about security, for example people on trains, buses and planes and stuff?

No.

Just now then, the way that terrorism, things that happen like in London and stuff, that doesn't affect you in the same way?

It doesnae bother me, no, if I was down in London, I'd think yeah, then I probably would.

Do you feel quite safe?

I feel quite safe up here. But that's not to mean that we are safer up here. You just do feel safer up here.

I suppose living in Germany where it had been before, a target anyway, as well as after that shooting, then you would feel more nervous about it, because it had happened before we went and during the time we were there. So do you remember after it happened, having to speak to us about it or anything?

Well yeah, we would have spoken to you guys about it “Be careful”, where you were and who was round about you. And things like that, and not to go off on your own and just things like that. Which you never really did anyway.

But you didn't have to tell us about the actual incident or...what, like, having to explain to us what was going on or anything?

I don't know if I did that, maybe your Dad did Craig. I probably would have thought you were too young I think. I was a bit concerned in case it would....

Worried us?

Worried yours. Yeah, but...maybe your Dad would have done, maybe with Karen, but...

But you can't remember afterwards...

Must have done really, cos Karen knew, Karen was aware what...

Karen said she half knew what was going on but...other than having to check your cars and stuff, do you get the impression that people were more frightened and stuff, did it ever bother you, not bother you but, did you ever think about the fact that, because Dad was in the RAF, and they were targeting people in the military, did that worry you? The job that Dad did, or does? Would make us more vulnerable maybe?

Yeah, I suppose I've got to say yes to that, but I never really thought much about it, because we never really went to places that I felt that we stood out as a target, do you know what I mean? The big thing was the number plates on the cars, that was the big big thing.

What the black and white ones, or the ones that they changed to, like the normal British ones?

No, when they changed to the normal British ones, it wasnae as bad, because it's not as obvious from a distance. It's not quite so obvious but, a car with white letters and black just stood out straight away.

Did you ever think about having a German car or anything?

Ehm, no, nut, no. Because we couldnae afford one anyway, apart from the fact we would have to change it to come back (to Britain) and the license and everything, no, no.

So, it didn't really affect general life?

Nut. Nut. Nut. Not me, as far as...I used to get concerned after it if I'd seen other peoples garage doors open because...because you're talking bombs, and open garages are sitting targets. You could walk past an open garage and see a box in it on one occasion, and then the following day that box is there, ok that's normal, you could walk past it another time, and there'd be another box in it, and you'd be thinking “Ooh. Is it odd, or is it not?” so my view of it, or my view on it was it should never be open in the first place, to give that worry to anybody else anyway. We were specifically asked to make sure our garages were closed at all times, closed and locked at all times. You didn't open your garage and drive away, and leave it open, you had to get out your garage and shut the door, lock it, and then drive away. People

prior to that were just ignoring that, and just driving their car out the garage in the morning and driving off, and it still be open when they got back.

I remember them being open, because we used to play football in them.

Yeah, well that used to bother me because you know, if there's things like that going on, and some people are being aware and taking security measures and everything then, it was irritating that other people weren't, because what's the point?

It just takes one...

Yeah, if half the people round about you were doing it and half weren't, that you know...

It defeats the object.

Well it does really.

Do you think people in London then, are doing the same sort of worrying things, about seeing people with bags or...

Ehm...my guess is people in London probably are, a bit suspicious of people round about them but...

But you don't feel that at all?

No, no, and I think, fortunately I think, most people, I don't know if fortunate's the right word, unfortunately or fortunately, most people are the same, you have to, have got to get on with your life, so it's some people's natural instinct if you like, just to remember things for a while, be effected by them, and forget about them, and carry on as best you can.

Do you think that the incident, the remembering of it would have affected you...keeping enough of a memory of an incident or, a feeling of something...do you think you...cos that'll help you in the long run to deal with things...or do you think it's just best to completely forget about it?

No, I don't think it's best to completely forget about things like that because, no, you need your part of life, you know, you need to...sometimes I think you need to...hmm. To *feel*, you need to feel that kind of thing. What's the word? You need to go through it to ehm...

To be more grateful of...

Well yeah, yeah, because you're not aware then, you just go through life...

You're sort of naïve about it...

You stay in the same place and nothings happened to you etc, and I don't suppose you'd be a lesser person, but, it'll help you prepare for something else. Whatever comes along, that's along the same, same way like, you know? It might help you deal with it better, the next time. it would make you, it would make you aware, really.

Dad said he felt it was thought about for a long time, or at least til the next thing happened because there was other bombings and stuff. Would you say that was probably....

Yeah, yeah that would be true.

Was there any kind of atmosphere in the village, from the Germans or could you, I guess it's hard to tell but...

No, I don't think so, but then we never really mixed much with them anyway. The ones round about would always nod and say "good morning" and things anyway, and as far as I'm aware they carried on.

Do you feel that, like you said, you think about it for a while, then you forget about it, not completely but, don't think about it at least. Have you ever thought about it again, in the, well its over 16 years but, do you ever think back to that incident or anything or...

Ehm...I think I have, once or twice when things have happened.

Do you remember how worried you were, when you are remembering it?

Nah, I just think I'm aware of feeling sorry for the people, that its happened to their families, yeah because, of how concerned we were at the time, but we were about whether that kind of thing was going to happen round about again, but concern for you guys and our friends but, really really concerned for the people it had happened to, I didn't know them personally, but still...

Do you feel that they were part of your "group" I guess?

Yeah, because they were a part of your community, your area, so you do feel for them. So it makes you aware of...

Emotions? How people it happens to now must feel?

Yeah.

How bad it must be. Do you remember if there was any kind of service or anything? Like a memorial service or anything? Karen says she thinks she can remember the Queen coming.

I can't, I can't remember Craig. I really can't remember. I just remember feeling, remembering back and thinking just how lucky we were, that it wisnae any of us, or your pals, or Karen's pals, or our pals fae working, or your Dads friends.

So did you worry beforehand about Dad? Before it happened, were you worried about Dad because he was in the RAF, or again, afterwards that....

No, I never really...afterwards I think I did, yeah, that's normal, but no I dinnae think so. I used to worry, start to worry when you seen them checking every single car, and an alert statement up on camp, cos you knew that something somewhere must have happened.

There was a scare or something...

Yeah, and then, I used to worry then, yeah.

What about when Dad would check the car, did you ever did you worry then?

Yeah, yeah.

Cos I remember worrying .

Cos I remember, in fact I do now remember saying something to him about that. I don't know what was better, them checking the car as you're going in and out of camp, or you checking

your car. Because if there was something there, you're the one who's going to get clobbered or set something off like...

Dad says that he was, he always thought that he was quite eh... a bit more knowledgeable than other people because he had to do some bomb disposal and stuff, so he felt that if he had seen something that he would be, not ok, but that he could tell.

Yeah.

Where were you working at that time? In the NAAFI?

The NAAFI Rheindahlen, yeah.

You don't remember there being, I think there was something happened in Rheindahlen, just before it, like a, an attempted bombing at a barracks or something?

Nut.

Nut?

Nut. I've got a bad memory, I tell ye.

Well no, when things get triggered...do you remember anyone phoning from home, or do you remember if it was in the news much?

I think it was in the news, and I think I do recall somebody phoning, I can't remember who it would be. Other than your Dads Mum and Dad and that, or my Mum and Dad, yeah I'm sure there were phone calls yeah.

Did you know there was a baby killed in the shooting? In the car.

What the one in the garage?

Uhuh.

No, I cannae remember that Craig. Nut...oh, a young couple and a baby?

Uhuh.

Yes it was.

The guy was shot, and the baby was shot, the mother survived but...was there flowers or anything laid out at the garage or...?

Yeah I think there were.

I kinda half remember that.

Yeah? One thing I think it did do, was a lot of people suspected the Turks.

Right.

Yeah? I don't...I cannae quite remember why that was. I think it was because they thought they'd seen, seen a car pulling away, and that was like, had Turkish guys in it...

Right, ok.

I recall that.

Was that just like a rumour around the village or?

Ehm, I think it was a rumour in the village yeah, but I think there was some truth in it as well.

I think when the news came out and that, on the news, that they said that as well.

Right.

Ehm, but then there's Turkish people living in Germany, and the Germans didn't like them anyway.

So they were suspicious of them anyway?

Yeah, they were suspicious yeah. And there was quite a lot of Turks that hung about at that...

At the Schnelle?

At the Schnelle, and that as well yeah.

Obviously, it was the IRA that did it, were you ever aware of why they were doing, what did you think about why they would do something like that? Or did you just think, there's no excuse for someone to do that? What did you, or do you think about the kind of people who did it?.....Nothing?

No.

Nut?

Nope.

You didn't get angry about the sort of, the pointlessness or...

No, cos I didnae understand the politics behind any of the IRA, or anything like that, I just had natural feelings of being angry with anybody that would do that kind of thing, for any reason...to me if the IRA attacks, Egyptians or Israelis or whatever, I just would never be able to comprehend how anybody can do that.

Well that's what I mean, I mean, that is a feeling towards that kind of thing, I don't mean the politics of the IRA, I just mean if you just cant accept that, you know, any reason for doing that. You still, do you think the same things now, when things happen on the TV,

Yeah, probably just really really sad, and bad people....I'm not gonna be here long enough to worry about it...haha! Its you guys that are gonnae need to worry about it...but what can you do about it? You just have to make sure that everybody around about you in your family, and your life and friends etc, are... I don't know...happy I suppose really. Cos if they're not happy, then I think that when these kinda things happen.

So you think you've got a bad memory?

Bad memory of what? Of what happened in Germany?

That incident, you don't think you've got...

I've got a sad memory of it, I think.

If you look back at it, do you remember a feeling, do you have a feeling of sadness or worry or...

The feeling of worrying I think, cos I do remember that, I do remember your Dad going out and checking the car, I do remember getting stressed out about the doors being left open, because its somebody else taking your families life in their hands really, by being either thoughtless or, or careless. Knowing that we were in that situation, we were like, targets if

you like, ehm, I remember being worried about that. Being angry about that, and the people round about you, because we were living in a community where we were all so close.

It makes you realise just how dangerous, or just how vulnerable you are. You want to do your best to stop anything happening really.

Yeah, cos we were sitting targets, by the cars and the areas we lived in.

But that didn't worry you to the extent that you didn't want to be there, or....

Be there, no.

No?

Nut, no. Cos that was our choice to be there, we knew when we went out that...

And you don't want that to be changed by...

Yeah, you don't want other people to stop you doing what you want to do, and where you want to go, because of, other people. What they might, or might not do to you, you know? You just have to...get on with your life and hope that nothing like that's going to happen to you! I don't know...

Do you think its important, obviously I'm doing this, looking back at that particular incident, do you think its important for people to go back and have a look at how, how it felt, or what their memories are of important things like that?

Yeah, I think so. Cos you forget about things so easily don't you! As we've found out by asking me these questions! Ehm, so yeah, yeah, yeah, cos you need to think about your experience in life, as you do along don't you? You need to think about the bad things as well as the good things, because its, well, its emotion, yeah you need to, I think you need to look back every now and then.

I think its important to look back as well, but I find it quite interesting to find out our memories of this, because we weren't major figures in it, in the actual thing, we weren't politicians, or members of the IRA, or members of the family, but I think its quite interesting to know how normal people experienced an important event, or a significant event, because, you know, when you look at history books and things, they're often about Army Generals and things, but there's ehm, there's everyone else around that, everyone else has an experience of it. Like your experience of feeling worried or, that affected your life at that very second, I mean, you were worried because of this thing that happened.

Well you do need to don't you? Because you forget as well. But I think, one persons view on something, or their memories of something can probably be distorted along the way.

Yeah! Every one of us so far (the family) I think...

Has said different things?

Well, two points...

I wouldn't be surprised

Well, I know that my memories distorted, and I'm trying to work out why. I mean, my main memory of the incident is wrong.

How?

Well, from memory, I don't know if its memory, or what I thought happened. I thought, I was playing cards with Dad at the time, and that you were on your way, or had been, at camp, picking Karen up. And I remember – I have a picture in my head – of me playing cards at the table with Dad, and there being a noise, and Dad looking up and saying "That wasn't right, that was gunfire". But, that's me giving it to a specific incident, but what coulda, I was in the house, I may have been playing cards on my own, and Dad might have been in the kitchen and I might have heard him say that, but through the course of time, I've developed what I thought was a particular incident which didn't, it didn't exist. Or at least I don't think it did.

Yeah.

And so going back, and us all giving these stories, it goes to show that you know, in a huge event, in a massive event...

You could actually be right Craig. Because I vaguely remember having been in the car with somebody too. And coming home, and finding out about it. but that could have been the wrong day...

What it goes to show is, you know history, how...

I think it's probably because...

You merge them all?

Yeah. Because I'm thinking "ok, lets say I'm in the kitchen with your Dad" and it was right, we heard something together, which I think probably did happen, but because I'm partly thinking, I think afterwards when we discovered what had happened "oh my God, I *could* have been in the car picking Karen up. I *could* have been in the car bringing Karen back, and stopping for petrol"

And in turn, that could have affected my memory of it.

I'm thinking, that's maybe what it was, yes. You could have heard me say, "Oh god, I could have been away to pick Karen up, I could have stopped and got petrol, I could have been getting chicken at the Schnelle, or chips for the kids" or, yeah. It was all, "Aw could have been, what if...oh, I'm glad I didn't go out that night" or "I'm glad I was ten minutes later" or "I'm glad it wisnae any of our friends" but you're not, certainly not glad its happening. Should never, should never have happened.

No. I think that's why I've, that kinda structure of memory, that's why I'm interested in doing this, because this is, this is an incident that was quite a big deal, that we all experienced in one way or another, as a family, as close people, but it still varies.

Aye, yep.

And it varies in terms of what you can remember, and what you do remember, like what you choose to remember. And it also varies in emotionally, and so when something happens...

Yeah, but its when, when you're asked about it, as well I suppose. If you were asked comparatively quickly afterwards, you maybe would recall more, than later. Whereas if you don't speak about it at the time, and as time goes by, then somebody asks you about it, you will probably, maybe end up saying what you think happened, than what actually happened.

And it also gets confused by things like the news at that time, or other people's opinions, which you then take on as your own. Because when something major happens now, or at any point in history, like I say, it's recorded through, mainly through the eyes of the important people. And if it's easily mixed up, amongst us, then it must happen a lot of the times in other things as well. That's kinda why I wanted to do this. Because, at this moment in time, its hard to know what's the truth or...and when you're presented with things on the news you don't know from what point of view things are coming from. You know, like things in Iraq, you don't really know what's true and what's not true.

I remember I used to stand at the Schnelle actually, waiting for a lift from Angela.

Uhuh, to go to Rheindahlen in the morning?

Yeah. I'm trying to remember if I was actually still there. Or if I had finished there and ended up on camp in the laundrette.

'89, Karen was in her first year in Rheindahlen.

It must have been about the time I stopped I think. I can't recall. But it was either when I was still at Rheindahlen...no...oh gosh, I can't remember. Maybe I'd finished in Rheindahlen and was on camp. Ehm, because I know I used to stand right at the edge o the car park, at the Schnelle, waiting for her to come. But then I had moved up, away from the garage, to wait for her in the morning. So I can't recall whether that was because of what, that incident. I've got a funny feeling I don't think I was working in Rheindahlen, I might have been working on camp at that time. cos I certainly wouldn't stand there, have stood there again. After that.

I was going to say earlier, do you think that being close to something like that, you know, you're saying its important emotionally, you've got emotions and you need to go through emotions, do you think it gives you a sense of empathy with it happening to other people? Do you think that something major, all though it was close to us, it wasn't directly close to us, it didn't actually involve us directly, do you think that it's important to go through things like that to have a greater understanding and sympathy with other people and their emotions and things? Because if you go through something, you know how...

Well, it's like everything else, until you going through something yourself, you don't really know how people around about are going to be feeling or how it's going to affect them. I wouldn't wish these kind of things to happen so people can find out, but, ehm, if what your asking is....well, from the point of view of being able to help the people that that kind of

thing happens to, then yeah, it would be of benefit to have people around about them that have gone through the same kind of thing, to help them get through it. all the stress and emotions and everything. That is important then I suppose.

So, in a way then, you know, wondering about how significant an incident it was for you, for all of us really, like anybody in our lives, I guess in a way, being that close to something gives you a certain understanding of, ehm, how big a deal it can be emotionally. And so that, you know, do you think that affects how you are after that, in the way that you feel for other people? I mean, its hard to explain what...going through that incident, being part of it, kind of, do you think it made you more.....care more for other people? Be more understanding towards other people?

Nooo...I'm no sure really what you're asking, but mmm, I dinnae really.....no.

Do you think you would feel, basically if that hadn't happened...

Yeah

...and you'd seen terrorist things on the TV now, do you think you would still feel the same sort of sympathy for the people involved? Or do you think that because of every experience you'd had at that...

I think you would obviously, you would feel more sympathy, ehm, empathising with it more, because you have gone through it, and you know how it affected, as you said, you know how it affected us, even though we weren't really...ok, it was so many hundred yards away from us, but, and it was somewhere we used tae go tae, every day, twice weekly, on a weekly basis, kind of thing, ehm...it would help, you would feel...*sorrier*. You'd feel more emotional I think, towards the people that were, say, in bombings and that, in Ireland, and that...

That's what I kind of mean, make you care more...

Yeah, "oh god" you know, you've got all these people that are dead, its not just them, its their families, its their friends, its people in the shops that they used to go tae, the clubs they used to go tae, the places you used to work, people are no longer seeing them go in and out, that kinda thing and...yeah

So it spreads wider and wider, and affects everybody... Sometimes when I, obviously I think, it would make you care more, but I'm only asking that to see how you would express it.

Mhmm. Maybe angry, angrier, about the people that do it, or that have done it, really irritated towards them like.

Because you know how it can make people feel?

Mhmm. Yeah...and its wrong isn't it? I mean, you shouldnae be taking peoples lives for anything, for whatever reason, never mind political, religious or whatever, its just, they shouldnae be doing it. They, its just...

So, in that case, I mean it does, going through that does make you more, eh...even if its just a thought, or a feeling, watching things happen on TV, going through that does sort of make you care more.

Mhmm.

About other people, and how the things that you do affect other people around each other. And so do you, in turn, I think, "that" going through your head, as a parent, and therefore your attitudes about how wrong this sort of thing is, can therefore affect your children. And how I would feel about the same sort of thing. Cos if I know, you think that's such a wrong thing, I mean, I'm sure all parents think it's the wrong thing, but for example, parents in Northern Ireland, who think, who may...you know, how easy it is to...

Influence?

...to influence people.

Yeah, there could be some people in Ireland jumping up and down thinking "hoorah, got the..." And their kids are sitting there hearing that, seeing that, thinking and assuming that's the way things are, and the way things should be. They'll carry on in a similar fashion I suppose.

That's how easy it can be done as well, I think.

It's just how you're brought up, and how the people round about you react, and act, and what their thoughts on things are. It's very easy to get caught...

That's why for me just now, I think, you know, there's a lot of paranoia and things, in Britain and America just now, because of things that have happened. And so, people's children are going to be paranoid as well I think.

Yeah, if you're parents are nervous about going out and about, then the kids are gonna be...I think that's what's really one of the reasons why I can't recall having said anything to you and Karen, because I think at the age you were, if we had, I think, yeah, you'd have been worried.

I don't remember being worried.

Yeah. There were certain places we wouldn't go, but we wouldn't have turned round to you and said, or Karen "right, we're not going here because of this and this" and the same thing was, I do recall, when we used to go back to the UK, which wisnae very often, but we would go back in the car in the ferry, when we would come to traffic lights, we were worried. We were definitely worried, but we would never have turned round and said...

As you came off the ferry?

Usually round about the ferries, yeah, definitely. Coming and going. Or if you were in an area, in Germany, that maybe didnae look that great, maybe there were...I hate to say it because I'm not prejudice, but there were a lot of Turks in Germany, and the Germans didn't like them either... "either", the Germans didn't like them, its just there were certain areas,

you would go and drive through, its like driving through Glasgow, certain areas in Glasgow, you just know you don't want to be in certain areas, so you wouldn't park your car there, you wouldn't spend any great length of time in that area...

See, that's interesting as well, that – in a sense – is comparable to the parent and child, because the Germans are obviously in Germany, and knew more about Germany than you or I, and so their suspicion of a certain group of people fed its way into you in a sense.

It's instilled it, yeah, the only reason why.

Maybe not in a logical, so you had a fear for something, but without knowing why, because somebody "older" or "more experienced" than you, has that suspicion then its quite easily...

You take it on, you half take it on board don't you? And that's what it would be, when you get to traffic lights, and you'd be looking around, you'd actually slow down, you know when the traffic lights were changing in advance, you'd try and slow down to try and get there in time for them changing back to green, so you could carry on through without actually stopping, ehm, or you just looked around, at the people round about you at the traffic lights. But we would never have turned around and said to you or Karen "Put your heads down" you know, cos then you'd say "Well, why?" haha, you know!? We would have to tell you...

Cos that's it, that's...

If we did that, that would instil fear into you and Karen...

And we'd lose the innocence as well. That's why I find it, you know, its kinda strange that it was that close to us but, ehm, its only now that I look back and I think "this was a significant thing". But in my life as a child, it wasn't a significant thing, that's why I'm interested in your, from your and Dads perspective because you were adults. I mean if it happened in my life now, it would be, I would immediately think that it was a part of my life, but not as a kid, it didn't, it didn't cross my mind. Which is again why, I maybe didn't think about it for maybe 10 years, until I was an adult, and then I look back at it. and then I realise how mixed up my memories of it are!

Yeah, because I think if we'd told you and Karen, you'd have been petrified to go outside. Wouldn't ye?

Yeah.

You wouldn't have wanted to go anywhere near the Schnelle again you know? And I'm sure you asked us questions, you know like "Why aren't we going to the Schnelle?" "Oh, we're going to the other one down the road, we're going to Wassenberg" or whatever, you know, we'd go there...

Well that's funny as well, because it was never going to happen again at that Schnelle.

No, that's the other thing, most people would assume that. You know its not going to happen again because of the police and the security and etc, and everybody else would be looking out for it.

But there's still the aura of what happened, the incident, around the place, which kinda stops you wanting to go.

Yeah.

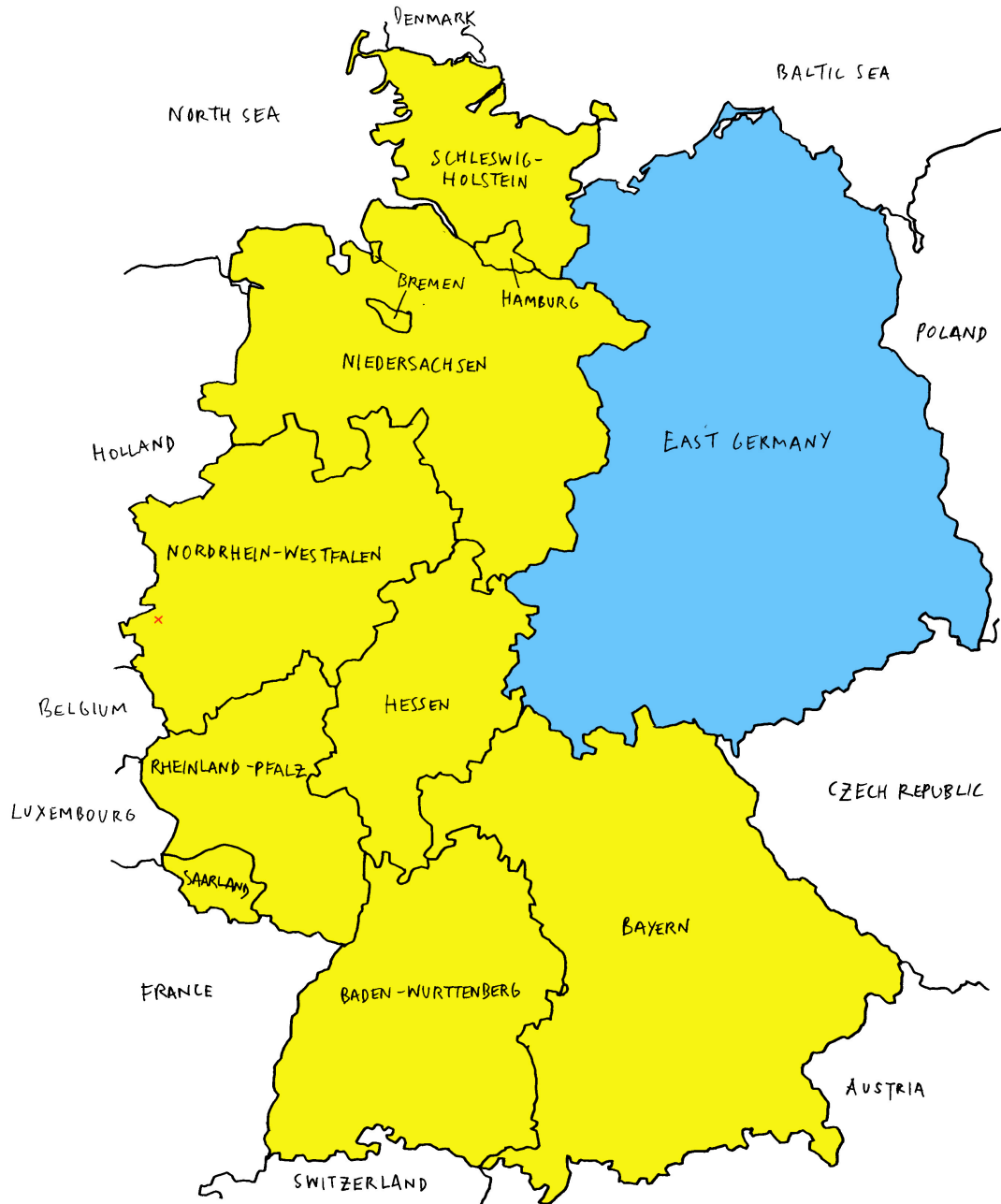
Even though logically you know, you're pretty sure it's not going to happen. It's the same thing with people not wanting to fly on planes. I mean, it's happened, I don't think it's going to happen again. But people, you know it's that, instillation of fear, being paranoid about things. Which is quite interesting, I don't get any sense of...you don't feel worried about what's happening now, for yourself. Cos we are kinda removed from it. Right, well, that'll do.

Ok?

Yip.

Ahhh.

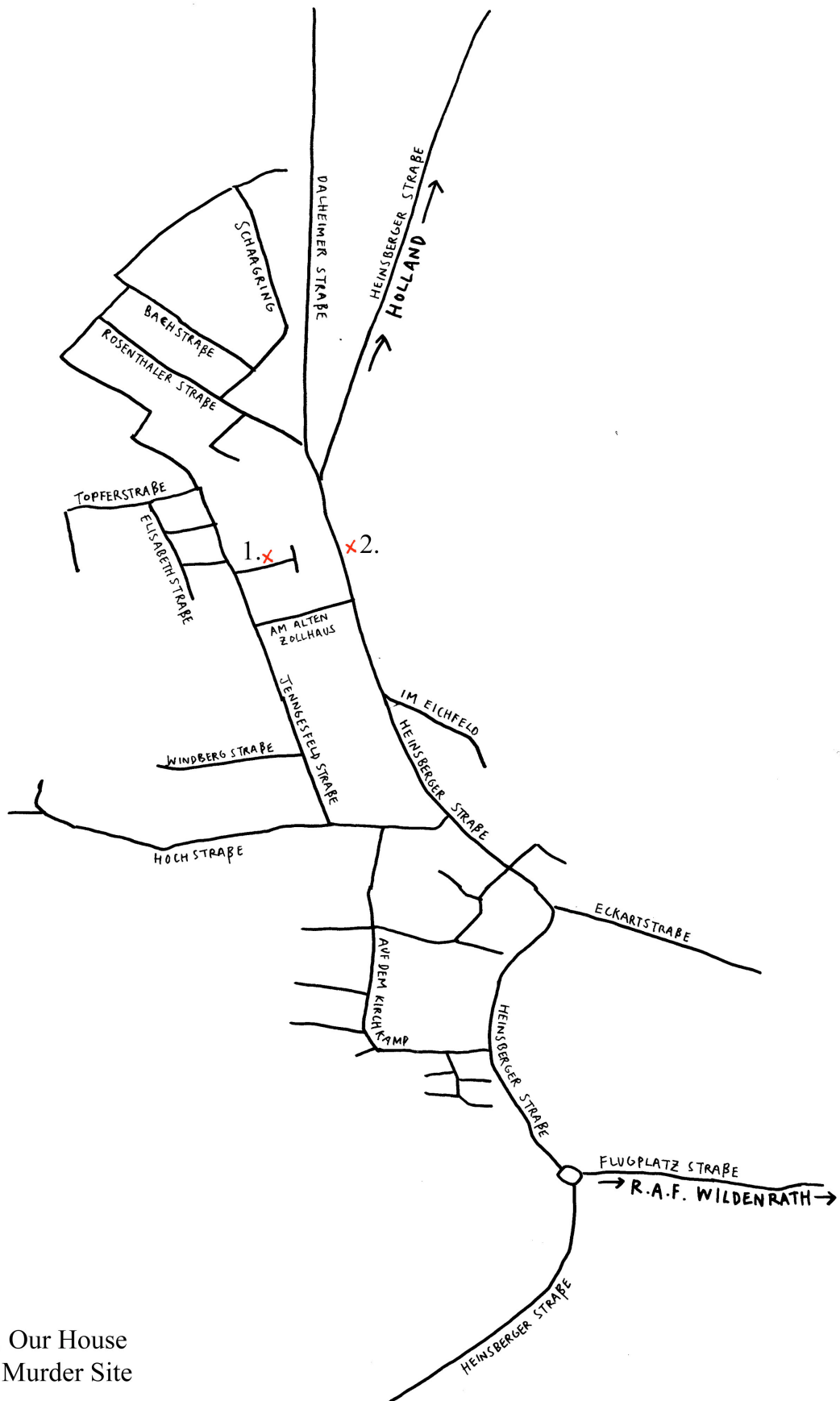
That was 50 minutes.



West Germany



The region of Nordrhein-Westfalen



- 1. Our House
- 2. Murder Site

Wildenrath

Notes

- ¹ March 1987 – 26 people injured by a 300lb car bomb, Monchengladbach
May 1988 – Three RAF men killed in gun and bomb attacks, Nieuw-Bergen
May 1988 – Car bomb defused at barracks, near Bielefeld
July 1988 – Nine soldiers injured in bomb attack, near Duisburg
August 1988 – Soldier shot dead in Ostend
June 1989 – Bomb attack on barracks near Osnabruck foiled
July 1989 – Soldier killed by car bomb, Hanover
August 1989 – Serviceman discovers bomb under car, Hanover
September 1989 – Two off-duty soldiers shot, near Munster
October 1989 – Soldier and his baby daughter shot dead, Wildenrath

² Up until September 1988, distinctive number plates with white letters on a black background were used by the British military services abroad. These were changed to normal British registration plates, after the murder of a soldier, identified by his number plates, boarding a ferry in his car in Ostend, Belgium.

³ According to police investigations, a Kalashnikov rifle used in the attack in Wildenrath was also used in an attack in Munster the month previous, seriously wounding two British soldiers

⁴ RAF Wildenrath was one of the largest British airbases in West Germany at the time, with approximately 1200 servicemen and women, many of whom had dependant families, living on and off the airbase.

⁵ There were 3 states of security alert on RAF bases. Black was the normal state, with amber more serious and red meaning a serious incident had occurred, or was believed to occur in the future. At the time of the shooting, cars were checked for bombs, parking had to be a minimum of 20 metres from buildings, uniform was not to be worn out of work, and travel patterns were to be varied, regardless of the state of alert. During higher states, guards would be issued with guns and ammunition, patrolling in greater numbers and with higher frequency, which included random checks of the married quarters by RAF Police.

⁶ BFG – British Forces Germany

⁷ On the 2nd of January 2003, 18 year old Charlene Ellis and her 17 year old cousin, Letisha Shakespeare, were shot dead in a drive by shooting in Birmingham. 2 other women were seriously injured in the gang related shooting. 4 men were convicted of the shootings in March 2005.

⁸ Baader Meinhof – The Baader-Meinhof group was one of the core groups within the Red Army Faction (Rote Armee Fraktion “RAF”), which was post-war Germany’s most active left-wing terrorist organisation. The RAF referred to its members as “urban guerrillas”. It operated from the 1970’s to 1998, causing great unrest (especially in the autumn of 1977, which led to national crisis) and killing dozens of high-profile Germans in its more than 20 years of existence.

⁹ On the 7th of July 2005 three bombs exploded within 50 seconds of each other on three separate London Underground trains. 56 people were killed, including the 4 suspected bombers, and approximately 700 injured. Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the attacks, which were the first suicide bombings in Western Europe.

¹⁰ NAAFI – The Navy, Army & Air Force Institutes

¹¹ SSVC – Services Sound & Vision Corporation