

# ELEVEN EMPTY SPACES

PART OF AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT RECORDING AND REMEMBERING  
THE EVENTS OF THE IRA ATTACK ON THE ROYAL MARINES SCHOOL OF MUSIC, DEAL  
ON 22 SEPTEMBER 1989

*“Within minutes people were arriving ... the fire engine and the police were called and we got things moving quite quickly ... the immediate things that had to be done were try and save and rescue people as quickly as possible” – G Harvey*

Although the ambulance service were on an overtime ban this was ignored and all the emergency services rushed to assist in the rescue work already being undertaken by the Marines.



Fire appliances from many stations in the area attended  
Picture courtesy of the East Kent Mercury

*“The servicemen had organised themselves extremely well. They were releasing the more easily extricated people probably buried up to their knees or stunned by the explosion but not badly injured. They were trying to run a line of people to ... take bricks away from the site and done an exceedingly good job” – M Gidman*

*“It was chaotic. People with rank were trying to establish some form of control. I remember seeing a lot of junior bandmen that were scrambling on the rubble. Some were distraught. The distraught ones were being led away. Not long after, the first fire appliance arrived and that's when order really started to kick in” – T Oliver*

*“One of the first jobs we had to do was to clear the site because we couldn't ... make out who was injured who wasn't injured ... there seemed to be dozens of people over the site” – M Cowie*

Many of the emergency service staff were shocked by what they had come to deal with.

*“I have to say that even for a hardened ex-military doctor it was quite a sight”  
– K Rawlings*

*“We got there to be confronted by mass devastation, something I'd never experienced before, not knowing really what to expect it was something that was ... over and above what we normally do” – T Hardie*

*“On the way I saw some chaps being led away from where the band take refreshment ... two or three of which I recognised as friends. They'd obviously suffered injuries” – T Oliver*

*“I can remember seeing a young marine sitting on a pile of bricks just inside the site and he'd obviously been somewhere very near when the explosion occurred ... a local doctor went to him ... he said 'I need this chap to go to hospital straight away. He's been traumatised'” – J Clapson*

*“We also had to look after the young musicians ... They were first on the scene ... you're talking about 16, 17, 18 year old young boys and then once the heavy crew got in there 'thank you very much boys, go away' and they were just left on the parade and it became very noticeable to one of the senior medical staff. He said to us 'you're going to have problems with these young people you've got to get them motivated' ... In fact we were told by ... the naval commander 'go and hug the boys ... they need it. Give them a big hug ... [and say] up you get' because they're crying with the stress and we were made to do that which was very good, also for us. It taught us another aspect of our leadership” – D Cole*

*“A lot of twisted metal was within the concrete and even though you could hear the murmurs and the cries, as muffled as they were, there was no way that you could move that stuff with your hands” – T Oliver*

Some of the emergency service staff were concerned about the possibility of a second explosion which would sometimes happen in these cases.

*“It was quite a shock to me to see what we'd come to deal with ... I had seen that type of thing before as a young boy ... in Malta during the war ... but the first thing that struck me ... there were people all over the site ... this is a bomb site there's been an explosion and it hasn't been that long ago. Are we in the right position to be here doing what we're doing at this moment? Could there be something else that nobody has thought about? ... being ambulance men ... our job is to ... save life ... but we didn't know what was going on inside” – J Clapson*

*“The police made an exclusion zone around there because there was another problem there of the second bomb [a] possibility that was brought to my attention” – M Gidman*

*“I didn't suppose for one minute that there was any risk to me or to anybody else who was still there. I don't think we even considered that we might get blown up ourselves, but I suppose there was that theoretical possibility” – K Rawlings*

The rescue process itself was difficult and it was essential that the emergency services worked together as a coherent team. While the fire service were concerned with rescue, the police had an additional responsibility.

*“The primary aim of the police officer is protection of life but at the same time we've got a secondary concern about actually trying to preserve evidence, so we can catch the offenders ... every piece of dirt and what have you ... was shovelled into dustbins, because that would have been sieved ... to find the evidence of the bomb” – T Bartlett*

*“The scene right from the start ... was a crime scene. Crime scene is taken care of by the police so ... on that particular one they've got primacy” – T Hardie*

*“Can I just say that the fire brigade did a marvellous job ... and the other one that I'd like to say ... is Maureen Bane who did so much for the wounded Marines in the hospital. She was marvellous” – T Higgins*

*“My feeling is that given the chaos of a bombing I think the whole thing was managed incredibly well by the emergency services, police and the service personnel that were on site as well. I can't think of where I'd point a finger and say I wish we could go back and do that slightly different ... what could have been done was done and was done pretty well, but if it hadn't happened I'd have been a much happier man that's for sure” – J Perkins*



Many local people queued for hours at the drill hall in Deal to give blood  
Picture courtesy of the East Kent Mercury

It wasn't just the emergency services who rushed to the scene. Many residents and friends came along as did some local doctors, clergymen and other people who just wanted to help in whatever way they could. There were also the concerned relatives who came for news.

*“I just talked to them ... I just helped where I saw it was practical” – F Kent*

*“The only way I felt useful at the time was to go and make tea and coffee for the wives and relatives who were waiting quietly for any information that could be given to them. The Royal Marines were totally in command of the situation and I just felt the need to help in any way that I could” – M McNicholas*

*“Everyone was desperate to do something to help and if giving blood was the only way they could do it they were there” – R Walters*

*“Between the Herald disaster and September 1989 there was a lot of interest in preparation for psychological care and we had been doing a fair bit of training ... so that should something like Deal come along we would be prepared” – B Bano*

*“It was terrible trying to sit there and talk to somebody, reassure them, knowing that you'd just been told that their son, husband, father was actually one of the casualties”  
– R Walters*