

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

“The speech he [Sir Martin Garrod] gave was so amazing and so brutally honest and he did accuse the IRA of murdering the 11 young men” – M McNicholas

The following week the remaining band members marched defiantly through the town, leaving eleven spaces in their ranks where the victims of the bombing would have been.



The Royal Marines band return along The Strand. The empty spaces in their ranks are clearly visible. Picture courtesy of the East Kent Mercury

“To see it with the eleven empty places it was a tear jerker for anybody. I think the emotions were just let loose when they did the parade” – J Clapson

“They come marching down playing and then I realised there was these vacant spots ... that really did get to me” – D Goodban



Sir Martin Garrod, Commandant General of the Royal Marines Corps, arrives at the barracks. Picture courtesy of the East Kent Mercury

“Richard Dixon ... had told the Royal Marines in the barracks to be in the drill hall at four ... he got up on a bench and he gave a speech which I shall never forget, very inspiring, telling his men that ‘the buggers won’t win’. He was going to give them the weekend off and he wanted them all back on Monday morning on parade and they were ... It was a unique moment and I thought Richard was absolutely outstanding as a leader” – B Hawkins

“It was very organised and all wanted to do this defiant march” – J Duffy



The Royal Marines band pauses in Canada Road by the site of the explosion. Picture courtesy of the East Kent Mercury

“Deal turned out proudly ... they did say goodbye in a very dignified manner” – S Briggs

“I think we were told it’s a security risk. Of course it’s a security risk ... everything you do in life is a security risk, but we were adamant they’re not going to win. If you allow them to put you behind the gates, you don’t come out, they’ve won ... there was a bloody mindedness – they are not going to win. They will not stop us making music. They will not stop us walking down our streets” – D Cole



Many local schools and businesses closed on the morning of the parade so that staff and children could attend. Picture courtesy of the East Kent Mercury

“Sadly another young marine had died after the bombing, so that meant eleven spaces were going to be in the band” – M McNicholas

“I think when the march came the following week Deal had a chance to express itself en masse if you like and that was an eerie place to be that day, because the streets were absolutely piled with people and you could hear the band coming in the distance and nobody quite knew what to do because the streets were lined with people. I think some of the schools were closed so that people could take their children ... you could hear the band coming in the distance and as the band got closer the crowd got quieter and as the band came into sight people just burst into applause quite spontaneously and as they’d gone by it got quieter again. It was spooky in a way” – S Briggs



The crowds watch the Royal Marines band leave Canada Road to march along The Strand. Picture courtesy of the East Kent Mercury



The Royal Marines band approaches the saluting dias. Image provided by Dover Museum

“It hit home quite hard ... I was there, I’m okay. There’s young kids there that are never going to see their dad again” – B Walker

For the families and friends there was still another ordeal to be endured. David Cole tells us that the funerals were meticulously planned with consideration for each of the victims.

“There was a full [funeral] service with an orchestra ... in the church ... hymns were chosen and a piece of music was chosen for each of the boys who died” – D Cole



Sir Martin Garrod takes the salute. The Mayor of Deal, Marianne McNicholas, is by his side. Picture courtesy of the East Kent Mercury