

John Williams
Officer Training

We had NCOs there who I feel, especially the junior ones, must have had unhappy married lives or their wives had left them or something, because they were delighted. "You're not the bloody officer yet". You know that was the general sort of attitude. And they took a delight in treating us, because we had to stand to attention when we spoke to them and say "Yes, corporal, no corporal", and "Don't look at me like that", you know, examined your face. It was a Teutonic sort of thing. I remember once when we were at Morecambe we used to go to the local theatre, you know. I remember on this occasion there was something good I went to see and I had my tickets and so on. And I was just issued with a new greatcoat and this one was double breasted, it was the forerunner of what the Army was meant to get. And you had to stand to be inspected by the picket on the guard. And the buttons were all polished up smart as could be. Boots shining, gaiters all Blancoed and so on. And I stood in front of him and this lance-corporal said "What the hell are you doing with your greatcoat like that"? I said "New issue corporal. I've just been issued today, I'm wearing it the way I was told to wear it". "You're not the bloody officer yet, only officers have double breasted greatcoats". And "I'm sorry corporal that's what I was told". "Well, we're not having that bloody nonsense yet get back to quarters". And I just went back to quarters, I couldn't go out. And that sort of thing. On another occasion the German bombers used to come across at night across the point of land to bomb Barrow, and when the siren went we were instructed to put our greatcoats and steel helmets on over our pyjamas, pull our boots on and go out into some slit trenches. And inevitably among young men there was a bit of false set of laughter, you know, and "Keep quiet there!" and there would be a peal of girlish laughter, you know, and nobody knew who it was in the dark. I remember on this occasion when the 'all clear' went we were marched on to the parade ground. I stood to attention for two hours in the middle of the night with our pyjamas on to remind us not to make funny remarks.