

Under Cover Job *by Peter Brooks*

In the early 1970s my late father was working in a unit that made a variety of information and training films for police cadets – how police dogs are trained, how autopsies are performed, how crowd control is exercised during an incident and so on.

The CND Aldermaston March (more popularly known as Ban The Bomb), which had been suspended for several years after things got out of hand in 1963, was due to recommence and my father had been instructed to make a videotape record of aspects of the march.

He needed someone to help him in the endeavour, both to carry the heavy 12 volt car battery necessary to provide extended power for his luggable videorecorder and to afford him some semblance of being innocuous (there was some risk that he might be assaulted if it was thought that he was not part of the regular media).

We were – to all intents and purposes – going under cover. I was even given a cover story and a fictitious name for our television company, should anyone ask.

It was the only time in our lives that we worked together – a rare moment of father-son bonding that I will always remember.

The plan was to record the march as it approached a location just outside Reading known as RSG6 – the place where things had once got out of hand in the past and part of the march had apparently diverted from its usual path and caused problems.

I'd never heard of RSG6, but I soon learned that the letters stood for Regional Seat of Government. My father gave me some background: in the event of nuclear war, power in the country would devolve to various regional seats,

located underground, from which selected members of the establishment bureaucracy would try to maintain law and order in the country. RSG6 was just the sixth such centre, but it was considered likely to be a target again if the march got out of hand, again.

The weather was fine, even a little sunny, and we located and followed the march as it wound in well behaved fashion along the main road, accompanied by a few uniformed officers and a small cortege of media (I saw signs for the BBC, ITV and one or two others).

At one point two very burly individuals separated from the marching group and accosted us, demanding to know who we were and what we thought we were doing. I froze and my father replied smoothly (I thought) with our cover story, and the two seemed satisfied with what they were told.

In the entire time we filmed the march (several hours – and with me lugging that dratted 12 volt car battery the whole time) that was the only point at which anyone ever asked us anything.

What was most interesting, though, was my experience at RSG6. Since this had been the target in 1963, my father decided to anticipate any potential activity by travelling ahead of the march and waiting by RSG6 itself.

Amazingly, the place was marked: on the main road was a standard English wooden signpost of the time with a white arm pointing down the side road, and the black lettering declaring "RSG6" and the distance to it.

The whole area was heavily wooded, and when we turned down the designated road I wasn't sure what to expect. After a short distance the road curved to the left, and I could see a

group of houses of the type often seen in the countryside at the time and what looked like a typical English country pub.

We pulled to the side of the road not far from a couple of nondescript small cars, both of which were filled with large, well built individuals – two in the front, two in the back – all wearing identical gabardine raincoats, buttoned up, and sunglasses.

"Special Branch" said my father with authority (I have never had reason to believe he lied about that, since I was vaguely aware that he did have something to do with that department).

In later years when I saw spy movies such as *The Ipcress File* and *the Secret Service* or *Special Branch* were portrayed as all wearing the same raincoats I suddenly realised that perhaps those movies presented a more accurate portrayal than one might otherwise have thought.

No-one acknowledged anyone else. Instead we all sat in our respective cars and waited. After a few moments a couple of Ford Transits rolled up, filled with uniformed police officers and for the first time I noticed that across the road from us, a little way further up on the other side, there was an opening set back from the road, and I could see a tall barbed wire topped metal fence with large signs on it declaring it to be electrified (I recognised the zig – zag symbol for electrification).

Looking more closely I could see that there were uniformed individuals with alsatian dogs patrolling the fence on both sides, and there was actually a large gate through which, I suppose, the select few would have entered RSG6. Barely visible in the distance through the trees was what looked like a garden shed

made of concrete.

My father explained that that was the entrance shaft to RSG6, but that the bunker complex itself was buried some distance below ground. I envisaged a lift shaft descending hundreds of feet into the earth, but in reality I think it was barely forty five metres or so, if that.

So we continued to sit and wait, and the uniformed officers got out of their Transits and ambled around on the grass, presumably to stretch their legs, but nobody else moved until the march had passed by without incident, at which point all the vehicles suddenly left, heading in different directions.

It was an oddly surreal experience and one that I shall not easily forget.

As it turned out, we filmed more than the regular media did – and later that evening, when we saw the coverage on television at home, both BBC and ITV concentrated on the few seconds of a minor scuffle, as if that was representative of the entire day's march. So much for unbiased reporting.

But I had actually been there and seen what no viewer could see (not even if they had been on the march itself) and that gave me a different perspective, one that stays with me to this day.