

Michael O'Donnell

Born in London, UK. Did national service in the British Army and joined the Metropolitan police. Went out to Rhodesia having been recruited to the BSAP in 1961. Married in Rhodesia in 1965. Resigned from the BSAP in 1972. Continued working as a Police Reserve into the independence of Zimbabwe. Left Zimbabwe for South Africa in 1999. Left South Africa for the UK in 2000.

This is Annie Bramley interviewing Mike O'Donnell on Thursday the 18th of December 2008. Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed. Can I start by asking about your decision to go to Southern Rhodesia. Could you tell me about your background leading up to that decision?

Very well. I'm a Londoner and after service in the Army I joined the Metropolitan police. I served with them for about eighteen months and I wasn't completely happy with conditions in England at that time, with the weather. Having served in a hot climate I found that I missed the heat; so I started to look around for a job in a hot country and preferably doing what I like doing, being a policeman. I saw an advertisement that recruits were needed for the British South Africa Police and wrote off. I got the books, it sounded good, so I went for an interview at Rhodesia House; and was accepted.

And you were telling me before we started about why you chose Rhodesia. I thought that was very interesting.

Well I particularly wanted Africa if it was possible; I liked the idea of the colonial police. At the time, all the colonial police under the British government were controlled by Crown Agencies in London and at the time the only vacancies they had were in Nyasaland, now Malawi. I wrote to them and they gave me some information on a typewritten sheet. But the British South Africa Police sent me this beautifully illustrated booklet which showed policemen on horses and on motorcycles, driving through the bush, in Land Rovers past herds of elephants. It looked so wonderful, I thought, "this is for me."

And were your family all in the UK at the time?

Yes, I had no connection with Africa at all. I hadn't even met anybody who'd been in Africa I don't think. I suppose if you ask me what I knew about Southern Rhodesia, I vaguely knew it was north of South Africa and that Victoria Falls was in Southern Rhodesia but that's about as much as I knew.

And at school previously or in your later work before going out there, did you have much knowledge of the colonies or of Southern Rhodesia?

No, not much knowledge of these places at all. Obviously in those days a lot of the map was coloured red with British positions and I suppose you just had

this sort of mental picture that the people that lived there had a much better life in the colonies than they did back in cold old England.

(00:03:49) And you also mentioned before that the reason you liked the hot climate was because you'd been in Hong Kong?

Yes, in the Army they sent me out to Hong Kong. I'd been there for two years so I got used to living in a hot climate. Walking the beat in London after that in the middle of winter just wasn't very good at all.

Didn't quite compare.

No.

Where would you say that your "home" was at the time? Did you still feel rooted to England before going?

Yes, my family were in London and I was living in London; yes, this was home.

And did that change when you arrived at all?

Only after I'd been in Rhodesia for a number of years, did I stop thinking of England as being "home."

And what did your family think of your decision to go? Did they have much involvement or say in that?

No, I don't think so. I can't remember any comment being made about it at all. They just accepted that's what I was going to do.

Can you tell me about your arrival in Southern Rhodesia, and your experience of travelling there as well?

Yes, a small group of us went out in November 1961. We went to Southampton, boarded one of the Castle ships and fourteen days later arrived in Cape Town. We then caught the train, which was going northwards to Rhodesia and arrived in Bulawayo. We had to stay there for a short while and then caught another train to Salisbury where we were collected and taken to the police depot. So seventeen/eighteen days travelling to get there.

What was the journey like?

It was very good, an adventure. The sea trip and then the train, crossing the Kalahari Desert and that sort of thing, it was wonderful. Quite an adventure.

And what happened when you arrived in Bulawayo initially and then Salisbury.

We only had to stay in Bulawayo for a while and then catch the train to Salisbury then we went into the police depot and the training started immediately, a small squad of about a dozen men I suppose. We mixed with (00:06:46) a couple of Rhodesians and a couple of South Africans who'd been recruited and we were trained together in the police depot.

And how did you find the training?

Well it was entirely different from the Metropolitan police because with the Metropolitan police it was all in the classroom and learning the law and police procedures. At the depot in Salisbury, we spent more time learning to ride horses than anything else. We did a lot of time in foot drill too. It was a paramilitary police force really, so yes, obviously we spent some time in the classroom doing law and police work; but we also had to learn animal management and various other funny things. We also had a certain amount of riot training as well, before going on to be trained riding the motorcycles and driving vehicles.

So it must have felt that you were being trained for something very different to what you were used to?

Well I suppose I accepted that because it was a colonial police force. I didn't expect that it would be the same as I had experienced in Peel House in the Metropolitan police. Obviously it was going to be more active, more outside; and learning to ride a horse was fun.

You got on ok with it did you?

Oh yes, there was a big stress on physical fitness and it was good training.

And how long was the training?

I don't remember in all honesty, probably about three months, something like that I think.

And you mentioned that you were with South Africans and Rhodesians?

Yes, I think there were two Rhodesians who had been recruited locally and there were two or three South Africans.

And what would you say your opinions of each other were? Were you all equally looked upon by each other or were there certain rivalries?

I don't remember any rivalries, obviously there were friendships and dislikes amongst the squad. At first we tended to stick together. All the poms stuck together, and the South Africans. But as the training progressed that sort of dropped away and you all became a squad. I don't remember, we certainly didn't hold ourselves away from each other.

I imagine it must have been quite unusual, perhaps, to be going out to Southern Rhodesia having not been in the area before?

(00:09:56) I don't think so. The chaps I was with, the ones that went out from England with me, none of them had any connection with Africa. We just didn't know really what we were getting into. But in those days, it wasn't such an unusual thing for men to leave England and go and work in another country, in one of the colonies. It wasn't unusual at all to do something like that. It might seem stranger these days perhaps.

I was also wondering about the other recruits and what they thought of people coming out who hadn't been before. Perhaps there was more rivalry later on but did they feel that there was any lack of understanding?

I don't think so actually, no, just young men together. Obviously you've got your pride in your country, which occasionally boils over I suppose. But no, we all got on pretty well I think. Most of the police force in those days were recruited in England. The number of South Africans and Rhodesians was very small in comparison; they seemed to prefer to recruit in England. I think in a way they looked upon it as a good way to get immigrants into the country, but a lot of men joined the police, did their three years and then went on to do something else. So I think it was part of the immigration policy almost. They probably didn't expect most of us to stay after three years.

So you had signed up initially just for the three years?

Three years, yes.

Can you tell me a bit about the generational differences and so on? Were there any tensions between different generations?

You mean after we left the depot?

Yes. Could you tell me then what happened after your training and then we can talk about that?

When I finished training I went to a place called Shabani, which is now called Zvishavane or something ridiculous. It was a mining town, a large asbestos mine, with a population probably of about fifteen hundred people, most of whom were connected with the mine in one way or another. A lot of young men who were working on the mine, I think they tended to look down on people from England, young men like me. Remember, these chaps were brought up in the African sun: They were sunburnt, they were into sports and all the rest of it; and then they get these pasty faced pommies coming out here and I suppose like colonials anywhere, they thought they were superior to people from England. I think you still get it amongst Australians, don't you, and people feel they're twice the man that the poms are. So it sometimes took a while before you were accepted. From my point of view, I thought they were fooling themselves because most of us that had been brought up in

England in fact had a harder childhood than they had had, particularly in austere England in the 1940s and 1950s. I thought these guys had been living rather comfortably. They had nice houses, they had domestic servants, (00:14:01) and many of them had motorcars. I mean most of us that went out there had never had a motorcar in our lives, but these were the thoughts at the time.

So you had lived through the wartime period in London as well?

Oh yes, born just before the war.

And so can you tell me a bit about your work in Shabani?

Well there was a small police station, a chief inspector, inspector, sergeant and four constables in those days. Unfortunately we didn't have a horse – I was rather sad we didn't have a horse – but we had to patrol on motorcycles and with Land Rovers.

What position did you go into then?

I was just a constable. Quite often we would have to go out on patrol and be out for several days. Around the area there are a number of, I think in those days they were African reserves or something. Later on they called them Tribal Trust Lands. So a young constable would be sent out on a motorcycle with an African constable to help him with the language. He'd sit on my back and we'd be out for a couple of weeks. Wonderful life, away from all the authority, camping out in the bush at night and getting round, talking to people and just being seen. We were not armed; they were very strict about firearms. We were not allowed to carry firearms and in fact that was the situation right up until the terrorist war made it necessary. We were and probably will only ever be the only police force in Africa that did his job unarmed.

At that time you mean?

Even now there's not one police force in Africa that doesn't go around armed. We never did, it was absolutely discouraged and we didn't need to be armed, people were friendly. Even by that time, Nationalism was becoming a bit of a problem and there was a lot of intimidation going on but you felt absolutely safe. The Africans called us Majoni; a policeman was a Majoni, a white policeman. And I think they respected us and I think we respected them.

And you've mentioned that you would have had an African constable with you, that was to help with language?

Yes.

Had you started to pick up any languages?

Yes, I must admit, most of us did not learn the language and it's a thing maybe we should be ashamed of, but we didn't. Obviously you pick up some (00:17:13) words and expressions, that sort of thing, but we got lazy because most of them spoke English and because of that we didn't bother to learn the language. A few chaps did, but I'm one that didn't. So a few words you get to know as you must do; but no, I was never a fluent Shona speaker.

How did you find it working with a translator?

No, no difficulty. All the African police spoke English. Their English often wasn't very fluent but it was enough for you to understand them. And as I say, a lot of the people we were dealing with spoke English anyway, particularly the young people that had been educated.

Going out to Southern Rhodesia, what was your experience and opinion of divisions between African police and white police; and also generally in society?

I didn't know when I went there what the position would be in the police force with the white and black officers. I kind of just assumed that the whites would be superior to the black officers, which of course they were. The educational requirements for an African coming into the police force were obviously considerably less than they were for white officers. The standard in those days for a black man to join the police force was standard 6 I think, which is about the equivalent to eleven-plus in this country. But obviously they did have the advantage of language, which we didn't have; they were bilingual and we were not. Well I suppose in all honesty when I first started going out into the reserve with a constable on the back, he assisted me a lot because he had the experience and probably stopped me making some silly mistakes sometimes. But it's not long before you realise that your knowledge is much greater than theirs. Even an old sergeant who had been there for thirty years, still didn't have the same knowledge that I had got from a couple of months in depot; knowledge of the law I mean, although he had the practical experience. But generally it worked alright. I don't think they resented the fact that there's this one young white guy straight out from England and he's my boss and he's only been here five minutes. I don't think those sort of thoughts crossed their mind. Maybe they did, I don't know.

So you were vaguely prepared for that but was it quite an unusual situation compared to London?

No, it was my vision of what the colonial police would be. No, I wasn't surprised at that sort of set up at all.

And what did your work involve at that time in Shabani?

I investigated all sorts of crime. This is what's so interesting from leaving the Metropolitan police where a policeman on the beat in those days never dealt with any serious crime unless you fell over it. It was mainly sorting out fights, arresting drunks and doing school crossings, stopping the (00:21:44) traffic for

children that were coming out of school. But now suddenly this was entirely different. In no time you're sitting at the desk with half a dozen murders, probably about three or four rapes and a few grievous bodily harm cases to deal with and you're the investigating officer. So it was a complete change as far as that went, it was every sort of crime you could possibly imagine.

So were these journeys that you would go off on, for a few weeks at a time?

Well where we were I think the maximum patrol time was two weeks.

Right, and would you be mainly investigating the crimes that you had had reported, or would you sometimes come across things?

Whenever you went out there was always a file of enquiries that needed to be done: Perhaps over some crime that had occurred, maybe looking for somebody who's wanted by another station, something like that. Any enquiries in that area that came in would have been sent out to you to investigate. You obviously became aware of certain crimes when you were out there because people knew the Majoni was at the bridge, and if they'd been raped or something they could run down there because the Majoni was there. So quite a few cases were reported to you when you were out like that; and obviously then you'd climb down and investigate them.

So how long were you based there for?

I was in Shabani for about six years, until I was promoted to section officer, a year after UDI.

And as section officer, did you stay in Shabani?

Yes, I was there for a little while and then I was moved to Gwelo.

And what was your move to Gwelo for?

Gwelo, which is now Gweru they call it now, it was Gwelo in those days. Yes, I spent a year in the quartermasters' branch in Gwelo.

And how did that work differ?

Well it was quartermaster's work. It wasn't investigations; it was something entirely different.

You were mainly in your station?

Well yes, we had to visit stations and do checks on equipment, that sort of thing. But yes, it was just paperwork.

(00:24:21) And so by that time then you had exceeded your initial three years as well?

Yes.

You'd decided that you wanted to stay?

Yes. I actually got married after I'd been there for three years. My wife had been a teacher in Shabani and we met, got married and came over here for a long holiday, a long honeymoon.

So you'd had a break back here?

Yes, that was my first holiday back here and that was in '65. We got married in the January and came over here on honeymoon. It was later that year they declared UDI so already by that time Rhodesia was very much in the news.

It happened when you were actually here then?

No, no it was later in the year, I think it was November they declared UDI; we were just over here for a couple of months.

And did you get a sense then of the changing perception of Rhodesia?

Yes, the press over here at that time seemed particularly hostile. News reports seemed to be very much against us. I think I bored everybody because I used to get into long discussions, telling them how Rhodesia's right and this is all wrong. I think I must have made a real pain in the neck actually sticking up for Rhodesia. There were some people who did support us, but generally people who knew nothing more than they read in the Daily Mirror every day were hostile.

And so UDI was declared shortly after you'd returned.

November 1965.

And were you following the political situation?

Well you couldn't be unaware of it, yes.

Did it affect your work in any way, or your feelings about your work?

Not my feelings about my work because my work hadn't changed. We were starting to get terrorist activity in the country before UDI, but I was not involved and there was nothing near me. So it was a small problem in those days. The Prime Minister Ian Smith had met Wilson on a couple of occasions, on warships usually; The Tiger and Fearless. But these talks were obviously not going anywhere and (00:27:47) things were not being sorted out politically at all. Then came UDI and the commissioner at the time sent round a note to all stations reminding us that we were policemen and it was our job to maintain law and order; and regardless of the political changes, that was still our job. And they really laid it on the line because that was it, wasn't it, the

country needed a police force, we were the police force and we just had to carry on doing our job, so we did.

So you had been working as quartermaster after UDI?

That came after I was promoted because I was promoted early in '66 and then transferred to Gwelo as assistant quartermaster's representative.

And so how long were you doing the quartermaster's job?

I was in Gwelo for about a year and then I was sent to Battlefields as member in charge of the station. We had police stations of different sizes so the person in charge could be of various ranks; so invariably, he was known as the member in charge. I was sent to Battlefields, which was a small station between Gatooma and Kwekwe.

Can you tell me a bit about what work there involved?

Well I had one other white guy with me, a patrol officer. We'd had a change of ranking by that time because I'd been a constable and the next rank up was sergeant. By the time I did my promotion they'd changed it and constables were patrol officers and sergeants became section officers. So I was a section officer, and I had a patrol officer and about a dozen African police to assist me. It was a farming area, huge ranches, twenty/thirty thousand acre ranches; and it was country which was good really only for growing cattle, it wasn't good for crops at all. So that's the reason they had these huge ranches. And there was a tremendous amount of game round there in those days. Going on patrol was wonderful, we saw all sorts of things.

So was the work quite similar in some sense as to what you had been doing in Shabani?

Well it's still the same.

You would go off for two weeks at a time?

No, unfortunately I couldn't get out as much as I wanted to. The patrol officer used to go out and not for such long periods, as it was a smaller area. Again, the terrorist problem really hadn't hit us but we started to get odd call-outs because there had been some terrorist activity in the Zambezi Valley. The surviving terrorists were often trying to get home and quite often we were called out to try and stop them because it was one of their infiltration routes. They never had maps these chaps, so they would often cross over from Zambia and come down the Munyati river until they reached the (00:31:52) railway line, and then they knew where they were. Then they could either turn right and go down towards Bulawayo, or turn left and go up to Harare. So they used the Munyati river as one of their routes into the country. A number of times they were intercepted and there would be a fight and one or two blacks would be running away. Often we would try and stop them.

And who would intercept them? Where were they coming from?

Well for example I know of one case where they actually knew that a man had survived a clash with the security forces. He had spoken to some of the locals and told them that he was going home. He knew he was going to die; he lived in Bikita, so he just wanted to get home and die in Bikita. Armed with that information the security forces now wanted to block various places on that route and it meant if he went in a beeline, he was going to come through our area, so we were out hoping to intercept him. We never did actually, he did get out, that one; he was arrested at his kraal in Bikita. But there was that sort of thing. I did my first anti terrorist training the time I was promoted. I went to a promotion course in Harare and as part of the promotion course we did some anti terrorist training.

So this was when you were promoted the first time in '66?

Yes. They realised the way things were going and so we had to start being trained to be soldiers.

And was this PATU?

Yes, it was PATU training, police anti terrorist unit were training us..

And did that then affect your work? Did everyone receive that training or was it only people who were at a certain level?

I think with promotion courses you had to do it. Other chaps volunteered. The first time I actually did PATU patrols was when I was still in Gwelo. We went out a couple of times and they were aborted, nothing happened. But one time, it was the Featherstone area where there'd been some report of some armed men being seen, but we didn't find them. Another time I had to go with a PATU stick to the Prime Minister's farm, Mr Ian Smith, which was near Selukwe. Again it was some concern that armed men might have been seen in the vicinity and he was staying there that weekend, so I went down there with a PATU stick and we guarded him that weekend. That was a very pleasant weekend actually.

Why, what did it involve?

(00:35:29) Well he invited us into the house, so we sat and chatted to him and his wife Janet and had dinner with them and that sort of thing. They were very accommodating and he told us stories about his meetings with Wilson on these warships and they were very hospitable.

That must have been quite a privilege to be able to meet him.

Yes.

And what were your opinions of other security forces at the time? Had you come into contact with many of them?

No, not at that time, later on I did. I told you earlier that I didn't think these guys were as tough as they thought they were because I thought they'd had life pretty easy with their motorcars, servants and living in the sunshine. I thought they'd had a pretty soft life. I did think that at the time but the war showed me I was wrong. I was very impressed at what those youngsters were prepared to do. Their morale was high, they had that feeling that all good soldiers have that they were so much better than the opposition. It was very impressive.

And were there particular groups that impressed you because I guess there were different divisions within the Forces, for example the Army? Or do you mean particular groups like the Air Force?

Well the Air Force one didn't see very much of apart from being moved around by helicopter, so there was no close communications with them. Remember I was very young, very junior rank. The Army, we didn't really see. It sometimes happened but rarely we actually operated with them, we tended to do our own thing. What I saw impressed me quite a lot, as did their attitudes; they really wanted to go out and sort these guys out.

Did you also mean other Rhodesian police people when you were saying about being impressed?

No, when I said that I was talking about the Army; but generally within the police force again, we wanted to take them on. I suppose you've heard stories about guys who left the country rather than be called up, but I don't think there could have been very many of them really. I don't think that was the prevailing attitude at all.

So can you tell me what your movements were afterwards and how this led into your involvement in war?

I was at Battlefields for a while at this station. As I say, occasionally we were called out to operate within that area. I was also called out to operate in other areas when I was still stationed at Battlefields so it was a bit of strain. You've got the paperwork, which is piling up on your desk and then you've got to suddenly shoot off and go and patrol in the bush for a week or something.

(00:39:17) And was this with PATU sticks that you would have been doing that?

Yes, this was operating with the PATU stick. I went out with PATU sticks a couple of times without seeing any action; nobody shot at me. Then I was transferred to Enkeldoorn, which I think on the maps is now shown as Chivu. I went there as second in charge.

So that was effectively another promotion?

No, it was just a different station. The work was still the same, I was doing ordinary crime work.

What year would that have been roughly?

It must have been about '69. I'm just trying to remember if I did any PATU work at that time? I honestly can't remember. Obviously in the training – we did the training – we trained police reservists in anti terrorist fighting.

When you were in Enkeldoorn?

Yes, but I don't remember actually going on any PATU patrols at the time. You had the odd scares, when you think something's going to happen and then everyone arms themselves and gets ready to go and fight somebody. And then nothing happens. But that's police work. That would be just in the general area.

What was the training for? You were training reservists you say, so was there a sense that you were building up your force for something that was going to happen?

Well it was happening. I mean we trained a lot of those police reservists who were in PATU, or who would be in Bright Lights. Have you heard about the Bright Lights?

No I haven't.

The Bright Lights were the men who were a bit less active. They stayed with the blue uniforms, they didn't get camouflage; and they were sent to operational areas like Operation Hurricane. They would be static guards at a farm, so a farmer might have two Bright Lights. I don't know where the words came from, but I think it was because we came from the Bright Lights, so it was the townies coming out to the farmlands. So a farmer would have a couple of Bright Lights who stayed on his farm for maybe a week and lived with him. If he went out into his fields though, they would go with him or maybe he would prefer them to stay at home, whatever he (00:42:41) wanted you to do.

I actually did this once just after I'd left the police force and I was living in Fort Victoria and I'd volunteered for PATU but nothing came through. They wanted men to go up to Hurricane for Bright Lights, so I said, "yes ok, why not?" and so I volunteered and I went out as a Bright Light. There must have been about thirty of us who left the Fort Vic district and some of the chaps were considerably older than me. We went to the police station at Centenary and had a briefing, were told what the security situation was and I remember when we came out we had to wait in the yard to be collected by the farmers. There was a vehicle there, which had been badly shot up and actually, a farmer and his wife had been travelling in that vehicle when they had been ambushed and killed. It was a severe reminder to actually see this thing, which was riddled with bullets. We were each given a pile of rat packs, the 24-hour ration things, and I went with another chap. This middle-aged lady came in a little R4 car and with us two crowded into it and holding our ration packs, this thing was really loaded. She set off and took us to the farm and

we stayed there for a week or two. We actually slept on the veranda, this chap and I and occasionally we went out with the farmer if he wanted us to go out somewhere. Nothing happened. They were a little bit jittery because the farm next to them had been hit a few nights before we arrived. Although there was a lot of activity in the area at the time – a lot of Army patrols going past, PATU patrols; there were ambushes, mines going off – again, we were not involved. But it was an interesting experience and I think we helped these people.

So you just had to base yourself on the farm? You weren't involved in the actions that were going on around.

No, no all the farmers had the radios, the Agric Alerts and so if there was anything going on, they could call for help on that. No, our role was to be bodyguards I suppose for the farmer and his family. And if the farmer wanted to go in a particular area and he asked you to come along then fine, you went. That was the job of the Bright Lights and that carried on right through the war, I'm surprised you haven't come across it before.

No I haven't heard that phrase; it's a funny word isn't it?

It is actually, isn't it; a bit derogatory really, isn't it? You were the hopeless crowd from the bright lights of the cities.

So you were saying that this was going on in the area when you were in Enkeldoorn, is that right?

Yes, I don't remember when the Bright Light system started but I think some of the chaps must have been going on Bright Light work then. Prior to the terrorist war starting, we still had the reservists in on a regular basis and we'd train them in riot works, batons and shields, throwing gas and that sort of thing. We had both an African police reserve and a European police reserve and we trained them in these things. Once the war started and (00:46:39) the role of the police was becoming more military, the training changed and it had to be more military in training.

And did you receive that training as well? Did you feel that your training was adequate?

Well, during my first training I had the advantage of having been in the British Army so some of it wasn't new to me but yes, my training was on my promotion courses. And we attended police reserve training when they would be trained by someone else so that we could see what was going on as well and get involved in it: things like chaps had to be trained how to get into a helicopter. You don't just run up, there's a proper way you've got to do it; what you do with your packs and what you do with your rifles and that sort of thing. This all had to be trained, so we'd had this training as regulars.

And you said that initially you had been doing your duty unarmed, at this point were you generally armed when you were working?

I think it was only when I got to Enkeldoorn that I actually started carrying a firearm if I was going out into the reserves. At Battlefields I don't think I ever did, except when there was a scare on but normal patrolling, no. I think at Enkeldoorn if we were going out into the bush, we started to carry firearms then.

Was there more training for that as well?

Oh yes, it was going on all the time.

How long were you in Enkeldoorn for?

I actually left the police force in 1972; I resigned.

Oh so you were there from '69 was it?

From '69 to '72, and then I resigned from the police force.

And what was your decision to resign for?

I was a bit frustrated; we were terribly badly paid. It wasn't the war or our involvement in it; and it wasn't really any concern for the future. It was just that I was a young man, I was married, I had a little girl, I wanted the best for them and I just felt that financially this was a dead loss. We were working very long hours, it was a lot of strain and I just didn't think we were getting properly rewarded for what we were doing and I felt I could do better outside. But I maintained my contact. I moved to Fort Victoria, got a job there and immediately joined the police reserve and put my name down for PATU. So then I was a reservist being trained by the regulars, going at weekends and spending weekends in PATU training; and I started to do patrols (00:50:35) in operational areas. I think all the patrols I did were in Repulse, which was the bottom corner of Rhodesia.

And at that point had conscription started? Were people being conscripted into the forces?

I don't remember when conscription started because of course that was an Army thing wasn't it.

I think it was certainly sometime at the beginning of the 70s, and then the age for it had increased.

Yes, well it was '72 when the war really started to hot up. Up till then it had been mainly police action, in those early contacts. It had been more police and police reservists than it had been soldiers. I think maybe the police were reluctant to let go of their responsibility, or maybe the Army were reluctant to get involved. Maybe they still wanted to see it as a criminal activity.

As opposed to terrorist activity?

As opposed to an insurgency war. I think certainly the early operations like Nickel and Cauldron, it was only police reservists involved and not the Army. But I could be wrong about that.

It has struck me how it was a very gradual and quite a subtle shift between the criminal work, so for example raids or thefts, which were criminal activities, but then they could have been funding terrorist activities. So I can appreciate that it was not always clear.

Well to us, certainly to me, I never looked upon them as people driven by a politics. I remember when I was at Enkeldoorn, we got the list of eighty identified terrorists who were outside the country. I think this was probably the first list they brought out and they all had criminal records. Some of them were wanted for serious crimes and rather than face the music, they rushed across the border and I so saw them as criminals. They weren't communists. They were trained by the communists and they came in their groups of commissars and all the rest of it, but they were not communists; they couldn't have had an intelligent conversation about communism, they didn't know anything about it. In many cases, as I say, they were just criminals, this was bandit activity and it was a good life for them, because in African society, respect comes with age. Now if you're a young person, you've got no respect. So we had educated these people – I say "we" because basically it was the whites paid for it up to a certain standard – and most of them had their standard 6 education. So now we've opened their minds to the wider world and then we throw them out of the school. If they can't get a job they're going to go back to their home in the reserve where they're nothing. I mean you're sixteen years old, you know, "shut up, look after the cattle." And the education wasn't the same because they could see these old men who were sozzled with drink and all (00:54:51) the rest of it and "why should I respect him?" So they had a little bit of education, they went back to a very dull life and maybe it was the sense of adventure; they sometimes sent them out of the country and "wow," you know, "I'm bored out of my tree, I can go out there and..."

You can appreciate the frustration that may have built up in them?

And what made that sort of life attractive. I mean it wasn't for all of them because as you probably know, the terrorists actually kidnapped a lot of people as well. But I think a lot of them, because they couldn't see any future at all for themselves and life was dead boring, you know, a soldier's life is adventurous, isn't it? And once they became terrorists and they came into the country and they operated at night, the "Gandanga"...have you heard that word? It actually meant the people who came in the night, which is what they did. So then you get these young men with their AK47 rifles stroll into the village and now they're telling everybody what to do. They're young men, they're telling the old men, the old madalas(?), "you do this" and "you do this" and the bloke gets up "yes boss, yes boss, yes boss." Wonderful. They used to have their own courts "oh yes, bring us your civil cases. What? you've been playing around with that man's wife? We'll sort this one out." They're twenty years old and it was such a reversal in roles and they absolutely enjoyed it. It

was being treated with respect. So the terrorist life was quite attractive for them. Yes, alright, get rid of the white man; if we get rid of all the whites we're all going to live in nice houses and have big cars, great. There was some of that in it, but also it was a life they were enjoying. Am I explaining this well?

Yes, it's very interesting to hear what you felt of the other side. I was interested to hear you say that you could see this communist motivation, or idea that was being planted amongst them?

I don't think they were communists, I don't think they thought that much about it really.

What did you feel that you were fighting against by that point?

Criminals, bandits. I don't think any of them were actually driven by patriotic motives. I don't think even patriotism applies to these people because you had Shona and you had Ndebele. Now I don't think they ever thought nationally. It was important to the chap that he was a Shona, that he was a Karanga of the Shona group; but *that* was important to him, not that he was a Zimbabwean, not that he was a Rhodesian. Their loyalty to their tribe was paramount, which of course we saw as soon as they got independence. Prior to that there had been no tribal troubles that I'd ever seen or even heard about. Take the white man away and trouble started. So, no, I don't think (00:58:46) they were politically inspired, not if you're thinking of politicians as an "ism." No, I don't think so.

And I'm interested that you saw these as criminal offences. Do you think that your being in the police particularly formed opinion, in that you were maintaining law and order?

Oh yes.

Were you aware of other opinions on this and do you feel that a lot of people did feel that they were fighting communists?

It was just communist inspired but no, I don't think anyone thought they were fighting communists. Obviously I viewed it as a policeman, but I think most people would have just seen them as criminals. Maybe we would have had a bit more respect for them if we had thought they were idealists. I don't think they were, I really don't think they were.

You said that by that point you had moved to Fort Victoria?

Fort Victoria, it's now called Masvingo I think.

How long would you go off on these PATU sticks?

Two weeks.

This is when you were not in the force?

When I was not in placement, yes. You'd spend two weeks based at a police station and patrol out from there probably for about three or four days at a time.

And were you doing other work when you were back in Fort Victoria then?

Yes.

What work had you found?

I worked for an insurance company first of all and then I worked for a grocery company, it was stores.

And what did you feel was forming your opinions and views at the time? What sort of media were you in touch with and were you listening to music or radio and newspapers?

Of course there's no doubt about it, we were getting propaganda over the radio as you would in any situation like this. There (01:01:32) were the songs and a couple of singers made patriotic type songs, which you might have come across. I don't have any of them but I have a couple of records for you to look at here, small ones. But the propaganda was preaching to the converted really, I suppose. Everybody believed this is what we've got to do. I noticed there's something about being lectured by superiors? [on the list of questions previously sent out].

Yes, we were asking whether you receiving any sort of political instruction from your superiors?

Not a word, it wasn't necessary. It didn't come and we certainly didn't discuss it amongst ourselves. The politics of it really didn't come into it, it was a war situation, there was the enemy and the politics didn't come into it. I tried to look back on my own feelings at the time with the advantage of hindsight. I think when it started I thought we could easily contain it. I didn't think that the Shona were a particularly warlike people – they're not – and I didn't think that they would be able to overthrow the government. I thought with all the militant talk that was coming from the north of us that eventually the black nations might cooperate and form a united force to attack us; and in fact I can remember talking to somebody about this. They were just so hostile and all those newly independent countries from Ethiopia down to Northern Rhodesia, Zambia, everyone hated us. I could see them forming some sort of united-nations type force to attack us, which of course never happened. So I thought if that didn't happen we could contain the situation.

Later on my views changed on that, after a discussion actually. I was out on PATU one time with another guy and I thought, no, we're not going to win this because no one ever wins a terrorist war. From my knowledge of history I don't know if any country had actually won a guerrilla war unless the British claim they won the war in Malaya and I would doubt that. So we couldn't win

but what I thought we were doing. There were negotiations going on from time to time and I thought that the more we helped them, the better fist we made out of it, the stronger our negotiating position would be. And in any event, what was the alternative? If we did nothing we were just going to give way to chaos. We'd had the examples of what had happened to the north of us, all these countries that had got independence: There had been the slaughter in the Congo; there'd been the fighting in Nigeria with Hausas that were slaughtered there. We'd seen bad government in places like Ghana; we'd seen how the dictators behaved like Banda in Malawi. We'd seen our economies had gone down like in Zambia with Kaunda and we just didn't want it. We had a country which was strong, vibrant, rich and with a very large white population in comparison with those ones and not to fight wasn't an option. We couldn't give way on that one.

So there's a sense you were fighting to maintain that?

Yes.

And to hold off what you saw was going on around you?

(01:06:07) We had to keep the curse at bay, yes, because by then of course it was my home. I wasn't thinking "I can always run back to England." I really wanted to stay there. I had two children that had been born there, I was happy there, I had friends there and I didn't want to let them down either, so I just didn't want to let go.

I was interested in you saying that you weren't really talking with your friends about it very much really?

Not the politics of it, we didn't really discuss the "isms."

So was it quite a personally formed view? Did you talk about it with your family, with your wife, or was it quite a personally formed from what information you'd got?

As I say, it was when I was on PATU one time, one young chap spoke to me and made me face up to the fact that we weren't going to win but I can't remember any significant conversations at that time. We were getting on with our lives; I mean we were still doing the things we liked to do. We still had a social life. Alright, you went off for a couple of weeks in uniform, you came back, took off the uniform, went back to work, played tennis next weekend, took the kids to the cinema and put it behind you for a while. Things were getting hard to get, sanctions were having their effect, a lot of things we had to do without; but generally life still seemed pretty good. Yes, your friends got hurt, your friends got killed, but it was the price that had to be paid. It was a very small white society there and quite often you'd get a couple of Rhodesians talk long enough and sooner or later they'd find common ground. Particularly of a certain age group because if they didn't go to school with a chap, they'd played rugby against his school and they knew old so and so and that sort of thing. You'd listen to the news and they would say two members

of the security forces were killed today in action and everyone would stop because there was a good chance you knew them. Not so much us from outside, because I hadn't grown up with these people but for the Rhodesian people themselves, particularly the people around that age group, the young people, everyone stopped "who is it this time?" And I can remember Debbie coming home from school one time, she was very upset, her friend's father had been killed.

That must have been difficult for children to live through that?

Yes it was. They knew what was going on, they'd been brought up with it.

Do you think that war was fostering a sense of Rhodesian identity?

I think so, yes. We were a people united against the world really because we didn't feel we were in the wrong. The rest of the world said we were, all the churches said we were, screaming "get (01:10:11) all the investment out of the country" and this tremendous amount of misinformation. You were in a siege and we thought we were doing pretty damned well. The country had been going since 1965 when UDI was declared, we'd had sanctions so people learnt to make things that we couldn't get, rather than buy them; they learnt to repair things rather than replace them. I think we were pretty proud of ourselves and with good reason too. The rest of the world didn't understand as far as we were concerned, so maybe that brought us closer together.

What kind of values and qualities would have made a good Rhodesian?

It was their home, they were fighting for their home. Many of them had no other home. A lot of Rhodesian families started after the Second World War, when ex-servicemen went out there. So twenty years later they'd established, this is their country, this is their home, their children have grown up there, they don't know of any other home. England was that over crowded Mud Island over there, that wasn't home. So this is what they were fighting for, they were fighting for their very existence.

So a Rhodesian would have felt a belonging to the place and having family there was quite an important tie as well?

Well absolutely, I mean this is what you're fighting for isn't it? What you're going out for? To look after your family against people who were incredibly cruel. When you got out into the tribal areas and you saw the way the people were living and how terrified they were, you had to feel sorry for them. I don't know if everyone felt like this but I felt I was out there to defend the people from the terrors, because they had a pretty rough life.

Were you involved in any particular operations at that time, either before you left the force or when you were a member of staff?

Actually the first time I was actually shot at was as a reservist, when they attacked police camp. This was down in Chibi and they attacked us at night.

Was it an operation or an attack?

No, they came for us actually, approached us at night and then attacked the police camp with rifles firing and mortars.

Had you had any warning of it? Well presumably not?

Well there had been a lot of activity out there but we didn't know we were going to get hit that night, that's for sure. It was a pretty mad affair, there wasn't much damage done. One of them actually killed himself because he'd fired a rocket grenade, then it hit the tree above his head and it came back and killed him, which we thought was rather nice and funny. But no, it wasn't too (01:14:05) serious at all. A heavy piece of shrapnel finished up in my sleeping bag, which I've still got here somewhere.

It didn't hit you? It was just in the sleeping bag.

No, no. When it all started I sort of rolled out the sleeping bag and went into position.

And you found this shrapnel?

Well when I went back, my sleeping bag was shredded and there was a big piece of shrapnel. Then it was some while after that that I drove a truck over a mine and I got a back injury out of that.

Was that with other people?

Yes, I was with Special Branch at the time and I was the Special Branch officer In Chibi. We had some information that somebody had come in, in an area know as the Taka barasha(?) area. We had men of the support unit at the station and it was decided to deploy them in the area. So we load them up into two trucks and early one morning we set out to go and deploy them. We never used to stop the trucks because obviously a large army truck can be heard for miles. So what these chaps used to do, you'd just slow down and two of them would jump off the back and then a bit further, slow down and a couple would jump off the back. We were doing this and I was driving the second truck and it was that time in the morning when it was light before the sun comes up, what the Africans call "Mushambanzo;" the time when the elephants are washing." I dropped two men off and had just negotiated a bend and suddenly there was a tremendous bang and I knew immediately what it was. My windscreen smeared up immediately with white smoke or dirt or something and it felt to me as if the vehicle had just reared up and then come down again and it banged a couple of times and really hurt my back. In actual fact it had travelled quite some distance. I've got some photographs here I can show you.

Of the vehicle?

Yes.

So you'd actually been blown off the ground and landed?

Yes, [shows photograph] you can see in this photograph, there's the vehicle, the front wheel has been taken off and you can see where the men are standing, that's where the crater was, it was quite some distance back. (01:17:11) There's another shot of it, this man is actually standing in the crater and you see where the truck stopped.

So that's a good fifteen or twenty metres even?

It was quite a distance, yes. So whether we actually flew through the air or just reared up like a dog begging and hurtled down the road; I really don't know because I had no knowledge of this, I couldn't see anything. My rifle leapt off the rack and gave me a fearful crack on the head and then there was just smoke and dust and I was there feeling sorry for myself.

So you did actually, well you had to stop then presumably?

Well yes, I couldn't go any further

Was that quite a dangerous position to be in? Having been hit by a mine?

Well if they'd stayed around it could have been but they never did. Whenever they laid these mines they didn't stay around, they ran off somewhere. I'd actually damaged two vertebrae, I always thought it could have been a lot worse. It still occasionally troubles me but I was very lucky.

Was anyone else hurt?

Yes, a couple of the guys in the back got a bit knocked about but not too seriously.

Well that's very lucky then, incredible. And the truck that you were in, it looks like it's an armoured vehicle, is it?

Yes. It's actually a Japanese Isuzu truck, which the Rhodesia people had armoured; obviously very effectively, otherwise I wouldn't be here.

It looks incredibly sturdy.

Yes, it was so designed so that the shape of it, the blast is taken away from the cab. You sat on a hard metal seat without any cushion and obviously with a seat belt on. If I hadn't had the seat belt on, I wouldn't be here now. My back took quite a rap there, I must say. At the time I felt alright; it was only afterwards that I started to feel a bit bad.

Well this must have been a lot worse but in any accident often you have that stage of adrenalin, which keeps you going and masks any pain?

I don't know, perhaps I was a bit hacked up at the time.

The shock of it can sometimes make you not realise that you're hurt.

(01:20:10) But it was fortunate that my vehicle went over and not the one in front because they weren't so well armoured as I was. My friend was sitting on the back of the truck in front and he said we sort of reared over the top of him, he thought the truck was going to come down on top of him. But landmines were such a common thing that you often heard of and saw the results of them, like this sort of thing: It could have been a lot worse.

And were there other particular operations that you got involved in? You said that you were in Special Branch at that time?

I was in Special Branch, yes.

How did that move happen?

I sort of drifted into in from PATU. They wanted chaps who...I suppose manpower was becoming a problem at that stage. The fact that I had previous police experience must have had something to do with it and they asked me if I would do it.

And was that more of a full time occupation?

No, I was still a reservist, going out there for two weeks. Taking over from somebody else and doing my best for a couple of weeks and then leaving it for a while

And what sort of time was that, in the late 70s?

I actually remember the date; it was the 5th of November 1977. I'd been with them for a while before doing this sort of thing but no problems in the past. That was a particularly bad one. Shortly after that I moved to Salisbury and because of the back injury they didn't want me to go in the bush again. So I stayed with Special Branch in Salisbury.

And how did that work differ because was Special Branch slightly more informed about what was going on and gathering more intelligence?

Well again my role as a reservist wasn't very great. I was on what they called e-desk which was concerned with the European side of things. I did a lot of duty at the airport where we were very interested in who was coming into the country and who was going out and sometimes what they were carrying. We got extremely good at opening suitcases and we had some interesting finds sometimes on that.

What kind of things would you come across that interested you?

(01:23:22) We found, well not me personally, but one of the other chaps found an Army officer leaving the country with all the information about an Operation that was going to be carried out. I don't know why he was taking those out the country...I had no follow up, I don't know what happened about that. There were some reporters and church people, some visitors we were interested in. I think there's a lot of this stuff that really, even now I don't want to talk about because it could be embarrassing somebody. But most of my time, I was at the airport. They actually had an attempt to mortar the airport one night when I was on duty there, but it was pretty ineffective. A few mortars fell, didn't do any harm.

So it was much more about intelligence then?

Yes.

And people, rather than the operations?

Oh yes, there were certain people who needed to be followed and reported on, watched. Quite often you didn't know why you were watching him or where it was leading. You just did what you had to do and they didn't bother to tell you, you didn't ask.

As with the case of information being taken out of the country, was it about controlling what was going out?

I don't think it was control; I don't think that was the word. Sometimes just to know what people were doing and saying.

And did you have much awareness of the African belief system and cultural belief system at the time? I'm thinking particularly about Spirit Mediums and what part they played in your work?

I do know that for a long time there was no terrorist activity in Gutu; because the story was that the Spirit Mediums there had told them that no blood must be spilt in that area or something. They respected that and they didn't have any operations in the Gutu district for quite a long time probably.

Was that ever used at all by the police in the sense that people would respect and follow the recommendations of Spirit Mediums?

I don't know, not that I know of. African religion is a strange business. Certainly for white people to try and get involved in trying to manipulate that, I don't think it would work. But the story as I heard it from Gutu, that wasn't inspired by government or the Army, it was something they came up with themselves.

So in your experience, it was very much going on in the background; something that you weren't involved in (01:27:20) but it existed amongst the local population?

I don't think about it like that, I don't know enough to answer that really. I know nothing more than that incident at Gutu, which I heard about.

And you've mentioned Malaya, but I wondered whether there was any folk memory of people who had served in Malaya or in Kenya?

I'm sorry?

Were there any people who you were working with or systems incorporated into Rhodesia that were similar to Malaya and Kenya?

Well, yes, during the training for PATU, we were shown a training film called *Keeping the Peace: Part Three*, I remember. It was all about the Malayan campaign and how the chaps operated there, setting up ambushes, even how they camped. It was all based on that and our initial training was based on what we saw in that film. Kenya, I don't know if that really came into it, I never came across anybody who'd served in Kenya so I don't know.

That's very interesting about Malaya, so it was something that could be learned from?

Well the basic idea was there and it gave the chaps something to start from; how you establish killing fields from ambushes and this sort of thing. That's general to all sorts of Army training I suppose, but it was a good introduction.

And what did you think at the time of your commanders?

The commanders?

Yes.

I think everyone had a lot of respect for Peter Walls, the Army commander; he really was a nice chap. I had some dealings with him and I had a lot of respect for him. Police officers in all honesty, I can't say I had the same degree of respect for. I mean quite often these chaps hadn't done the training and yet still gave the orders and I think quite often a lot of them were motivated by their own thoughts about their own career rather than what was best. I was always impressed with the regulars and the reservists I met, particularly in PATU. A lot of them showed a tremendous amount of interest and dedication to it, but senior police officers got involved and no, I didn't have the same degree of respect for them. They came up with some funny ideas. I remember one, one time, decided it would be more effective if our Land (01:31:13) Rovers didn't have windscreens on the front. Well if you drive along dirt roads, you need a windscreen, believe me. Another one decided at one time that our FN rifles, when we first had them, wouldn't fire fully automatic and I think the senior police officer said "good gracious, policemen don't need fully automatic weapons." Well we did, and so unofficially the armouries changed them so they were fully automatic in spite of what somebody in police headquarters said. So these people would often come up and they should have shut up.

So they had little of the experience that you people on the ground had?

Well exactly, they didn't have the experience at all. All they had was the rank. The Army officers, well again I didn't have much to do with them, just Lieutenants and people like that. Being ex-British Army, I found it so entirely different. In the British Army it's much more officer class/other ranks, stand to attention and salute, "yes sir, no sir." They had a much more free and easy relationship with their men, which I think you also get in other colonial forces but it was quite interesting to sometimes see how these chaps argued with their officer. It just wouldn't have happened in the British Army. But they worked; the discipline was still there, they did a good job.

Were there any divisions between the police because I understand that later on some South African police were brought in?

Yes that's right.

Did you have any experience of that?

The South Africans got men to join their own version of PATU and then they sent them up to Rhodesia and the first thing they did was train them again. I remember these chaps were fascinated by television because in those days they didn't have television in South Africa and all they wanted to do was sit in the mess and watch TV. We used to laugh at them because we didn't think that their standard of discipline was very high at all. I know of at least one who got shot and shouldn't have done; he just wouldn't obey orders, but this sort of thing happens. I suppose they developed after a while but they weren't impressive to start with.

You were in the Special Branch then towards the end?

It was towards the end of the 70s so I can't remember now; I probably did about two or three years with SB.

And were you in that then during the transition period of '79 and Muzorewa?

What in 1980 when they got independence? Yes I was.

And in Muzorewa's government in '79?

(01:34:43) Oh yes.

Did you have any experience of the auxiliary groups that were used?

No, I was never with the auxiliaries; I never saw any of them. But at the time of the independence, I was still with SB and a lot of visitors came from overseas and we were acting as the heavies and going around with them as guards, that sort of thing.

Were these observers before the elections?

No.

Or this was actually after?

As I remember it, the ZIMCORD conference was a conference of people from all over the world who came to join in the celebrations of independence and to pledge various aid packages to this new fledgling country. And I spent a bit of time with Russians and a Romanian, I seem to remember and they didn't know I was a reservist. As far as they were concerned I was police and I remember having to take these chaps to a cocktail party and wait for them to finish and take them back.

Quite a change!

Absolutely, yes, so we looked after these chaps for a while. I remember we went to a party at the Monomatapa Hotel and they were not impressed with the new leaders at all.

The new leaders?

Well the people who were with the leaders, I don't think the foreign dignitaries were very impressed.

So in what capacity were you working at that stage?

Well I was a reservist attached to Special branch in Harare at the time of independence and then it just seemed to fade away. Nobody ever told me "your services are no longer required" but they just stopped calling us out as things went down and down.

And was that quite strange to be working with this government that you had been almost fighting?

Well actually I wasn't because when I was SB, after independence they started calling it CIO. What had happened is, they had made Nkomo minister of police and the government didn't want him to have control of Special Branch. So they took Special Branch out of the police and put it in CIO, which meant we suddenly became CIO officers. I was still working under the (01:37:45) same white guy I had before and nothing changed except that suddenly we weren't called out on call-ups anymore, pretty soon after that. But you know Annie, by that time, I think we were all pretty war weary. I'm rather amazed actually when I hear about the trouble in Israel and Palestine and I just wonder how the dispute can go on because I think we'd all reached the stage where we'd had enough. Remember I did my first PATU training in 1966 and it was 1980 they got independence. So we had all those years of uncertainty, shortage and people getting killed and being unable to go places because of the war and I think everyone had just had enough; they just wanted it to be over.

I can remember one time, a lot of us were being addressed by a senior officer and this was just prior to independence, at the elections. He was babbling on, “well the way we see it, if Smithy gets those seats and Muzorewa gets those seats and Nkomo gets those seats then when we’ve got this balance...” and one of the chaps stood up and he said “look, I don’t know who you think you’re talking to but all of us in this room have been involved in this war for a long time and I can tell you now, as they can tell you, exactly who’s going to win the election – Mugabe is going to win the election, because he’s the only one who can stop the war. The blacks have had enough, they’d vote for the devil himself to stop the war.” And that was it, I don’t think Mugabe was ever popular, he wasn’t, they voted for him for that one reason only; he could stop the war. We couldn’t and Muzorewa couldn’t, nobody could and they would have done anything, they were suffering so much. And of course that was true, this chap was just babbling away. But then come independence we hoped that things would be better. I remember one of their politicians standing up and saying “we’ve learnt from the mistakes in the north, we’re not going to make the same mistakes they did,” and of course they did. And for a few years it looked as though it could come right, but...

Did you continue working in...was it still insurance?

No, I’d moved on. In fact I had a little shop in Salisbury at that time and then just after independence.

So had your family gone with you when you were moved to Salisbury?

Yes. I had a shop in Harare until 1990; and then I went into business with my brother-in-law and we had a number of stores in the Eastern Highlands, that’s round Mutare way. We ran those stores for about three years and then he and I had a falling out and the business came to an end.

And going back to your perspective on the war, to what extent do you think that it was ideological or racial or perhaps even civil war?

It was none of these at all. It was people just defending their homes from these armed insurgents. Tribalism. I never saw (01:41:57) any signs of tribalism prior to independence – well no, that’s not true; prior to the war starting I saw no signs of it – because remember we treated them equally. In the police force, if a man came to a promotion, we didn’t worry if he was a Shona or an Ndebele or a Dhow. If he could do the job, he got promoted. So you didn’t have that problem of tribalism that they’ve got now. And it actually arose during the war because the Matabele – Nkomo’s crowd – were being trained by the Russians and they created ZIPRA, which was their Army. The Shonas were being trained by the Chinese and I heard stories, I don’t know if they’re true, of Shonas and Matabele terrorist groups meeting in the bush and fighting it out. So that’s when it first started arising. And of course, they say, “take the white man away and then the tribal race has already started.” You’ve probably heard of the slaughter of the Matabele by the Shona?

Yes, which happened after independence?

Yes. Power, just power.

How do you think that the different reasons for the war being fought affected how it was fought and the way that people fought the war?

Obviously there was frustration on the part of the blacks; they wanted change. I think the Rhodesians realised their system was archaic, which it obviously was, and I think they were ready to change and they were changing, but it was the pace. Things changed, certainly within the police force, from when I joined. Over the years we saw lots of changes taking place and always it was an improvement for indigenous blacks. Once the war started and people are going out in the bush and they're dying, you can't then keep giving things away because then you're undermining the morale of your own people. So then things like attitudes hardened, but prior to that, things were changing quickly too. In essence the whole Rhodesian war comes down to one thing: How quickly change should take place. Obviously, the whites didn't want to see it go too quickly and descend into chaos; but blacks felt they were being held back. So it was just the speed of change which was in dispute.

And can I ask the extent to which you would differentiate between black Rhodesians and the black forces that you were fighting against?

How would we differentiate between them?

Yes, was there a clear difference? And again between civilians who were caught up in it: there were some that you were working with, some that you were protecting, and some that you were fighting against.

Operations with blacks in the bush, I never had any doubt about their loyalty. I never thought that they could turn on me, which, it would have been very easy to put a bullet in my back and then say "oh sorry, you got killed in an ambush." (01:46:03) In fact, when I got hurt, the blokes on the truck were so angry, they went into a kraal nearby and set fire to it. Now I had no control over them at that stage so don't blame me for that but they said "no, these bastards knew it was there, they should have told us and they're going to suffer," so they set fire to their huts. So I had a lot of sympathy for the blacks in the rural areas, but a lot of frustration with them too in the fact that they were so easily intimidated.

I'll tell you a story: I was once out with SB in an area and I met up with my opposite number, who was operating out in Chiredzi at the time. He was so frustrated because it was a time when the terrorists were killing African police who were going home on leave. They would often attack them in their kraals and a constable by the name of Maparanga had disappeared and he hadn't come back after leave. So they went to his kraal and questioned the people there including his family and they said "Maparanga? Haven't seen him for months, didn't come home here." Anyway, this chap wasn't satisfied and he arrested the father and he took him back to the police station and he said, "right, you're going to sit here until you tell me exactly what happened." I think it was probably a couple of days later this old man said to him "right ok, I'll tell

you the truth. My son did come home on leave. At night there was a knock on the door and the Gandanga were there and they pulled him out. All of us, everyone in the kraal had to go with them. We went down to the river and we stood around singing patriotic songs while my son dug his grave. They then put him in the grave and they shot him. We then had to fill the hole in and we had to dance and sing and march up and down on the ground and that's what happened." So this opposite number of mine said "very well, we'll go out there and you'll show us the grave, we'll bring his body back here and Constable Maparanga will be buried with full military honours." And when I saw this chap out in the bush, he had a platoon of the RAR with him and the old man was still so terrified, he wouldn't show them where his son was buried. This is what I mean about frustration. Although you can understand it, it's still terribly frustrating when that was their attitude.

Very awkward positions that they were in, and that you had to contend with as well.

Yes, even while you accept that they were in a terrible situation, had that been my son, I don't think I could have had the same attitude that he had. I don't think I could have been that terrified, but I don't know. But that's what I mean about the frustration. It sometimes happened that security forces would visit a kraal and then be told "oh no, everything's fine, no problem at all" and then they'd find there's somebody there who's been badly tortured. In one case, a woman whose lips had been cut off by bayonet and she hadn't been taken to a hospital. It was only when the security forces found her that she received any treatment. Yes, this frustrated you; how can you be so scared? But this is the way the terrorists operated. I believe, didn't Mao Tse Tung make some comment about the terrorist is "like a fish that swims in the water of public opinion" or something. Get public opinion on your side, terrorists must survive. They didn't in Africa, but they survived by terrorising and terrorising the people.

I knew of one case where a man was dragged out of his kraal one night by these terrs, they gathered all the people around and (01:50:57) they said "this man is a sell-out, we're going to kill him." He'd done nothing, he'd never seen anybody, there was absolutely no reason for them to say that. So they said "mark out your grave," so he had a bit of rock and he marked out a place on the ground and then he threw the rock at one of the guys and ran like hell. He came to the police station and told us this and we actually set up an effective ambush on that one. He was one man who was prepared to talk about it, that was why. But this is the way they would operate, you see. They would go into a kraal, slaughter one man most horribly and make everybody watch and they're not going to talk to the security forces because they're there all the time. The security forces might visit every two or three days, but they're in the bush all the time and you couldn't beat that.

So they were constantly surveying what was going on?

They were a constant threat.

How was it for you then, seeing independence?

Well of course there is the sadness and you think, “what did all those guys die for?” But also, the same war we were in was all over and “let’s try and make the best of the future.” I mean a lot of people said “hey, I’m not going to hang around here, I’m off.” And in a way, they were the wise ones because they were obviously able to get out with things. Afterwards, people left with nothing.

So these were people who went in the middle of war?

Well a lot of people, we had that continuous drain of people leaving the country, particularly amongst professional people and artisans; people who find it easier to find work elsewhere. So you did have that drain going on and it was obviously accelerating towards the end. And then the final crunch, obviously a lot of people just said “I’m out of here while the going is good.” The ones who stayed were the people who said, “now hang on, let’s try and make this work.” And they’ve suffered as a result.

You said that you left in...?

I left in '99.

Leaving what was by then Zimbabwe.

Yes.

And where did you go after that?

There’d been trouble with my brother-in-law and the business; my marriage had broken down; and I was going to live in South Africa. I actually stayed in South Africa for a year before coming back here.

(01:53:49) And what was that like, going to South Africa? Had you travelled there much from Rhodesia?

I’d had holidays in South Africa, I didn’t know it well. My daughter was living there then and she had quite a nice place near Durban so we went down there. My son-in-law and I built a flat next to the house just for me and I stayed there for a year.

And what was it like when you finally did move to the UK?

Well it was about a year after that. I actually came over here to visit my mother, who was widowed and living on her own and her health wasn’t very good. I wasn’t working, and I decided the thing to do was stay and look after her for as long as she needed me. I think I gave her a new lease of life because she lasted for another six years. But I wouldn’t go and live in South Africa now. The flat is still there, my daughter rents it out but I’m not too happy about the future of South Africa, so I’ll stay here.

What was it like coming back to the UK having been in Rhodesia for so long?

Well it wasn't difficult. First of all, I had been back here on holiday from time to time, so I was not unaware of what things were like here and I had a home to come to. I felt very, very lucky actually; the fact that I could go out at night and walk around without any fear. Not very far from me is Epping Forest, now I quite often walk over there and if it's late and dark and I'm walking on the path, I don't care. Now you can't do that anywhere in Africa; you can't go for long walks in South Africa; and in the bush where I was, it's just too dangerous in Zimbabwe. It's great. This country is so safe and I'm very pleased to be living here now and I'm very grateful to this government frankly. They pay me a pension, which is good because nobody pays pensions from Zimbabwe.

And you had decided to keep your British citizenship?

Oh yes, I've never given that up. I actually took out Rhodesian citizenship but the Brits don't mind, you can have dual citizenship, so I was Rhodesian and British. For a while I travelled on a Rhodesian passport but then some years ago I changed it to a British passport again.

Had you actually voted in the Zimbabwe elections, or in the latter years of the war? Were you able to vote if you were a citizen?

I don't remember, but I must have done. I remember it was about '72 they had a thing called the Pearce Commission, did you ever hear about this commission? (01:57:11) It was an idea that the Rhodesians had cobbled together for a new constitution and the Brits said "if you can convince the blacks of that," they would go along with this (?).

Oh yes, I think I have.

So they sent out some people from England to oversee this.

And to work out if people were really satisfied with it, is that right?

Well the intimidation was ridiculous. It was so obvious at one place, because the nationalists – let's call them nationalists rather than terrorists – wouldn't let the people go in one by one to see the commissioners, because they didn't know what they would say. So they said "no, no, you must address us as a group." It was quite funny to watch how they did this because they herded these people like sheep dogs around a flock. You'd have a hundred people marching down the road and these people sort of circling, and they arrived outside this place and the commissioner came out and he smiled and he said "right, would you like to come in one by one?" and they all shouted "no, no." And then he grinned and he said, "do you want independence?" And they all thought he was asking them if they voted, so they all screamed "no." So then the sheep dogs were kicking them and shouting at them saying "shut up you fools," and the intimidation was just so obvious. I remember I did vote in that

one but a lot of good it did us. But then the commissioners came back and said, “no, they didn’t see any sign of intimidation.” But they saw an awful lot.

How did you feel that people viewed you coming from Zimbabwe to Britain?

In 2000?

Yes, when you came back?

How did people view me?

How did you feel that you fitted in to Britain?

Oh, life is easy because I’m a Brit, so I’m English. My son came over here four years ago; now he’d never lived in this country. He was born there, his wife was born there and he came over because he had found life was getting intolerable there.

So he came to actually live here?

He came to live in England, yes, which he was entitled to because he got a British passport through me. Also Tracey, his wife’s parents were British, so there was no trouble about them coming to the country. They (02:00:14) became very concerned about the future. In fact, I was talking to one of my relatives who said he’s been amazed how easy he’s found it to settle down here. So yes, they’ve settled down here, they’ve got a little baby now and they’re very happy, got a house and so on. But for me, coming back to England, I didn’t find it difficult. I still miss aspects of Africa but what I miss doesn’t exist anymore. That was a great life: I mean we kept horses, my wife and my son were into show jumping. I used to do a lot of gliding and sports, which in this country are pastimes which you really couldn’t afford to do. Life was good and I liked the laid-back sort of attitude. I liked the barbequees and sunshine and hey, I miss it particularly when there’s winter weather here. But you’ve got security here; you never had security in Africa. There’s no security there, so no, I wouldn’t go back. I’d go back on visits but not to stay.

And finally then, what do you think looking back at the conflict now; and do you feel that it was worth it?

I’m very proud to have been a member of the British South Africa Police. I’m proud to have been with the Rhodesian security forces. I think what we did was right. We couldn’t have done anything more than what we did; we couldn’t have done any less than what we did. I’m glad my children were brought up there; both of them went to University in South Africa. Yes, it was a struggle at times but I think my kids had a very healthy upbringing. There weren’t the same problems with drugs and that sort of thing. I’m horrified when I see the way the school children hacked around here. Their behaviour appals me; our children were brought up differently. My son’s school, they wore hats and when you walked past them, they used to take off their hats

and say “good morning sir” as a visitor, and I like that. I’ve got two children I’m extremely proud of and I don’t know if they would have had the same opportunities here. They had a very healthy upbringing in the places where we were stationed. They took part in their sports and I think altogether it was a much more healthy way of bringing children up. So I don’t regret holding on, in fact I don’t really regret very much actually.

I was fortunate in that coming over here I had somewhere to come to. I had a home and when my mother died, obviously I got it. Had that not been the situation then it might have been a lot more difficult, so I’ve been fortunate in that respect; but did I think it was worth it? I frankly don’t know what else we could have done. Unfortunately, in a situation like that you can’t deal with moderates. Africans will follow the bloodiest spear, the toughest guy, the strong man, the Idi Amin’s, the Mugabe’s. These are the people because politically this is where they are; this is the old chief, isn’t it? You see Chaka Zula: this is the one chief, he’s the boss and you don’t have to worry about anything. And I’m afraid politically they haven’t progressed. They still want a strong leader and Mugabe’s well aware of this; he’s the chief. He’s a chief as much as Chaka was, he rules and this is what they want. They don’t want any mucking about with “proportional representative government.” “What’s he talking about? We want a chief,” which he is.

And this is why he hasn’t been overthrown. You and I see a cruel dictator; they see a firm ruler. That’s fine because they know if it’s not him it’s going to be somebody else. I’m afraid that’s the situation. Over here, people (02:05:28) can argue about political philosophy, and “I don’t agree with what you say, but I defend to the death your right to say it.” No African understands that. It’s a generalisation; generalisation is wrong, ok, but a lot of them don’t understand it anyway.

Well thank you so much for today.

End of interview