

Brian Taylor

Born in the UK. Served in the RAF for three years. Travelled out to Rhodesia in 1956, age 22, having joined the BSAP. Was sent to Nyasaland briefly in 1959. Got married in 1963. Left Zimbabwe in mid-2006.

This is Dr Sue Onslow talking to Mr Brian Taylor at the Victory Club in London on Tuesday 2nd June 2009. Brian, thank you very much indeed for agreeing to talk to me. I wonder if you could begin by saying, please, how did you come to be in Rhodesia in the 1960s and 1970s?

I joined the BSAP as a result of serving in the RAF in England for three years. By the end of that three years, I was determined to leave England, to anywhere in the world; it didn't matter where it was as long as it took me away from the climate. I applied for various jobs in various places and the BSAP were the lucky ones. They accepted my application and I went out there in June 1956. By 1960 I had done four years service and came home for six months. I married in Rhodesia in 1963 to a Rhodesian and from then on, that was home.

Where was your family from in the UK?

Hampshire, although I was born in Kingston-On-Thames but we moved to Christchurch in Hampshire in, it must have been about 1938 because I started school in September at four and a half. I was at that junior school in Christchurch until the war ended. I went to Brockenhurst Grammar School. I left there at sixteen, passed various civil service exams and ended up working for the Ministry of Supply, as it was then, in Christchurch until the national service became due and I signed up for the RAF for three years because as a civil servant I was allowed to keep my job for that extra year to draw the regular pay.

Where did you serve as part of your time in the RAF?

Well that's the silly part of it. I volunteered, right from the start, for overseas service. At that time the Korean War was on, the Malaya Campaign was on and we were all over the Middle East. I did my square bashing at West Kirby near Liverpool, it's now closed. From there I was transferred to a RAF hospital at Wroughton, also now closed and from there, my last year's service, I went to Titchfield in Hampshire which was three quarters of an hour's motorcycle ride from my home. So much for overseas service. By then, that decided me to get out and I got out.

So where did you see the advertisement for the BSAP?

In the *News Chronicle*. The *News Chronicle* used to carry adverts for all sorts of overseas appointments at that time and I think various police forces included.

What did your family think of your decision to do that?

By the time they found out, I'd already made the decision.

(00:03:08) Ah, you didn't discuss it with them first?

No, I was not one to do that. I make a decision, I didn't ask people, should I do this? Or should I do that? I did it. My mother was very upset, my father...

You were what? 22 by the time you went out?

Yes, I followed in father's footsteps in effect because he ran away and joined the Army and ended up in India between the wars so he was not particularly put out when I did a similar thing.

Did you have brothers and sisters?

I have a sister. Well, she was already a student teacher over in Bristol so it wasn't her concern.

So how did you get to Rhodesia in 1956?

Oh you went to Southampton and got on a boat.

And how long did that take?

I think at that time it was a pretty old ship. It had been a converted aircraft carrier during the war, it was the Carnarvon Castle. Fairly beaten up by modern standards but for us, it was all a new experience. I think that took fourteen days.

How many of you went out as part of the BSAP recruitment group?

We were going out then in squads of twenty plus. I think, I'm guessing now, I have got the roll but I think there were about twenty one from the UK, one from Rhodesia and a couple from South Africa, something like that. At that time, that was about par for the course.

So the BSAP at that point were recruiting principally from outside Rhodesia?

Oh yes and had done for many, many years because it was a source of immigration. It was accepted as such. You weren't expected to do more than three years, your initial contract. It was only the oddballs that stayed on and did their twenty. That trend grew, or shall we say the trend lessened, especially after the Second World War. In 1946 they recruited, and Fred Punter was one of the guys, 365 men in 1946. The highest number ever, before or since and the sad

thing about that was, and Fred will probably confirm this, for pensionable service you had to do twenty years as when I joined also. It was changed in 1958 to twenty five years. Anyway, it was twenty years but war counted towards pensionable service so when all these guys reached their twentieth in 1966, they, as one of them explained to me, he said “from now on, I’m entitled to a twenty five year pension although I’ve only done twenty years so in effect, I’m only now working for half (00:06:17) my salary”. This resulted in a hell of a lot of them leaving just when we needed those guys after UDI. The terrorist assaults on Rhodesia were starting, not by UDI, before UDI and Smith would have been well aware of that – the Rhodesian government would have been well aware of what their intentions were by the time of UDI.

Going back to you going out to Rhodesia in the first place, did you have any idea of the country that you were going to?

Not really except the sun shone there.

So you hadn’t exactly done your homework before you went, to find out exactly where you...?

Well yes, that was a bit of a coincidence because word got around that I was going. This is after I’d been accepted and I got a ‘phone call one day from someone who said “would you like to come out to...?” You might be interested in this, there’s a film show, a chap giving a film show tonight, Mr Llewellyn and he’s the brother of the governor general and he’s just been out on a tour with his brother right round the Federation. The Llewellyns were...the sister was a JP in Poole at that time. Anyway, they were quite a well to do family and Lord Llewellyn was the governor general. So I went along; it was a marvellous film, it was probably a 16mm home movie type of thing but it was the brother filming his big brother doing the thing including the trip up through Barotseland.

Break in interview

Part two

When you arrived in Rhodesia, where were you sent first of all?

The police depot

Morris depot?

Yes, it wasn’t called Morris depot at that time and the African police depot wasn’t called Tomlinson depot either [the new names came about in the early 60s I think].

After you’d done your basic training, where were you sent then?

My first posting was Waterfalls

Your first posting then was at Waterfalls?

(00:08:58) Yes and in my ignorance, I immediately thought “Victoria Falls”! It was a suburb of Salisbury but it was probably one of the better stations from the point of view of a young inexperienced recruit policeman because it covered the entire spectrum of Rhodesian society at the time. At one end of it you had the Seke Reserve and Seke Township which is now Chitungwiza. You then had European farming, you then had European urban suburbs, white collar workers and that sort of thing. You then had the lower class, also European suburbs next to that and the progressing along, you came to Ardbennie which at that time was the only...was a multi-racial suburb and it was sort of at the bottom of the heap and all sorts of things went on there. This was the days when the Africans were not allowed European liquor so down there they were being supplied it by various white low-lifes and it was sort of a free-for-all, great fun. I got my nose broken in the local pub there but the licensee got his leg broken that sort of thing

It sounds a bit like the Wild West

Yes, it was a bit.

So how long were you at Waterfalls?

About...December '56, I think, February '58, I went to Marandellas and that was district branch and to go to district branch in those days, you had to apply and you had to demonstrate that you'd been a good boy and were a suitable candidate to be 'elevated' to district. So anyway, I went to district to Marandellas I stayed there until mid 1959. While I was at Marandellas, Feb 1959, I was sent to Nyasaland for two and a half months.

During the Emergency?

Yes

So what did you think of African Nationalism at that point?

Oh, well it's the same here. The younger generation, as in the UK, were not particularly interested in politics. I don't think they really got that bad at that stage. Petrol bombing hadn't become fashionable; when it did, it incurred the death penalty if you were caught [and deservedly so]. At that point I think they were just name calling and stone throwing and were just a general nuisance. But that was from the white perspective. What was going on underground of course was another story. I don't recall that there was a Special Branch formed at that time, but there must have been some kind of intelligence gathering set up but anyway, I was not privy to it.

Was any of your training influenced by the Kenyan experience during Mau Mau and how to deal with African Nationalism?

(00:12:13) I don't think so. Six members of the BSAP were seconded to Kenya for that. One died only recently in Harare. I don't think any of those six are still alive. One was Jack Denley who became commissioner...

Break in interview

But you spent your two months in Nyasaland. You weren't sent up to Kenya?

No, no, there is an album that they brought back of photographs of atrocities and all sorts of things, souvenirs, whatever, which as far as I know is lodged in the police museum in Depot, or the CID museum, one of the two. I think it was the CID museum and it's probably still there. That was pretty hairy by all accounts. We didn't go, they were all senior men that went, sergeants and detective sergeants.

So in 1959, you went back down to Southern Rhodesia?

After my two and a half months in Nyasaland?

Yes

We were there as a mobile column

Right

To bring a bit of order and discipline to the place

Then where? Back to district branch?

Ah yes because on return from Nyasaland mid 1959, I went back to Marandellas and I was offered a probationary transfer to CID or a transfer to Umvukwes. They obviously wanted to get rid of me, one way or the other and because I had no money at that point and was thinking in terms of long leave. I decided to go to Umvukwes which was a rural station where I could save money. I knew what CID was like so that's it and having turned down a CID opportunity, it was never going to be offered to me again. I knew that so that was that. Anyway, I spent a year in Umvukwes during which time, a month before I went on long leave to England, I went up to Kariba to the official opening by the Queen Mother which was fun. Saw the inside of Kariba, inside the turbines and all the rest of it. Very few people ever saw that later.

Well, it's an extraordinary engineering project

Oh yes, unbelievable. And then I came here, to the UK, on leave. I was actually on the terraces for the Royal Review of the BSAP by the Queen Mother and I left Salisbury the same as she did, the same night.

How did you find England when you came back?

(00:15:24) Well I came over for six months at that time. Now bear in mind I'm single and I'm getting a better rate of pay than I would have been getting here. It was a glorious summer, I can only remember a couple of days of rain in that six months, now. Come on, I'm living the life of a bachelor, I wasn't living the life of an Englishman, it's a totally different thing, I just had fun.

So you didn't find English society drab, boring, feeling out of place?

Not at that time, it hadn't happened at that time, but you weren't born then I suppose?

Just

Well not old enough to know what it was all about.

No

I was just thinking about this now. In effect, I'd left England for fifty years and in that fifty years, the place has been destroyed as far as I'm concerned. Largely by the loony left who aren't necessarily all in the Labour party. They're all over the place, that's the trouble and to me, one of the turning points, you remember there was all this crap about the Swinging Sixties?

Yes

Now, from our point of view over there, all the swinging being done in the sixties was police batons. That was the year the Congo blew up among others. That was the year the Yankee universities had a lot of trouble and my opinion, it was that time or give or take a year when the porn magazines were allowed in paper shops in this country. They were banned in Rhodesia and never were allowed for whatever reason. To me, that started the road down, complete lack of discipline, self discipline, any discipline.

So a feeling then of Britain getting increasingly decadent?

Oh it's unbelievable, I just cannot handle it.

So going back to Rhodesia though, you went back after six months?

Oh yes, I couldn't wait to get back.

And then where?

In fact every leave I've been on, by the time I went back, I couldn't wait to get back.

So you went back in 1960? 1961?

'60 for six months and then I went to Chinoyi when I got back from there.

(00:17:57) **Ok, but this is now a time of accelerated African independence**

Yes, the first one was Ghana.

'57, but 1960 is the year of Africa. It's when sixteen African countries gained their independence.

Not all in 1960.

No but it was a great wave.

Yes

And then an accelerated wave as well.

And if the Congo wasn't a lesson enough, we still carried on giving them their independence.

How much did the Congo crisis affect peoples' thinking down in Rhodesia, that you recall?

I had a habit of being somewhere else when there was trouble, all through my life.

Sounds a good habit

Except perhaps today. When the Congo blew up and all the refugees trekked down, I was here enjoying myself. By the time I'd got back there, it had all, I won't say "sorted out" but "simmered down". The saddest part of that was getting rid of Tshombe but how much was greed there and how much was politics did not a matter because Katanga province is the richest province of the lot. So there we are. I think it was in that year also there were riots in Harare and the BSAP reluctantly, at least as far as the hierarchy were concerned, not as far as the lads on the street were concerned, fired their first shots in anger since 1896 in the country. Police headquarters were...this is bar/police canteen gossip really, were prepared to sacrifice their lads rather than tell anyone to open fire and all sorts of risks were being run. Well eventually of course it had to happen

and it did happen but I was district so I didn't get involved in all that nonsense.

Ok, in the time then between 1960 and the run up to UDI, did you pay much attention to what was going on? And the politics of...?

UDI?

Yes, '65

Oh yes, that was the sad part of it, if it had been anyone but Harold Wilson in power, it probably wouldn't have happened, certainly not if Maggie Thatcher (00:20:24) had been in power. Yes, he was a communist, no two ways about it and I heard rumours at that time that there was serious talk here, of serious consideration that...of a military coup here to get this man out. Now you're so far away from that, from Downing Street, nobody's going to tell me the truth but I've enquired over the years here and there, odd things.

You're reporting hearsay.

Yes, oh yes, very much so. Later on I spoke to someone else, a retired Army officer, here. I said "I heard these rumours" I said "was there ever any truth in it?" he said "well yes there was" and he said "Lord Mountbatten turned it down" which he probably had to because he was related to the Queen anyway and a General Walker was then approached. Not our General Walker, Mike Walker, it was another General Walker in the Far East. He was approached and he turned it down and it sort of died a natural death eventually. Well it didn't happen – obviously.

Going back though to UDI, so your feeling was one of sorrow? You didn't consider resigning your commission or your post in the BSAP out of protest?

No and I'll tell you why we didn't. Because we were assured by the then governor and the commissioner. Now the governor was never kicked out, Sir Humphrey Gibbs. He publicly stated, and the commissioner, either whether it was through the commissioner or whether they both stated, that you are here to preserve law and order. It is not your job to worry about the pros and cons of UDI. And we all knew, let's be honest, if we had done the right thing, what Harold Wilson wanted us to do, resign and then come back to England. I knew, if I had done that, come here, what thanks would I have got? Nothing, so that was never going to happen. But at the same time, they all knew, both Smith and Wilson - I'm certain of it, it was certainly common talk - that there was no way the white Rhodesian troops were going to take on the white British troops and that feeling was mutual. That's why the RAF never went further south of Lusaka. They didn't stay there very long either.

And the planes were serviced by Rhodesian technicians.

Very likely.

Oh they were, I've spoken to people who did.

Well there you are.

Your awareness, though, of the gradually emerging bush war, when did it start to really filter across your line of vision?

Well the planning stages had obviously occurred long before UDI but in 1964, there was two incidents and one of which I was slightly involved with and one (00:23:56) of which I wasn't. The one incident there, a car was stopped at a road block and the guys inside were arrested and they were trained terrorists coming from Lusaka, as far as I can recall, and among the weapons, and I remember this bit, was a sub-machine gun, the one the Navy used, the British Navy used, with the wooden butt, like a Sterling...

I don't know that one

Lanchester, I think it was a Lanchester, they were recovered and when enquiries were made through the various governments, it was discovered that these had been destroyed in Egypt at the end of the Second World War. Well they hadn't, they were flogged off. The other incident involved a truck driver for Clan Transport I think it was, the big federal-wide transport company, which if you track it back enough through the various boards of directors, well you'll end up with Anglo/American, as you did with everything else. Anyway, this driver was caught bringing in arms of war. Now I never found out or was never told and wouldn't have been told anyway, but Special Branch would have sorted that out so where the arms of war had come from and where they were going to, which is more important. Anyway, he ended up in this prison they built at Goromonzi at that time. Now I was at Goromonzi when it was built, have you not heard of this prison there?

I have

I could draw you a plan of it

I have heard of Goromonzi

Yes, it's still there. We should have knocked it down in 1980 in actual fact, anyway, that was built. The thing about that prison was... I was stationed at Goromonzi for four years, while it was built, after it was built and while it was in use. We were the Jailers only: our job was to feed whoever Special Branch put in there. You could not put anyone in there without a written authority of the

Minister of Justice, as far as I recall, or the Attorney General, one of those, you had to go pretty high and you couldn't take a prisoner out of there without the written authority of the provincial criminal investigation officer or a provincial Special Branch commander, whoever they were at that time. It was extremely ingeniously built. You had six cells: you had a brick compound like this room and inside were six little brick cells and you could not see out of them. The daylight came in on an arrangement like a chimney, you could look up and see whether it was day or night but you couldn't look out and see what was what and no single cell opened onto another. Every single cell had a double door and each doorway opened onto a blank wall. I can remember where two of those doors were but I can't remember, you'd have to figure it out, the other six. Now this truck driver, Clan Transport, as far as I can remember was the first man to be put in those cells and he stayed there quite a while and he turned grey. Now I don't think that was from fear, rather than lack of sunlight. It didn't do him any good; he'd no idea what was going to happen to him. Our job was to feed whoever was in there. We didn't even have to know who it was. We weren't overly interested in who it was anyway (00:27:54) because we hadn't put him there. That meant you went there with the food, you opened both doors and you had to be accompanied by another one of us standing behind you with a loaded revolver in his hand. That was the arrangement, that was our only contact with it. But at night, there was a sort of guard room at one end, separate from the yard and one of the rooms was fitted with a tape recorder and one of the cells was bugged. The silly thing about that was they put the bug in one of the panels in the ceiling and the panels were made of this stuff, it's got holes in it, it's full of holes and it's a kind of cardboard, some kind of board like that and the panel with the bug behind it was weak because of that and it kept falling out.

Not very subtle

No, well of course they didn't put prisoners in the cell when the panel wasn't there and for us, the only problem it brought for us was that the African police who were on guard at night, they didn't have keys to the place, they just had to stand outside and guard it and kept falling asleep and we'd have to keep charging them for being asleep on duty. Otherwise the two white spies that were caught...

Yes

They ended up in there, served them right. They thought they could spy in Salisbury, as it was, with impunity. It never occurred to them, I don't think, that black men would actually shop them, nick them.

Were you involved in intelligence gathering ever, in any of your capacities?

Every policeman was, it's not peculiar to Rhodesia. I don't know where it came from but it's called Ground Coverage and it's absolute grass roots level.

Everyone down to the junior African constable, was tasked, what we call Ground Coverage. What it meant was in practice that whoever was on patrol would be debriefed when they came back. "Well, did you see so and so? What did he say?" This sort of thing "what did you hear – anything?" The African police were, in the main, totally loyal to us or to the force. That would be recorded by the station, someone would make up a... and they would put it through, type it up and send it through to CID. CID would have a look at it and decide whether it was...it was a question of straws in the wind, you get enough straws in the wind and you begin to get the message.

Was there any debate in the BSAP about whether you should be banning political parties? Whether you should be locking people up? Or whether you should allow dissidents out in the community so you could keep an eye on what they were doing?

You only locked people up if they broke the law, whatever it was. The difficulty was proving that they'd broken the law. In the districts, one of the things was to make all the Africans burn their cattle dipping cards, have you ever heard about that?

(00:31:36) **Yes**

Dip card burning or dip tank destruction, dip tank burning. Now I actually took part, when I say I took part, I actually patrolled the township in Kariba, an African township, all night to try and stop a general strike being called the next day. Now the majority of the workers didn't want to go on strike but the agitators wanted them on strike. We walked around that township all night and all we ever saw was a few shadowy figures and we heard knocks on doors. That is all it needed, was a knock on your door. The next day you didn't go to work. That strike took place, it happened there, right around us.

When was that?

1962

But in the post UDI period, you were, in your view, part of an apolitical police force to uphold law and order, is that right? Is that how you saw yourself?

Yes, any politician who tried to influence or interfere in the running of the BSAP got very short shrift; I know that for a fact.

So did they try and make political appointments at the highest level of the BSAP?

The only time any political appointment issue came up, I think, now again, you'll

have to speak to someone like Fred Punter, people who were at police headquarters, not out in the sticks, was when UDI was declared and Smith wanted to be certain that the Commissioner of Police was on his side. And that resulted in the Commissioner, who was appointed, jumping the gun, jumping the list. It was all very strict in those days, you could see for years ahead when your turn was coming, if it ever came

What your professional path was going to be

Yes and I think, again, you need to speak to Fred, I think it was Sid Bristow who became commissioner, UDI but I may be wrong, now Sid was a Cape Town man.

When the bush war started to gather intensity, what did you think you were part of? What did you think you were fighting against?

Ah well, that was where my opinion differed from others in this business of JOCs, sub-JOC, where you had the OC police, you had the Army commander, whoever he was, the Special Branch man and the DC and it was running a war by committee. And you had various officers, again, this is only my opinion but including one of my OCs who equated his rank which was a chief superintendent with that of Lieutenant Colonel. Well we're (00:34:56) not? We're not soldiers, we're policemen and I used to say to him "it doesn't matter what's on your shoulder, if you're in police uniform, to the general public, you're just a copper," it's as simple as that.

So you didn't see yourself as part of the armed forces? You didn't see it as the security forces?

Not trying to run a war, no. Oh if I wanted to fight wars, I'd have joined the Army.

Right, did other people think like you?

Some did.

Most did?

Some didn't, some went after UDI altogether. But UDI was, it was in that fifteen years of UDI that every single one of those independent black states collapsed, at least once, didn't they? People say to me, "what was it for? What's this fifteen years? What did we die for? What did they die for, these guys?" They died to stop the march of communism.

So you felt you were fighting against communism?

Well, to my mind it was all part of an attempt to take over Africa.

By whom?

Russian communists, rather than Chinese communists. Now though it's no longer Russian communists, it is now Chinese communists.

But at the time, you felt the greater threat came from Moscow?

Oh yes

So did you feel that they were training, guiding, instructing...?

No, communism in general

So where were the guerrilla fighters in all of this, in your view?

They were the mugs, they had been brainwashed. They had been brainwashed by their own Africans, taken to places like Lusaka and Mozambique and brainwashed even more. They were convinced that they had a cause and that it was right and that paradise was going to be delivered. It never was.

Did you ever think, 'We should be accelerating African political and economic rights to offset the attractions of communism'?

(00:37:05) Yes, with hindsight

But not at the time?

Ah, wait a minute, when I went to Nyasaland, Southern Rhodesia was never a colony as you know

No

When I went to Nyasaland, we were disgusted by the fact that the African there was so, not mistreated, deprived. We were told "oh, no whites can own land in Nyasaland". I think this applied to all the British colonial territory: no white can own land here, you can lease it but you can't own it, fair enough. And you cannot go into the African areas without permission, you can't own a business there or you couldn't then, you couldn't in Southern Rhodesia either. White men had to have special permission to own a store or whatever in an African area. But we found the African owned nothing, the Indians owned it all. Blantyre was an Indian town; the poor African, he owned nothing at all, even the transport companies were white, down in Southern Rhodesia the Africans owned all sorts of things. So we thought, well, what's the difference? At that time, in Southern Rhodesia, the post offices had a wall, whites this side and everybody else that side. It never bothered me one way or the other. I didn't like it in the sense that I didn't like people telling me where I could stand and where I could sit which is

what apartheid was all about in South Africa, as far as I was concerned. When I got to South Africa, I went to the post office, the like of which I'd never seen before. It was a marvellous building in Cape Town, the new Cape Town, it was simply a marvel and I'm sitting on a stool and I'm...this big white man came over and tapped me on the shoulder and told me to move, "go and sit over there, this is for nie blankies, blankies over there". That niggled me but it was neither here nor there really but when you get to Nyasaland, the only white man in Blantyre main post office, because we all want to post letters and cards and whatever, was the white post master. All the staff were black and there's no dividing walls so I'm queuing behind my black policeman and whatever. Didn't worry me, didn't worry them.

What did you think you were protecting in Rhodesia in the seventies? You said "law and order" but there's a war that's accelerating, what are you fighting for? What are you fighting to stop? What are you fighting to protect?

I wasn't fighting

But you're part of a state...

I was doing a job

Right, but that's a political job?

No it wasn't, it was a police job, police work.

(00:40:00) **This is a state that's in rebellion against the crown**

Yes, it was a republic by then

Yes it was, that's true, from 1970 onwards

It was my choice, whether I choose to...if you don't like the job you leave it.

So Rhodesia was "home" for you by this point?

Oh yes, of course it was

So you didn't feel Britain was "home" anymore?

No, I consider myself now, a refugee

Yes, so what in the 1970s to you made 'a good Rhodesian'? What would you say made a good Rhodesian?

Well, what makes a good person anywhere? There were bad guys, layabouts, druggies whatever, not on the scale you've got here but they were there. We didn't not arrest someone because he was white; if he committed a crime, he got arrested, didn't matter what colour he was. African police were, well they were top class men.

Was there much discussion that the guerrillas, the terrorists, as you called them, were being treated through the criminal system?

They were. I personally didn't think they should have been, they should have been shot out of hand and I know people here that should be shot out of hand too. What about the guys that tied this guy to a tree the other day and poured petrol on him?

Oh that was barbaric

Yes, in a so-called civilised country. What would you like to do with them? What use are they ever going to be to anybody?

How far do you think the war actually helped to create a sense of Rhodesian identity?

Oh yes, it brought it together, very much so but there were a few irreconcilables as you might call them amongst the whites of course, but there probably were amongst the blacks as well. It reminded me of those years of the Second World War. I know I was only ten/eleven at the end of it but it was there, you sensed it as a kid. I remember, when was it? I think it was 1979 so we were in the stage of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia, Muzorewa, Bishop Muzorewa, and we're in the long bar at Kariba and I'm there on duty as protection, so it might have been '78. We were sent up, well I was sent (00:42:45) up in charge of a squad to guard the fishermen for the annual tiger tournament. It was a frightening experience because all the buggers behind me had far more weaponry than I did, and I'm worried about that lot, not the gooks in front. Anyway General Walls went up there, the whole Army team had their machine guns out, there was a scare but it was neither here nor there. Anyway, I had also a squad of support unit there and one of the sergeants in charge, a big tall giant of a man. One morning we're staying in the long bar because once they were all gone out on the lake fishing, that's it for the day, you had nothing to do, nobody there. So I'm standing at the end of the long bar with these three or four white guys who...there was a little bloke there and he had everything, he had all the gear and all the badges on his hat, like he was a master fisherman, but he wasn't fishing, he was standing in the bar and this support unit guy walked in to the other end. Now by that time, there was no restriction in pubs and clubs and whatever, there was no racial restriction any more, that had long gone and this guy walked in at the other end of the bar and asked for a drink or whatever and this little sod turns round and he says "what's that bloody "munt" doing in here?" Nigger or munt, same thing, "what's

that bloody “munt” doing in the bar?” and I said, “well, why don’t you go and ask him, as he’s a sergeant in the support unit?” In other words, ‘He will sort you, one time’, and he’d be dead, if he had, it would have been a waste of time come crying to me, I couldn’t stand that. Then we had a message, four whites, in 1956/’57 at Waterfall, there was prostitution all around the suburbs, a lot of the whites used to go out; now if you were caught, that was a deportable offence, that’s why the government would never tell you why they were deporting Mr so and so, whoever. One night, we got this report that these three...of course this was in the days when the immigrants were flooding into Rhodesia and they were all artisans from this part of the world and had different attitudes. Anyway, we got this report and we were told “at such and such a house, there are two white men with two girls and it’s a brothel”. So we trekked off over there, this is about ten or eleven o’clock at night, knock on the door, the girls answered the door. It was a nice house, all nicely furnished and all the rest of it. They were making a lot of money by African standards in those days, those girls, that’s when I first saw African women driving cars, the average African only had a bicycle. Anyway, no sign of these men, of course, one’s in the wardrobe and one’s under the bed, “come on out, get your bloody clothes on, in the truck”. All we used to do was take them to the police station and record all their name and address, date of birth, blah, blah, blah and pass it through to CID. It would be noted on their immigration record and if anything other came up, it would be another nail in their coffin. Anyway, we said “get in the back” so our constables went to get in the back with them, they said “we’re not getting in the back with these bloody kaffirs”. I said “what?” Of course, the African police were not amused: they didn’t mind shagging kaffirs, but they didn’t want to travel in a truck with them. So they got in the back, they got a bit of a hiding. When I was at grammar school, in fact I almost got expelled for it; I was a red hot Socialist, would wear a red tie on Labour Day and all the rest of it and thought every man on this planet was equal. And I arrived in Southern Rhodesia thinking much the same thing, oh well, they’re black, I’m white and that’s...Well you soon learnt the hard way that there was a vast difference.

(00:47:04) Was there a vast difference between whites there too? Because it wasn’t a...

Oh yes

In what ways?

Now, I’m going back, bear in mind I’m a medal collector and I do a lot of research into people’s medals I’ve handled or received or whatever, there was very much a posh end of town and a downtown end of town and that persisted, not now, it wouldn’t really say it now, but certainly in the sixties when I was there. The north end, in the avenues where all the government officials lived and the commissioner and so forth and so on, down below, and it sort of went down the social scale from then. If you, as a white man had taken a coloured wife, or in

rare cases, an African wife, I mean publicly taken, not nocturnal activity, you would be persona non grata.

You'd be ostracised

Oh, no two ways about that, yes

And was that, like that, throughout the time of UDI? Or did that start to change?

Well by the time...

After all, Wilf Mbanga lived outside Harare, or Salisbury as it then was. I know that he couldn't live with his wife inside the city limits.

Ah yes, that was in the...it was one of the provisions of the Land Apportionment Act, yes, where you had certain areas which you couldn't... well they were set aside for multi-racial residence and you had a large area set aside for Asian as opposed to...Arcadia was for the coloured people, that was a coloured suburb, still is. People who married across the colour line like Wilf would have been living possibly, well even if he probably hadn't done it, he wasn't known in the fifties was he? When did he get married?

I think it was in the seventies

Oh, things had changed vastly by then. I think Park Town, Ardbennie was a multi-racial suburb and the Federal Hotel in Charter Row was the only licensed premises in Harare that was open to non-white drinkers who could drink European liquor as it was called, but even there, blacks weren't allowed, that was for non-whites.

What did you think of South Africa? You talked about being in the post office but what did you think of the South African policemen who came up, from the late sixties? What was your view of Rhodesia against South Africa?

(00:50:02) I met very few South African policemen. One I did meet, I thought he was thick but...

Bertie Cubitt said much the same thing

That's by the way, there's thick policemen in every force, let's face it. I think it was very much like...The South African police, is very much like, I suspect all police forces are like it, that the special branch and CID are actually the cream of the force, the rest are just foot soldiers. What used to annoy us in the BSAP was that the CID would claim they were the cream of the force. We said "no, you're

not, you're the cream of those who *volunteered* to join the CID". Not everybody wanted to join the CID, I never wanted to again after turning down the first chance.

What did you think of BSAP reserve police?

Now are you talking about the years of the Federation? Not previous...when I first went there, a lot of police reservists were people who liked power without responsibility, little busybodies some of them. Some were ok, I got involved with the police reserve rifle club, shooting, target shooting, service rifle shooting in 1960 when I came back from England.

What about during the war, in the 1970s?

I was involved with training them, on the local ranges as well as shooting with them and all the rest of it because I could shoot better than most of them and the result is now, I'm half deaf in one ear, as you will find in most of my generation. It's like every other body of men; you get the idiots, the skabengas, and you get the good guys.

Was there much mixing, social mixing or linking between Army guys and the police?

Yes, it varied. We had some great nights out with the Army guys that were stationed with us. One night, in Matopas, I was member in charge and we had a training ground there and the Army came out, the territorials, they came out and because I'm member in charge, I get invited round for a few drinks in the evening. Anyway, we sat there and it turned into a bloody good session. We drank all the beer and eventually one of the troopies came in, now we're drinking with the officers, you see, one of the troopies walked in and said "can we have some beers?" and these bloody officers had drunk it all and I'd helped them. I thought this isn't proper man management so there were faults but as I say, they were territorial. I think regular Army were somewhat better. The Rhodesian African Rifles, they were a good crowd, I would reckon they were one of the finest regiments in Africa.

Why did you rate them so highly?

(00:53:27) Because they were extremely disciplined, extremely efficient. The terrorists couldn't hold a candle to them. They even shot their own commander down in Matabeleland because he disobeyed his own orders. Set up an ambush and walked in front of it, after dark. He was one of the first casualties. They were great, we played a football match against them once at my station and they were good guys.

As the war intensified in the 1970s, did it ever cross your mind that it was

becoming a civil war?

The sad part of it was we didn't, because the South Africans had a different way of reaction to us and they were able to do it because they were not in their own country and they had a different attitude down there anyway. If they were involved in an incident, like they hit a landmine with a vehicle or anything like that, their standard drill was to jump out of that vehicle. Well, that was standard drill for everybody and immediately slaughter everything that they could not see, they just sprayed the bush with fire, regardless. We would, to a certain extent but a landmine usually means that there's nobody, whoever put it there has long gone. We had the problem where many of our, well all of our African police had family in there. What you saw out there was their family, our men's families as well, so you couldn't just go to a kraal and slaughter the lot because the chances are you were going to slaughter some of your own men's family. So it never got to that stage.

But did you feel it was a civil war with Rhodesians fighting Rhodesians?

Well it was, yes

Did you think that there was a race war going on as well?

From their point of view, yes. Not from ours. If they happened to be black, they were terrorists, they happened to be black, they weren't all black, there were Russians and coloureds killed in Zambia and Mozambique.

Do you think that helps to also explain the level of brutality? Because it was a particularly vicious war.

What brutality? Theirs?

Well yes, particularly ZANLA but also ZIPRA

Hard to say, it's the African way of doing things. I heard stories about the Congo, the missionaries in the Congo and that's an African attitude up there when one guy, one day, they're sitting around cleaning some of their weapons, he accidentally fired his weapon, shot his mate in the leg and they all fell about laughing, they thought this was hilarious [this anecdote is actually taken from Mike Hoare's book on the subject].

Weren't there stories going around of also white beatings, white intimidation, white torture, white atrocities?

(00:56:34) It might have happened, I was never one for physically torturing him, actually touching him. If I required anything from you, I would find out another way and if I didn't require anything from you, I would simply shoot you. That was

my attitude to it. But, the problem was this, now we were told, when I was deployed in teams, that meant you went out, I was in charge of a team of whites and blacks where you'd go into a terrorist infiltrated area, in my case, this was Murewa and your job was to find the terrorists. Not necessarily to take them on, find them and then direct the superior forces to take them on and liaise with the rest of the guys and gain intelligence you see. Two of our constables pitched up at this kraal and there were terrorists, not in the kraal, just below the kraal, based up and below them was the river. People in the kraal sold them out, the two constables were taken away, murdered and thrown in the river; the bicycles were kept in the kraal, hidden in a hut. After these two hadn't returned, the ground coverage, and this is a ground coverage team, called on us to come and help them find them. So me and my guys all went up there and we tracked their bicycle tracks through the bush, there was no road anyway. Tracked the bicycles to this kraal, went round, looked round, we found the camp where the terrorists had been, they weren't there then and we came away empty handed. A few days later, the ground coverage boys went back to the kraal and they found the bicycles, that was it. I'm not sure what came first here, they brought the kraal head back from that kraal. Now he was number four in line, the first three had already been jailed for feeding gooks. They brought this guy back, they must have known that he...well the tracks, bicycle tracks went to his kraal, therefore where are our constables? The eventual result with this was he was beaten to death over a barrel, the kraal head.

By whom?

By my guys

Did you know that?

I wasn't there, but I know it, yes. I was at my main base, they were still at the GC base which was about 10/20 miles further north.

Was that unusual?

I shouldn't think so but I couldn't tell you of any other incidents that I heard of. Anyway, the end result was that that must have been what told them where the bicycles were. Now they were highly annoyed about this and they went down and I heard later, and again, this is only hearsay, that that kraal was actually razed to the ground. Not that the inhabitants were killed, but the kraal itself was razed to the ground.

What, by black members of the BSAP?

No, I'm, not certain about that, I have a feeling it might have been Army or both; it was revenge, that's what it was. The guys who did the beating were (01:00:15) our black guys and then word got back, and this was the ridiculous part of this

whole scene, one of the gooks' friends, supporters, whatever, phoned London and told them what had happened. The next thing, my OC is on the 'phone, he said "what's the story?" We were just about due to be relieved ...my guys were then instructed to go to the OC at Marandellas on their way back to Harare. Well me and those still at the base, having handed over, were to go in through another route to Harare. So I said to the sergeant in charge, I said "tell them nothing" I said "you know nothing, you saw nothing. Tell them to get stuffed" and that's what they did. Because when we...as the leader of the team, I had to go down to headquarters in the Midlands and be briefed by CID and whoever on these teams and what we were going to do and what we were expected to do or not do and whatever. And that's when we were told, you must not ill treat these people, you cannot torture people for information. I said "I know what you're saying, you want..." in a war situation, it's no good you telling me, confessing your sins in a week's time, I need that information right now, before you disappear. There's only one way you're going to get it and I said to the CID, I said "I know what you're telling me, you're telling me that I must get information but you will not back me up. I said "well I've got news for you, I don't care, I'm not interested, I'm not going to put my career on the line just to save some bloody communist or otherwise, I'm not that committed". So I wouldn't get involved in that sort of physical torture but there were other ways. But in a terrorist situation, you haven't got time to faff around, you've got to get it, it's only relevant now, it's not relevant next week. So what do you do? Ask Special Branch in London, they'll tell you.

What did you think of the hearts and minds campaign, the protected villages to try and persuade people to...?

You must have seen the old cartoon about that? If you've got them by the balls, their hearts and minds will follow – simple. That's how I see it.

Was that pretty much the attitude?

Well it couldn't have been all our attitudes otherwise the hearts and minds thing wouldn't have come into being. Somebody must have believed in it.

Well ok, obviously, but did you and your other BSAP colleagues think much the same of it?

Generally speaking, I think so, yes

Was that also because of your fairly disdainful view of the ministry of internal affairs?

I used to wind up my brother-in-law with this.

How?

(01:03:44) Well like everything else, there are good DCs and poor DCs. He was a very good one, he's fluent in Shona for starters. He lives at Sudbrooke in Lincoln, he's connected with the RAA, to what's his name? Heppenstall...

David Heppenstall

Ed Walker and all the rest of it, they will know him, if you want to talk to him

I'd very much like that, if he would be prepared to.

Don't mention my name, he might say...(laughs)

But how about then, once Smith had made his historic announcement in September 1976 saying "majority rule in two years", from then on...

Do you know what happened then? Do you know what started happening?

Tell me

All the senior African NCOs started resigning

Did they?

Because they knew what was coming, as we did, they weren't going to trust a black man to pay their pension and they were right weren't they?

Well there's also retribution, after all, they had been working for a white minority government

That may have been a factor but my friend, who ploughed up my land, I went to see him on my way back from South Africa, he was in a remote little spot in Matabeleland, Victoria District. I thought, well if I've got time coming back, I'm going to go down and see him if he's still there. I was curious to see about his business that he told me he had, and I did. I went back, he was still there and that was in...that would have been about 1986 I would think. He was very pleased to see me and we sat there and had a coke and a waffle, he hadn't run away, he wasn't hiding from anyone, in fact he was doing pretty well for himself.

Did you feel at any point in the 1970's, the writing's on the wall, I should leave, my family and I should leave?

No

So what were your feelings?

It wouldn't have been my decision, it would have been my wife's. The kids in the

1970's, my children were starting high school. My daughter was at high school. We were founder pupils and my wife was the founder secretary of Lomagundi College. One of the first private schools (01:06:30) created as a result of the activities of the Mugabe thugs. They put a lot of... it was supposed to be used, like the state schools at sixth form level to intimidate, well I presume, all the white staff and pupils to leave. They were threatening them with knives and all sorts of things, beatings, beatings up and whatever. Well the unintended consequence was that purely white funded private schools were created by interested parties who had the bucks and the go. And of course the kids were about to go to school.

So you had golden shackles then? Your kids were at a certain point of their education?

Oh yes

Your family was settled?

Yes

There were the financial disincentives to leaving?

Yes, what would I have been here with a wife and two kids? Nothing, bugged, I would have destroyed their lives.

At independence, you stayed in the BSAP?

Yes, which independence? 1980?

1980, yes. When did you leave Rhodesia? Zimbabwe as it then was?

'06, June '06, fifty years to the day, to the day.

Why did you leave?

Because I was on a small British pension, I wasn't working, I was retired. Inflation at that point was 1200% and what I was doing was going to my friend in Harare and saying "can I have £50 worth of money?" or whatever. He would give me whatever the going rate was and that's what I would live on until I ran out and then go and get some more. And my sister was paying £50 out of my small British pension into his offshore account. That system still applies, I can still do that. I've got two pensions over there which up until now, now they're paying them in US dollars, were worthless. So I couldn't stay. I sold my house, once I decided to go, no faffing about, I'm going, finish, gone. I put my house up for sale by word of mouth for six million dollars in '06. That was the going rate and I said, if you pay me ten thousand pounds in England, you can have the contents

as well, as is, I just walk out. So word got around, anyway, this little girl came and said “my brother will pay you ten thousand pounds”. I said “well when I get ten thousand pounds in my son’s account”, he (the brother) being in London and he being illegal, he arrived here legally but he’s now illegal, or was then. I said “there are the title deeds and I’m gone” and that’s how we did it. Now, when I go back two years later, that six million (01:09:45) dollars would only have bought me a couple of beers, if that, so where would I have been if I’d stayed there?

Had you kept your British citizenship? Or had you become a Rhodesian?

Ah, yes, that became a point of issue you see, I became a Rhodesian citizen in the Harold Wilson days, a Rhodesian which automatically became a Zimbabwean until Mugabe decided all the white men would vote against him, therefore we must take them off the voters roll, therefore we will say that anyone entitled to dual citizenship must renounce one or the other, knowing that they would renounce their Zimbabwean citizenship. Well I kept my Rhodesian/Zimbabwe passport right up until it expired in about 2003/2004 and I went there and I said “can I have an application form to renew my passport?” and they said “yes, here you are”. So I filled it in, went back, I had a shock Z\$5000, just to do that, so I went back, handed it in on the table, “right” they said “have you got your certificate of renunciation from the British Embassy?” I said “ah, there we come to the point, now let me tell you something. It is never going to happen”. They said “right, cheers, you’re gone” so I said, “right, stuff you”. By then, I already had a British passport that was illegal anyway, so there we were. In my British passport, I have permanent resident right of abode in Zim, so I can go back any time and if I won the lottery, I would. The other problem, at the time, in ’06, well two other problems, both my kids were nagging me to get out, there was no future. They’re not thinking in terms of politics or danger or anything, they were thinking in terms of old age. “You silly old sod, you’re going to fall over one day and then what?”

So when did your children leave?

My daughter lives in Germany

When did they leave Zimbabwe?

They both went to University in South Africa, Richard graduated with an MSc the year Mandela took power

‘94

Well that year, they flew out of South Africa to England just before that election and got a job as a barman or whatever, they worked their way up from there.

Break in interview

Just to finish then, how did you find England when you came back here?

Awful

(01:12:47) In what way?

Total lack of discipline, self discipline, any other discipline. You see it everywhere, you're banging on about the environment, saving the environment whilst you're littering the country with rubbish, that's one example. You don't call the police force "the force" any more, it's now "a service", they don't even wear hats. In Rhodesia, if you weren't wearing your hat, you weren't considered to be on duty. It's this general, everything, it's scruffy people, can't be bothered to dress properly, they can't be bothered to talk properly and this total absence of discipline, self discipline. We need national service back.

Why did you choose to go back to Havant?

Because I had no other option. My sister lives on her own, she's got her own house and she had enough suitable accommodation for me to live with her. If that had not been available, I'd still be in Zim.

Had you ever encouraged her to come out to Rhodesia/Zimbabwe?

Once when she had a small son, well she's still got a son, but he's not small anymore, I suggested she came out, it was when my mother died and she was looking after our mother so I said "now mother's died, you can come out and see me". "Oh I can't come out there with my son and have my son shot at". I thought, well what an attitude, who's shooting at my kids? Why should they shoot at her kid and not mine? My kids were never shot at, so anyway, eventually she did come out in 1995 I think and I took her right round the country, Vic Falls, the usual, all the usual places, ah, yes, she enjoyed it but she thinks English summers are too hot so she wasn't going to last there.

Looking back, do you think the bush war, the war that the government was trying to fight, was it worth it?

Yes, if it hadn't happened that way, during that fifteen years, all the other black states collapsed and had military coups, at least once. Had we rushed into what we went into eventually, then, as Sir Edgar Whitehead would have liked, whilst he was busy selling his farm and emigrating to Britain. The same would have happened in Zim, it would have been a far worse situation that it ever became. In that fifteen years, my children left high school and went to University in South Africa, right up to Master's degrees and could have gone on if they'd chosen to. So I didn't lose anything, I would have lost far more by leaving than I did by staying.

Do you feel yourself to be a Rhodesian or a Zimbabwean?

Both

Do you feel yourself to be British at all?

Yes

(01:16:08) In what way?

Well in terms of the armed forces, the fact that I was born here and whether I like it or not, I'm British, I'm not British, I'm English. The fact that I don't like what I see here doesn't mean I don't have to like England. There's no question of me taking up arms against Britain or supporting anyone who does, so yes, a bit of everything really.

Thank you very much indeed, Brian.

End of interview