

Carl Gibbard

Grew up in the UK. Joined the British Army after leaving school. At the end of his service, went to Rhodesia having joined the British South Africa Police in 1975, aged 20. Moved into Special Branch work from 1978. Left Zimbabwe for the UK in 1984. Moved back to Zimbabwe for work in 1990 but left the contract after 6 months to return to the UK.

This is Annie Bramley interviewing Carl Gibbard on Tuesday the 13th of January 2009 in Bristol. Thank you very much for coming today. Could you start by talking about how you came to be in Rhodesia?

I joined the British Army when I left school on a short service commission in the Artillery. Finishing my service, I was hitchhiking home – a lot fitter in those days – between Cirencester and Cheltenham and at some unearthly hour of the morning, I got picked up by a guy with a funny accent in an old Morris Traveller.

We got chatting and it turned out the guy was in the police in Rhodesia. It went even further because he was actually on his way to Cheltenham to meet with my father who was a serving policeman in the Gloucestershire Constabulary at that stage.

During the course of half an hour, telling me about what life was like over there – he knew my address because of the father – he said, “When I get back I’ll send you some information.”

I thought no more about it. I’d actually applied for a job at the Royal Hong Kong police at that time and both the sets of literature arrived at the same time. In one you had a guy in camouflage, which looked like the camouflage I’d been wearing in the Army, same cap, a police dog and I like dogs and the rifle he was carrying was very similar to the rifle we’d been using. The other guy was in funny shorts, knee length boots, surrounded by millions of Chinese.

So I looked at the two and thought well I’ve worn the uniform, I know the rifle, I like dogs so I’ll go there. That was how the choice was made.

So it seemed much more familiar?

Yes, that particular bit. I knew nothing about the politics, didn’t even know where the place was; I knew it was in Southern Africa. There was a little bit of hasty catching up and then one day an airline ticket arrived with a letter and that was it, off I went.

And this was an airline ticket for you to go and be interviewed?

Well the way it was put across was; you come across, you do IQ tests, an interview and then if you’re suitable then we’ll retain you. Actually having got

over there you realise that the chances of being sent back were negligible. You weren't able to fly direct from the UK so it was UK-Germany, Germany-Johannesburg, Jo'burg up to Salisbury.

The expense at that stage as well of the circuitous route to get to Salisbury meant there was actually little chance of being sent back, but it was a bit of a challenge.

What did your family think of that decision to go out?

(00:03:01) I'd been away from home in the Army, I had a brother and two sisters still at home, the old man was a policeman and had served in the Air Force, so he was used to travelling around as well.

So mothers doing what mothers do best, she worried about the distance. I think my father appreciated it for the opportunity it was. And of course in those days, it was before the insurgency really kicked off so there wasn't actually an awful lot of news floating around. I think all of the news that I could remember at the time involved the discussions that Smith was having with Harold Wilson and the various other people. But it didn't rank very high on anybody's radar.

Can you just say for the record when it was that you had actually gone out?

I went over at the beginning of 1975 and then finished service at the end of '84 so it was just about ten years.

So it was really the sort of early days of the...?

Chimurenga?

Yes, and things were still fairly comfortable?

Yes I mean the joke when you arrived was "You arrive in Salisbury airport, you put your watch forward two hours and back thirty years."

I was met by a very pretty policewoman in a car, was taken to a hotel which was very comfortable, the sun was shining, I had an allowance, you helped yourself to food. As long as you don't tear the ring out of it, you can have beer as well and it was just nice.

Salisbury in those days was immaculate; the place was beautiful, clean, the buildings were well kept, everything was freshly painted, it was like something out of the movies almost.

This is Africa, a completely different experience. You go from Cheltenham just after Christmas with the weather you've got in the UK at that time and you go over there to this beautiful pristine place. It might have been a bit old fashioned but it just came across as being really nice.

Also there was a structure to the place and when you first arrive, you can't actually put your finger on it but everything was layered and had a place. It's only after you've been there a little while that you realise that the layers work pretty much along racial lines. All your waiting staff, all the support staff were black up to, if you like, a junior management level and then the whites kicked in and the structure went upwards. It's only after you've been there a while that you actually notice that. Up until then it's just a system that seems to work very well.

So it was operating quite subtly I suppose?

Yes, on the trips I did back to the UK – because I was visiting home at regular intervals right the way through the ten years – you would get the impression in England from the newspapers and news coverage that as you get off the (00:06:24) aeroplane, you get issued with a sjambok and it's then your God given right to beat any black face that turns up.

But it wasn't like that, sure there was, I suppose you call it discrimination, but it was much more subtle. You didn't get the heavy racist bent that was being propagated over here.

You said that you did National Service, or you were in the Army before?

Yes, I joined the Army in the UK.

And had you travelled in that period?

Only within Europe, nothing exotic, I never got as far as Cyprus or anywhere like that. I think the furthest afield I had been to was Germany, France and that would have been it, so not even a hot sunny climate. So this was a complete, absolute change.

And what about the political situation and UDI having been declared ten years previously? Were you aware of the situation that you were going into and things like sanctions?

No, complete ignorance. With the benefit of hindsight now...

Of course the first thing that happened was the building society savings account that I had in the UK was frozen. All the money I'd been putting aside with a view to moving over suddenly gets locked up and it's now going to be, what was it? ten years? 1980, before I got that money back.

There were lots of things, if I'd been fully aware of the situation...it wouldn't have stopped me going, but I probably would have done things in different ways.

You could have been better prepared?

More savvy, yes absolutely. But it was boy's own stuff really, off to Africa. Still considered it, if you like, as being part of the UK, it was the colonies.

And what was your awareness of the colonies from your schooling? Did you have much of a sense of them?

The sun never sets on the British Empire. It was before the old style grammar schooling so I know the emphasis on teaching the colonial effect has now changed.

I was a product of 1960s schooling so it was "This is it, this is the British Empire." Probably my thinking was very much coloured by that but again you're not making a conscious decision to go over and be part of...

If you look at it now you can say "Right, you've got a regime there that's declared UDI and here I am, a trained British soldier, electing to go across there and fight to prop up that regime."

With hindsight, that's probably the way it was.

But the way I viewed it, you were there, that was still part and parcel of (00:09:41) the British experience, so what you were doing there was maintaining a lifestyle that had been created by the UK anyway.

And I guess by the mid '60s other countries in the area had become independent and you would have become more aware of that with fighting in Zambia for example?

Again, I was in a rural grammar school in Gloucestershire and there were other things that were far more important like the rugby and I think coloured television had just come in then and a friend had that.

So really, even while I was serving in the Army, you were so busy doing other things that unless you had a particular interest, it was never really a priority. The only real interest I had was immediately before I left and it was "Oh, well if I'm going there, I'd better find out a little bit about it."

And there was such a stark contrast between what you read in the newspapers here or what you saw on the TV and then the actual reality of the place when you went over there.

We're back to this "We're in this racist place, these people are being put down." When the first thing you see when you get off the aeroplane is the porter immaculately turned out with a big grin from ear to ear offering to help you with your suitcase, and then the hotel staff are all running around, they all look happy, they're smiling, they're providing a service...

It was an easy lifestyle to slot into, and the beer was cheap!

A lot of drinking was there?

Oh yes, and sport. What was I? Twenty when I got there, so yes, it was a good single life, absolutely.

And I'm interested in this perception that you felt people had of Rhodesia in the UK; but you'd also said that you weren't very aware of the situation before you went. So is this just an impression that you formed before going?

When you've been over there and you come back on your first holiday, then everything catches up.

So you were much more aware of it having lived there and experienced it?

You get very frustrated and cross because it appeared that the liberal (with a small 'l') section was promoting their propaganda and it didn't actually marry up with what you were seeing on the ground.

I remember, I went to a couple of meetings that were called to muster support to try and overturn the Rhodesian regime as it was. You go along to the meetings and there I am, 20/21 years old, predominately it was women of a certain age, more blue rinses than you could shake a stick at, trotting out lines of propaganda that they were being fed in this country.

And you sit there and just explain how you've been through depot and the famous photograph of a passing out parade in Salisbury years ago, it must have been in the early seventies, where you've got a line of elderly white senior ranking (00:13:20) policemen: This is put over as "this is the Rhodesian police force," but what you don't see is this mass behind them of black constables who've just passed out, all volunteers.

There was no conscription amongst the blacks and these guys were joining what they considered to be a good organisation and for them, it was a good career.

Were these meetings that you went to in the UK?

I went to a couple, yes, out of curiosity. It was quite good fun because again, you're twenty years old, you're on leave and you cut a swathe through people's preconceived ideas. They get fed this information.

The other famous photograph was of black workers who were lying on an avenue in central Salisbury and it was inferred that these people had been shot and left to lie on the street when in fact you knew that at midday when the whistle went and these guys had their lunch break, the first thing they'd do is run to a warm spot, lie down and have a kip for half an hour.

It was a common sight at lunchtime, you'd see these guys all over the place lying in the sun, it just happened. It was the way it was put over here though.

So you could play devil's advocate?

Yes, absolutely.

And tell them your experience.

Yes, which we did, frequently.

And can I ask where you felt your “home” was at the time? Did you still feel linked to the UK?

Oh yes, England was where I was from and that was the distinguishing feature. I am an Englishman and I’m over here doing this job.

But then it gets blurred because after you’ve been there for four or five years, you come back to the UK and you start having nightmares about not being able to go back, because it’s an infectious place. And having been there, certainly within the first couple of years, you get a great affection for the place and for the people.

So, English right the way through, up until the end...but if I couldn’t be English, I would have been very happy to be a Rhodesian.

So there’s a sense of it changing when you were in the different places; you missed one place when you were in the other?

Yes, you had continuity over there. I was lucky that I got taken under the wing of some really nice guys, senior police officers, and steered in directions. I could easily have been a town policeman, which I would have hated but I didn’t, I ended up in the rural areas and that was proper, pukka, old fashioned drive round and police the area, policing; or that’s how it started.

Then of course you get this sort of rural lifestyle that these guys had, which again, was very structured. The extended family system that the black Rhodesians or Zimbabweans had worked very well, especially where it was (00:16:41) supported by the education, health and communications infrastructure that the government had put in place.

So that whole system worked really well and I was a young English guy, going out and trying to observe the niceties when you’re visiting the tribal areas and visiting people’s villages. It was still possible in the early seventies; you were able to do that.

Of course, as the effect of the insurgency increased in the country then I’m afraid the niceties disappeared.

Yes, it did get much harsher towards the end.

Well it got quite heated.

So you had gone out in '75 and you would perhaps have had to sign up for a minimum period?

I'm sure I did but I can't remember what it was. I seem to think it was three years but you very quickly lost track of that.

The stated aims then were to get out of depot, which I did; pass out as best recruit in my squad, which was just as well, a lot of ribbing if I hadn't; then I got sent to Umtali, which was a uniformed branch posting which I hated because it was urban policing.

Again, looking back it was probably a good place to start but things were starting to heat up and I had more of an interest getting into the more rural areas. You can go anywhere and see a town and issue parking tickets and speeding fines and stuff like that.

I then got posted to Chipinga after that and that really is where the rural experience started. It was literally a "one horse" town: You had an Air Force base and police camp at one end, a hospital, I'm pretty sure we had a roundabout and the country club at the other end and a hotel and a few shops in between and that was it.

As a lifestyle, the community that you're living in there, it was fantastic. The welcoming nature of rural people over there was...no sooner had you arrived on your posting than people were inviting you out for drinks, inviting you for meals, introducing you around, so literally you got taken round, introduced to all the personalities, the doctors and the dentists and anybody else around.

You got to know them very quickly?

Absolutely, and then the police camp is in close proximity to the hospital which is where the nurses' home is; so your social life is then into a nice structure.

Can you tell me a bit about your recruitment and the make up of the group that you trained with?

All whites: There was one ex-metropolitan policeman whose name I can't remember, Dave Luscombe I think it was and then squads either side.

I go a bit hazy on the individuals because we were there for a couple of months, and I'd palled up with people in other squads.

I remember the guy who was in the room with me, it was a guy called Kai Weinzheimer who's family had come up with the (00:20:33) Voortrekkers, they had been there for a long time. He'd come straight from school so that would have put him probably eighteen at a guess.

Was there conscription at that time?

There was but the national servicemen were trained separately so you had the regular squads, which is what we were, how many would there have been? 20/21 something like that, and we'd have been running through at intervals.

I think when I was there, there certainly was a squad ahead of us and there would have been a squad behind us. How many in total I can't remember.

The training staff at that stage were a mixture of locals who'd come out through; a couple of British Army people that had served, mainly Army; and the ones that I knew who had gone across and joined the police.

We were in depot which compared to the training in the UK, it was a doddle.

You were allowed out every night, you'd wander into town or the police club where the beer was cheap and it was very easy.

And two months sounds quite a short time. Had it got shorter by that time?

I might be wrong on that. It wasn't as long as the basic training in the UK but then it wasn't as specialised either. All they were doing basically is hammering you into shape so that you could then be posted out and then "On the job" training would take place at a police station.

And had they started any anti terrorist training like PATU at the time or did you do that later on?

Yes, we did the basic training, which was a farce. I'd been in the cadets at grammar school and I think probably, looking back, it was about on a par with that. But again, it was the early days and at the end of the day we were police, not Army.

I know as I progressed through there was a lot more emphasis put on the training side of it, and I would guess that two or three years later when everything hotted up, there would be more emphasis on it in depot.

But while I was there, it was taken seriously up to a point but not that seriously. But it was ironic because we went out on exercise to Inyanga and that was the area that I actually ended up going back to. At that stage, there was some activity there but not a lot. By the time I'd been posted back, there was quite a lot.

So the situation was changing rapidly?

Yes, again, you don't notice it because you are immersed in it and of course, with the reporting structure, you're feeding information back in and not necessarily getting full information back.

So if you were relying on the newspapers for accurate information you're wasting your time because obviously it was a government controlled organ. It was very good for things like finding fridges and second hand motorcars but that was about it. (00:24:01)

Reliable information, international news, not a lot, but then we had access to things like Time magazine. So if you really were that interested I guess you could find out.

A lot of people have said similarly that the news they were getting on the ground was actually better than what they could get publicly from newspapers and so on.

You had a mass population that they were obviously controlling what information was being fed to them and that didn't always go along with what we were seeing in the field.

Certainly towards the end of it, as I'd gone up through seniority, you get access to more information and you get a situation where I think at the end, in 1980, our intelligence about what was going on, on the ground was probably a hundred percent. And I've heard rumours to the effect that the predictions of the election results were absolutely accurate, but only proven so after they were released.

When they were presented to the powers that be, they were pooh-poohed, "There is no way that Mugabe is going to win with that sort of landslide victory."

Some people were they saying that he wouldn't win.

I don't know, I think everybody accepted it was going to change. You had that false storm with the first lot of elections, which were a bit of a farce.

Again, looking back with the benefit of hindsight, I think by that stage there was so much railed and ranked against the country.

The South Africans had thrown their weight behind the process so this bunch of farmers and politicians... there was no way it could stay the way that it had been.

Again, with 100% hindsight you wonder, if the British government hadn't been in quite so much of a rush to get rid of the problem, if there had been a little more help and a little more influence at an early stage, whether things would have worked out differently. But hindsight's a wonderful thing.

Speaking of changing systems earlier on, how did you find the breakdown of the BSAP and officers that you were serving with, being along racial lines? Did you form an opinion of it?

Yes, but probably more so looking back than at the time. If you go from school to the Army you're into a structured way of life, you come out of the Army and you go into the police, it's a different structure but the structure is still there. So I'm used to having a rank structure that I fit into and one of your ambitions is to move your way up through the rank structure.

At the time, I probably didn't give it an awful lot of thought, the fact that there was a cut off for the black police, which later got extended, but it was an arbitrary cut off.

You would promote up to a point and that was it and then the white entry point was the next one up. Looking back, yes, it probably would have been a better system had the promotion beyond that changeover point been hurried up. (00:28:08) And I think maybe the hierarchy then – and many of these guys, a lot of the senior police officers that I knew had served in the British forces so they were ex-Army, Air Force, Navy or whatever, so they themselves had their own rank structure – were very conservative. I think if there had been a little more flexibility and a desire to improve the heights that the black police could have reached, then maybe that would have had an impact as well.

But at the end of the day, I think it got to the point where it didn't really matter what the government, Police, Army or Air Force did. The political die had been cast. Britain had decided it wanted rid of the problem and the outcome was inevitable.

Did you have much contact with other sections of the white-led security services?

Yes, each area we were in had what they called Joint Operational Command, JOC or sub-JOC and Chipinga I think was its own JOC; you had the police station and the Air Force base literally just up the road.

At that stage I was only a patrol officer so I would have been at the lower end of the pecking order. As I moved round and got promoted then obviously you rise up the pecking order and you have more contact. I know when I was moved from Chipinga, I was stationed to a place called Nyamaropa which was in the Eastern highlands, a couple of kilometres back from the Mozambique border.

That was an interesting place and there we had quite a lot of contact with different Army units. We had the local 3 Independent Company stationed at Inyanga and then also from time to time you'd have other forces passing through.

Other sections of the Army you mean?

Yes, we had a little airfield, a single runway. We were on a little hill overlooking an irrigation scheme and it was a fortified camp so if you had Army or special forces operating in the area, occasionally they would use us as a place they could have a wash, a decent meal and a couple of beers.

It got used as a jumping-off point for operations that we weren't personally involved in. But our main point of contact was with the Independent Company in Inyanga and in fact still is because the guy that was the major then now lives in Johannesburg selling beer bottling equipment so I occasionally keep in touch with him.

What were your opinions of those other areas of the security services? Did you have contact with, for example, the Selous Scouts?

The Scouts were in the area.

It's one of these things now, many of those who 'served' there claim they were in the Selous Scouts or the SAS. I was actually very happy to be in the police. We did have contact with them, not huge amounts of contact, it was normally when they needed something from us, whether it was transport or a place to sleep overnight.

From an operational point of view, not so much: Going to Nyamaropa, the policing role had largely gone out the window by now. We were in the middle of a number of infiltration routes so we were there flying a flag to (00:32:05) maintain some semblance of control over that area and also reporting back as an intelligence source.

In terms of intelligence and so on, you've said that later on you did go into the Special Branch?

Yes.

But did you have contact with Special Branch in these early days?

Yes, at Chipinga the CID Special Branch offices were behind the single quarters so if they needed backup – maybe going out to speak to sources or whatever they were doing – we'd quite often get dragged along to offer support for them.

I think the reason I got singled out was because at my rank level I was probably two or three years older and had had more experience: Most of these guys had come straight from school whereas I had spent time in the forces.

With the posting to Nyamaropa, that started as a uniform branch posting but the uniform went out the window fairly early on. I got my interview to switch over onto the intelligence side; it took place under the wing of an aeroplane. I can't remember the guy's name, he was a detective chief superintendent, came out from Umtali.

The next time I went back into town, I had my photograph taken, new ID cards issued and that was it, you're now badged up. On the intelligence side you had different levels in the police. You had what they called Ground Coverage,

which were generally uniformed branch officers who were allocated areas and they would go out literally and cover the ground and pick up information.

The tier above that was actually full blown SB. So I was fortunate actually to be, I was going to say “promoted” into that. It wasn’t really a promotion, I was just badged up as an SB officer.

What year was that? Or how long into your service was it?

Not long, probably '78, or later than that, might have been '79, so it would have been three/four years in.

Can you tell me a bit about the time before then? You were in Chipinga first of all.

Chipinga, again, early on, I mean I can remember we’d decided that the single quarters needed beefing up in case of enemy attacks, so we dug a bunker on the front lawn, which attracted great attention from everybody.

It was the sort of in-between stage. There was activity going on and lots of signs that things were escalating but we were still doing things like anti-rustling patrols on the border, stopping people coming over from Mozambique and stealing cattle, there was that level of policing.

I spent weeks driving round the different tea and coffee estates, idyllic really. Where we were sitting there, you had the mountains in the north and the area went all the way down almost into the lower Sabi. If you kept driving another couple of (00:35:43) hundred kilometres you were into Triangle, so you had those different extremes if you like.

As a lifestyle it was fantastic. There was a little bit of military type activity going on but not so much that it was particularly evident.

I was going to ask a bit about that: you said that you were doing general policing work?

Yes.

Was there much sense of that changing in those first four years?

Yes, it was a sort of evolution. You start off at the beginning of the four years issuing parking tickets on high street, Umtali. Then you move down to a rural area where because of the social etiquette, you don’t issue parking tickets because everybody in the village or the town will have some sort of social interaction with you anyway.

Then it gives way to the patrols that we were sent out on: Land Rover, you, plus a constable driving onto the estates, you chatting to the management of the estate, the constable wandering around the quarters and just picking up bits and pieces of information to feed back.

You were reassuring the population it was normality, carrying on a proper policing job. Then all of a sudden, the policing job starts to include patrols at night where instead of wearing the grey and khaki, you're now into camouflage; and instead of tucking the pistol or whatever it is behind the seat of the Land Rover – which is what we used to do on the day time stuff – all of a sudden now you're carrying weapons and ammunition.

It's a sort of gradual process. The radio room would establish itself in the police stations, so that was manned 24 hours a day. And then there was this sort of subtle change in the police station itself because you've got an ordinary police station operating and then in the car park at the back you've got the prefabricated buildings of the police JOC and the infrastructure that built up from that.

The structure, what you saw happening and building up around you changed?

Yes, and the groundswell starts building up. Then I get transferred to Nyamaropa, now we've gone from a one-horse town to three/four buildings on top of a hill surrounded by a fence and this is now the real thing. This base camp had been heavily attacked twice prior to me getting there. The guys are coming across from Mozambique with mortars, rockets, machine guns, all the usual stuff.

Can you just explain to me, sorry about my ignorance here, where exactly is Nyamaropa?

Nyamaropa was on the...(points to map). There's Inyanga, so if you come across (east) from Inyanga, it's basically there.

(00:39:09) **I was wondering whether it was the border.**

Yes.

So it was very much exposed?

You had the river, the road, and the other side of the river was Mozambique.

Then you had an airstrip and the irrigation scheme, which is why the police station was there.

The history of the police station was that it started off as a tent with a white patrol officer, a black constable and a Land Rover and that was it; that was the patrol base. Then, I'm not sure if it was because of the importance of the irrigation scheme or whether it was just a territorial thing, but it was reinforced. So by the time I got there, the place looked like something out of a Vietnam movie.

We had an 82mm mortar dug in, 2 x 60mm mortars, 303 and 30-06 machine guns on stands. Sandbags everywhere, metal netting above the buildings as

protection against mortars. It looked a bit roughy-toughy but actually, because it was still a police camp...it was a funny atmosphere, you were there still running a police station even though it looked like something out of a war movie.

**Was the work very apparently changing when you first arrived there?
Did you sense this change from police work to insurgency?**

Yes, I got sent there because the previous incumbent had just been killed. His name was Noel Jackson. A National Service Patrol Officer, Gerry Dodd had been left. There was a police reserve stick of six whites who had completed their national service or whatever, were either volunteers or had been called back up to do reserve service, so the place was...

And these reservists were living in the area?

They were living inside the wire. Of the permanent staff there when I got there, there was me, a national serviceman, we had thirty constables (but that included black reservists), two sergeants and a PATU stick and that was it.

The accommodation consisted a wooden building that housed myself and Gerry, we had cells, office radio room, the African quarters, so we were at opposite ends of the camp and then originally the reservists were in with us.

Although later we kicked them out and they ended up in their own building so it was all very civilised. We had showers and proper plumbing and what they used to call a Rhodesian boiler that got stoked up every morning so we had hot water and it was quite a pleasant spot. It was just unfortunate that some of the locals were less than welcoming.

Why was that then?

Well, as I said earlier, you had infiltration routes through north and south of us so we were literally in-between two fairly active areas.

(00:42:44) And were they being indoctrinated?

Yes.

They were in quite hostile positions I suppose? On both sides?

Yes. There was a lot of activity, we were doing night operations in the immediate vicinity just to gauge the attitude of the locals and you can sympathise with them.

They were getting visited by us during the day in the Land Rovers and then we'd go back to the base camp at night and our opposite numbers would come in.

Where we were still trying to win “hearts and minds,” these guys didn’t care, it was the old philosophy of “If you’ve got them by the balls then their hearts and minds will follow.” The longer I was there, the more overt the activity became so we had, as I said, a couple of attacks on the base camp. We were getting regular ambushes and landmine incidents.

And you can tell. When I got there, whenever we drove through the rural areas, wherever we were, you’d wave and gauge the reaction back and if you got kids waving and running along the road next to you then that’s good. If you wave and everybody disappears that’s not so good. So as time proceeded, so the atmosphere changed.

What did you feel at the time that you were fighting against; and did that develop or become more apparent?

It becomes a personalised thing, where you see what the guys were doing to ordinary tribal people and the atrocities that were taking place on all sorts of levels. We had the mission station Regina Coeli just around the corner from us and there were countless episodes of fairly barbaric behaviour.

We rescued women that had been beaten with maize poles to the point where their skin and muscle was literally falling off. We had the, I don’t know if you’ve heard about the Red Cross incident?

I don’t think I have.

A Toyota Land Cruiser with two Red Cross officials and a black interpreter driver. They were killed and again, barbaric. They’re prominently displaying the Red Cross and one of the local ne’er-do-wells took it upon himself to shoot and kill the three of them.

So that sort of thing was becoming more obvious. I think we recognised we’d probably reached the point of no return when the locals were being marched out at night at gunpoint to dig the roads up so on our main supply lines it became increasingly more difficult. In fact, in the end, we ended up being re-supplied by air because it was just so difficult and dangerous to go out in vehicles.

(00:45:52) And it strikes me that some of the tactics and quite horrific things that you were seeing were becoming more violent or were they just becoming more common?

Oh yes, it’s difficult to gauge, and I still don’t know now, whether it was a deliberate tactic to terrorise the population and win them that way. You’re denying support to the security forces by making them so scared that they won’t do anything as a deliberate ploy. Or was it the fact that these guys were badly trained? The level of training was pathetic. They weren’t particularly good as soldiers; I mean we never lost an ambush in the whole time I was there for just under two years, even where we were outnumbered.

On one occasion, Gerry and myself, we were driving north of the base camp; it was quite a hilly area. We were going out looking for our PATU stick who were out patrolling the area and we came under small arms fire. The PATU stick when they swept through the area afterwards located 50+ firing positions, so it was a lot of opposition.

We were two people and a Land Rover and if it had been the other way round, if you'd had 50 security forces and two guys, they'd have wiped them out.

So the level of training and the level of professionalism on their part wasn't very good.

Also, on the vehicle ambushes we were in, you knew very early on in the contact that you were winning because you could hear the way these guys were firing. They'd start off firing in amongst the vehicles, but as soon as you return fire, the first thing they'd do is duck and the rounds go up in the air. So instead of having strikes in amongst the vehicles, it's all going over your head and again, it was all signs that they weren't particularly good at what they were doing.

So if you've got a poorly trained opposition, that maybe then overcompensates with what it does after hours when we're not around. And it's classic terrorism: you terrorise the local population and bend them to your will.

How did you cope with some of this violence and perhaps mutilations?

You were still trying to carry out the policing side of it so all of this sort of stuff was still being documented.

As criminal activity?

Yes, and we'd go out and even as late as 1979, we were still collecting cartridge cases from where people had been murdered or attacked and sending it back to Salisbury.

For intelligence?

Yes, so even now, you've gone way beyond the uniform branch, we're now trying to provide an element of border control or you're out gathering intelligence to feed back to the JOC, to feed onto the Army and whoever.

It's still at the back of your mind; you're collecting information and evidence as a policing activity. I don't know whatever happened to the stuff, we're gaily (00:49:30) going out and collecting this stuff and sending it off. There's probably a box somewhere where they threw it all into.

Well I guess some of this might be in the Army archives? I don't know if they would have any of it, I don't know about Special Branch archives and CIO and so on.

Well after the election results in 1980, the amount of burning going on. I was then at a place called Shabani, we were burning stuff there for days so I would imagine that most of the good stuff has gone. It's a shame, but then needs must.

How did you cope with that violence that you were facing as well?

You do become hardened to it. I was going to say immune but that's probably overstating it. It's more difficult if...we took casualties, not many we were very lucky, but we took casualties within our own ranks. So I lost a young lad called Russ Lieberman who was shot and killed in an ambush, out with the Army ironically enough. I had a constable Makodza, he was badly injured in the same incident. As far as I know he's still working there now because he recovered and then stayed on in CIO.

We probably had two or three other guys that were killed or seriously wounded. The locals, I suppose it was a bit of an "us and them." They weren't part of the immediate family so even though it was terrible when things that had happened to them, you were sort of third party, you know. It was somebody else and it didn't directly affect you as much as your own people. It sounds strange but...

It sounds almost like a way of distancing them, of coping. It must have been hard when it was people in your group?

Yes, it knocks holes in it because the black and white staff, we weren't living in the same buildings but you're cheek by jowl the whole time.

We were sharing some of the facilities there so in that environment you're bound to form bonds that go beyond the racial thing and Chikodza, whenever I went anywhere he was there with me, so that was a little aside.

After he got wounded he was put into Salisbury, no, it would have been Harare hospital in the township. We went looking for him and arrived there a few days later and found him in terrible conditions. They knew he was a member of the security forces but he'd been shovelled out on a trolley and I think they were moving him around, no real attempt to look after him. We commandeered one of the ambulances there and took him back to the police camp and he recovered.

Thank goodness you found him.

I know and he's still there as far as I know.

(00:53:24) I've asked a little about it already but in the sense of who you were fighting, how did that change?

It becomes more personalised I think as you go on. You lose the grand political scale of things. You've got people that were getting paid far more money than we were in Salisbury making decisions on that level and you do feel, I mean we were truly appalled at the way they were treating the locals.

You'd have to be a very hardened individual not to feel sorry for the local tribesmen and a lot of that was down to us as well. At one stage we had a 23 hour curfew in our area which, in a rural area where people are relying on the fields to cultivate, to provide themselves with a living, that's tough conditions.

And then the local storekeepers, the guy in the village, you remain on reasonably friendly terms but you don't want to overdo it because if you overdo it, he then gets tagged as the collaborator, which he did and eventually some idiot comes along and shoots him, which is what happened to him.

So you develop, it's not a soft spot, that sounds too trite, but an affection for the population and when they're getting hurt, you've got this desire to try and help them.

Then of course, you personalise it as well. Because we were gathering intelligence, we knew the names of people that were coming through the area and there were some that were associated with particularly brutal acts. Others were more laid back about it.

People could be tracked quite precisely couldn't they from information and things like cartridge cases?

Yes, there was that, we were fortunate that we still had the fruits of the early policing that we did so there were some people that would still provide you with information. But these guys aren't subtle when they were having meetings in the various kraals where they were dragging the local population in and indoctrinating them.

Generally we had a pretty good idea of who was in the area. The problem we had was it was all very well knowing who was in the area but you've got no resources. So actually doing anything about it was a problem.

When you say resources, do you mean weaponry?

Troops. The Army was stretched every which way. The RLI, they were in helicopters non stop. The local 3 Independent Company, I never actually discussed it with them, I should have asked, I think their principle role was protecting Inyanga. So actually getting troops on the ground to go and do something about it was quite difficult.

So there were other more strategic positions that they were working in than yours?

Yes, if you start prioritising. I know while I was there they carried out what they called a high-density operation which was where a big chunk of area was

cordoned off and they then inundate the area with a mixture of, I guess, conventional soldiers and special forces and see what turns up. (00:56:54)

But you could have almost done that on a daily basis, either side of us, there were always people passing through and you got almost blasé about it.

I remember the last attack on the base camp, they were firing 75mm Recoilless rifle rounds at us and missing and we were all sat up, there was no returning fire or anything like that. We were actually sat up, we'd cracked open a few beers and were watching the fireworks. You became quite blasé about the whole thing and in fact I've still got one of the cartridge cases in my office.

It sounds like it was becoming more everyday and...

Well you do get de-sensitised.

That's it, de-sensitised.

If you're in it for, I think it was 22 months in the base camp and I probably shouldn't have been there that long because you do lose track of what the priorities should be. But then the first lot of elections came along, was it '79? The Muzorewa ones?

I think that was '79 but were there some earlier ones, do you mean ones where black politicians had got in?

Yes.

I think it was '79, the Zimbabwe/Rhodesia one?

Yes, that's it. After those elections, I came out and then got shunted down to Shabani. I'm not sure who I upset to end up there but Shabani was, and still is, recognised as...I think it's got the largest long fibre asbestos mine in the world. So wherever you live inside Shabani precincts, out to about the ten kilometre peg is covered in this very fine asbestos dust. So you put your washing outside for ten minutes, it comes back even dirtier than it went out, not nice.

Is it dangerous?

I've no idea, that was thirty odd years ago. I figure if it was going to manifest itself it would have done by now.

I also wanted to ask about discussions that you had with your superiors. Did you feel that you were under any sort of political indoctrination in the sense of who you were fighting against?

(00:59:32) No. If we say Nyamaropa was about as intense as it got for me, I decided that the level of activity elsewhere was nowhere near as intense.

Definitely no indoctrination. The guys we were dealing with, they were more interested in welfare issues, making sure that we had sufficient water, we had sufficient food, there was enough beer in the place to keep us happy.

The idea of the Superintendent Ray Allen, sitting down and indoctrinating us would have been a joke.

What about discussions with your colleagues or friends?

Politics just didn't feature. I think the closest we came to talking politics would have been a guy with us who was attached to Pfumo ReVanhu. We ended up with three hundred odd Pfumo ReVanhu stationed beneath the base camp and he was one of two white officers who were attached to them.

He had more recently come from the UK, he was ex-British Army and he chatted away a little bit about politics. I've never been a particularly political animal anyway and at that stage I think we were more interested in the day to day stuff, running the base camp, running the area and then if you were off on R and R to Salisbury, the anticipation of the R and R and then chatting about it when you got back, who you'd seen, what you'd done, that sort of thing.

Did you have any sense of what the different elements, ZANLA or ZIPRA fought for? Would it have mainly been ZANLA in your area?

We were ZANLA in our area, yes. There was a perception that anybody trained by the Chinese and the Koreans were useless, whereas the Russian-trained ZIPRA guys were more professional. I think that sort of born out, they were maybe more professional and better trained because they weren't actually actively involved in much fighting. Whereas the other crowd, they were dragging them out of the tribal areas, getting them across into Mozambique, indoctrinating them, arming them and then dragging them back in so there was a lot more activity. The effectiveness of them, as I said, we didn't really rate them as professionals.

Did you come across any of their material?

Yes we used to capture all sorts. We had a mini propaganda war going on at one stage where we were leaving notes for the local commander and it was an exchange of letters. I think I've still got, in the police magazine, they carried an article on it and it got into the newspapers. He'd complained because they'd attacked the base camp and we defended it so rigorously that when we went out the next morning, they'd left so much kit behind that we actually ended up with more ammunition at the end than we'd started with. So we were writing to this guy, I forget his name now, and saying "if you want your ammunition back, pop down at any time and we'll be happy to fire it back at you." So that went on for a little while, it was a bit of light relief.

(01:03:19) Did you have any other more formal contact with the opposition?

No, it was always at arm's length. Afterwards, in 1980 when the assembly points were put together I was transferred back up to Inyanga proper.

When I was at Nyamaropa we operated out of Inyanga but I was located at the base camp. I actually went back into the station and ran the SB's station at Inyanga for a while and there we did come into contact with guys from the assembly points.

I remember, again, Chikodza was there and we actually drove into the assembly point. There was no intent or anything, but on one of the holidays I'd had back in the UK someone had given me a sticky-backed plastic Union Jack and when I went back, I stuck it on the side of my Land Rover. No intent: It was a sticker, I stuck it on the vehicle and that was my vehicle and this had been noticed and the guys that we met after the ceasefire actually recognised the vehicle and when I drove into the assembly point with the sticker on this vehicle, the level of welcome was a lot more than I'd anticipated.

There were guys coming over and shaking hands and the constable was absolutely terrified. As far as he could see, you're now in the middle of however many thousand of these guys. We caused a degree of aggravation for them, they must have taken casualties in some of the contacts we'd had but the way they welcomed us, it was bonhomie, very surprising.

One guy who'd been injured in a vehicle ambush where we'd returned fire with a little 60mm mortar, we'd actually blown him up and because of the conditions they were living in, his leg had never healed properly so he had this hideously distorted leg and he couldn't wait to get across and say hello. He'd be pointing at this leg and saying "You did this to me" with a big grin on his face, quite bizarre.

Another guy who we'd met who later turned out to be quite a senior member of their organisation, we'd been driving through a little village with a bottle stall by the side of the road and we'd stopped off for a beer. We went in, they had the old paraffin fridge in the back, bought a couple of beers and this guy was sat in the corner, an older bloke and I bought him a beer.

He came up to me and made a point of "Do you remember me? Because when you drove through and you came in, I was the guy that you gave a beer to" and it was "right ok, and you are?" and he ended up with us, I don't know what he was, he was fairly high up in their pecking order.

When you say "their" do you mean ZANLA's?

Yes, he was a commander of some description but I think at that stage, certainly the guys we came into contact with, there was this sort of feeling of relief: That was it now, it was finished, let's now get on with the next bit.

That it was over, they needed to build the future.

Yes. It was quite funny because ironically, I think we probably got on better with the former combatants, as they were known, than we were getting on with (01:07:16) the monitoring forces that were there. The monitoring forces were very suspicious of us.

Yes, I've heard mixed opinions...

Well when we were in Shabani, I think there were a few guys there from the Royal Green Jackets and they were great. They were nice lads, they got stuck in and they'd come drinking with us and we got on really well with them.

When I went back to Inyanga, it was a different crowd; I forget which regiment they were from, different attitude and very standoffish. They didn't really mix or socialise, so their problem.

What about local culture and languages, had you picked up any?

My language skills are appalling; I struggle now to chatter out a few words of French. You develop a knack for speaking with an interpreter and again, the first guy I had when I first joined over there in Chipinga was a guy called Manomano who was unfortunately killed in a vehicle accident.

Nice guy, constable, young, hadn't been in the force long. Very bright and he was able to...you'd have this simultaneous translation and opinion coming back: "He says this, that and the other, but I don't think he's telling me the truth." So you've got this sort of two-way communication and you get used to that, and rely an awful lot on that.

One of the areas we went into which was south of Chipinga, I think the tribal group were the Ndau down there, who spoke a completely different dialect to everybody else. So in order to speak to a tribesman down there, it was English to the constable, the constable in a Shona dialect to a local who would then translate into the next dialect along. That was quite challenging, it didn't happen often.

Thankfully yes, that sounds difficult.

I mean you would learn the usual "hello" and "how are you?" and you could ask for beer or food or whatever, the pleasantries; but while they did school us in depot and we were encouraged to learn the language, I personally found it too much of a challenge.

And what about local culture and things like Spirit Mediums or shrines for example?

Well Inyanga you see is the place of the Witch Doctors. In depot, it was assumed that if you were local, you were born in the country, you'd have had a nanny who brought you up or you'd have come into contact with servants and children so you would pick up the culture that way.

With me it was a bit different, it was a bit of formal teaching where they gave you structures if you like that you could apply across the country. Bearing in mind I only ever served down in Manicaland so that was a bit different. And yes, you take an interest.

It works well when you were interrogating people that had been collected following incidents or if you were just basic intelligence gathering. If you understood the fears and beliefs, it was a lot easier getting people to give information. If you understand how (01:11:07) the village works and how the family unit works and what they're afraid of.

The guys in our area were terrified of chameleons, they didn't like chameleons or snakes and so we had a chameleon and in an interrogation, the local would spend more time looking at the chameleon and watching to see what was going on over there.

We found that was a useful way of, not threatening them with the thing, but just the fact that it was there unsettled them and they wanted out of the area. So they were more inclined to be helpful with information.

So that's one way it was used. Were there any other cases that you knew of it being used?

I didn't get involved in the psychology, the bits of the Rhodesian forces that I didn't have a particularly high regard for were the Psyops people army and it was the classic oxymoron the "Army Intelligence." The only useful thing the Army Intelligence did for us was provide us with a vehicle, a four-wheeled drive vehicle and they were very good at copying our reports and putting their own name on the top so there was a certain amount of distrust on those sides. Didn't get involved in the psychological stuff at all and how successful that was, I don't know, there's others that will be better qualified to comment.

And what sort of media were you getting access to when you were there?

We had radio, so Sally Donaldson, the forces sweetheart over there on Sunday afternoons. My mother used to tape Top of the Pops or the Top 40, so once a month I'd get a C90 or a C120 tape with the latest pop music on. So actually in the middle of the African bush, we were probably more up to date than the rest of southern Africa at that stage.

So was it mainly British media, apart from Sally Donaldson?

No, out there radio was a bit hit and miss. Television hadn't been brought into the areas we were in. Newspapers, you didn't bother with to be honest. We used to get the newspapers for the crossword.

I don't think anybody took seriously what was printed in them. You would be constantly scouring through because obviously they'd got casualty lists, to see if anybody you knew had been shot or blown up or whatever. And then

magazine wise, as I said we used to get Time magazine and there were a couple of others that came in but there was no real hunger for...you weren't pouring through the papers every day to see what was happening outside of the country or for an insight into the political situation. You just didn't bother.

You mentioned earlier that you had been back to the UK a few times?

Yes, I used to come home probably every couple of years. You'd save up and as soon as I had enough money, I'd take leave. The leave was quite generous and if you were stuck out in a bush station, you accumulate leave fairly well. So I was coming back probably every couple of years. (01:14:44)

But that almost infuriated you more in terms of the perception?

Yes, where there was coverage you could see how one sided it was. Again with the benefit of hindsight I'm sure you can argue the rights and wrongs on both sides and you would like to think that in a perfect world there would have been a better solution for the place, one that wouldn't have ended up with the mess you've got nowadays.

But the de-colonisation of the British Empire...these were the last few vestiges we were getting rid of so I'm sure the Foreign Office were in a mad rush to divest themselves of any sort of responsibility. Which I think is ironic now because the last few years we have been travelling quite a lot to South Africa and it's interesting now seeing the attitude of black and white down there and in particular blacks on the politics of Zimbabwe.

You almost get the impression they're sitting there saying, "Well hang on, you guys created this problem, why aren't you in there sorting it out?" And then you come back to this country and it's "oh well, it's an African problem, it's down to the Africans, they must sort it out themselves."

Very conflicting views.

Well I think the British government's got enough on its plates I mean it's not taking on any more responsibility than it has to.

I also wanted to ask about your perception of African issues, land rights and so on. Did you have much awareness? You've mentioned that in your area there were a lot of farmers and so on?

You can understand the argument that says that the whites walked into the country and where they wanted, they took the land, which is true.

But I think where there is a debate now over what was happening to the land before they got there. When the whites arrived in the first instance the indigenous population was nowhere near as big, it was a tiny fraction of what it is now.

So the land was there but there were no title or ownership issues.

Then colonisation takes place, the place gets carved up into different ownership and I think probably there is an argument that says that some parts of the country should be handed back to the indigenous locals to make the best of it.

What you've actually got now is this scrabble for all the best places: They're not going into agriculture, it's being handed out to cousins, cronies etc. So it's made a complete mockery of it and the resulting mess is obvious for all to see.

So yes, there's probably an argument for some restructuring there and some land going back to indigenous population. But there's also an argument for certain areas that were wholly developed out of nothing, and the argument says the resource has gone in; people have paid over generations for this. So it's finding an accommodation somewhere in between.

So the issues are perceived quite differently now because of all of the investment put in?

(01:18:24) Yes, there's a massive infrastructure that's just been...well Mozambique is a good example. Mozambique now is a flourishing agriculture and part of the reason for that is because a lot of the farmers that have left Zimbabwe have been attracted into Mozambique. They've gone in there and then they're building the infrastructure up.

[In Zimbabwe] You've got the complete reverse. It would be interesting if you were given a free hand in Zimbabwe, how quickly you could get the commercial farming back to what it was and I'll bet you, you're probably talking in terms of seasons if the resource was put back in. But you've got the political situation there that dictates "I'm in charge, it's my country, I'll take this land and I'll give it to whoever I want" and the farming issue seems to have gone out the window.

Going back, can I ask about your perception of what was going on in the international environment and the Cold War at the time. Did you feel that shaped your perception of who you were fighting against?

Almost certainly I would think. In the Army you're trained, the Russians are the bad guys. You've still got, in the seventies, this mindset of European battlefield, the enemy is in Russia, this is where the next war is going to be and then all the factions around the world.

So even in my political naïveté then, you can understand the pressures in Africa: The Russians wanted influence there, the west wanted influence there but were probably too limp-wristed to do anything about it, and the Chinese wanted influence there.

That would be how I would have seen, at that stage, the international influence on the place. But ironically I found you got more, not bitter and

twisted but halfway towards bitter and twisted about the attitude of your own government. It's almost, you want to drag them out and say "Can't you see what you're doing here is going to be wrong? It's going to mess the place up. You're tearing down something that worked and leaving the floodgates open for this mass of externally funded, terrorists to come in and take over."

I think that's how I would have understood the way it's set up and probably is still set up now. The influences are still there.

So do you think this externally funded force that was being fought against was largely a communist force, or was it just a general sort of greed; or both perhaps?

Oh I think all sorts, it's like with all these things, you start off as an idealist, "This is what I want, I want to free my country, I want to remove the yolk of colonialism from my brothers." Then you take over and you're driving round the Governors' Rolls Royce and it's "That's a nice farm, let's kick the bloody white farmer off."

How many years have we had now? Everything blurs doesn't it? So the idealist today is the dictator of ten, twenty years' time.

Like you said earlier, with hindsight and so on, it's very shocking in a way how quickly things changed.

(01:22:22) Well he (Mugabe) came across as being a wholly reasonable person. Somewhere in my kit, I've got a letter that he allegedly has signed. This is after independence where, I don't know who got it, but I know all the Special Branch guys that I've spoken to, were told "There is a place for you, this is how it's going to happen, you'll be given rank, your pay is secure, your pensions are secure" all of that, "We don't want you to leave, we want you to stay" so we stayed.

There was an amusing – or I found it amusing, he didn't – story about Garfield Todd who was a former Prime Minister of Rhodesia. While I was at Shabani I was tasked to go and arrest him and bring him into the station which I did and then the powers that be decided that they weren't going to prosecute him so I ended up taking him back to his farm.

I met him after independence walking down Shabani high street and he came across because I'd obviously spent time with him, and he said "What are you going to do now?" and I said "Why?" he said, "Well you've got no job." I said "you're joking, I've been promoted, they put my pay up, I've got a new vehicle, a new Mazda truck" I said "if I'd known we were going to get all this, we'd have stopped fighting years ago" and that was it. He looked, shook his head and walked away, very down in the mouth and dejected.

I think the guy (Mugabe) came across reasonably well and then it's a slow process isn't it? The transition from the conquering hero to the despot that he is nowadays.

I'm just going to ask you a bit more about the sense of what you were fighting: Did you feel that there was any memory of Malaya or Kenya?

No.

In the sense of fighting styles and so on?

Yes, there would have been lessons learnt. You had the Guard Force and they did start concentrating locals and depriving the opposition of contact.

Is this protected villages?

Yes but that came in...

Did you have much experience of them?

Well yes we did but I don't think anybody I knew had a particularly high opinion of anybody involved with Guard Force. I think it was one of those things that came in; it was too little, too late.

So did you feel that they worked?

I think if it had been undertaken a lot earlier and the emphasis had been put on the hearts and minds thing which came in very much towards the end then maybe yes.

But then countering that, you had tens of thousands of these poorly trained guys coming across using ever more barbaric and escalating levels of violence, so would it have worked? I don't know.

If the (01:25:42) political will isn't there externally then no, it doesn't matter what you do, you're always going to loose that sort of situation.

So what about the fighting styles and so on? Was there a sense of keeping it alive?

No, I don't think so. I don't recall anybody consciously using that as examples on the ground. I know in discussion at higher levels, you would have had guys like Walls, who I think served in Malaya so I guess some of the senior people would have had information like that in their minds but on the ground...

It wasn't in your training?

No.

But it would have perhaps been filtered through to apply it to local situations?

It was more practical. The training was more on anti-ambush drills and that sort of thing rather than the politics behind it.

Yes I see what you're saying. You've mentioned a few contacts that you came up against and so on. Were there any others that you came up against?

No, it was just a hazard of where you were. The largest attacks we had massed against us were the attacks on the base camp. If you compare the effectiveness of the troops we were against, you can be outnumbered ten to one but if they're poorly trained and not particularly good at what they're doing then they're on a hiding to nothing.

I think I mentioned the fact that if you're sitting in the base camp, we get given an allocation of ammunition that you can use for training so it's comparatively easy. You'll fire a couple of 82mm mortars so you know where the killing zones are for those. You'll fire the machine guns and you'll take your constables and sergeants through firearms drill. There will be target practice, anti-ambush drills, all of that and it was done on a practical level to keep the skills current but it was also, "what else can you do?" There's no television so it makes it a bit interesting for them.

The last attack on the camp, the centre of the attack was under a large tree that we used for target practice with the mortars. They were all set, ready to go, so as soon as the opposition opened fire, the first lot of fire that we put back into them was at the centre of their attack. So straight away, we've won the initiative. They're leaving, I don't know what it would have worked out, probably a couple of tons of kit that they've dragged all the way across and they've left it behind.

It was all down to reasonable quality training on our side, the fact that we were disciplined. We didn't have guys running around doing their own thing, an indication of poor training of the opposition.

(01:29:10) At this stage, were you in Special Branch?

By then I was, yes. We're now talking, that would have been the back end of '78/'79 that sort of time period.

We have covered that a bit haven't we, in Special Branch, you were also doing intelligence?

The role changed so when I went to Nyamaropa, the job then was running the police station. So, it sounds trite and old fashioned now but in the morning you'd have the parade, you'd issue duties, the flag would go up, the gates would open, you'd be mounting guards around the camp, we'd be organising patrols out to the local areas, all that sort of thing.

That carried on for a few months. Then the uniform we were wearing is the district wear, so it would have been long socks, khaki shorts, grey shirts and caps. As the frequency of attacks on the vehicles increased then we put through or asked for permission to stop wearing the grey which was a bit

obvious and we went over to green or camouflage shirts. The rest of the kit was the same.

Then as the pace of things increased you found you were taking more and more infantry-type kit so where maybe at the beginning you'd go out with a pistol on a belt and an Uzi behind the seat of the car, by the time you've finished, you're going out in full camouflage with rifles and probably with a machine gun or maybe even a hand-held mortar and that became more the norm.

But that was a gradual sort of progression as the situation deteriorated.

And how was the work changing?

It went from normal everyday policing...you've got a set of laws so if somebody steals a donkey or a goat or something, you're there. You weren't dispensing justice on the spot but there was a process that you would go through.

That stopped fairly quickly and then you were into hearts and minds to a certain degree. You were making your presence known amongst the population and then feeding back what information you could.

And at that time as well, were infiltrations becoming greater?

I don't know the scale, they certainly seemed more.

Because you said that above you and below you there were infiltration points. Were you involved in defending those points?

No, we were getting information that we fed back so there would be a daily sit rep back to Inyanga and then we'd get called in to do the re-supply run probably every two weeks and every month or so you've got regular contact with the sub-JOC which was in Inyanga.

Then it would be every couple of months I guess, you'd get dragged all the way back to Umtali and sat down to go through what would be a debrief on the (01:32:39) activities and also get given information on what perceived activity would be coming through in the future.

So that you could prepare yourself?

Well you didn't, I mean, you just went back and carried on as normal but yes, it was nice to get information fed back down. And the interesting bits were where they had maps, because the mapping was quite important and it was something that the Army intelligence were quite good at. They were plotting routes through and various sorts of activities so that was quite interesting. Mainly because it sort of backed up what we thought we knew was the case on the ground, so to see that actually up on a wall was sort of reassuring.

You had the feeling that maybe what you were doing did have a larger impact, so that was useful.

It must have reaffirmed what you were fighting for, what you were doing and where you fitted in the wider picture?

Yes, absolutely.

And you've mentioned the parades and the flying of the flag and so on, do you feel that the war helped to sustain or reinforce the sense of Rhodesian identity?

It did for people in the camp. The effect it had on the locals I think was probably far less pronounced as it went on and on but certainly when I arrived there, the atmosphere amongst the locals was almost conventional. It was considered as the police station so we were still getting people coming up and complaining. They'd come up and say "somebody's stolen this" or all this sort of minutiae of rural policing was happening when we got there.

Take it to the end when I actually transferred out; the opposition were going in and burning the villages around the irrigation scheme to deny them to the locals. They didn't want anything working there so they were trying to blow up the reservoir, disrupt the water supply to the camp, dig the roads up, anything that would destroy the infrastructure.

So the fact that they were forced to do all of that I guess means that what we were doing was having an impact, it was just unfortunate it was having so much of an impact that we couldn't have prevented the degradation.

And throughout this time, you've said that you felt at home in both the UK and Rhodesia. Did you feel that your sense of identity as a Rhodesian was stronger?

No it was never "home", England was always going to be "home" because it's where my parents and family are. I had no family there. In fact, I think at that stage I was the only Gibbard in the whole area. You could have almost written to Rhodesia, put the name on and eventually it would have caught up with me.

I did identify more and more with the people I was with and it was all very subtle. You didn't wake up one morning and think "Ah well that's it now, I've been here two years so I'm a Rhodesian now." It was far (01:36:14) more subtle than that.

If you'd squared me up in a bar and accused me of being a Rhodesian I'd have laughed in your face, "I'm not a Rhodesian, I'm English," but then you find the opposite. You come back to the UK and you'd hear somebody in the pub having a go at the place and you're the first one pitching in and saying "No, you're wrong" so you're there protecting it. It wasn't an ideology or even a country that your allegiance was to.

What it boiled down to at the end of the day was the people around you and it was as much the black staff that I had, as it was the white staff.

What sort of qualities do you think made a Rhodesian?

Well you've got the stereotypes, the white guy with the big chin in shorts, rugby player, rugby ball in one hand and beer in the other and a braai going on in the background. And there were lots of people like that in different sort of forms, nice guys, the sort of bloke if you were on the piss with on a Saturday you'd have a good time.

Then the black population, the ones that we associated with were almost all service personnel, you know, constables or sergeants or whatever. And I got the impression, again with the benefit of hindsight that they were probably taking on a lot of the characteristics they saw amongst their senior white staff.

You'd go maybe once or twice a week, have a wander through and we'd sit down with the sergeants and have a couple of beers and a bit of a chat, you get a certain camaraderie.

We used to run a VD clinic on a Saturday morning there; because we couldn't get medical staff out and half these guys would go on bloody leave and come back with the lesser strains of different sexually transmitted diseases. Once they were diagnosed, it was up to me to give them treatment so that develops a certain bond as well, you know, when you've got half your bloody staff presenting their backsides to you on a daily basis and you're curing them of this terrible inconvenience.

So yes, there was a comradeship that built up and that did carry over, even afterwards when I got transferred up to Kariba. We had staff there, my 2IC there was a former combatant, nice guy with glasses, great sense of humour, loved his brandy and coke, and eventually he found that brandy and coke and motor cars don't mix and killed himself in a car accident.

But that would have been a good example of where you've got people that were on opposite sides, they get put into a posting and actually get on very well together.

By the time I came back to Salisbury or Harare as it was then, the whole thing had changed and you'd lost the distinction between former police and former combatants, so we knew some of the senior guys were obviously former combatants to have been promoted that quickly.

But when you were talking on lower ranks, you were never quite sure who was ex-ZANU and who was ex-BSAP and again, it seemed to work, there was a nice meshing, there was no overt sort of hostility between the races.

That sounds very interesting that later on after Zimbabwe there had to be this meshing; but at the time of the struggle was that confusing?

How did you differentiate between guerrillas and those who were on your side?

(01:40:25) It was difficult. If you took a general rule, if you came across somebody on the opposite side and you had the opportunity of shooting and killing them you'd do it because the rules had been drawn up.

It was after the 1980 election when you actually came into contact with them. That was the first sign and it would have been interesting, again, if there had been more of an influence from Europe or the UK on the way that the former combatants were indoctrinated into the security forces, but there wasn't. So you got what could have been the forerunner of the sort of the rainbow nation that you've ended up with, sort of, in South Africa.

You could have maybe had more of that in Zimbabwe but for every liberal that you got there that would be accommodating to black or white depending on which side they started, you were always going to have the guys with more hardened attitudes. And it's unfortunate I think that most of those ended up in the government.

We've discussed a little about the sort of ideologies that people were fighting for on both sides but also the way it becomes personalised. What sort of war do you feel was being fought? Do you feel that it was a racial war or an ideological war or a civil war? There are lots of ways that it has been described and I wondered what your opinion was?

It would be difficult, race is going to have to play a part because I don't know of any white former combatants so it was always going to be a black force led by black commanders up against a black and white force led by whites.

So the racial element was always going to be there, how far you'd be justified in saying it was wholly racial...I think people genuinely believed that the country would be better run under the system that was running at the time and there was a lot of resentment towards the UK. The fact that some civil servant arbitrarily wanted to effectively scrap the existing infrastructure and just let these unqualified people...I mean what qualifications have they got for coming in and taking over? that was the view.

But then it's easy to defend both sides isn't it? If you're a combatant, you're liberating the country from the yoke of colonialism. If you're on the other side, you're defending a system that sympathetic and supportive of the population, so you've got your arguments in place.

Civil war, I don't know, there was an element of that I guess with ZIPRA but then you see Bob, very cleverly, used the old Rhodesian fighting machine to sort that problem out so I guess that was there as well. But I wouldn't have thought you would have described the white led government and the ZANU-PF factions as civil war. They wanted power and they were going to do anything to get it and up to a point, I think the white politicians and

commanders felt that they weren't worthy of the job and would do anything to stop them getting it.

When you say that Mugabe used the old Rhodesian fighting machine, do you mean the forces?

Yes, well I think it's a matter of history now, the actions that took place in Bulawayo. And again, it was a good move on his part. You've got what were then certainly the (01:44:39) best trained troops in the area going in against a relatively well armed and well ordered but relatively inexperienced fighting force and they cleaned up.

If you still had the two-party politics, what effect would that have had? That would have been interesting with the Matabele on one side and the Mashona on the other but that wouldn't have worked anyway. I think the end result would have always been the same, one way or the other.

Someone had to come through? Someone had to surface, come to the top?

Yes, he's got no appetite for sharing as we're seeing at the moment.

Do you think that that perception of what kind of war was being fought affected how you fought or how you managed day to day?

I had a particular beef and we're starting to see it creeping in here, with the attitude of the general population, and the people that were actually going into operational areas and fighting.

Sally Donaldson we mentioned earlier on, all of the messages going out to troops that were going into operational areas were "you've only got six weeks or twelve weeks" or whatever it was, "keep your head down, just do your time and then you're out" and it's creeping in here as well. You're getting the messages at Christmas to the troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, "oh don't worry, you've only got so many months left, keep your head down and then come back in one piece."

It's not a political thing but a comment that I would have agreed with at the time, was, what you should be saying is "right, you get your ass in there, you've only got six weeks, go in, sort it out as best you can and then you can come back, have a bit of a rest and then go back in and do it again".

The attitude was far too cautious; you needed the aggression when these guys were on operations and I think that sort of encouragement wasn't there. Now that's not to detract from the guys who were in organisations like the RLI, the Selous Scouts and whatever, very professional and very good at what they were doing.

But perhaps the sort of external sentiments...

Yes, the people all around.

So perhaps they needed more encouragement.

I had ten years there, of that. You could say three/four years in operations culminating in the two years at Nyamaropa and then after that you went back to more conventional sort of intelligence stuff.

You then have thirty odd years of looking back and “what if?” so I think all of it is easy to say in retrospect: “If we’d done that, if the bosses had done this, if the commanders had done that,” then things would have come out differently.

But I think at the end of the day, it didn’t really matter what any of us were doing because the (01:48:17) politics or the major political thrust was outside of the country anyway and it was down to what the South African attitude was, what the British government attitude was and then all of the interests of the other parties; the Koreans, the Chinese and the Russians.

Absolutely, really, that force was always going to be there wasn’t it?

Yes.

Can you guide me through your interesting time in that transitional government period; you did stay on after 1980?

Yes, 1980 I was transferred. I forget how long the attachment was at Inyanga. So I’d gone Umtali, Chipinga, I did an attachment at a place called Chisumbange but that was under Chipinga which was further south. Then I got put forward for Nyamaropa, did two years there, went to Shabani, then from Shabani back to Inyanga and from Inyanga to Kariba and then Kariba to Harare as it was then.

And so what was, Kariba, you were there in the eighties?

It would have been uniform branch in Umtali, uniform branch and ground coverage at Chipinga and Chisumbange.

Uniform branch for a couple of weeks and then basically intelligence gathering or field intelligence for the whole time we were at Nyamaropa. Shabani was a funny posting, I’d been hurt in Nyamaropa and I think they put me there because it was in the middle of the country; there wasn’t an awful lot going on there so it was a safe place.

So I did a bit of CID work there which was quite interesting.

What sort of things did that involve?

You can walk through certain areas of Shabani and emeralds sit on the surface so there was a lot of theft and emerald trading there so we were doing undercover work catching people, proper policing basically. So having served

my time in Shabani, which was an awful place – nice people but you’ve got the mine there and it was a dirty, not a particularly nice place – then I got the posting to Kariba, which was great, fantastic, loved it.

Then, having done a stint there, I had to go and do some ‘proper’ work again so I got transferred back to Harare.

Shabani was CID. Kariba, was a joint station so it was CID and Special Branch but we had the Zambian border there so there was a bit of liaison with our opposite number on the Zambian side which was quite interesting.

What was that liaison over?

(01:51:41) The border had opened, so you’ve got the dam wall and the border was a river that ran down the middle. They had a CID man, can’t remember his name, nice guy. As far as he was concerned I was also the CID guy and I’d go across every couple of weeks and he’d come across every couple of weeks.

He was very nervous because there’d been quite a lot of activity around the area during the war. I remember there was one instance where the German Air Force had done a military flight into Salisbury and on the way out had requested permission to overfly the dam and they’d been given permission.

This German military aircraft flew down across the dam and then off into Zambian air space. We had a hotline, literally two phones on the end of a bit of wire and my phone started ringing and it’s my opposite number who has got it into his head that everything’s off now, we’ve gone back to operations and this is the beginning of an invasion.

A bit of chatting to him and calmed him down but even...what year would that have been? ’81? So everything had been over a long time but still there was this...

Quite edgy.

Yes. We also had, it was a nice little number running because he could get proper Scotch and we could get Gin and cooking oil and he could get Nescafe granulated coffee which we couldn’t get. So whenever I went across, it was with a boot-full of gin and cooking oil and whenever he came across, it was Scotch and Nescafe.

In terms of sanctions, had you felt the pinch of those towards the end?

It was the equipment and things like, they developed a lot of techniques for getting the best out of things so it was a lot of homemade kit. It made Dad’s Army look actually professional with some of the kit we had.

When they started welding Land Rovers that had been blown up in landmines together to produce vehicles and some of the locally produced stuff, it showed. It was great resilience.

We noticed it with things like certain types of ammunition and any specialised equipment that were hard won. But on a personal level, did I miss anything? not particularly. They had an indigenous beer industry, the beer they produced over there was very good.

Break in interview

So you had just been talking about sanctions ...

You became adept at reusing stuff. If at the beginning of the two years at Nyamaropa, everybody on the camp would have been issued with a NATO-type weapon so they would have been carrying an FN rifle and the standard sort of 9mm kit; by the end of the two years, probably the majority of the staff there were carrying AKs and ammunition that we'd acquired locally.

There were two reasons for that. One was because we had lots of the kit lying around that had been captured; but secondly the AK is a lot lighter and easier (01:55:40) to carry so if you get given the choice between this big heavy rifle and a smaller one then you went for that.

So a lot of the stuff was captured from opposition?

Yes, we had more ammunition holdings from both the attacks on the base camp at the end of it than we had at the beginning.

And you were able to hang on to that for your own station's use?

Some of it got shipped back, if it ammunition that we didn't have weapons for. But we had all sorts of stuff dropped off at us as well. Occasionally if the Army came through, I had a Chinese 82mm mortar and one of the SAS guys who'd been external dropped off a Dial Sight so we actually knew where we were firing so there were little things like that and then we would pass on stuff.

Going back to Inyanga on re-supplies, you'd have friends who were farmers or whatever and we'd help them out with hand grenades or smoke or ammunition, whatever. You'd be giving them stuff as well so it was a sort of, not a free market in the stuff but you were helping people out.

It must have been very necessary with things running out and so on?

I'm sure there were people in the headquarters in Parliament who were worried about the effect of sanctions and kit was running out. On a local operational level it would have impacted but it wasn't something you thought about every day.

Probably the biggest one was the fuel, you were limited to a degree on the amount of fuel you went through but it wasn't something that sort of plagued your everyday thought.

Were you based in Kariba then in 1980?

I'm terrible on dates, it would have been '81/'82 so it was after independence and it was coming back to some semblance of normality.

And what about independence? We've mentioned briefly the Zimbabwe/Rhodesia transition government. Did you have to work with any of the auxiliary troops?

We had, when I was at Nyamaropa, we had Pfumo ReVanhu. We had 365 of them, one for every day of the year, and they were very smartly turned out in the kit that they wore.

They were well armed but the level of training and the level of professionalism was very poor. We used to joke and refer to them as "Walking figure eleven targets." You got the impression that, I'm not sure what their political rationale was, but they weren't taken seriously as troops.

So you had more contact with these different factions in opposition?

(01:59:08) Yes well the base camp that accommodated them was...we were on the hill and at the base of the hill was a dam and their complex was next to the dam.

But your opinions of them weren't so good?

Well they were a bit of a shower and they didn't really contribute much. They wandered around and I suppose they were a presence in the area but I didn't rate them.

So did you see much of the monitoring groups?

Monitoring Force?

Yes.

I saw them, that would have been after the '79 elections when I was in Shabani, we had them around all over the place. The quarters that we had there, there was a small mining town fenced with, they were almost like pre-fabricated buildings, breeze block buildings, very basic. I had one and I was going to say they were next door, they weren't but there was a police woman next door who was actually going out with one of the monitoring force so there were always guys there and we bumped into them. You'd go drinking with them and got on reasonably well with them, that was in Shabani.

Were you able to vote in any of these elections?

No.

And so you had, all that time you wanted to maintain your British citizenship?

Yes, but the only reason I'm British is because they don't issue English passports.

You would be English then?

Yes, well I was born in Cheltenham so it's difficult to be anything but. It would have been difficult to rationalise a vote, given the way I was thinking about it.

At the end of the day I was being paid to do a job, which I enjoyed and was not particularly interested in the politics. When the battle lines were being drawn up between the different parties and you got the likes of Sithole and Muzorewa and that coming to the fore; if I had a lack of interest in the politics prior to that, then it diminished even further, so I wasn't too fussed about not voting.

Did you personally feel any sense of threat after the independent government came, after Mugabe came in?

(02:01:49) What after 1980?

Yes, because you did remain in your post, didn't you?

Yes. We predicted the election results for our area and got them spot on, so we knew that they would take all the seats in the area and my understanding is that Special Branch or whoever presented a report to the powers that be – the British government and our lot – accurately predicted the outcome but for whatever reason it was never acted upon.

And you'll know there were all sorts of plans made for if the election went the wrong way then certain things would happen and certain people would get taken out. I was isolated away from that tucked down in Shabani.

We had two days of burning, going through files, shredding and burning. We were reissuing identity documents to all the black staff so if it did go "tit's up" then they'd be able to disappear and they'd have a change of identity.

So they couldn't be associated with having worked with the opposition?

No. And then we had a rather grand plan: if it did get sticky, we would have mobilised a convoy and driven down and across into South Africa, that was the fall back position. So that was seriously promoted and we had a Detective Superintendent, Sid Clark, who was the Detective Inspector there and me.

That was on the cards if it went bad and we felt that the situation would be untenable then we'd put together a vehicle convoy and we were going to drive our way out.

I think Sid also had contingency plans for all of the seized emeralds and foreign currency that we had in the CID safe as well, bless him.

Clever, yes.

But as it happened, the election came in, we had lots of warm glowing feelings coming down from Salisbury, told not to panic, don't worry, reassurances that our services were required and that was it.

On the back of that, to get a posting like Kariba, you know, I wasn't going anywhere for a while.

When did you eventually actually leave Zimbabwe?

'84.

And can you explain how that came about?

I was working in counter intelligence out of a place called Medical Arts Centre. The boss there was a guy called Mike Crafter. I'm not sure what rank he was because we changed, I think he was the Chief Superintendent, maybe even higher. He headed up Medical Arts.

Prior to that we were at Daventry House and then moved out to Medical Arts. There was a no.2 and I (02:05:01) can't remember his name, black guy, well connected politically. He ran the Russian desk, nice guy, big, bluff, quite a character.

Then you had a couple of desk officers, I ran a desk and special projects.

You had Charlie Hand, I forget which desk he had but there were a mixture of black and white then running different parts of the organisation.

I had staff, again, black and white from all over. A guy called Earl Harper-Ronald, Jake, who was ex-Army, who joined us as a photographer but into all sorts of activities and then we had loads of surveillance staff, certainly tens, mainly black guys; and then a sort of reserve pool that we could call on depending on what sort of operations we had.

And what was the nature of that work? What were they surveying?

Oh we were counter intelligence so we were mainly concerned with external agencies. You had a massive influx of embassies being established in Harare and it was our job to keep an eye on them. They'd come in, you'd have diplomatic activity at one level and then you'd have all sorts of other activities at other levels and it was our job, as far as we could, to keep track of what else was going on.

Yes, the full picture.

Yes and they're all vying for positions. So you had the Americans, British High Commission was there obviously, the Germans, French, North Koreans, the PLO had an embassy there, all sorts, Chinese, Russians, all vying for positions and trying to establish sources within the government. And we were there trying to hold the tide back.

Were you generally friendly, if that's the right word, with all of them or were there some sort of old hostilities?

What with the embassies?

Yes.

No, we got paired off so I got British High Commission, American Embassy, West German and I think the French. They were the ones we did liaison with so it was one long tea party and cocktail party, which was great. But you get to the end of a period, the only promotion route for me would have been...Well, non existent.

Mike stayed on, so he was still there, the 2IC was a black guy, ZANU, so a political appointee, nice bloke though. I think the Zimbabwe High Commission in London was his posting on from that.

My career I think had just about peaked, there were no promotions that we would have qualified for and we were being encouraged to train up black staff to take over our jobs. So it got to June '84, I was due to get married; I'd met Ali.

Things politically, you were always a bit, you weren't comfortable. There were people from time to time, especially in our job that would disappear and then reappear and he's just had two weeks locked up somewhere because it was suggested that maybe he was involved in other activities. So you weren't 100% confident.

Our plan was we'd come back to the UK, get (02:08:53) married here, leave the wife here, go back, tender my resignation and then if anything untoward did happen then all I had to worry about was getting me out. So that's what we did.

As it happened, the departure was very civilised. The minister came to my farewell party and wished me all the best and shook my hand and it was a bit of a non-event. But I think people at that stage were becoming a little more paranoid.

Yes, a lot of people had become by that point.

And of course again with hindsight, you look back and you think, well yes, it wasn't me being paranoid, it really was that bad. And in fact if anything, given the circumstances there perhaps we could have been even more paranoid and been justified.

Can I just check, where was Daventry House and the Medical Centre?

Daventry House was down near, I can't remember what street it was on, it was near the central Police Station.

This was in Harare?

In Harare, it was the top floor. The Medical Arts Centre was, I think it was on the Borrowdale Road.

I just wasn't certain they were both in Harare.

Oh yes, both in Harare. Medical Arts was taken over by ZANU after the election. Prior to that it was a medical facility, dentists and people like that had different surgeries there. Then the government then took it over and we got moved into it because it was a secure compound but we went in there and we were always digging stuff up in the garden that these guys had dropped, grenades and magazines from rifles, all sorts. But it was a nice spot; it was very modern. And of course because the independence had been recognised, we were flooded with new kit.

We had a bit of a joke there, where we were asked what equipment we needed and we were asking for camera equipment and listening devices and all this sort of stuff and we asked for audio surveillance equipment and the West German government, bless it, sent us, I don't know how many Audi motor cars, they completely misunderstood.

So all of a sudden, all my bosses are now driving round in a brand new Audi whatever. Anybody that drove one, anybody in the intelligence community would know that these guys are either senior government or more likely from CIO and we all ended up in brand new VW Golfs, very nice.

So it wasn't very subtle?

No, there was nothing subtle about it. We did have our strengths, the surveillance teams were very good. But we're up against people from the main Embassies, like the British, the Americans and the (02:12:10) Russians and that. These guys are "Dyed in the wool" experts and with us, we were almost the happy sort of plucky volunteers that "You've done this job now, you've spent x amount of time in Special Branch, so now we're going to put you in charge of that. "

And you look at it and knowing now what I know about the facilities that you need to do the job that we were trying to do, you realise that it was actually hopeless. But having said that, it was good fun.

What did it feel like coming back to Britain?

Well it wasn't too bad. I had a job to come to, we had a house sorted out so it was a bit of a soft landing.

Was your wife from the UK initially as well?

She was born in Umvukwes, her father was with the government there. He's an expert in range and resource management. Then the job that he was going for, there were two people going for one job, the other guy got the job so he came back to the UK. So Ali, who'd been born in Rhodesia, came back to the UK at the age of ten, then spent the next ten or eleven or twelve years, maybe longer than that, saving up with the intention of going back and meeting a farmer and settling as a farmer's wife.

She arrived in the country and on the second day, she came into Harare then flew up to Kariba. I'd been in Kariba a year then so I had my intelligence network finely honed. Ten minutes after she landed, I get a 'phone call from Ted Chisnall – whose son was also in the Special Branch; he ran the tour company office in the Lake View Hotel – to tell me that this young lady had arrived from the UK and I'd better get my ass down there and meet her before everybody else did and that was that.

So intelligence was used for other purposes!

It got used for all sorts of things. We used to have the aircraft in twice a day and if there was anybody on there worth knowing, we got to find out fairly quickly.

That's a nice story.

After what we'd been through, I was given the posting as a pat on the back and thanks very much, off you go and you just made the best of it. We had the police boats up there and we were allowed to drive those, even though we were plain clothes.

I made the front page of the national newspaper with a photograph, it was a young lady, can't remember her surname, Siobhan was the first name, out of registry from Special Branch headquarters, skiing in a bikini behind a police boat.

Unfortunately somebody had taken a photograph of it and the national newspaper printed it and I got a bit of a telling off, but it was good PR.

It was a great place, lots of fishing, jobs included doing the rounds of the hotels. We had various safari lodges there that we were allowed to go and stay in overnight so it was fantastic, thoroughly enjoyed it.

(02:15:40) Have you been back since you left?

From '84, I was going back about once a year. We were selling boring stuff, batteries and bits and pieces and vehicle spares and one of the customers was government-based so that normally got me a trip.

Then in 1990 I was offered a year there. We went across, we actually lasted six months and I thought it had become a waste of time. We were being paid locally, we weren't being paid in foreign currency. I had two young kids by this point and I just couldn't see any future so we pulled out of the contract early.

You were there with your kids?

Yes, and that's it. So from 1990 I've not been back and to be honest, I'm very happy going to South Africa now because you've got all the game and it's a nice environment, the climate and I think it would almost be a pity now to go back and see what Zimbabwe has become.

Had you been to South Africa during your time there?

A couple of times on holidays and that.

Because some people felt that South Africa was very different at the time?

Yes, it was very, very...they were two different countries. South Africa was, it's almost like comparing America and Canada, that sort of relationship where we were the poor relations and they had all the flashy things, the expensive buildings and vehicles and aeroplanes and all that. We were the old fashioned country boy but now, we love the continent. South Africa's convenient because a lot of friends have gone down there so it's just a nice place to visit.

And you touched upon this briefly, but what do you feel about the end of Empire and leaving it behind?

After a couple of years of rule by Mugabe, there were stories circulating, the blacks having voted and having been promised everything, looking at their lives and saying "Well actually we were actually better off under the old system." I'm sure one or two blacks did actually say that but that sort of view proliferated and I think people started to realise that the honeymoon period was over.

It's difficult to see, without a fairly robust external influence, how you would be able to get that country back to what it was prior to 1980. The politics wouldn't allow it, nobody would have any appetite for going back in and colonising and maybe it's an outdated sort of concept anyway, colonisation. But on the other hand you're looking at the resources available there and the way that the people are suffering. It's the lesser of two evils there but fortunately that's for far more learned heads than mine.

(02:19:09) I finally just wanted to ask you how you feel looking back at the struggle in the 70s and whether you feel that it was worth it?

Yes. I think it's one of those things, the only regret is probably that I didn't have the depth of knowledge then that I have now.

I think what we were doing was a perpetuation of colonialism. Maybe that was wrong, but also it was a way of trying to provide some protection to the indigenous population.

It's an easy choice isn't it? You take the state of affairs in 1976 with a developed infrastructure, education, the health system that was running very efficiently and compare it to what you've got today and it's difficult to see. Ok, they're their own people, it's their country but you wonder when were they better off? Then as it was, or now as it is?

What sort of benefit do you think that knowledge would have given you at the time? Because in some senses, like you said, you were doing something that you felt was right then, and almost still is, so...

I don't know, it's a thing that comes with age I think. I'd have probably spent less time swilling beer on R and R and maybe taken more of an interest in the politics of it. But then, you're twenty one years old doing a job that you've trained for, for a number of years – the training I had in the Army here, plus obviously the training I had over there – you're putting all of those lessons into a live situation. And for a young man with no family ties there, no responsibilities, it was an ideal situation.

In some senses I wonder how having more political awareness would have actually helped. Because you were able to act more instinctively perhaps; and that may have helped your preservation more?

Yes possibly...it's never going to happen but it would have been nice maybe.

Is there anything else that you want to add?

No, I think we've gone on slightly longer...

End of interview