

Chris Pollard

Grew up in Essex. Joined the BSAP in 1959, aged 19, and travelled out to Rhodesia. Married and later divorced. Left Zimbabwe for the UK in 2005.

This is Dr Sue Onslow talking to Mr Chris Pollard in Burrough Green, near Newmarket on Friday, 9 January 2009. Chris, thank you very much indeed for agreeing to talk to me. I wonder if you could begin by saying please, how did you come to be in Rhodesia in the 1960's and the 1970's?

I joined the BSAPolice in 1959 having been in the English police, Essex police. I was out there in the police for twenty five years.

Did you decide to emigrate to Rhodesia, or was it when you went in 1959 just for three years?

It was just for three years in '59, but after four and a half years I came back for a holiday and annoyed my family by calling about Rhodesia as "home".

So you grew up in Essex though and your family were still in Essex?

Yes

And so at what age did you go to Rhodesia?

Nineteen.

How did your family feel about you going out there in the first place, at nineteen?

Shrugged their shoulders and thought 'Well, they'll be back in three years.'

They?

They thought I would be back in three years , and when I delayed coming back for my first holiday after about four plus years and insisted on going back to Rhodesia, they shrugged their shoulders and said "alright" . And my mother thereafter came out every year for three months of the year where she worked in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe as a pharmacist.

And your father?

He couldn't have cared less

Really?

They were divorced at about that time so...

What was your family background in Essex? What had been your...?

(00:02:06) Farming

A farming community?

Yes

So arriving there in 1959, how did you find Rhodesia?

It was an adventure, it was exciting. I enjoyed it very much and I always have been a country boy so as fast as I could, I got transferred out to the districts. I've always been interested in birds and animals and that sort of thing, wildlife, so it was perfect for me.

So how were you recruited? Did you just happen to see an advertisement for the BSAP?

No, when I was in the Essex police as a cadet, one of the cadets I was with joined the BSAPolice and his father was the Chief Inspector who I knew; and my inspector that I was under, his son had already gone out to join the BSAPolice. I happened to go up to London to see London as a tourist one day and walking down The Strand, there was Rhodesia House. I walked in just to find out about it and in an hour and a half I was signed up.

Almost on a whim?

Yes

It sounded, as you say, like an adventure?

Yes

So how many were in your group that went out?

There must have been about twelve

Yes, and how did you travel there?

By steam boat, The Union Castle Line

Yes, where to?

Cape Town, and then up by train to Salisbury and then by donkey cart, a mule cart to depot.

So, having already been a cadet in the British police, was your training for the BSAP any shorter?

Oh no

So you still did your five months of training there?

(00:03:52) Oh yes

How did you find the equitation aspect of it?

Well, I'd done a little bit of riding as a kid, not a hell of a lot, and I was fined the most in my squad because I was the one thrown off the horse more often than anybody else.

But you got back on again?

Yes

After doing your five months training, you said that you were "sent out" of the urban areas as fast as possible?

Yes, I was transferred to Bulawayo from depot and I applied almost immediately to go to the district and about four months later I was transferred to Essexvale - Esigodini as it's known now.

Were any of your original group that came out from England with you? Or this was a very different...?

Yes, one was with me and he got transferred to Matopos which is next door to Esigodini or Essexvale. But unfortunately he was killed in a motorbike accident.

Quite soon afterwards?

Yes

How tragic

Yes

So what were your responsibilities at Essexvale?

To look after the horse, take it on patrol and look after the motorbike, take it on patrol. Go and deal with any investigation there was to be done and I think I was only there about six or eight months before I was temporarily transferred to foot and mouth cordons, cattle cordons at Mphoengs which was south of Plumtree on the Botswana border. I spent six months on cattle cordons which meant driving along a fixed line where there was special African police who were to stop the crossing of any stock. You could do nothing about the wildlife, of course, which would jump over and carry foot and mouth anyhow; but I used to have to patrol along there every day, take their food in, deal with any problems and generally run the cattle cordon and move it when necessary when the disease moved on.

So how long did you do that for?

(00:06:18) That was for six months

Yes and then?

And then I was transferred back to Essexvale and almost immediately on to near Nyamandhlovu just for a short while; and then they were short of staff at Tjolutjo, so I went there.

So this is all in the pre-UDI era?

Oh yes

What did you think of the political situation in Rhodesia?

To be quite honest, at that stage, when we arrived and in fact for the few years afterwards, I took no notice of the political situation because my whole time was taken up with either my police work which wasn't just eight hours a day. It was generally a damn sight more, but in those days you didn't worry about that and when I wasn't doing police work, I was enjoying myself. It was drinking with the boys and it was playing cards and dice and darts and maybe going out and doing a bit of hunting and fishing. One didn't really think about the political situation. It was only when '65 came along and the run up to that where Smith wanted to...because Zambia and Malawi had become independent and wanted also independence which was of course refused and that generated a lot of talk about it. But at that stage I wasn't a Rhodesian, I didn't have the vote, it didn't really matter very much. However, shortly after that, it must have been about '68, I became a Rhodesian citizen. I got my citizenship and it became a little bit more interesting from that point of view but in general, whether it was police here or police over there, one was not encouraged to get involved in politics other than by voting. You didn't discuss the situation because you had to keep an open mind about everything. I could see the arguments on both sides but when it came time to vote, I would very often vote the way I felt I should vote, so sometimes it was for Rhodesia Front but when they got a bit more "to the right", I voted for the more moderate party. You know, you've probably heard from other people but earlier on, certainly by the late sixties, early seventies there were in fact more blacks entitled to vote than there were whites.

But there was a split roll at that particular point?

Oh yes but I'm talking about when the roll came in, with basically the one roll which was on education and finance. There was an old couple living in the village where I was. They'd retired from the railways, he had no education or money; he didn't have the vote.

Really?

He was white and he didn't have the vote, whereas a couple of the policemen I was stationed with who had the service and the education; and certainly a (00:10:31) couple of store keepers I knew and a couple of black farmers, they had the education or the money, the value of property and they could vote.

But I'm intrigued by this, Chris: because the popular perception is that every white had the vote. That's the perception: every white in Rhodesia had the vote, had a privileged vote?

In the earlier days, yes, when there was a split vote. Yes, that was the case and in fact that did change once they brought in this single, virtually a single voters roll, but on education and monetary qualifications. It meant a number of what would be called "poor whites" lost their franchise.

In your experience, how large was the "poor white" community?

Not very big

Was it concentrated particularly around Bulawayo, or were there in fact also pockets in Salisbury? Or was it in the rural community?

No, not so much in the rural communities, although I did know a few who were running little stores out in the bush who wouldn't have made any money, but probably had the education. You see, in general, the whites did have the minimum education qualifications whereas a lot of the blacks didn't have because they'd left school, junior school virtually at fourteen/fifteen so they didn't have senior education. But then I could see, even when I got over there, I wasn't encouraged to learn the native language because...I wanted to, I was intending to, but every single person I met out in the bush who could have perhaps taught me, wanted to learn English so everybody spoke English to you. Virtually all my black policemen with one exception could speak English. I had a very old black policeman who joined in the 1930's called Handison and I had to have an interpreter when I was de-briefing him from an investigation because he couldn't speak English, but that was very rare.

Did you develop an understanding for Ndebele?

Yes, when I was at Tjolutjo, not the first time but the second time. The District Commissioner there was teaching us. He was a bit more enlightened than a lot of the DC's were and he was teaching his young whites Sindebele and we, in the police, could go across and attend these lessons. I learnt a little bit and in fact it came in eventually over the years. I remember years and years later when I left the police and I was working in the Casino; I was driving down to a forest area and a couple of old people were at the side of the road and I picked them up and gave them a lift. It was only when I dropped them off at the forestry headquarters that I realised that I'd been speaking to them in Sindebele and they'd been speaking to me in Sindebele and I'd understood everything they'd said and they'd understood everything I said. But don't ask me to say very much in Sindebele because it's virtually all gone; but I don't think it comes back.

Interesting

(00:14:17) Yes

So your first posting at Tjolutjo: you were in the uniformed branch of the police as a patrol officer still, or had you risen through the ranks?

Well no, at that time it was constable still: European constable and African constable.

Yes, so had the war started?

No, when I went back to Tjolutjo in '60...? When did the first operation...? '67 was the first incursion into Matabeleland. Operation Jackal I think it was and that was where we ran into the terrorism which wasn't prosecuted very heavily by them. At that stage they weren't seriously injuring and killing and raping the locals, and of course being a policeman, it was these actions of the freedom fighters/terrorists, whatever you like to call them, that interested me more because they were committing serious crimes against individuals. I wasn't concerned as much about their anti-government feelings.

So you weren't thinking about their motives? You were thinking about their actions?

Yes, more often than not

How did you regard them at the time? Did you see them as nationalists, even if you didn't agree with their motivations?

No, I saw them as criminals, murderers that needed to be arrested and put into jail.

So you saw this as criminal activity?

Yes

This was not political activity to you?

No, you see in 1963, that's when they banned NDP. We were called in to deal with that. We had to attend meetings, we had to arrest various people but it was mainly run by CID/Special Branch with the back-up of the police to give them back-up at that stage. I remember when a friend of mine told me when they picked up Banda in Gweru and transferred him up to Salisbury; he went with him and they were chatting and joking in the back of the vehicle. There was no animosity. I know Banda was Malawi, but at that stage it was still Federation and he was still fighting against or arguing against white rule. But I went through to a meeting in Filabusi. I sent there to see what went on and it was only thereafter that they decided that the speaker was to be arrested. Well, he was arrested, he wasn't giving any problems. I'll give you an example: during the war, I was stationed for a time up at Mount Darwin to do

patrolling duties in a tribal area, an African farming area. Now the squad... I (00:18:16) was there for, I think our tour of duty was for two months. The squad before who'd been there had been attacked with landmines, with bullets, that sort of thing. In the two months I was there, not a single incident against me and my men, and I put that down to the fact that the first day, I drove down to the business centre and there was a senior political figure running and owning the store there. I went to see him to introduce myself, to tell him I was patrolling the area and if he had any problems, to come and see me. This is the sort of thing I would do if I was on patrol anywhere else and he was highly surprised by my attitude; he actually shook my hand when I left and I had no problem there after. Even when I was then told to go and arrest him because Special Branch had picked up information about him passing stuff on to the terrorists who were coming through the area. I went to see him, I didn't just leap in there and grab him and handcuff him and drag him away. I said "look I'm sorry, I've received instructions to take you into Mount Darwin. Do you want to arrange to hand your keys over for the store and to get yourself a suitcase of stuff, and we can go through?". I gave him half an hour to get himself sorted out and he was very pleased with that. Now you could have the one attitude or you could have the other attitude and I felt that you could have a human attitude to doing police work, even if it was to deal with terrorism. I accept the fact that after one incursion into the Karoi area where one of my police reservists was killed and they'd attacked a couple of farms. I turned my back when I saw somebody in CID beating up one of these people. I just walked away because at that stage I was feeling very anti because of their illegal activities of going round murdering people and raping women. That sort of thing which you know, when you had to go to a kraal because they'd been attacked, ordinary black people who weren't on anybody's side and all the women and kids had been forced into a hut and the hut was set on fire and the door wired up, you had no feeling for these bastards at all. It might have been different, they'd taken all the men and the older boys into the bush and they shot them all. Alright, they shot them but then they put the rest into a hut, wire the door up and burn it down. It was disgusting and I had no feeling for them thereafter.

When did you first encounter such brutality?

Basically in the Mount Darwin area when I was up there. Not in the area I was patrolling, but in other areas particularly in the tribal area down in the valley. And then when I'd come back to Karoi and then transferred off to Banket in the tribal area in Sinoia, and north of my area in Sipolilo that had been going on, I hadn't been personally involved but friends of mine in the police had actually dealt with it and had meetings and we discussed this.

Did you ask yourselves why are they doing this?

We knew why they were doing it because Nkomo was not prepared to go the legal route, which he could have done, to form a legal political party to approach the blacks who had the vote to encourage them to vote for him, because he knew they wouldn't. A lot of the blacks, particularly those who had businesses weren't prepared to go the route of following Nkomo because

they could see things would not pan out too well business wise. Years later (00:23:14) when I was running a casino at Vic Falls. virtually all my staff were black: the senior ones had been brought up during the terrorist years and we had a lot of open discussion in the staff room or over the counter, times when we weren't busy and we would discuss what went on and what happened to their fathers and uncles, and if they were older, to their brothers and cousins. There was no good feeling for the opposition because they were only interested in violence. They were happy to...we would go along together to vote because at that stage I was still allowed to vote; it was only taken away in the late '90's and we'd stand in the same queue and chat and joke and vote and talk about the old days.

Going back to the late '60's and the early '70's, what you're describing to me then was ZIPRA? Was it violence in Matabeleland attacking the peasant population in Matabeleland?

Yes, there was at that stage less in Matabeleland than there was in Mashonaland and Manicaland which was ZANLA. So ZIPRA, we didn't meet up very much with ZIPRA until the mid to late '70's when they had got themselves into the Plumtree and Mphoengs, Filabusi, Belingwe areas. When I was transferred to Victoria Falls as the officer in charge, I was a chief inspector then; we had a bunch of terrorists in the area. I had been up in very very early years when they had first come in and I was sent up there to help try and track them down to ground, but when I went back there although the SAP had been up there for quite a number of years, that hadn't stopped these people moving in. In fact they'd attacked the SAP camp and I reintroduced...because my first trip to my sub-station in the tribal area, I'd gone in a Land Rover in police uniform. All my accompanying vehicles with police reserve in were all in camouflage with guns and I could see their vehicle ahead going past a group of youngsters standing around a bore hole. They just stood there sullenly watching this vehicle go past and but when I drove past in police uniform they said "ha, polisa, polisa", and smiled and waved (all of these kids?). I thought "this has got to change. So I then introduced all the police patrolling in police uniform. We still had to carry guns because we had to safeguard ourselves, but sitting in the vehicle, you don't want camouflage, you're not getting camouflaged in a vehicle. That made such a difference with the exception of one area which we knew were anti-Police.

So that was applied countrywide?

No, no, this was just in Victoria Falls

Just Vic Falls, ok

I suggested it for other areas of Wankie district to the OC, but I don't know whether it was ever done.

Another question, just going back to the late '60's early '70's: I've asked you "did you talk about why are they doing this?" Did you also talk

about how are they doing this? How do human beings cross a...break (00:27:49) such taboos. because using violence against people in kraals broke so many taboos.

It was assumed that because... well, I certainly assumed that because all the terrorists were backed by communists, either Russians for ZIPRA or the Chinese for ZANLA. That it was the communist way of doing things that human beings had no...

No value?

No value. That the political state was the over-riding thing and we assumed that this was it.

So what you're saying there is an equation that you then made with communism and brutality?

Yes

Had you read any Marx? Had you read anything like that?

No, it's just what I'd picked up from all the things I'd read: news, seen on films whenever.

Rhodesian news? Rhodesian films? Or the news and films outside, that were made outside Rhodesia?

Made outside, because most of the time we were in the bush we didn't get television. We were too far out to get television so we didn't see it. Generally we tuned into things like Radio LM for our music. We just didn't get much in the way of news on. I suppose we tuned into RBC to get the daily news but then that was about the lot.

Did you see RBC as putting out the government line or did you see it as being relatively independent?

I suppose putting out the government line because there was nobody else to put any other line. I do know, I don't know if you heard this from any other senior policemen, but in the mid '70's, the minister of law and order, minister of home affairs he'd be called, Lardner-Burke, wanted to bring out a law to stop blacks drinking in white areas. Now we didn't as such have white areas but he'd decided that this was the case. There would be white areas for drinking after 7.00 pm and he approached the commissioner for a list of those cases or all the cases where there'd been problems in licensed premises between blacks and whites. The commissioner came back to him and said "nothing. Between whites and coloureds and coloureds and blacks at Queens Hotel in Salisbury, yes. But that's the only place". In other words, there's no need to bring out any legislation; so Lardner Burke totally ignored him and brought this legislation out. We were instructed by the commissioner, the

senior officers, inspectors and above that there would be no prosecutions in terms of this law.

(00:31:19) So that was the minister for home affairs, his racist views, dictating his perception...?

He and one or two others were very right wing and they pulled Smith further right. Smith was very much in the middle, the centre line, as was Mugabe when he started. He was centre line of his party, and he was pulled further left by his left wing which is why he is like he is now; and Smith was pulled further right and lost a lot of backing because of it. I knew him as a person and I liked him as a person, but I didn't latterly agree with his views.

Chris, in the 1970's, Fred Punter had described Rhodesia as "sliding into war" and that the BSAP were at the front line of this because it was seen as criminal activity. Would that accord with how you remember the war developing?

Yes, you see the police were the first line of defence officially because we were the senior service (thing?). However, I would have never turned round to an Army captain or a major and said "no, I will run the war effort in this district". I'd let them run it. I dealt with the crime and we got on very well at Victoria Falls when I had Army, all sorts of Army up there and police and my staff would guard the bridge until it became obvious that the other side were going to send their tanks over, in which case the Army then took over my positions at the bridge.

Did you see the conflict in the 1970's as a civil war? Or did you continue in believing that this was an externally supported deviant element?

Yes basically because we weren't fighting the local Africans who themselves were getting thumped up a lot more than the security forces had done. There was no doubt that there was beatings and other things that were carried out by security forces against the population, particularly if they were so damned scared about saying anything and they wouldn't say anything to anybody.

So did the authorities turn a blind eye to that, or was that licensed? The beating was part of a, shall we say, a range of...?

No, I wouldn't say it was licensed. I would certainly have reported any member of the security forces for attacking civilian locals.

But you said earlier that...

That was a terrorist I saw being beaten up.

So you made a distinction between the two?

Yes, he was...this was a funny little group called FROLIZI (**FR**ont for the **L**iberation of **Z**imbabwe). I don't know if you've ever heard of them?

I've heard of FROLIZI.

(00:34:36) Right ok, this is the one and only incursion into the Karoi area that they made before they fell apart and were absorbed by the other side, Their only win was the fact that they killed one of my police reservists right in front of my eyes and nearly killed me because the bullets actually made my...

Parted your hair? So what happened in this incursion?

They had attacked a farm, attacked a store but although they had shot some of the locals, the woman store owner and her two children were just told to go. They weren't attacked which surprised me but we had a battle with them later; they attacked some people in the tribal lands and some of them were eventually picked up, arrested and although those particular people hadn't carried out any, as far as we were aware, any vicious unnecessary attacks on the civilian population, the very fact that you didn't really tell the difference. You know, he hasn't got a button on saying he's FROLIZI; he's ZIPRA/ZANLA. They were all following the same route, coming from the outside of the country into the country to cause chaos and I'm afraid they were all tarred with the same brush, if I can put it that way.

How far do you think the war created a sense of Rhodesian identity?

I don't know whether the war created it, but the fact that Britain refused to give independence to Rhodesia - although at that stage the plan was that more and more blacks would be given the full vote and they would be brought in over a period of ten or fifteen years into being able to run things for themselves. As it showed when they took over in 1980, half of them patently had no expertise; it was probably the lack of education of course. But we would get people into senior positions in the police force, having to be put there who had no idea on how to run the admin of the police force and to do anything that a senior person would be able to do or should be able to do. Things started falling apart because of it and the same with government. It's one of those things that if you educate somebody then you can bring them up to a better life and to be able to do more and more, but you can't expect somebody who hasn't got financial knowledge to have financial responsibility.

Well, there were enormous tensions within ZANLA and ZAPU between as you say, the educated type and those whose education had been incredibly disrupted, who had been either forcibly or had volunteered to fight and who didn't have the same level of education.

You see, I had one senior member of the casinos who had been brought up throughout that whole period. He'd done schooling. Now it was always said that, by The Guardian, that the blacks couldn't have a senior education. If they showed promise, they went through. If their parents were too poor to put them through, there would be assistance and one of my managers in the casinos had come up that way. He had shown promise at school; he'd gone right the way through senior school, taken his 'O' levels, his GCE's and he'd made good for himself because he and his family had pushed him. They

hadn't sat back and said "oh we can't do it, oh it's too hard" but I know that his (00:39:48) parents had started off basically what you call the right way. They wouldn't speak a native language at home. Half the youngsters in my casino in the eighties could hardly speak an African language because they'd been brought up to speak English at home so they would learn, they'd be able to...The girls for example, there were four or five of them and they'd all been to a convent in Harare and had been taught by English speaking Nuns. They hated going back to their tribal roots because it meant they had to straighten their hair, they had to learn how to speak the language, they had to kneel to all the males and they only took the end of the food that was left after the males had finished eating and they thought this was dreadful.

Well, it was, as you say, emancipation from gendered, social roots, as well as from a white dominated government originally, for those African women. I had asked you whether the war created a sense of Rhodesian patriotism? You didn't feel it did? What do you think did create a sense of Rhodesian identity then?

Smith's pushing of independence for Rhodesia, I think, more than anything else. The war itself caused a lot of hardships to ordinary people. It didn't put them off the idea of independence, but I don't think the war itself, I personally don't feel the war itself engendered any patriotism.

I just wondered if it meant that laager mentality that had been instilled through UDI: the imposition of sanctions, a sense of Rhodesia against the world and then with the escalating war. If there was also a sense of a tight community?

Salisbury, yes. Salisbury was a tight community. They didn't even know what happened over their back fences. Half the people living up there with servants didn't even know where the servants came from, had no interest in the servants. I can tell you that in Karoi, the first farm that was attacked by terrorists and this was a full blown attack on the farm, we knew that that farm would be attacked probably first because the owner only paid his staff when he felt like paying them. His wife didn't even know where the compound was and had shown no interest in a woman's club to encourage them into cooking and to sewing and that sort of thing which a lot of white farmers' wives had. This farmer, he would go off to town, he would thrash it up in the club, he'd forget to get the money for the wages "oh I'll go in next week"; well, of course the employees wanted their wages then and there and there was...

A degree of settling scores then?

Yes, in that case. The first white farmer attacked was at Mount Darwin. I thought of his name recently, I've forgotten it now, but he was a typical white highlander from Kenya type, you know...

Were there many of those?

(00:43:51) No thank goodness but this was his mentality and he got attacked, double barrel name, dreadful fellow and his farm was burnt. The farmhouse was burnt down and he got away to the neighbour and bugger me, the neighbour was attacked because he was staying there. Th neighbour was alright but because this bloke, I think it began with C, a double barrelled name, but he was the first white farmer attacked in Mount Darwin area and because he'd moved into the farm next door and was being looked after there, they then attacked that.

Did you ever think at any point in the 1970's, "the writing's on the wall here. We have to either go for a political settlement, or leave"? Did you consider leaving?

No I didn't consider leaving at all. I could see we would have to go for some form of political settlement and in fact in the middle of the seventies, '77, the then commissioner of police went against the government and against the minister, again, the same damn minister, and he brought in blacks at patrol officer level.

That was his initiative?

Yes it was not wanted by the government but he said, in effect, "get stuffed, I'm doing it" and of the first blacks brought in at patrol officer level when they came out of depot, two were sent to me at Victoria Falls and I dealt with them like I dealt with any of the others. I'll tell you this, it doesn't always reflect good on me but it does reflect on the general attitude to having policemen doing their job properly. One of my little black chaps was on duty one evening and he went up to the pub, one of the hotels, and he took a pistol with him. Now we weren't armed around town; we had no authority to be armed around town. He decided he was going to stick a pistol in his pocket and he waved it around.

Showing off?

Yes, I got into my office the next day and I closed the door and I grabbed him by the throat and I slammed him against the door and told him his fortune. "How dare you lay your hands on me? You're only doing it because I'm black" I said "walk down the passageway lad, go and ask some questions and come back and apologise". So he went down the passageway, he walked into one office and said to the white policeman "has the boss ever hit you?" "yes" he said. Went to the next office "has the boss ever hit you?" "yes", they were lying but he came back and apologised. I never had any more problems with him and he eventually became an inspector and he was kicked out because he was a Matabele and by that time, Mugabe's bunch didn't want Matabeles in the police.

Chris, what did you think of the process over independence, '79/'80? Had you decided to stay in the BSAP? Had you decided to stay in Zim?

(00:47:25) Oh yes, I thought it was a total British cock-up and in fact my pension of course which I don't get, let's face it, if it was being paid at the same rate as it was when they stopped it, I'd be getting a quarter of a farthing a year. But the pensions were verbally guaranteed by that excuse of a senior member of the British government who went out there and who talked/spoke to all the sides and sorted things out; and he verbally said "our pensions would be guaranteed". They fell right back on that as usual. I'm not complaining because I'm being looked after all right here but I decided to stay on.

When did you decide to leave?

A combination of things. My marriage fell apart and I got divorced

Do you think that was a product of the war?

Oh yes, yes. There were certain things going on at Victoria Falls that I knew was going on, on the other side. The impending attack by ZIPRA Army with tanks and rockets and the usual thing and I knew that was going on, I couldn't say anything and I couldn't even send my family away.

How was that stopped? I know that the Rhodesian security forces blew up the bridges which meant...?

No, they packed the Falls bridge with explosives ready to set it off if necessary and I sent out my staff, my police reservists and the police blokes to patrol the river frontage. I would go out myself at night in the boat making it very obvious that I knew the river backward, and I could see what was going on, they could expect me at any time. Because the idea was to send a large group over onto our bank who would then go round and hit the bridge guard from behind.

So what stopped them? What stopped it?

Don't know, but they didn't do it

I know they didn't

I just hope that it was our actions on making it obvious that we knew that...

Nkomo says in his memoirs that he reckons that the British Secret Service leaked it to the Rhodesians who then mined the bridges.

No it was the Zambian police

Yes I think it was a rather different route

We still had a telephone line going across to Zambia, to Livingstone and we would regularly 'phone across and speak to the police and CID over there and they would regularly tell us what was going on. We used to swap accused: if

we picked up an accused person from Zambia or if they picked up somebody (00:50:49) from here we wanted, we would meet in the middle of the bridge, guns from both sides pointing at us and hand over.

So you're talking about low level constant co-ordination between Rhodesian CID and Zambian CID?

Yes and the uniformed branches

And the uniformed branches?

Yes, it was only done there at that point with a very few from either side but it was done, we had the contact. We were told...

That's 1979/1980?

Yes but even before that when the first terrorist attack in '72. '71/'72 I went up to the Falls and we knew that there was a terrorist trying to get across the river because the Zambian police had 'phoned us to tell us this was going on and we were able to, we were going to pick him up alive but they decided to run and dive in the water and try and get away and got shot.

How did you find coming back to this country after so long away?

We had intended dying in Zimbabwe and getting buried there. There was no intention of moving away but it was made very obvious that we had to go because my wife's salary and my two pensions was not enough to pay for the medical aid. And we had money outside the country but we knew we couldn't...the older you get, the more medical you want and we couldn't afford to stay on and of course you weren't allowed to emigrate without authority so I had to dump everything. I think I filled up my car twice (with property) and drove it down on holiday to South Africa and left it there which we then sent over. A total of less than a cubic metre of stuff, we had to decide what we were going to take and what we were not going to take so that top shelf (of books) is what we brought.

When did you come back?

In 2005

How did you find this country besides the weather?

You know what struck me more than anything else was the fact that I'd dealt with political thugs in Zimbabwe and I found you've had the same over here, the unions. I couldn't get a job because I was over sixty. I could get a part time job but on pension credit, if you get a part time job, that comes off your pension credit and I couldn't get a part time job that paid more than my pension credit. I couldn't get a full time job because the unions say "no, you're over sixty, you can get a pension, you can't have a full time job" and

they won't listen to anything else and they stop the firms from doing it, which is illegal.

(00:53:55) It is illegal

But this government won't do it because it's the unions, nobody will take any action but both Tesco's in Newmarket and what's the firm? The firm that does the coils, Beehive Coils, they were going to employ me. Well, it was suggested they employ me by a friend who works there and the manager in the office said "we can't do it, the unions will refuse to allow us to take him on and this is the reason why".

Any other things that particularly struck you besides, in your view, ridiculously restrictive employment legislation?

No because I didn't bother thereafter. I was getting more money by pension credit so why work?

How about socially in this country? Had it changed out of all recognition from...?

We used to come over every two or three years but it was to family, we had few friends over here as such. We only had family and their friends. We didn't really notice the social conditions over here and of course no, we can't really afford to go pub thrashing. If I want a drink, I'll have it at home, it's cheaper.

How did you come back here, rather than Essex?

Well, because my mother was living at Newmarket

So when did she return?

Oh she was only out there for a couple of months every year

Oh I see, I'm sorry I thought she had in fact emigrated to...

No, she would just come out for a holiday, would work for three months with the government as a pharmacist at one of their (hospitals)...She'd have seen more of... Zimbabwe than I have and then she'd spend a month with us and then come back and she had a summer-only job with Boots here.

How much does Zimbabwe stay "home" to you?

It's not. We knew at the time when we left, we know there's a warrant of arrest for me out because I didn't repatriate the money I got for my house so that Mugabe's wife could spend it in Bond Street and it's just as well we weren't stopped at the airport because our bras and underpants were full of notes but we have cut ties. Here we don't look upon it as "home" because that is over, even if things suddenly got better in the next year, Mugabe died and all his

cohorts were arrested and hung, it still wouldn't get good enough for somebody like us.

(00:56:46) One last question, how important is the BSAP to you as a way of staying in touch?

I find it interesting to stay in touch but again I don't attend many of the...meetings or any of the things going on because I really can't afford it. I like to keep in touch, I keep in touch with particular friends of mine overseas.

The internet's a godsend in that way

Yes it is. We've got a lot of friends over here from Rhodesia, we still make contact with friends particularly in Victoria Falls, both black and white and we had a little physiotherapist in Victoria Falls who was starting out on his own having come out of University. He wanted to come over and get a job here and I loaned him some money because he needed payment in pounds so I gave him a cheque to pay for his... registration over here and he paid me back in US. Now we still stay in contact; he's working in South London in a hospital there and his wife is a teacher and is working in a school over here and they're doing very well and they go back occasionally to see their families.

And they remit money?

Yes and they are the new Zimbabwean, one is one tribe and one is the other and that makes such a difference when the two tribes marry. Three of my senior casino staff had crossed the tribal line and Matabele married Mashona and it made all the difference. They had a totally different outlook on life, refreshing.

Chris, thank you very much indeed for talking to me.

End of interview