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David Lemon

Grew up two years in India. Parents moved to Northern Rhodesia, went to boarding school in Southern Rhodesia and Kenya. Left Kenya for UK between 1964 and 1970. Returned to Rhodesia 1971 to join BSAP. Then joined Support Unit. Left Support Unit for Zimbabwe Police 1982(?). Left Zimbabwe for UK 1985(?)

This is Annie Bramley interviewing David Lemon on Tuesday the 16th of December 2008. Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed. Would you perhaps start by talking about how you came to be in Southern Rhodesia, and your family background leading up to that?

My father was an Army Officer in India. He was born in Barry in Wales, which I didn't know until a couple of years ago. He spent all his life in Australia and married my mother who was born in India from Scottish parents. When I was about two they left India; that was when Independence was coming there. They headed for Africa and somehow ended up in Northern Rhodesia to start with and I went to boarding school in Southern Rhodesia from a very early age.

Where did they arrive in Northern Rhodesia?

In Luanshya and then they went to Mufulira, both on the copper belt. My very first term of schooling at the age of about six was at Mufulira junior school, which I went to look at a couple of years ago and it's still beautifully kept. It didn't ring any bells though; the whole town was decrepit, but this little school was still going. Then I went off to Southern Rhodesia to be a boarding school man.

What year was that, when they had first gone out?

I was born at the very end of '44 so probably '46/'47.

And which school were you at in Southern Rhodesia?

I went to St Michael's prep school and then to St George's College.

And where were they?

In what is now Harare, Salisbury in those days. They wanted me to have a classical education, I don't know if it's done me any good at all!

Can you tell me a bit about what your schooling was like; what other sort of children were you schooled with and what sort of backgrounds were their families from?

St George's is probably the Rhodesian equivalent of an English public school. It's run by the Jesuits and your parents had to be reasonably wealthy to get

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there so I presume mine were. Didn't leave me anything when they died, but the school was run very much on public school lines with Latin, Classical Greek and a huge emphasis on sport. I went there as a seven year old with pink cheeks, curly hair and a name like Lemon. I looked like a little girl, much to my disgust but my mother's joy (00:03:11). It's not a good way to go to boarding school, particularly when your parents are a thousand kilometres away because I got bullied left, right and centre. Until Father Myerscough – who later on was involved in the war, at Musame Mission when the Missionaries were all shot except him – said to me "I'm going to teach you how to box." Within seven months I got in the school boxing team and then I wasn't bullied any more, even though I was still just as much of a wosse as ever, but they just said "oh, he's a boxer." So Father Myerscough was a good guy but the school was very much sport and classics orientated.

And you said that your family were a thousand kilometres away. How did you travel to school?

By aeroplane. At the beginning of term we would fly down there. Some of the boys came by train. I only went on the train once and that was in the very early days and I got such a hard time that I pleaded to be allowed to fly. Northern Rhodesia down to Southern Rhodesia was probably about a thousand kilometres.

Was that a hard time from the other school children going by train?

From the other kids. As I say, I was a very pretty little boy. It's changed now.

And what was that like being distanced from your family? Were you back every holiday?

No, some of my holidays I spent with a family in Harare – Salisbury in those days. They're still there, or the two girls are there. There were two girls and two boys and we all grew up together. When I go home I still stay with them in the same house. They are closer to me as sisters than my own sisters are. My sisters live in South Africa. The two boys now, one boy is still there but they don't talk to each other any more and the other one has gone to Australia. But I spent two out of every three school holidays there. I'd go home for Christmas holidays, which there, as opposed to here, are the long holidays. It worked out alright. To start with I used to cry myself to sleep at night; but once you get used to boarding school it's lovely.

Once you learnt to box?

Once I learnt to box. And I've always been good at sport, cricket and rugby and all that; so as soon as the other boys realised that, I was left alone and life was quite fun.

I guess you have to find your space before you can battle on.

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(00:06:11) And my two sons, I keep telling them how lucky they were because they were born ugly. They've actually improved.

Also can you tell me a bit about the kind of values that school was instilling in you at the time?

We had a lot of colonial history, obviously of our own country plus the Empire as such. We were taught that the British Empire was a wonderful thing and in many ways it was. It was very much old-fashioned schooling in as much that if you passed an adult, you took your hat off and manners were all important. Elders had to be respected and in this day and age I suppose it's really comical but to us it was serious. Funnily enough, although we regarded ourselves as a school slightly above all the rest because we were the only private school in the country in those days, my sons went to government school and they got much the same sort of upbringing, twenty or thirty years later. It's possibly still the norm there, I don't know, but it was very much good manners and respect for your elders.

So it really set a high standard for the country to follow in future years?

Yes, I think they were deliberately setting as high a standard as possible. It's why white Rhodesians always figured themselves to be something special. It instilled self-respect as well as everything else. Rightly or wrongly, it works.

And were you aware of racial segregation at the time?

No, we just accepted the fact that it was an all-white school. In fact it was the first school in Rhodesia that integrated completely, but when I was there it was all white. And yet when I went home, I had no white companions; all my playmates were black. From a very early age I'd been brought up with a black nanny and all the kids around me were black and I actually missed them when I was at school. It sounds stupid but the black African lives on what they call mealie-meal, which is a stodgy porridge. 'Herself' (my wife Lace) said that it tastes like wallpaper paste when I made her some. I had a terribly free and easy life as a little fellow and in my school holidays I was just allowed to roam and mealtimes would come and go, I'd have my meals with the staff. I spoke to them in their language, not mine. Then I went to boarding school and everybody around me was white.

What was that like, shifting from one extreme to the other? Did you feel confused or puzzled by it, or did one become more comfortable than the other?

At that age Annie you adapt really easily and I think when I was at school I didn't think about my black friends; and when I was at home I didn't think about my white friends.

It's survival I suppose?

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(00:10:36) Well it wasn't survival as such, it was just enjoyment. You just go with who's there and like I say, most of my school friends were not really true friends. A lot of them came from the towns and the cities – in this country they'd just be small towns, but to us they were cities – and they didn't think like I did: To me, if I'm walking along the road and I see a mark, I think, "oh, I wonder what made that." I was like a little savage really at home, and then I'd have to go and put on my tie and my uniform and all the rest of it and I'd be a very polite young St George's boy. It was a good grounding I think.

So were many people from rural areas?

Yes, I'm being hard on them because there were a lot of farmer's kids and most of them lived the same sort of life that I did because again, they would have had very few white friends.

But are you saying that you encountered another sort of person, who was not so aware of what was happening around him?

A lot of my school friends couldn't understand why I would bunk out of school and go off into the bush. They'd say "well what do you do?" and I'd say "well go and sit under a tree," which to me seemed a natural way of doing things; whereas they would bunk off and go to the cinema in town.

Enjoyment from different things.

Yes.

And you mentioned that you spoke a local language at the time?

Bear in mind that my first few years were in Northern Rhodesia, so I spoke Chinyanja and Chibemba. Later on I learnt Chishona and I did my last two years of schooling in Kenya, so I had to learn Swahili.

So you did learn a lot?

Yes and even now I can get by.

But presumably that would have been discouraged at school would it?

No, no.

Or it was just not spoken?

I'm just trying to think if I've got it the right way round. In Rhodesia, the rural white man, 90% of them would speak the local language. In Kenya it was the other way round, it was frowned upon to speak the local language because it wasn't quite the done thing. They would speak to you in English; you wouldn't speak to them in their language. But to me I was just brought up among them so I spoke to them in whichever came in handy. Our (00:13:39) conversations would have probably been quite interesting to listen to because there were

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English words thrown in here, Chishona and Chibemba. It was an amalgamation, but we understood each other.

You mentioned that you spent your last two years of schooling in Kenya, so when was that?

I left school in '62 I think and it would have been in '60/'61. My parents were splitting up and the old man went up to Kenya and then the old lady followed him. So I was dragged along and I met my first wife in Kenya. I spent about four years there, two years after school. I was going to be an accountant, God help me and I got this job…what do they call it? I was an articled clerk in this firm in Nairobi and she was the boss' secretary.

So did your parents move to Nairobi then?

Yes, but then the old man disappeared somewhere and he came back to Nairobi and stayed there for a long time; and the old lady went down to South Africa. It was all horribly messy.

And you were at school in that period?

No, that was after I left school. As I say I did my last two years there, which was quite fun because it was also a private school. But the standard of most things at St George's in Rhodesia was a hell of a lot higher than it was at St Mary's in Kenya. So I just sailed through everything, it was too easy. Even in Latin, I was further advanced than the guys of my own age in Nairobi, so it was great. But I left first because my girlfriend, as she was, her parents who were out there from here on some contract or other, were going back. They were going to drive down to Cape Town, so either she or her father said "why don't you come down to Cape Town with us?" And I said "yes, ok," and went down to Cape Town and managed to get a boat across to here. I thought, well, "I'll become a teacher, go and teach Latin and mathematics" and all these funny things. And I became a cop.

This is when you arrived in the UK?

Yes, I am actually an illegal immigrant because it was 1963 and I arrived off the boat and gave my passport to immigration. The bloke said "what are you here for?" and I said, "well I want to get married to this lady and live my life in Britain." I didn't know what Britain was really. They told me it was cold but on that particular day the sun was shining and I was in my shorts and he looked at my passport and he said "where's your work permit?" I forget what they called it in those days, but it was a document I was supposed to have. I said, "I don't need that, it's a British passport." He said "No, you weren't born here, that's a commonwealth passport so you've got to have this thing." Fortunately for me that law had only come out about six months previously.

They'd just started being quite strict on immigration.

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(00:17:04) They'd only just started it and I said to him "what do I do? Get back on the boat?" He said "oh no, for God's sake, get through." And he just stamped my…and it couldn't happen nowadays. But I hang on to my British passport now because it's a proper one. And we also had two budgies, which somebody had given us …

That you'd brought with you?

…from Cape Town. And this guy having dealt with my passport said, "what are those?" I said "they're budgies coming with me, they're mine." He said "I know what you're going to tell me, you're going to tell me you've got no Veterinary certificate." I said "what's that?" and he said "oh, for God's sake, get out of my sight, get through, go!" So I'm an illegal immigrant.

You can't imagine that now, can you?

Oh no, I'd be straight out again.

So you took a boat from Cape Town?

From Cape Town, yes, it's the only way to travel. In those days it was a cheap way to travel.

You mentioned that you hadn't been to Britain: At the time, where did you feel that your "home" was?

Rhodesia, it's always been "home." Even when I was in Nairobi I still thought of Salisbury as my sort of home city.

So it was Salisbury not Northern Rhodesia; it was where you were schooled, rather than where your parents were?

Yes. I don't know why, I've never actually thought about that but yes, it was the schooling possibly that made it home, even though they later moved down there and I was still at school when they moved down there. I should really think of (?) as home, but I don't.

So they moved down to…?

They moved down to a little place called Mangula. It was called Mangula in those days, Mhangura now; and the old man worked on the mine there. I haven't thought of these things for years, but they still left me as a boarder, by then I'd become my own person. So I don't know why I think of Rhodesia as "home" but it's always been "home."

(00:19:38) **That makes sense if your family were there at the time and you'd been schooled there.**

Though when I started off at school they were up north. But in those days it was Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia so it was all just Rhodesia

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basically to us. There'd be great conflicts among the boarders between the north and the south.

And which did you fit in with?

Oh, then I stuck up for the north. Confusing isn't it?

It's really interesting. At that time in the sixties, did you get a sense of whether many people were leaving Kenya,?

I honestly wouldn't have known

Because you had left Kenya in '63, so that was around independence?

Kenyan independence, yes it was one of the reasons I left. It's something that's difficult to imagine in this part of the world but with independence looming the whole mood of the populace was just "doom and gloom and we're all going to die." I don't know that that had any effect on me leaving, I was in love, but it was just before independence and off we went.

So were many people doing the same?

In Rhodesia they also had huge political problems because of arguments about independence but I think most stayed put at that stage. It was only after UDI that they all started with "things are going to be different."

So tell me a bit about your time in the UK and how that led to you going back to Rhodesia, as it would have been by that time.

I came here, as I said, to become a teacher and I went to St Paul's college in Cheltenham. They said, "yes we'll take you, but it'll have to be next year" because this was just before the intake were due to come in and they were full up. I joined a bank in Cheltenham because I've always been good at maths and I thought the only thing I can do is add up numbers. I've never been so bored in my life. My first wife and I eventually did get married, we were both very young and we had a little flat opposite police headquarters in Cheltenham. One day, I can remember it was a winter's day, I came back after work and I thought I can't go on like this and I went into Police headquarters and said "look, I'm married, will you take me even though I'm only 19 or 20?" They said "yes, if you pass all the tests," they gave me a form to fill out, I had an interview with the Chief Constable and a few weeks later I had one of these funny hats on my head, which I honestly thought only existed in Noddy books, truly. One of my abiding memories in life is looking over the side of the ship as it came (00:23:12) into Southampton and seeing a Bobby there. I said to my first wife "I didn't think those hats existed, I thought they were Enid Blyton inventions."

Well you said that you were an illegal immigrant, but the whole environment sounds quite alien to you?

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For me it was like somebody landing on Mars, everything was totally different, even the weather. After that first sunny day it went back to normal.

You said the only things you knew about were the weather and so on but did you have much awareness of the wider world when you were in Rhodesia or Kenya?

No, we were and still are, those who stayed there, a very insular society. From here I travelled quite a lot, wandering around looking, seeing what was going on in the world and I learnt. But when I first arrived here in July '63, I was a total innocent. If you put me in the bush and ask me to track an elephant or something I'd be in my element, but here I haven't really improved.

So what was it like having to police a country that you felt quite alien in?

The only difficulty to start with, on my first night on the beat in Cheltenham – awfully posh Cheltenham in those days – I had to go with an older Bobby and I gave a ticket to a guy who, I don't know whether it's still an offence but in those days it was an offence to park within the studs on a Zebra crossing. So I gave him a ticket and the older Bobby said to me "give him a ticket but he won't have to pay it." I said "why not?" and he said, "because he's a friend of the boss." And sure enough nobody paid it. So that, to a certain extent, taught me well. It's not so much different from Africa. If you're in trouble in Africa you hand over a few shillings and you're alright. It was obviously the same here. But I adapted and because I had an accent everybody took the mickey out of me and I quite enjoyed that. On the 11th of November 1965 I was stationed in Filton, down near Bristol and I was on a 2 to 10 shift. I came back for tea or something and my car, which was a good old Ford Popular which had cost me £2.00 – believe it or not, the tax cost me more than the car – was totally decorated, it was like one of these "just married" things only this said "rebel, Rhodesian rebel, treason" and all that. But it was all in fun and I scowled and shouted and they all laughed but it made me think of home, which up to then I hadn't really missed too much. I played a hell of a lot of cricket, I did my boxing, I had a new wife and a new job and life was alright. But then I got transferred down this way, to Stroud and this area where I live now was my last patch because there used to be a police station down the main road, which was where I lived. I was a village Bobby and it was fun, I played a lot of cricket and didn't do much work. But I was bored and I kept hearing from home about terrorist incursions and blokes being killed.

Where were you hearing this? On the news or from friends and family that were still there?

(00:27:18) No, not really from there, more from here; we had no internet or anything in those days. I kept looking at my kids and my eldest son went to Brimscombe School and then I think the school here in Chalford Hill and I kept saying to Missy, my first wife, "do you know this is not growing up, what these kids are having…they've got nowhere to run around." And she missed Kenya where she'd grown up. Eventually I said "come on, let's go back." The only

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way I could go back was getting accepted by the BSAP, so I wrote to them and eventually they sent me a ticket and suddenly I was there. I did ask them before I went, "what happens if you don't want me when I get there?" because I had no interview or anything.

So they paid for your passage, is that right?

They paid for my flight, they paid for a hotel, my wife and family were following later and everything was paid for including their air flights. They'd never even seen me and I can remember arriving in Salisbury airport, being driven into town and taken to police headquarters for an interview. Now I'd been on a plane for 24 hours, I'm unshaven, I'm dirty, smelly and I sat in front of these three senior officers with all their flash gear and thought "oh God." But I suppose they couldn't afford to send me back.

Take it or leave it.

Yes, so suddenly I was a copper again. When you read that [referring to book], my police career is full of things like that. How I've gone through life I don't know but it's all been totally by chance.

So were you aware of the BSAP from the UK, or from before going out?

Yes, when I left school I actually applied to them and they said again that they would pay my fare from Nairobi down to Salisbury, which wasn't so much in those days. But I could only join as a cadet and I didn't want to be a cadet, I wanted to be a cop." So I forgot all about it and once trouble started I thought well the only thing I can do is apply to them again.

So what age were you then? What was the minimum age that you had to be to be an officer?

Nineteen I think, but I'd done seven years here. I was about 26/27 at that stage but when I first wrote to them from Nairobi I was seventeen, maybe even sixteen. I don't think they were too interested and I wasn't interested in being a snotty nosed cadet.

So at that time they weren't doing conscription; or were they?

(00:30:22) No, they had quite a steady stream of people coming over.

And did you need to join for a minimum amount of time?

Three years.

So presumably you did that?

Yes, and more.

And your family then followed?

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Yes, they came out about two months later.

And had you by then started training; can you tell me a bit about your training?

You can read it all in there [referring to book] but you're supposed to do six months' training. I was there with a policeman from the Metropolitan force here and we were both older than all the recruits so we didn't have all the rigmarole. The BSAP are a colonial cavalry regiment so there's lot of polishing horse hooves and the like and I don't like horses and escaped most of that. And we did what they called law and police, which was sitting in an office being lectured on the law, which was basically much the same as the law here. So it was all very easy and in three and a half weeks instead of six months I got sent out to my first station.

Was that because you were experienced?

To a certain extent. It was also because they didn't quite know what to do with us. We were both a lot older than our fellow recruits and to keep us away from the rest of the squad just meant that they had to take another instructor to look after two of us. So we were wasting their time and everything. We both knew the law so they said "come on, get out," which was wonderful. Six months in that place would have killed me.

That was in Salisbury?

In Morris depot they called it, in the middle of Harare/Salisbury. I'm not used to saying Salisbury so if I say Harare, it's because I go back and it's Harare to me.

So where was your first posting?

In a little town called Marandellas in those days. I actually went there as a junior Patrol Officer, but I went back there some time later as an Inspector. I was Section Officer, then I was promoted there to Inspector, and then I went back there for my last few months in the force as The Boss. So I had three stints in Marandellas, I know that area very well, even now.

Whereabouts is it?

(00:33:07) Seventy four kilometres east of Harare; it is called Marondera now. It was a little farming town.

So is that coming into the border with Mozambique?

No, but it's that way, on that same road.

So your family then joined you there?

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Yes, we spent three or four days in Harare while they could sort of acclimatise and get clothing and that. We bought a whole load of furniture and went off to a police house in Marandellas. I was absolutely broke and we now had three brats; I think Brian was about that size, Graham was that size and Debra was a baby. I was getting 170 Rhodesian dollars a month, which was at the time roughly £170 and I had to buy a new car, new furniture, new everything and I was desperate. I thought "I'm going to hang myself, I hate being in debt" then we won 700 dollars on the state lottery, which cancelled all our debts. It was a lottery where you had to have a nom de plume. You bought a ticket and it wasn't like here, it wasn't numbers, they must have pulled it out of the hat and our nom de plume was "Lemons Luck." My first wife and I were sitting down and talking about it one day when she said "can't we change this name because we're not winning anything" I said "no, keep Lemons Luck, my father always said Lemons Luck was what you need." And suddenly it came up, it was only a minor prize but it cleared off all my debts.

That's fantastic! It must have been a lot of initial outlay, like you say, setting up a whole family home?

Yes, it was huge.

In another country, it's a lot.

You know, we'd sold everything here but there wasn't very much to sell and you didn't get much for it. It wasn't like now where a pound here is worth billions of dollars. Then a pound was a dollar.

And what was the place like, was it quite a rural village?

Yes it was the centre of a farming area, a vast, very prosperous farming area and they were all very influential people. The previous Prime Minister to Ian Smith, Winston Field came from Marandellas and his son was still there. They were all very influential and I was now regarded as a Pom. Here I was regarded as a foreigner, now I get there and I'm a Pom.

You can never get it right.

So I had a hard time again but sport came to my rescue with boxing and cricket. Somehow, particularly as it was a very male orientated society, the fact that I was good at sport got me accepted, even though I tended to say the wrong (00:37:01) thing and offend people. But they put that down to "he's come from England, doesn't know what he's saying," at least I think that's what they thought. I can remember my boss one Wednesday afternoon which was sports day, and we all went to play tennis or golf or whatever you play and I went along to call a bloke I was going to play tennis with. Every police station had its own court and he worked next door to the boss's office and I said, "hey come on, aren't you ready? Haven't you finished yet?" And there was a sarcastic comment from the boss saying "this is not England, we do overtime in this country." And I said "Sir, in England we get our bloody work done in time," so I got into trouble again. But that's been the story of my life.

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Although they were calling you "the Pom" and holding you up to your English ways, how did you feel? Did you feel that it was going home?

Yes.

Were you happy to be there?

Oh, it was wonderful. The sun was shining, life was very good once the debts had been cleared; plenty of beer and the work was easy enough. I was also much older than the blokes in the same rank as me and I had far more police experience than almost all of them including those senior to me.

And what was the make-up of your station then? Were there generational differences and divides?

I can tell you the make up I think. We had a Chief Inspector in charge, two Inspectors, three or four Section Officers – which is the same as a Sergeant here – and then probably half a dozen, perhaps eight of us lowly Patrol Officers, the same as a Constable. Then you had a black section run by a Sergeant Major, a few Sergeants and a load of Constables. So there was this big division in the ranks.

And the Sergeant Major was black as well?

Black.

Yes.

And again I used to get into trouble because I would get very upset that a Sergeant Major of thirty years standing would have to call some whippersnapper straight out of school "Sir." But it was the system.

So all of them were lower than the lowest white?

Yes, the lowest white was above the highest black, which to me seemed totally wrong but I was constantly lectured that that's the way it is. Had we done something about that a decade or two earlier, we wouldn't have had the (00:40:35) problems that we did, I'm sure of that. By the time we did start integrating the blacks with the whites, it was too late.

I guess that counted for all sections of society, as well as the police?

Yes, I'm sure it did, certainly all government bodies. There were a few cases in business where blacks did do very, very well. I think four, maybe even five of my books were published by a firm called College Press in Harare who are a subsidiary of Macmillan and their chief office boy basically has been their Managing Director for the last, well since I started writing. He's a great friend of mine now; his name funnily enough is Mugabe although he says he's got nothing to do with the big man. But he is incredibly wealthy, spends his time travelling around the world, is a wonderful publisher and does an incredibly

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good job. But in the Rhodesian days, Ben was an office boy. If only these guys had been pulled up earlier, but it was the system.

And to what extent were there tensions because of those sorts of divisions?

In the police force, certainly in my experience, very little. Although it all sounds incredibly racist it was a paternal sort of racism. My blacks would come to me even in those days when I was really junior. I'd get a Sergeant coming to me and saying "oh can I borrow some money?" I'd say "no, I haven't got any money" he'd say "but you're my father." I'd say "well too bad, I'm not your father." But it was totally paternal. I would look after those below me as though they were my kids. If anybody else got on at them, I would be angry with the other person and there was no direct animosity or if there was, I certainly didn't see it. It was basically racist but that's the way we were, it was regarded as right and proper.

And everyone just fell into their role?

Their allotted slot, yes. And the AP, as we called the African police, had their own police camp; we had a police camp; and they had their own football teams. I used to go down to their camp, which was called Dombo Tombo and teach them how to box and it was all friendly but at the same time there was a division if you see what I mean. I'm confusing myself, but nobody was at loggerheads.

And what about between generations amongst the white police force and also between people who'd come from different backgrounds, from cities perhaps or from more urban places. Were there any tensions in that respect?

No because in the BSAP you had two distinct divisions. Even then you had the town police and the district police and when you were in depot being taught, you had a choice, "do you want to go to town or do you want to go in the districts?" So the two different types usually found their own way, that part of it worked.

(00:44:31) **And were there many people who came out later, later immigrants? Did they cause any fractions?**

Not much, but there was one particular incident and I've named him wrongly in there [referring to book]. A guy called Wallace, he came out from the Met I think and he threw his weight around. He was very much…immigrants to Rhodesia had a huge culture shock in as much as they'd come from here, sometimes from lowly backgrounds or whatever, and suddenly they're a boss and they've got servants and they've got all the rest of it. They found that difficult to cope with and would throw their weight around and be far more racist than the average Rhodesian who'd just grown up with this and accepted it as life. And this one particular policeman, he did cause a lot of trouble and he was made to feel unwanted and he eventually deserted. But I called him

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Willis in there [referring to book] and a friend of my sister in Johannesburg was Dave Willis, who was also stationed at Marandellas at the time and he came round for supper and he said "look," so in the end we changed it back to Wallace.

Mistaken identity.

Yes, in fact I was trying to disguise his name so as I wasn't going to get sued. But unfortunately, Willis came to mind and because we'd been in the station at the same time, it caused a little bit of trouble. But we're friends again.

So at that time then, UDI had been just declared?

No, this is 1971; UDI had been going for six years.

So when had you actually started your training?

I went out there in 1971. I did six and a half years here.

So quite soon after that, had they started doing conscription?

No, it was still…

Were they seeking volunteers?

To an extent, we had what they call the Police Anti Terrorist Units, which were voluntary. I was called in by my boss one day and I think I'd just been promoted and he said "right, I want you to start a PATU stick in the station." I said "but I thought PATU was voluntary?" and he said, "yes it is." I said, "well then I'm not doing it, I'm a policeman, I'm not a soldier." And I stuck to that, which made me very, very unpopular.

So would you have been expected to go out?

Go out in the bush.

(00:47:44) **What was the issue – was it that you didn't want to become a soldier or was it that you lost your wage or something?**

No, no I'd have made more money but I always felt that policemen should not be involved in a war. We aren't trained for it and I had very strong feelings then. I'm not sure they've changed despite the fact that I've had a very good war but I do not think we should ever have got involved. But we were the senior service; we started the country, the BSAP started with the pioneer column. Like the Royal Navy here, the senior service, we thought we must do everything and be involved in everything and I always disagreed with it, which as I say, made me very unpopular. Eventually that was forgotten and they accepted me again, but for weeks nobody would even talk to me. I wasn't being unpatriotic but I just didn't see the point. I wasn't a soldier, but things changed.

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So what did you think of the other Rhodesian security forces that were forming at the time?

On my initial drive from Harare airport to police headquarters I was driven in by an Inspector called Brian Cullingworth; I think I mention it in there [referring to book]. We had to go past the RLI barracks, the Rhodesian Light Infantry and he made terribly disparaging remarks about them. He said "every bugger who can't get a job joins the RLI. They're a waste of white skin, they're absolute rabble." But the RLI eventually became the heroes of the whole country because they did such a wonderful job. In those early days I had very little to do with the military, very little. I really was trying to be a cop, pure and simple. I loved being a copper. Despite my ambitions to be a teacher, I really have always enjoyed coppering and I didn't want to fight. I'm quite happy to fight in a bar room brawl but when it comes to an enemy trying to kill you, it didn't seem part of my job. So I tried to avoid it but couldn't.

And can you tell me, were you aware of challenges to your role and that people were trying to change it? What sort of work you were doing as a cop and how did that change; and what sorts of things were being demanded of you, perhaps more subtly?

In those days, apart from that incident with the PATU stick, my only involvement in the war was that every morning on the teleprinter we'd get situation reports on what was going on all around the countryside. We would be called into the boss's office and he'd say, "now somebody shot Bill, this is this, that's that." It was sort of like reading a book really; it was there and it was a slight worry, but we never actually thought it would happen to us. And then we had a local farmer shot. He had some report from his own staff that there were people in his maize field. The war hadn't hit our district and he went down to sort them out and said "can you get off my land" and they shot him.

I was supposed to play a very important cricket match that day and when I was told "go and get your (00:52:15) camouflage uniform on, we're going out to Wedza" – basically the whole station was mobilised to go out to this outlying station at Wedza – I said "well what about the cricket?" and I was told "the war takes priority" or something like that. When we got to Wedza, which is a lovely little place, I and funnily enough my next door neighbour who was senior to me, were detailed to go and collect this bloke's body. It was my first contact with other security forces because there was what they called the tracker combat wing involved; these guys went on to become the Selous Scouts. It was my first sight of what a bullet can do to a man's body and this guy's head…it was like taking off the top of an egg. It worried me for days because I'd seen dead bodies – every policeman sees them – but I'd never actually seen what a bullet can do. After that, despite my antipathy towards war, we were often called out on local incidents, if you like, where there was a possibility of armed terrorists being involved. Whenever I went out to something like that, I could feel the top of my head just cringing. I would be looking around, and I was scared, I'd had absolutely no training in that sort of thing. You can read about my firearms training in there [referring to book],

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which was laughable. We were given a handbook, a few weapons and told "go and sort it out yourself, you can both read."

I can see how you were expected to be there in your role as a police officer because it was a crime that had been committed, but at the same time, the motive was war.

Like store robberies; we used to have lots of store robberies and most of them were just criminals. But there was always a possibility that it was these guys getting through; and in later years it became inevitable that it was these guys.

So perhaps civil crimes were gradually becoming war crimes?

Yes.

But for you, your role was…

I was still a cop.

You were still expected to be there no matter what?

Yes, and we went out armed. Just before I left this country they had a referendum among policemen as to whether the British police should be armed and about 90% said "no." I felt like that too but I must admit in those early days in Marandellas, driving around in some really wild countryside I was quite pleased to have a rifle with me. Later on things changed and I'd wear a pistol all the time but in those days the rifle would be there.

Did your weaponry change as the crimes that were being committed changed?

Do you mean were we better trained?

(00:55:39) **Well, were you given extra, additional weaponry?**

When you join the force, every man is given a rifle, that's his rifle whatever. Each police station had its own armoury where the other things, the Uzis, the pistols and all would be stored, but you very rarely used anything else. If you went out of town, say, out into the farming area – I can remember doing a three-week motorcycle patrol totally unarmed and I had the time of my life – if you went into an area where it was possible things could go wrong, you'd have your rifle in the truck with you. In those days, things very rarely did go wrong and I can't remember ever using my rifle in anger in that first time in Marandellas. But I was worried that if I had to use my rifle I wouldn't know what to do because I'd had no training. Every year we had a musketry day where you'd be out and you'd have your specified course if you like, no actual training, but you were allowed to use your rifle. You had to do a drill whereby you were graded for the year and I was brought up with a .22 rifle but I discovered I could shoot pretty straight. But I still didn't know how I'd react in danger because I had no training; I was literally sat down with a book.

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So you had to learn that response yourself when you were faced with these situations?

Yes and fortunately it didn't come till much later but it was all quite fun.

And were you aware at the time of what was going on? You've said you were getting reports on the teleprinter and your boss would brief you on them. Was there a sense of who the enemy was and were you given any political indoctrination, as it were, about where they were coming from?

No, we just looked on them as terrorists, or gooks as we called them, and the political side of it never actually occurred to me. I was more of a thinking cop than my colleagues, it was not quite a game – people were being killed – but it was us against them. My black colleagues seemed to feel the same. They also had their sitrep mornings and we'd tell them what was going on everywhere and it was just a question of "these guys" – I'm not even sure that I knew who they were – coming into the country and causing trouble, but we had to sort them out, or the country had to sort them out; the Army preferably. But there was no political bent to it at that stage, certainly not for me and I'm sure for my colleagues too. My colleagues at one stage had a league table up in the single officers' mess as to which police station had the most kills. That horrified me at the time but later on when I joined the support unit I was also very proud that Charlie Company went up the top of the league tables. In those days I was possibly priggish, but I just wanted to be a cop.

(00:59:49) **So you were briefed on the facts and the figures, but were the groups named; were they identified as ZIPRA or ZANLA?**

Yes they were, there was that to it, but to us they were just two different teams; the political ramifications of it meant nothing. You know I never went down to Gonakudzingwa where these sort of leaders were detained. I had little to do with the political side of life except with my farmers who were all Rhodesian Front. I had one guy, I think he'd been in an accident or something but I was going to prosecute him for careless driving and he said "don't you know who I am?" I said "no" and I honestly didn't, and he was the chairman of the Rhodesian Front. Again I gave him a ticket and nothing happened but his name meant absolutely nothing to me. I knew Ian Smith, yes, but that was about the only one I knew of. Politically I was totally naïve. But then it all changed.

And at the time, what was your awareness of how this was being perceived in the wider world? What was informing your values by that time?

To be honest Annie, we didn't give a tuppenny about the wider world. We knew that the world was totally against us and that made for such a feeling of patriotism, we felt "yes, bring them on, we can take them." Even though in our more sober moments, certainly my first wife and I used to think that we really didn't have a chance because if the world wanted to, they could have crushed us in two hours. I'd look at my little brats and it would worry me but then you

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get back to being among your colleagues who were all gung-ho and ready to take on anybody. We had very little news, you could use BBC world service but most of us were too busy having a good time to spend time listening to the radio to see what was happening.

What sort of media was there around; on the radio, did you listen to music and so on and where was that from?

I'd rather listen to music than the news in those days. The Rhodesian Herald, well it's pretty bad now and it was just as bad then. They'd gone past leaving out the censorship blank for an article but it was all telling us what good guys we were and how well the war was going. We didn't have television, we couldn't afford television in those days, and even now I don't watch television. So I personally had very little knowledge of what went on in the outside world. If I listened to radio, I listened because it was a cricket match, England V Australia or something or South Africa V somebody else; that was far more interesting than politics or world affairs. So BBC world service was quite good for that but apart from that, no, we were totally insular, totally bound up in ourselves.

You said that you listened to music, what sort of music and where was it coming from? Was it British or Rhodesian music?

(01:03:50) No, we had our own radio stations and I can't remember whether it was called Radio One; I suppose it was like Radio Two here, always countrified music and what was popular at the time. Then as the war developed we had programmes with a lassie called Sally Donaldson, who died a couple of years ago. She used to go round to the forward bases and have requests from the soldiers and she was known as the "Troopies' Darling." Actually, when I was stationed in Kariba she came out there. She was a very lovely lady but I didn't get a request; she didn't ask me, but I think you had to apply.

And what about languages at that point because you said that in your childhood you had learnt some Northern Rhodesian languages. In the stations at that point, were local languages used?

People would speak English, it was part of the force structure; everybody spoke English. Like on this three-week patrol I was talking about, I went out with Constable Dzorwa on a motorbike and we went all through the farms. My immediate boss at the time, Jack Parker, was a soldier at heart and he said to me "we're going to get trouble now so I want you to go out there and look at the area, look at escape routes and possible incursion routes where people can hole up." He said "take as long as you like" and Dzorwa and I had a wonderful time; we went out for three weeks. We found an old city on top of a load of hills and spent about three days there looking through all the things and we would speak in Chishona because there was nobody else around. But in the station it was always English. His Chishona was obviously better than mine so I used him to practice on, but that would have been frowned on in the station.

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Amongst other people?

Yes.

To what extent were languages used in the work of the police?

You always had an interpreter. You would sit there while the interpreter chatted, which again could have been very awkward for those who could not speak any Shona because the interpreter would tell you what he wanted to tell you. They quickly realised that I knew what they were talking about.

So you might get a different translation to someone who didn't speak it?

Yes, but one of the guys coming straight out from here, or even some of the blokes there, a lot of the blokes there couldn't speak the language. They would get what the constable wanted them to get. Even in court you had an official interpreter. There's a lovely story: I don't know how true it is, but a barrister is questioning this lady and using long flowery phrases to ask her whether she is in fact a lady of the night. (01:07:46) The barrister had used about fifty or sixty words trying to go round it and the interpreter turned to her and said "Wena Mahuri?" and that was it. He was saying something like "are you a prostitute?" So the interpreter was all powerful, it seemed to work. I often used to wonder just what was being passed over in some cases because things would go totally wrong and you'd think "umm."

That's really interesting but it also makes me think that it would possibly have enforced that division; if like you say you were not able to communicate directly, you always had to go through somebody.

I've never thought of it like that but yes, it certainly would.

In your case it would have, because it sounds like you really got on well with using the language?

I frequently got on better with my black colleagues than I did with my white colleagues. I think it's probably due to my upbringing.

I guess there was not so much rigid structure. Maybe in the force there was always the structure.

I always thought of them as cops rather than "blacks" and I thought we were doing the same job.

Can I also ask, did you see any use of Spirit Mediums?

Not in those days, not at all.

Is that something you came across later?

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Later on, yes in my support unit days there was a lot of that. I had one gentleman, he went mad basically. We were having a very hard time and he suddenly decided that he was a leopard. He was a big man, most support unit guys were big because they didn't have to have brains; they just had to be good fighting men. And this guy would attack his colleagues and he would go at them like that with his teeth and you could hear the sound of a leopard. At one stage he had to be talked down from a tree. I took him into Harare – we were down in the south east of the country at the time – and he was as good as gold, quietened down and the Doctor gave him an injection and said "it's just battle strain or something like that." I took him back and the same thing happened again and again. Eventually my troop Sergeant Major as it was then came in and he said "boss, the medics won't cure him. We'll take him to a Spirit Medium down the road, but it will cost." We had a troop fund so I got out the money, off he went and he (01:10:52) came back and never had the same trouble again. And it did happen once in Marandellas, a guy called Kamisukiri, he went nuts too and he had to be taken off to a Spirit Medium and came back as good as gold.

Were these both black African officers?

Yes, if a white man suddenly decided he was possessed by the spirits, he'd probably be taken off and just locked away for a while. But we accepted the fact that to the black man, it was very, very real and sometimes to me it seemed very, very real.

Could you tell me how you came to be in the support unit and where you moved?

Not quite my last three years, but the three years towards the end of my service, were served in the support unit.

So how long were you in Marandellas?

Marandellas, the first time, probably about a year and I was promoted and sent to Kariba of all places where I had a wonderful time. I was Rhodesia's First Admiral because there, I got involved in the war for the first time.

In what way?

Two of my blokes were abducted, they were on the other side of the lake and we set up an operation. This was a huge military operation but because I was number two in the station, I was heavily involved. We were driving around basically looking for signs of these blokes – they'd been abducted with a load of villagers – and they were in civvie clothes. I had a Special Branch bloke sitting beside me and a couple of constables in the back of the Land Rover and suddenly this guy staggered out of the bush and he was one of my blokes, he was my Sergeant. I slammed the Land Rover to a halt and as there were no doors on them, we just jumped out and ran and we were hugging each other and dancing around in the road because suddenly we'd got him back. And in later years that would have got us killed, you know.

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When I look back, the Special Branch bloke who didn't know any of us from Adam was there with his rifle and eyes very wide, worrying himself silly because the rest of us were dancing around in the road. But it was my first experience of war if you like and because it was a waterborne operation – these guys had come across the lake at its widest part – a whole load of police reserve boats and private boats were requisitioned. The boss said to me, "right you can be the Admiral" and I ran operations for I think about six/seven months on a little island in the middle of the Sengwa Basin in the middle of Lake Kariba. That was wonderful, except I got bored to tears eventually. Nothing ever happened.

So this was to stop people coming from Zambia?

(01:14:15) Yes, Zambia. But I don't think it made any difference because they still came across.

So what kind of operations were you involved in?

Boats basically. My job was just to coordinate day and night patrols and look after their welfare and make sure they were all fed, which meant giving them a fishing rod and saying "go, get us some breakfast." It wasn't hard work.

And you didn't come into anything?

Not any action at all. We found where these blokes had been and I once set fire to a huge chunk of Zambia. The wind was blowing hard and a couple of us went across there and set fire to the grass and it went right down through the hills. We hoped it would burn through Chipepo township but it didn't get that far. We used to take the SAS across to Zambia and drop them off and on one occasion they came back with a whole load of souvenirs including a very large police boat. Our Special Branch OC said "sorry fellas" – because it was beautiful, a Rolls Royce engine half the size of this room – "we have to sink it." So we did with a few problems and to this day only a Special Branch Superintendent, myself and two SAS troopers know where that boat is. A lot of people said to me "why don't you let us know and get it up because there's a huge Rolls Royce engine down there?" But it's part of my memories and I actually wrote a novel on it, which was never published; one day, I'll re-do it. But that was one of the rare moments of excitement.

So why had you to sink it?

Because there were already, so we were told, ramifications in the rest of the world about Rhodesians going across to Zambia who we were not at war with. Now they started going across and brought back this Zambian police boat as well as a whole load of dinghies. I said to Dave George the SB bloke, "we can have a ball in this, look at that engine" but he said "no, it's got to go." And it took a lot of sinking!

So how long were you on…what was the name of the Island?

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Paradise Island; they called it Paradise Island sarcastically at first. We'd been there a few days, about thirty men or probably a few more on this island, with no facilities and only a very basic camp. One of the boats was coming in one morning and I was used to the place and didn't notice it too much but as he got off the boat he said "back to bloody paradise, you can smell this place from three miles downstream." And from then on we started calling it paradise and now it's on the maps as Paradise Island. To start with it wasn't a lot of fun but it ended up as a very nice camp.

(01:18:03) **And so how long was it until you moved and where did you move to after that?**

I was getting bored, I was at Kariba three years and it was supposed to be a two-year posting for a married man. My paradise stint was done and I'd gone back to the police station and there I was bored to tears. I certainly had more to do with the war now because we had the Selous Scouts training with us and we had the Army and all the rest. I was more involved, but not in the actual fighting. And then a friend of mine in Macheke, which is only about thirty odd km from Marandellas, rang me up and he said something to the effect that his wife wanted to go to Kariba, did I think there was going to be a vacancy. I said "I'll tell you what, if the powers that be will do it, I'll swap with you in Macheke." He was in charge at Macheke so now I could have my own station and I went to Macheke. In the two or three years he'd been there, the only excitement was a little bomb blast on the railway line. I got there and a week later we had our first farm attack and then for two years I was everything but a soldier. I took to wearing a camouflage jacket all the time, I carried a weapon wherever I went and had a few nasty times and it was just…

It didn't stop?

A hellish two years, not only for me but also for the farmers, they had a terrible time. We lost a few farmers and it was all quite nasty. Then I said to my spouse "listen, I'm basically being a soldier, we might as well get paid properly for it, I'm going to apply to join the support unit." Every year you had a form come round asking your preferences as to where you would like to go. So I put down the support unit. Then not long afterwards my boss came to me, I asked him "what's happened to my application to join the unit?" and he said "well I was contacted by the big boss in Salisbury (as it was then) and he said "if Lemon isn't careful he'll end up in the support unit!" I said "but that's where I want to go."

Instead they sent me back to Marandellas and for a while in Marandellas I was given a job to investigate a bunch of my Macheke farmers who had gone on the rampage in one of the Tribal Trust Lands. I said to the boss "why me?" and he said "because you know them, go and do it." It was an interesting investigation but a horrific one and despite the years of war, Macheke was still a serious war zone. I went with one sergeant, a black sergeant, all round the Tribal Trust Land wearing an old-fashioned police grey shirt and ordinary police uniform. I had a pistol in my briefcase but that was all and the guys involved wouldn't talk to me. So I made a bargain with their boss, the local

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police reserve party boss and I said "look, get them to tell me their side of the story, because I'm getting all these horrific reports and in return I will let you see my recommendations when it's all over." So he did and I put my recommendations in and I gave James a copy and eventually one of these guys came to trial.

Macheke was another very powerful, politically orientated area, they were all Rhodesian Front and many of them had huge political influence. One of them came to trial and at his trial the defence barrister held up my report that I'd given them. That was scary, I wasn't even there but Adrian de Bourbon who's still a big deal in the law there, he was the prosecutor and he went mad and wanted me hung, drawn and quartered and the powers that be wanted me hung, drawn and quartered too. So (01:22:35) next thing I am being interviewed, the trial date is set, basically a court martial, and off I go and I faced the board. We had a guy called Eric Saul who was chairman of the board and he was known throughout the force as an absolute out and out bastard. He was probably the most unpopular man in the force. I thought "I'm dead, I'm going to jail" you know, they wanted me charged with attempting to corrupt the course of justice and in fact I think I was charged with bringing the police force into disrepute or something like that, a slightly lesser charge, but I thought "I'm in jail now for sure."

I pleaded guilty, and I said "yes, I did it; I'm trying to bring peace to this area, trying to stop the farmers going on the rampage." They (the Board) went away and they deliberated long and hard and they came back in and I'm in total finery now but my heart is down in my boots. The prosecutor, who was a Chief Inspector I think, was a friend of mine and he said "oh you're for the high jump now." He came in looking very serious and Mr Saul read me the riot act. He told me "there's going to be…" – and my heart was going further and further down – he said "I'm going to hit you with all the force I can muster" and he fined me fifty dollars, which was a lot but it was just such a relief. And the Macheke farmers clubbed together and paid my fifty dollars. Less than a week later I was in the support unit. The support unit started off as a punishment arm of the force, and it ended up as a very proud body. But it was where the roughies went: If you got into trouble, you were thrown in the unit. So I got into trouble, I was thrown in the unit, and loved every moment of it. It was just wonderful.

Can you explain why the report that you'd written was so controversial, because you say the Macheke farmers actually supported you?

It was the only way they would talk to me but it was part of the police case.

Because you'd been sent there to do this report?

Yes but there was no way that they should have known what I was going to put forward to my boss. I did it completely wrong, I knew it, but then I thought it was the best thing to do at the time.

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So the only way they would talk to you was for you to show them the report?

The only way they would talk to me, yes.

And therefore they had proof that you had done that?

Yes, but I didn't think they would hold this up in court, because in my report I'd said that all five of them should be prosecuted but that this guy had slightly less and this guy had more and so on.

(01:25:25) **So the Macheke farmers should have been prosecuted?**

All of them, all of the Macheke farmers.

But they then paid for your fine, because you'd stuck to your word?

Yes, I think they sent me a cheque for fifty dollars in recognition of two years of helping them out.

So they weren't annoyed that you had been recommending that they should be reprimanded?

I had a love/hate relationship with my farmers. A lot of the time we hated each other, I used to have terrible fights with them and I mean, real shouting matches. I once tried to lock up my PATU boss because he was drunk as a skunk when he was supposed to be on duty and I was held up by two huge farmers, one on either side, they just held me up while he got in the car and drove off. So we hated each other but we loved each other. Six/seven years ago when that [referring to book] came out, somebody must have read it over there and I was out there working as a journalist. A friend of mine worked for the Zimbabwe Tobacco Association and he used to go out and inspect the farms but sometimes I'd go out with him just to see what was happening because it was early days in farm invasions. One time, he said "we're going to Macheke" and I said "yes, I'll come." He said "I've just got to call in the club at lunchtime" so we went in the club and the whole district was there, all to see me.

How nice.

And I got a lot of orders for that [referring to book]. So although we fought, there was a sort of mutual respect.

Can you give me a sense of your Rhodesian identity; presumably you were identifying with their cause but then on the other hand you also had to enforce actions against the farmers?

For me it was a terrible dilemma because these guys were friends of mine. I played cricket with some of them, I spent time in the pub with them and now I was basically trying to put them in jail. But they should have gone to jail, no

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question and they're all still friends of mine although their wives won't talk to me. For me, it was a terribly difficult investigation and when I gave my recommendations across to their boss I knew I was doing wrong. It was totally against all police procedure and I should have gone to jail but at the time I thought it was the best thing I could do. These were volatile young men and (01:28:39) although they're all ancient now, they were young men and they'd lost one of their main characters through terrorist involvement. He was trying to sort out the war on his own and got beaten to death, literally. So the district was aflame and I thought the only way I can calm it down is to get this sorted out. I was lucky because I should have been put in the stocks, instead of which I went to the support unit, which was lovely.

How did your work differ once you were in the support unit?

The support unit is the military arm of the force and is run like an infantry battalion. You've got companies, you've got the hierarchy in headquarters and the barracks outside Harare even had its own operating theatre in it. It's supposed to be the finest military barracks south of Khartoum, and we were divorced from the police force. We wore the same uniform except that our leatherwork was black instead of brown but apart from that, well, we rarely wore uniform, we wore camouflage most of the time. We went where there was trouble, so whereas I hadn't wanted to be involved in the war, suddenly I found myself getting shot at quite regularly.

Were you given specific training as well, and what was that like?

Lemon's luck again. Normally you go through a huge training spell, three or four months doing basic infantry work. I got there, the boss said to me "I don't know what to do. I have nobody available to give you any training. I'll tell you what, go out with some Superintendent who was visiting troops and just learn from the guys on the ground." I think I had three days with one particular troop and I visited a few more and that was my training. Suddenly I was in charge of 120 men and had to take them into battle. That's why I say nothing in my life seems to have gone as it should do.

Were these African forces then that you were then in charge of?

We had 120 infantrymen, sergeants, constables, the troop sergeant major and then you had what in the Army would be the sort of Officer Corps. You had the company commander, the 2 IC and a few young whites. But I don't think we were ever more than six whites in my troop and the rest were all black.

Was that quite a different balance to the police force?

Yes, to join the police force you had to have certain educational qualifications. To join the support unit you had to be able to write your name. As long as you were big, strong, fit and willing to take on the world, you were in. They were difficult to control at times – far more so than ordinary policemen – but they were wonderful. And there was a huge spirit amongst them because not only were we the Black Boots and different from any other policeman, we were

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also incredibly well paid; there were all sorts of allowances in cash at the end of a patrol. I spent my first few months trying to engender a company spirit. We were Charlie Company, we were the best and we did pretty well. (01:33:08) I was commenting earlier on the fact that the youngsters had this kill table, we had a kill table too and we managed to get ourselves going up and up and up. I was terribly pleased about it and I often thought, hey, is this the same guy you were a few years ago? But bear in mind, in Macheke I saw some absolute horrors, my farmers being killed, and ambushes. So I had changed and I think we all changed.

How do you think you coped with what you experienced? It sounds like the support unit was more of an emotional motivation for involvement, rather than the motivation of law enforcement as before.

Well I wasn't a cop anymore.

So it sounds like for you, it perhaps became more emotional?

It did, certainly. As a cop you had to remain totally dispassionate, like for instance with investigating my own friends. I was there as a cop, totally as a cop and I had to stay totally aloof from it. Once you joined the support unit you were just a soldier, even though I was an untrained soldier and it's a question of "go where you're supposed to go, fight the enemy." Now I didn't have to remain aloof, I could get totally involved and I did. I enjoyed it and I often used to think of myself, "what is happening to you? You were the guy who didn't want to be involved."

I also get a sense that as a cop, you were in these impossible situations and it didn't make sense; you had this structure imposed on you. But once you were in the support unit you were freer in a way to just follow your instinct, and you were in control.

We were totally free, we were put down in an area, told what the local security situation was and then it was up to <u>me</u> what we did. And I had enormous power. I could fight a war in a large patch of countryside as a totally untrained soldier, but the problems were totally different. For me, my whole outlook had changed. Macheke I think did that to me more than anything else.

It sounds like it was quite a horrific time; was there anything in particular that happened there?

In Macheke?

Yes.

My first week there – now I don't know whether that's something your other guys have told you – but we had an agricalert system on the farms whereby there was a radio where all the farmers could communicate and they could communicate with the police station. I'd been there either a week or (01:36:44) possibly even less when the alarm went off for the first farm attack

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at about eleven o'clock at night. I spent that night sitting by the radio talking to the people at the farm who were an old couple, but they had two big strong sons. They saw off the opposition and I went out there the following morning and had tea and breakfast and all the rest. Four or five weeks later the two boys were going off for their Army call-up and mum, Violet Van Aardt, was waving to them from the door when they hit a landmine in the drive. They were in a Renault and when I got there, the old man was looking for his son's leg. The son was dead as a dodo but he didn't have his leg. Poor old bugger.

They wanted to find the body.

He just didn't know what was happening in the world. He was just totally shocked and again I spent hours there and they became firm friends. The other son funnily enough survived: he was driving and the ignition key went up through his chin and came out in his eye, but he survived. It was the only damage he had, he lost an eye but his brother was just…. And from then on the war was there all the time. We had ambushes and I knew all about what a bullet can do to a body.

You saw it all.

I saw it all firsthand, close-up. On one occasion I went to a store robbery and again by that stage with every store robbery, you knew who was involved. We had to wait for Special Branch to come out and it was just getting light and I said to one of my blokes, "I'm just going to go and warn the nearby farm house." I was driving a Renault 4, you know those little tiny bucket type things and I started driving and one of my sergeants stepped out in front of me and he said "stop, stop, stop." It was a dirt road and in the middle of it, coming out of the dust was a little tiny piece of rubber, inner tube of a tyre. Our opposition at that stage felt that if they put rubber over a landmine it would stop the mine detectors from picking it up and so I stopped and I didn't go anywhere. Later on the Army came out and they lifted up a British Mark IV mine, so that sergeant got himself a case of beer. You didn't get much sleep and life was lived under enormous strain because these were my friends who had been blown up, shot and all the rest. And the support unit was quite a relief.

And you had to learn a lot on the job then, because you said that you didn't have any specific training?

I had to learn everything.

So situations like that, where another officer had to stop you in the middle of the road, then you would know for next time?

No, that was just pure foolishness on my part because I did know that this was happening, but it was early in the morning. But in the support unit I had to learn everything from scratch.

(01:40:37) **Did you have to learn very quickly?**

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Yes, because now we were really being shot at and nobody moved anywhere without a weapon. I carried a pistol on my hip and I carried my rifle everywhere and we had sentries out in our camps and mortar tubes set up. It was war and poor little innocent me in the middle of it enjoying every minute.

And did you have a sense by then of who you were fighting against? Was it emerging?

Yes it had changed now.

And who did you think it was?

Both factions: we had a lot in Matabeleland and a lot in Mashonaland and a lot in between.

So you moved around quite a bit then?

We'd go out for six weeks at a time, come home for ten days and those six weeks would normally be spent in the same area. But occasionally you were picked up and sent somewhere else if something was happening.

And where were your family based at the time?

At that stage we'd bought a house in Marandellas and the kids went to school there.

And what was that like, going off for six weeks and only having ten days back? How would you travel, presumably by car?

I was the only company commander who didn't live in Chikurubi barracks. I fought a running war with one of my senior officers because I used to sneak my personal Land Rover home for R and R and he was always out to catch me, but never did. Each company commander had his own personal vehicle and that was mine and nobody else's, so I wouldn't leave it anywhere. And besides, it saved me a fortune in fuel going backwards and forwards from Harare to Marandellas, so I'd take it home and usually hide it round the back in case anybody went past. The joy for me of the unit, and it sounds crazy because I've never been that sort, was the sheer all-round discipline of it. I don't know how to put it but I always rebelled against discipline and my first term in boarding school, I set a new boys record for the number of times I was beaten; that's how much I rebelled. That was at the age of seven, so now suddenly I just found myself revelling in it. You'd get these huge salutes and everybody was immaculately turned out.

(01:43:32) **Was that because you were part of it perhaps?**

I think so, I was part of an individual entity of 120 something men and they were mine. It's a power thing perhaps, I don't know, but I literally held life and death over them. We lost a couple of blokes, but it was my decisions that caused their deaths.

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Perhaps not just power but also, like you said, it was exciting?

It was exciting.

You're on the edge all the time, so I'm sure that must have had something to do with it as well.

I'm sure it does.

You perhaps get used to the adrenalin of every situation.

Yes you live with quite an adrenalin rush. I didn't spend a lot of time out but I would go out whenever I could and even in camp we were attacked a few times. Despite my own lack of training it was wonderful to see the system working perfectly. At the first shots the mortar blokes are in their pits and everybody's in their right place and then they're all waiting for me to tell them what to do. Yes it was a power rush I suppose, but it was exciting.

And did the operations generally go to plan? Or were there problem situations…well if there can be a plan to that extent?

Put it this way, our kill rate rose and I think when it all folded up we were third on the kill table out of twelve, thirteen troops. We'd gone from close to the bottom up to close to the top. There was always a feeling of satisfaction and it was no longer a fact that you were fighting against people; you were fighting against a pawn. It was like a game of cricket, you had to try and outwit the opposition and if you did somebody died; and if you didn't, one of your blokes died. It almost became like a game.

You mentioned in what you'd written before I came here about the environment of the Cold War at the time. Can you tell me how that affected your perception of the opposition and who you were fighting against?

We were told from the start we were fighting against a communist menace.

When you say "the start" do you mean when you were in the support unit?

No, right from the beginning, even on the sitreps they were known as CTs, communist terrorists. Sometimes if you asked a question at a briefing as to why, they'd say "oh no, this is confirmed terrorists," but we all called them communist terrorists. And yet (01:47:09) I don't think any of us really knew anything about communism. It was a word, it was a threat that was held over us I suppose by the politicians or perhaps our own leaders, I don't know, but communism was the ogre. I still don't know a great deal about communism except that it never works. It was also the fact that our two opposition, Nkomo's lot ZIPRA were funded by Russia, and Mugabe's lot were funded by China; both also ogres of the East, and that did temper our thinking. Quite why I don't know, I'm older now so I've had time to sit down and

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dispassionately think about it and I just do not understand why there should be this communism thing.

Did you get a feel for what it was, or did you come face to face with any of the terrorists? You talk about the numbers of bodies as it were; but did you capture any alive and get a feel for what they were fighting for?

No, because I would try and stay aloof. I was a company commander and we had quite a few brought into camp at one time or another and I would talk, but I wouldn't get too involved unless there was a particular reason for it and that didn't often happen. Later, after the war I met up with a lot of them. When we were in a place called Enkeldoorn, which is now Chivhu, we had what was known as the Wiltshire Tribal Trust Land funnily enough, which was all ours, for many, many months. There was a guy in there leading the opposition called Sachiweshe. I tried to learn everything I could about Sachiweshe and it was very little but whenever anything happened Sachiweshe was involved: "this was Sachiweshe, that was Sachiweshe," and he built up in my mind as quite a guy. After ceasefire when they were all going into these assembly points, there was trouble at Enkeldoorn police station because a bunch of these blokes were being bussed through and they'd gone into town and gone on the rampage. We were probably 10-15km out of town and I sent one of my blokes in and said "go and sort it out" and he called me back, I would say an hour later, and said, "boss, you'd better come because there's huge trouble here and we can't sort it out." The brown boots – the regular police – couldn't do it and this was all in the police camp in Enkeldoorn

So I went down there and there were blokes milling everywhere and rifles and everything. I got hold of what I figured was the most senior of the opposition and said "come on, in the bus." I tried to keep it nice and quiet and I was getting nowhere and then they started calling me names, "white pig" and "Smith's soldiers" and all the rest of it. A little bloke with a little tiny grey beard was sitting under a tree watching all this and he said, "Mr Lemon, are you having trouble?" And I said, "how do you know my name?" He said "oh, I know all about you. They call you Charlie 9, you live in Marandellas, you've got a wife and three children." I said "oh is that right?" He said "do you want me to get these guys into the bus for you?" and I said "yes." Five minutes later they were all sitting quietly in the bus. He hadn't even raised his voice. I said "who are you?" and he said, "well you guys call me Sachiweshe." He was the man and I just wished I'd had time to chat with him and as you say, found out his motivation. He saved me from a difficult position, I'd have had to back down.

How interesting, so you came across this person?

(01:51:39) Yes and he was a most insignificant little bloke. There was me in full regalia with a fancy hat and all the rest of it and there he was sitting looking scruffy and dirty. But he had more pizzazz than I had and I would have loved to have sat down and talked with him. But we never saw each other again.

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Do you think others had a sense of what they were fighting for, or was it very much informed by this picture that the media were creating, or the picture that those above you were giving?

Do you mean others on our side or others on their side?

On your side.

No it was all…policemen aren't meant to think, we're not educated enough to think. And I'm not being disparaging; the modern cop goes to University and all the rest; but in my day, as long as you had a couple of O-levels and a bit of common sense you could make a good cop. As I told you I had a very expensive education in which I was taught to think. But I don't think too many of my colleagues really worried about the whys and wherefores of it: It was all a question of "yes, we'll win the war if we can; in the meantime, we're going to enjoy." And I developed much the same attitude.

Did you talk to them much about it and did you compare your thoughts?

No, not in the support unit because I was the boss and it was very military in as much as I was up there and then everybody else was below me.

So you would have had to maintain that goal or that mission?

Yes, my job was specifically to clear out an area.

No questions asked.

No. And among my fellow commanders, we'd get together every month or so. Most of them enjoyed it, I think we all occasionally had sleepless nights worrying about the future because most of us had families. But basically it was more a huge game than anything else, which is sad because a hell of a lot of people died. It wasn't really a game.

In terms of the other forces, you said that you did come into contact with the Army and Selous Scouts. Did you get a sense of any other forms of warfare being fought? I'm particularly wondering about people who had come from Kenya or from Malaya. Did you see any protected villages and so on in your area, or do you know much about them?

(01:54:50) I know very little about the PVs. Yes, I visited a few but I've never actually worked where there was one. I visited a few on various trips here and there but most of our Malayan veterans went into the Selous Scouts or the RLI and although I had a lot to do with the Scouts, it was all on a friendly basis.

Because they were just in your area?

Because they trained in Kariba and we became friends. They were wild men, but they did a good job.

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So were some of them with you when you were on your six weeks away?

No, when the Scouts moved into an area the area was frozen to all other troops, nobody was allowed in. If we were in an area and they wanted to come in, we had to get out. I don't know whether I've put it in there or not [referring to book] but I can always remember a guy called Stretch Franklin. He was called Stretch because he was six foot five or five foot seventeen as he used to say. Stretch was one of the original members of the Scouts. He had all sorts of medals; he was a killer through and through, a big wild man. I can remember once he had my daughter, who was probably one and a half, in his arms and he was cooing. And I looked at this huge bearded creature and I thought, "well there's a human being inside that." He was a lovely, lovely man, but he was a killer. Weird isn't' it?

Yes, so you saw the war doing lots of different things to different people?

Yes, war changes everyone. Whether you were physically involved or whether you were just on the periphery, everybody suffers.

What did your wife or family think of this at the time. Coming towards the end of the 70s, conscription was enforced on older people as well; was it up to age 59?

Something like that, yes.

So what were the women thinking; and what did you feel about conscription and whether it should have been extended?

As a regular, conscription never worried me as such. We had what we called Dad's Army, the old guys, they were all younger than I am now, but we looked on them with a sort of friendly contempt because they wore a uniform; the same uniform as we wore, but we thought "no, they're too old." And wives, I can only speak for my own. She went through a hell of a lot: Our house was attacked, she was ambushed and she seemed to enjoy it. But gradually, particularly when I joined the support unit, our paths went further apart (01:58:22). She had her own friends, I had my friends and never the twain shall meet; and inevitably it all fell apart after the war. Everything suffers in a war. We were close when it started and during my three years in Macheke, two years, whatever it was, she was a huge support because I spent most of my time in tears, or a lot of my time in tears. She was much stronger than I was.

Was this from what you'd been seeing and experiencing?

Yes, there's nothing worse that picking up bits of bodies. It turns us all a little bit crackers, but it happened. Even more so when the bodies are innocents, which was usually the case. But there you are.

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And what do you think the war was doing for a sense of Rhodesian identity at the time?

A lot of people left. They didn't want to face any more of it and I didn't blame them at all because we all had families. Those who stayed came closer together, but even in those horrible days when we should have been one solid unit we had schisms: Perhaps in as much as you've got the businessmen who, probably quite rightly got out of going to the war zones; and those who went to the war zones would be upset about their next door neighbour who's making a lot of money and never goes into the sharp end. So it caused huge friction in the community as such.

So there were some who were willing to fight for it and some that thought they perhaps shouldn't get involved?

A lot made a huge amount of money and most of that money probably went outside the country, which upsets me about modern Zimbabweans: but that's another subject altogether. Some people, if they didn't stay at home they just stayed in the headquarters in Harare/Salisbury and that caused friction among those who had no choice. If you had a good job sometimes, a very necessary job, they had to stay behind. But a lot managed to work the system; it happens in every war in every field of life and it caused huge divisions in society. And those who left, people would say "they're taking the yellow route" or "taking the gap." But I never thought that was fair.

You could see their reasons?

Yes, I often thought about leaving, but I thought "where do we go?"

What did you feel was happening as it came closer to the eighties; were sanctions becoming an issue?

Yes.

And how did that affect people's decisions to leave or keep fighting?

(02:02:11) Sanctions were always an issue Annie, in as much that you could never go out and just spend your money, if you like. You always had to think "well can I get hold of that?" or "can I get hold of that?" We coped because we'd been doing it for years and years and years. But I think by '78 all of us knew that unless sanctions were taken off, we were going to lose because we had a circular come out from headquarters – I think it was when I was at Macheke – advising us not to use up so much ammunition because each round costs 20 cents or whatever it was. And for those of us who were actually being shot at…

How can you put a figure on it?

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Yes. But I can see what they meant: I can now anyway; I couldn't at the time. But the guy in headquarters had to account for all this and somehow find the money to buy more. I can understand it, but I couldn't then.

Where would these rounds or weapons have come from; did you know?

South Africa, yes, I think most of our weaponry came from South Africa, although my FN was made in Belgium. Sanctions did cause us huge harm, no matter what anybody tells you.

Some have said that in some ways it contributed to that sense of unity and their sense of identity, in that it forced people to be efficient and industrious?

There's no question about that.

But when you're fighting a war, obviously there are certain things that you need that you won't be able to get, I'm sure?

Yes, when you consider that this little tiny land-locked country became virtually self-sufficient with the whole world against it: The French and a few others would give us cars, the Japanese would sell us cars and the like, but most things, Rhodesia had to make for herself, including our armoured vehicles. Suddenly you had Land Rovers looking like spaceships going along the road and it was all invented by the farmers. They got armour plating underneath and with some of them you could press a button and AK rifles came out of the headlights so you could spray your opposition. They did it all themselves. We were a versatile, ingenious nation. But you can't fight against sanctions forever and eventually that brought us down. We wouldn't have won in any case because there were too many of the opposition. I know most of my compatriots won't agree with that, they'll say "we could have taken on the world." But we couldn't, there were too few of us.

Can you talk me through your movements and your involvement towards the end of the 70s?

(02:05:50) At the ceasefire, I was sent up to Chinhoyi – Sinoia in those days – which was another big farming area. This is while they were going into the assembly points and I had two assembly points to worry about: one outside there; and one deep down the Zambezi valley, which was my home area so I was happy there. It was quite fun because the English were out there, the Army, and we had a big meeting I think on New Year's Day in Salisbury and I was introduced to this Colonel who was giving me some blokes to go up to this assembly point in the Zambezi valley. The meeting went on until well into the afternoon and he came to me and said, "right, are you ready to go?" I said "no" and he said "we've got to go, we've got to be there tonight." I said "you're not going to be there tonight." We did set out from Salisbury but when we got to Makuti, I stopped and said "I'm not going any further, I am not going down that valley road in the dark because we'll be killed." And he shouted and screamed and said he was going to get hold of General Walls. I said

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"you can get hold of God Almighty if you like." Again, I was a black boot, we answered to nobody except our own boss and it's the only time I've ever faced down a Colonel and won because there was nothing he could do.

He knew I was right. It's all very well to travel in Britain or Europe at night but the Zambezi valley is wild, wild country. Quite apart from hitting landmines or anything else, you've got elephants and lions to worry about. So, no, we had a party at Makuti instead. That Colonel and I never spoke again, but during the ceasefire itself it was weird to see our opposition walking to these places, carrying their rifles. These were blokes who if we'd seen them a week earlier we'd have shot them and vice versa, but now suddenly we're all, not quite at peace, but…When I was going down into the valley to this assembly point, Papa I think, we had a Pookie, a mine discoverer vehicle in front, peculiar looking thing, and there was my Land Rover. I had a ZIPRA liaison officer and a ZANLA liaison officer and the British bloke, so I said "right, I've got to drive" – my Land Rover had roll bars, but it wasn't properly protected – so I said "I'm going to drive and you three guys are coming in my vehicle. If I go up, you're going up too." We alternated, because we had to keep stopping and vehicles kept breaking down; I'd have two of the three on the seat beside me and the other one in the back. So I think everybody was totally quiet throughout the exercise, just waiting to be blown up.

So you were expected to actually work together at that point?

Well we didn't actually work together but we had to be polite to each other and they were alright. We had to have a section of men hidden close to each assembly point just in case the inmates got uppity and threatened the British, so we were there to protect the British. The assembly point in the Zambezi valley was an old camp called Rekkometjie and the nearest place I could put a section of troops was probably about fifteen kilometres away. On that road it would have taken them an hour and a half to get there; so I said to the British soldiers "there's nothing I can do, you guys want me to keep them hidden, that's the only place I can put them." But the only big problem came with lions going around the camp.

(02:10:06) **So these were British soldiers who had come to oversee the ceasefire?**

To keep the peace, yes, strange days.

You said that you were all going down together if anything happened; but how did you find that you differentiated between black soldiers who were with you and against you; before ceasefire and then after ceasefire. Was it very clear whether they were with you or against you?

No, there was huge tension. More so when, sometime after it had all been done but the assembly points were still in process, one of our troop commanders who had been my 2IC for a long time – a lovely little bloke called Billy Gloss – was called into this assembly point because there was a punch up between somebody or other, or there was trouble of some sort; and he

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was shot. We were all in Harare at a troop commanders conference that day and by that stage I was down in Bulawayo and I can remember driving back thinking "if Billy Gloss dies we're going to have a war." And Billy Gloss did die; he was shot in the stomach. But somehow, somebody kept the peace. I don't know how, because how many men were in the support unit? Probably about thirteen hundred. We all were homicidal because he was a very popular young man, but somebody kept the peace. It was a tense time and at times I'd have to go in amongst these guys for one reason or another and I'd feel the hair on the back of my neck prickle with the hostility. But we got over it.

Later on I was at Tongagara camp in Manicaland, which is now infamous as one of the places they trained the green bombers (Mugabe's Youth Brigade or militia) in Harare in Zimbabwe. Every time I went in – the boss of the camp was quite a good guy and if he wanted to borrow a book or something – I'd have to stop at the boom and my Land Rover would be searched, even though it was always full of weaponry and ammunition and all the rest because we were training in the area. On this one occasion, it was hot and sticky and I just blew my top and I screamed and shouted and really let rip. The boom came up very quickly and I was never stopped again. But the tension was such, that that was always likely to happen. Not only with me, but with everybody; we were all so close to just blowing up with anger or despair or whatever. For us we'd lost a war, we'd lost our country; for them, well I don't know. Even after ceasefire I still lost people. We had a bloke in that same area, one of my sergeants was shot just trying to do his job as a policeman. So tensions were high.

So what did you think of the auxiliary troops who were involved?

Pfumo re Vanhu, Muzorewa's men. I thought they were the most useless bunch of soldiers in history. I had a run in with one of them, when they fell under my command. This was in Enkeldoorn, shortly before the ceasefire was signed and there was trouble everywhere. I went in their camp one day and it was a total disaster area (02:15:13). I just had one of my sergeants with me and I demanded something or the other because I was in charge of them. One of their number, I forget what he called me but it wasn't pleasant, I was carrying my rifle and I just smashed the butt up and hit him in the jaw. It later turned out he'd broken his jaw and he went down. It was one of my most frightening moments of the war because now there's two of us and there's sixty or seventy of these rabble around us. I heard my sergeant who was a Matabele, cock his rifle behind me and the noise was so loud. Everything died down, but again I was lucky.

So were they armed?

Yes but they were a rabble, they really were. I don't think many of them had ever actually fought; they certainly were nothing to do with ZIPRA or ZANLA. Well there were two lots, there were Sithole's men and Muzorewa's men and for a while the support unit were given the task of training them, but it was just

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impossible; they were just kids taken up from the street. But that was a frightening moment.

I can imagine.

I haven't thought about that one for years.

It must have been quite strange that until the ceasefire, you had been trying to keep the peace for them. And then they were in a position where they were supposed to be working with you.

It was awfully difficult. I only had three or four months with these guys, probably not even that, in my area. As I say, I was responsible for them and throughout that Tribal Trust Land, things were happening that I knew weren't the opposition; it was these guys. There were robberies and rapes and assaults and it wasn't Sachiweshe's lot, it was these.

Were you having to investigate these at that stage?

No, we had policemen to do that, we just told the local police station. I wasn't a cop anymore but they were my responsibility and no, I didn't enjoy that part of it.

One last question about that period: What do you feel made a good Rhodesian at the time? What sort of culture existed?

We were all so confused. We weren't even called Rhodesian or Zimbabwean; it was Zimbabwean/Rhodesian. We'd had an election, Muzorewa had been made Prime Minister, the world still didn't recognise us. We were all confused and terribly depressed because we knew there was going to be more fighting and that this was basically a cosmetic exercise: you can't have four Prime (02:18:44) Ministers in a country and it was the executive council who ruled. Muzorewa was just a figurehead and not a very inspiring figurehead, either. He's smaller than you and had less personality about him.

So it didn't instil much hope in you?

No. And I think that was probably more depressing than the years after actual independence, because we knew that there was still going to be a lot of deaths, and what for? To keep this funny little bloke in power and his power was not real at all.

I get the feeling that you would have been fighting for something that you didn't necessarily believe in?

We didn't, we didn't believe in it at all. That was certainly the worst part of the war for all of us. And then we were supposed to go out and politicise for Muzorewa, for the elections and I again got into trouble because I said "I'm a cop, I'm not a political agent."

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In what way were you supposed to be doing that; what form did it take?

We were in this Tribal Trust Land, the Wiltshire, and I had to send people out sometimes in plain clothes and sometimes in uniform, to persuade the locals that they must vote for Muz. And yet the locals in that area had been totally subverted years before and they were all totally Mugabe's lot. I had an interview with General Walls shortly before the election, he was doing a countrywide tour. He stopped in at Enkeldoorn and he spoke to me, the Army commander in the area, the police officer in charge and the District Commissioner. There were only four of us in that room with Walls and he asked our opinions on everything. Then he told us, "Muzorewa's going to win by a mile." And I said, or the Army commander said, "not in this area he is not, he hasn't got a hope in hell." And we were told by Walls and the DC that we were wrong. The fact is we were on the ground and they didn't know, but they said that we were wrong and that Muzorewa was going to walk it. Three days later we had the election and Muzorewa got three seats I think. I've never had any time for General Walls since, because we were actually putting our lives on the line and we were there among the population and he told us we were talking rubbish.

They were out of touch, completely out of touch.

Totally out of touch. I don't know whether he believed what he said but why say it to experienced men on the ground? None of it made sense and Muzorewa lost by a country mile and never really had a chance.

Did you experience hostility when you were politicising in the Tribal Trust Lands?

(02:22:20) Yes, but in that particular Tribal Trust Land we'd always experienced hostility. It really was a bad area; the support unit companies used to shudder when they were sent there.

Was this around Marandellas?

No it was around…actually it was between Enkeldoorn and Marandellas. On one momentous occasion I stole a company hyena – which is a big armoured vehicle – and drove home to Marandellas down all the back roads, which should have been land-mined everywhere, to have a game of cricket. Somebody told me the cricket match was on so I had to do it. And nobody ever knew until I brought the book out.

So you were quite addicted to your cricket?

Oh yes, it was the only thing that kept us sane. I was in Enkeldoorn police station one day and I had to wait for whoever I was seeing, member in charge or whatever, and I picked up an old newspaper. In those days all we ever looked at in the newspaper was the obituary column to see who'd died and there was an old cricketing mate of mine there, Neil Wrench. I thought "poor old Neil," he was PATU in all of this so I thought he'd been shot. I rang

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through to Marandellas to my spouse and I said "what happened to Neil?" She said, "he got hit by a cricket ball" and I said "oh, that's alright then." He was fielding up close and a ball hit him in the head and he was out like a light in the middle of a war.

How unfortunate.

When your time comes, your time comes, it doesn't matter. It sounds horrible but I was so pleased for Neil that he'd gone that way instead of with a bullet. People dying all around us and he gets a bloody cricket ball.

Had you voted in any of those elections? You were a citizen; you didn't have a British passport, did you?

I had a British passport.

But it was a commonwealth one?

I had Rhodesian citizenship, which in those days you could have the two. And then you had Comrade Bob, who said "no, no, one or the other."

Later on.

Nowadays you can't have Zimbabwe and British and even that's only in the last ten years or so. For a long time you could have Zimbabwe and British or whatever country you came from.

Did you vote then in those elections?

(02:25:02) I voted in the Muzorewa ones, I didn't vote in the final one. No, I think it's probably the other way round: I voted in the final one. Not that I had any hopes really. We even got in a punch-up on one day of the voting when one of my little patrols of three or four men found villagers being herded towards the ballot box by Mugabe's men with AKs in their back. So they radioed me and said "what do we do?" I said "well kill them." So they did, well they killed one.

What, the people who were herding?

The Mugabe lot who were doing the herding. I took him round to the polling box where there was a Bobby from Nottingham, in the middle of nowhere. I'd been to see him the night before and we didn't have beer, we had dry camps so I said "if you want a cup of tea or anything, come round" and he said "oh no, no we've got to be impartial." I said, "ok, fine." And then the following morning when I went down there, he was complaining about the heat, the flies, the smells of the local people. I said "well you volunteered and you're being paid for it." Then when this bloke was shot, he was there in the back of my Land Rover, so I took him round to the bobby and said "right, now I want you to give your report but before you give your report just come and have a look at this please." A couple of the locals were there and an interpreter told

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him what they said about it, but he was overjoyed, I think that's the right word, at his first sight of a real live terrorist, well actually he was a real dead terrorist. And he got his camera out and I thought, "now what chance have we got?" Nobody understood.

Yes, very strange. So they were overseeing something, trying to be impartial. It's like imposing a completely alien set of values on a very complex situation.

Yes. And to us the black African smells, he smells different; and to him, we smell different. When you're African, you accept it, it's just we've got our different smells. But this guy was so upset because they smelt. I said "they don't" and I said to him "you smell to them too." Then I thought, "what is the point of this all?" And I put my report in about the incident, but it was ignored. But there you are, history.

So he was supposed to be being impartial yet he was complaining?

Yes, complaining about the locals and getting a photograph for his album. The whole thing was distasteful, the whole exercise was distasteful.

At that point, or looking back on it now, what sort of war do you think you were fighting? You did mention this in what you'd written for me, but do you feel that it was a Civil War, a racial war, or an ideological war; perhaps it's even changed with time?

(02:28:57) I thought very hard about that answer. It certainly wasn't a racial war because as I say I fought with 120 black men: I cuddled up to them at night on top of a hill just to try and keep warm. There was no racial animosity as such; obviously there were spasmodic incidents here and there. But it was certainly a Civil War because you had brother against brother. I think I said in my original reply to you it was probably an ideological war, but I'm not even sure about that. We were all brainwashed, their side, our side, we believed in what we were doing. But now nearly thirty years later, I look back and I think, "well, why did we do it?" And I'm sure a lot of the opposition will look back and think "well, why did we do that?" I don't know, just put it down as a Civil War. That very same sergeant who was with me with the Pfumo ReVanhu, Sergeant Dube, he came to me one day and he had a brother fighting for ZANLA and a brother fighting for ZIPRA. They were Matabele and I said "what happens if you meet them?" He said "we'll have to kill each other" and I thought "that's sad; so, so sad."

I don't think there is really an answer; I guess the question's about exploring that issue. Historically it has been put down to one or the other and for you caught in the middle of it there is no answer, is there?

No, I don't think you can typecast it as any particular type of war. It was just a horrible little conflict, but very enjoyable at the time of the conflict.

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Can you tell me about leaving what was Zimbabwe by that stage, and your decision to leave?

I stayed on in the police force for two, nearly three years after independence and I was involved in both the Entumbane riots in Bulawayo. I got shot at more in a couple of days in both those than I had in the previous six years. Then I was sent back to Marandellas, this time as the boss and then for three months I had to teach the officer commanding the district how to do his job because he went from sergeant to Chief Superintendent. He was quite a nice guy but he was intellectually challenged. He had no clue how to do his job and I thought "Jesus, he's getting about four hundred dollars a month more than I am and I'm teaching him." Then I was passed over for promotion and I was fed up and I thought that's the last of it. So I decided to become a writer.

Did you go back to being a police officer at that point; had the support unit disintegrated?

The support unit, we all sort of left at once. That was our farewell bash [shows photograph] with a few of the company commanders. We decided that because after Entumbane and Bulawayo, Mugabe had said he was not going to integrate the support unit because ourselves and one battalion – or it might have been two battalion of the Rhodesian African Rifles – saved his bacon, so he said he wouldn't integrate either. And two months later the integration started. We all decided to get out, to hell with it, so we all went out at once (02:33:26). We had a wonderful party and then I went back, but most of them went off to South Africa or other places. I went back to Marandellas and thought, "well I'll go back to being a cop, forget all about the war and go back to being a cop." But it didn't work like that.

When you say "all of you" did you mean all of the white officers?

All the whites, a few of the senior blacks, we all went.

You were saying that you went to Marandellas?

It had gone from Marandellas to Marondera, but I went to become a cop again and it just didn't work. Suddenly the force was totally political, you couldn't say anything. If I shouted at one of my blokes and he happened to be black I'd be racist and there'd be all sorts of trouble, so it just became a pain. Then when they passed me over for promotion I thought "no, to hell with it." But I stayed on in Zimbabwe for a few years, it was only divorce that sent me over here for three months and I'm still here, married to another English woman.

So you thought you were going to just come here temporarily did you?

Yes, the divorce wasn't nasty as these things go but it was very traumatic and I just wanted to get away. I just had a new book out there and I went to my publisher, another Mr Mugabe and said "I need an advance." He said "you know we don't give advances in this country" and I said "Ben, if you don't give me an advance I'm never going to write for you again." And he gave me a

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thousand dollars, which in those days was enough to bring me over here and keep me going for my three months. And Lace has a caravan in a field opposite, you can't see it today, it's the other side of the valley. It's an old showground caravan and I lived in that for eighteen months and had two novels accepted by Penguin at the time. I thought I was made and the time to go home again just came and went and didn't matter. But now…I was going to say I wish I'd gone home, but no I don't, life is still quite good.

You had to come to England to divorce presumably because you were married here, is that right?

No I came to England just to get away from all the hassle. My kids wouldn't speak to me and people were saying "wow, how can you do that?" So I took a three-month holiday away from it all.

Did they stay in Zimbabwe?

Yes, my former wife has come over here this year after all these years, and she's an English woman. I always said how unjust it was that I was living in her country and she was living in mine.

But did you say that her parents had…

(02:36:48) They'd been in Kenya.

But she still felt England was "home?"

Well they came from Cheltenham, which is why I ended up in this part of the country because I didn't know where Gloucestershire or anywhere else was. I had a vague idea that London was down there somewhere.

And what was it like coming to England, culturally, rather in terms of what you did; what was your experience of arriving?

The first time or the second time?

The second time.

I found it had all changed desperately, particularly the police force. I went and worked for a year in Stroud police station as a civilian, a reception clerk they call it and it was horrible. In my day we weren't paid for overtime, you just did it because in theory you got time off in lieu but you never did. And I can remember one night I was on in Stroud and there was a bloke in Painswick along the road who had come home from London and his briefcase was ticking and it was a time when bombs were going off. I got hold of the local cop and said "there's an interesting one here, would you like to go and do it?" and he said "no, if you can find an Inspector to authorise my overtime because I finish in ten minutes, then I'll go." I thought "no, in my day we would have been fighting to go there because it's interesting. It beats giving

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death messages or trying doorknobs. The whole culture had changed and it's the same with society in general, it has changed quite drastically.

Going back to cricket, I came over here on a cricket tour just towards the end of my stint in Macheke, playing for the Kenya Kongonis. I came up here and turned out for the local club and the captain lives directly opposite and we'd played cricket in the 1960s. He said "do you want to come down to Bristol where there's a West Indian club?" and I said "yes, I'll come and have a game." So we went down there and as we went into their dressing room – this captain of ours was and still is, a bit of a comedian – he looked round at all these blokes and said "gee it must have been a hot summer in Bristol." And I thought "oh God, here we go." Fortunately one of the West Indians grinned and said "yes man, that's why we're so dark," and the tension diffused; but for a moment there was huge tension. And I thought in the sixties if somebody had said that there would have been an immediate laugh. Suddenly everybody had become race conscious and all the rest of it. I find it sad, but I'm an old fogey.

So it was quite a different place?

Totally different.

Different to what it was just ten or twenty years previously?

(02:40:11) Twenty years, yes.

But also very different to Rhodesia or Zimbabwe.

Oh yes, totally different.

I guess people had a very different understanding of each other, or perhaps a lack of understanding.

It's lack of understanding. I give a lot of talks on Zimbabwe and the situation there and the history of the place, that's one of my loves. And you'd be surprised at how many people say to me, "but you can't call it Zimbabwe, call it Rhodesia." I say, "no, if I can call it Zimbabwe then you can bloody well call it Zimbabwe." We all have to adapt with our circumstances and whether you call it Zimbabwe or Rhodesia or Zimbabwe/Rhodesia, it makes no difference. It's still a country and it's still a wonderful country for all its problems now. I hope it'll get back to normal but not for many years, not in my lifetime. You go through it now and it's just a wreckage, but it's still "home."

So that point was very much the end of the British Empire as well I suppose, although Rhodesia hadn't, strictly speaking, been recognised?

I think we were the last colony to be given back. Well we weren't really a colony but we were…

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What did you feel about that change to the Empire as well? You say that you felt that life in Britain was changing as well; I get the feeling that the two were connected in some way?

I don't know whether the two are connected but what does upset me now is that everybody is very apologetic about the British Empire. Sure, some bad things happened, no question. But bad things happen in every country all the time. The British Empire did a hell of a lot of good. Those involved, those administrators were very dedicated people and alright, there were obviously some bad hats; there were obviously some out and out racists among them. But most of them did their best to integrate with the societies they were involved with and I feel it's something that people should be very proud of, not apologising for. I've got a book upstairs called "Rhodesian Rhymes" by a guy called Cullen Gouldsbury who does sort of Kipling-type rhymes and they're all about life in those days: for the administrator, for the magistrate, the district commissioner, the policeman; and in fact that they had hellishly difficult lives, but they did it because they were dedicated. And now, according to modern philosophy, they were out and out freebooting racists. But it's not so.

I can see how coming to Britain afterwards, there is this sort of apathy, if that is that the right word, about jobs and the sense of what you were working for. So it must have seemed better in the past; you had more reason to work.

(02:44:06) It was a different culture when I was first here in the sixties, in as much as most people had a job for life, for most people it was a career. Nowadays people go for a job and it lasts six months, three years, they're quite happy. But it's difficult for an old bugger like me because I joined the police force to be a policeman for the rest of my life, or until it was time to go. Nowadays they come and go and come and go, so the culture as such is just totally changed. I honestly don't feel it's a good thing, but there you are. As I say, I'm an old fogey. I don't know how long you will stick with your job or will you go on to something else? In my day, and I'm talking about your country now, you'd get a job and unless you were particularly badly paid or going through hard times, you wouldn't look for anything else. You were quite happy, you'd stick in your job and that's all changed.

Yes, we don't now have that consistent sense of what we're working for; it's always changing, you're always being offered something better.

You're having a job not a career.

Yes, there's always something else that you could…

Make more money out of.

Yes, that could serve you better. It's all about <u>you</u>, quite selfish in some ways.

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Whereas those old colonials, they didn't think like that. They went out there and gave their lives to the people they were working among. But that's all been forgotten.

And one final question, you've said a lot about what you feel looking back at that time, but one question that we're asking everyone as well is whether they felt that their part in the war, or even the war itself, was worth it? What do you feel looking back on the seventies now?

The war itself wasn't worth it, no. A lot of good people died. From my own personal point of view, yes I suppose it made a man out of me. It certainly changed my life around, whether that was for the better or the worse, I don't know. I would hate to have not lived through it but at the same time, it certainly didn't make me a better person but it changed me. The war itself, no, it wasn't, never, ever worth it. And yet when the war finished, Ian Smith stayed where he was, he refused to move. It was only when he was aged and infirm that he finally moved. He said that he'd told everybody else they should stay, so he must stay and not all, but 80% of his henchmen, his ministers and secretaries of state etc. all went off to pastures new. So if that war did nothing else for me, it taught me there are one or two honest (02:48:23) politicians around. Smithy's the only one I can think of at the moment. In hindsight he was wrong. He wasn't an intellectual heavyweight; he caused a lot of deaths. But he was a supreme leader and he was an honest man and this country could do with someone like him.

Do you mean that he said what he thought?

He said what he felt and he stood by his principles. As a leader he was incredible because after the war, back in Marandellas, I spent a lot of time in that place. They were having elections to the new senate and a local lady was standing and Ian Smith was coming to speak out in support of her. I'm not interested in politics as such but my youngest son was about fifteen or sixteen at the time and I said "come on, let's go and see the old man." I suppose he's not a good speaker but he's quite a guy and afterwards there was coffee and biscuits etc. Smithy was meeting people and I took Graeme up to him and I said "hello Sir" – he's the only person in the world that I call "Sir" – and I said "this is my son." And he looked at me and he said, "I know you don't I?" and I said, "well, we've met." He said "don't tell me, let me think" and he said, "it was either Macheke or Kariba." And I said, "actually Sir, it was both, but I was a very junior policeman." He'd remembered my face and when you consider that's a Prime Minister of a country, he meets thousands of people and he'd remembered my face. That, I thought, that's leadership. From then on if he'd said "hey, just go back to war," I'd have gone. So history will be unkind to him, but he was an honest man.

Well I'm aware that we've spoken for a long time, is there anything else that you want to add?

No, I haven't spoken as much as this in about twenty years. I won't have a voice tomorrow and it will be your fault!

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End of interview