

## **Dave Kennedy**

*Brought up in Bahrain. Moved to Rhodesia and joined BSAP in 1959. Left Rhodesia for UK 1980.*

**This is Annie Bramley interviewing Dave Kennedy on Friday the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 2008. Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed. Could you start by telling me your reasons for being in Southern Rhodesia at the time?**

I had been brought up on Bahrain until the age of thirteen. My father worked for an American oil company who didn't supply education after the age of thirteen. So I ended up having to go to boarding school and with international travel as it was at the time, I ended up going to a boarding school in South Africa. My late sister was older than I was and she had been to school in South Africa as well, but decided to marry a South African farmer. So my parents were sending money to cover my boarding school fees and my upkeep from Bahrain where they still were, to Evelyn my late sister, who sorted out my finances. By the time I matriculated, Evelyn had moved to Rhodesia where her husband worked for the agricultural research department and he was working at the time on an Agricultural Research Station called Matopos, which is just south of the city of Bulawayo, Bulawayo being the second major city in what was then Southern Rhodesia.

**And what year was it that you matriculated?**

I was matriculated in 1958 but first started going to spend school holidays in Rhodesia in 1956, or Southern Rhodesia as it was then. During these school holidays I developed a fair amount of friendship through sport and wandering around in the bush with the members of the British South Africa Police who were stationed at Matobo, which was the local police station. I liked the way of life that they had and it certainly appealed to me. When I matriculated, my late father was very keen for me to continue my studies and wanted me to go to university but having struggled to get through matric in the compulsory language of Afrikaans, which at the time was a failing subject in the South African education system, I was not keen; I didn't really fancy my chances being able to do a scientific course in a second language. I managed to convince my father that it was a good idea for me to join the police for three years, which was the initial contract; this being one way of keeping him off my back and secondly allowing me to join the police.

**So at the time you were volunteering to join and you got a contract with them?**

Yes, my late brother-in-law was a police reservist at Matobo police station and I had a lot to do with them. So I knew the ropes on how to join the force, which I did, and I attested on the 14<sup>th</sup> of January in 1959 when I went to the training depot up in Salisbury. It was a five and a half month training course. The police force was what we might call paramilitary, so we had a fair amount

of military type training as well as equitation, which, traditionally the police had always used horses and still at that time were actively using horses for district patrols. During the course of (00:04:17) my training I broke my foot in unarmed combat training and because of this injury, which was recovering by the time I passed out the training depot, I was considered unfit for full duties. So I was stationed at the Salisbury traffic department where I was given a desk job chasing up parking tickets and all sorts of boring things. It had always been my intention to try and get into the police dog training school because I loved dogs and unfortunately on Bahrain, while I was there, we were not allowed to have animals of any description as pets. So I applied for and was eventually in 1960 accepted into the patrol dog section. The dog section was very small at that stage, there were only three other patrol dog handlers in Salisbury city and I did a six-week training course at the dog training school in Adalynn on the outskirts of Salisbury and then commenced patrol work. I lived in a flat above the main police station in Railway Avenue where we were on 24/7 call and the country started experiencing a fair amount of rioting in the urban areas and the patrol dogs (we used mainly Alsatians and Dobermans at that stage) were found to be very effective at crowd control. So we found them very useful and it was decided at a high level at the Police General Headquarters to radically expand the dog section throughout the country.

**If I could just take you back a little bit, what was your experience of Southern Rhodesia, having gone from South Africa? Did you have much awareness of the black African/Zimbabwean issues arising at the time?**

My late brother-in-law ran a dairy on the Matopos Research Station and the one major difference that I noticed coming from South Africa to Rhodesia for school holidays was the lack of, almost hatred from the African to the European. In South Africa the African really resented the way he was treated whereas in Rhodesia, the African was treated a lot better. Mike, my brother-in-law got on very, very well with his African staff and I found them to be very good humoured and friendly towards me as a young schoolboy. And this is an impression I kept of the African right through my police service. There was the odd politically inspired dissident and there is always an exception to the rule, but by and large the African in Rhodesia was in my opinion very well treated. He was given a very fair deal. A lot of people think that he was underpaid but when you look at his standard of living and what the white man's employment is doing for him, he was doing very well.

Break in interview

**Do you mind just covering that again, so you had just started using police dogs?**

(00:08:32) Due to the planned expansion of the dog section throughout the country it was decided myself and another patrol dog handler would be transferred to the Adalynn police dog training school just outside Salisbury to assist in training large numbers of handlers. We were transferred out there and trained both dogs and handlers in batches or squads of six and eight for

well over a year until we had a fair number of patrol dogs and handlers trained up.

**Do you think this expansion was trying to achieve something in particular? Was it trying to make sure that you had coverage on both sides of the country?**

Yes, while we were doing the patrol work in Salisbury prior to my being transferred to the police dog training school at Adalynn, it was found that dogs were very good at crowd control as well as crime deterrent. So we were patrolling areas of the whole city where we would drive around to the suburbs, park up, wander around and let our presence be known and it was found that this was having a reducing effect on normal crime levels. This is the major reason they decided to expand dogs; however, it had been found that during riots and crowd control the police dogs were having a very good effect and were very useful in deterring from rioting.

**So does this mean that you worked more in built up areas rather than in rural areas?**

We were.

**Would you ever be required to go into rural areas?**

At that stage the police dog training school staff handled the rural tracking work and Adalynn, the training school, was about fifteen miles out of the city whereas the dog handlers actually lived in the flat above the main police station where we were on call 24/7. It was a bit awkward when we went out for a drink at night and we'd stagger home, because we had to go through the charge office and the main public Reception area and look sober for that twenty metres going through so we could get into the hallway. Yes, we were in great demand and it was this which convinced the police general headquarters that they needed to rapidly expand the use of dogs throughout the country. After a period of time training handlers it was decided that I would be transferred down to Bulawayo to open up a larger dog section than they currently had. It was more or less a one-man band and I went down and had to start from grass roots, building dips and kennels and all the rest of it and bringing in handlers from the police dog training establishment. We ended up with quite a decent establishment in Bulawayo. By then, as well as my patrol dog, I was actually handling Doberman cross Bloodhounds for rural tracking work. So I was the dog master who covered the whole of the province of Matabeleland with a tracking dog. Mainly for store break-ins and any politically inspired crimes, which by then were starting to crop up, dip burnings and attempted derailments and things like that.

**(00:12:42) And would this have been in around '62?**

'63/'64/'65 those are the three years that I was in dog section before I left. I enjoyed the rural aspect of it because it got me out of the city and away from the brass and it was nice to get out and do some downright good police work with the dogs.

**And were you doing that full-time at that point?**

Yes, I was on call 24/7 there. Wherever I went, the police information radio room had to know my whereabouts and I could be called out at any time. It had its drawbacks on family life but wherever I went, I went in the Section Land Rover with a radio so that they could give me a whistle if needed.

**And you said you'd signed up initially for three years?**

Yes.

**Had you decided to stay on permanently then?**

Yes, I haven't mentioned that but before, while I was stationed at Adalynn training the handlers up, I got married. I married wife 'Mark One' and yes, we were transferred down to Bulawayo as a married man and I lived in married accommodation right next to the kennels, where I was on permanent call for rural work. There, we were training up some of the handlers' Alsatians for urban tracking to a certain extent, quite successfully in some cases provided they were fresh trails. Whereas the rural work, because of timescales involved in 1) the investigating officer arriving at the scene and 2) us making it out to the scene from the city, it could be anything up to two or three days old when we arrived at a trail. So we had to use specialised dogs: At that stage we were still using Bloodhounds and Doberman crosses.

**And can you tell me a bit about the rest of your family at the time? You've said that your Dad agreed to you going into the police force, what were their opinions of you starting up this dog training section?**

At this stage of my career, my parents were still living on Bahrain and only got annual leave every two and a half years. They came down to see us in Rhodesia for four months seeing my late sister and I and they stayed with my ex-wife and I at the police dog kennel in Bulawayo. I was in the police camp and my father saw how happy I was there and gave up the idea of trying to get me to go to Varsity and becoming a vet. My former wife was a teacher and she was teaching at one of the local schools in Bulawayo and my parents were quite happy about my future within the BSAP.

**It sounds like you moved around a lot as you were growing up, from (00:16:38) Bahrain to South Africa to Southern Rhodesia. Where would you have called "home"?**

I think by the time I was posted to Bulawayo, Bulawayo was definitely my home. I loved the city, the people, the way of life, the climate and the environment. When UDI was declared a few years after this period, I went and handed in my British passport straight away and took out Rhodesian citizenship, the day after Ian Smith declared UDI.

**Was that a popular move for many people around you?**

What's got to be borne in mind is that there was a lot of friendly rivalry between squads in depot; the instructional staff fostered it. The police imported squads of people from the UK and they would bring in a squad of locals and we would play water polo, rugby and football against each other and there was this "pommie" or "local" outlook, but definitely on a friendly basis. A lot of the locals obviously were Rhodesians themselves and a fair number of South Africans came up and joined; but without going through the nominal roll I would say that at least 50% were ex-UK and 50%ish locals. And the locals, and I considered myself to be a local by this time, by and large looked on Rhodesia as "home." So as I've told you, I threw my passport very dramatically on the counter and said "replace that."

**What did you think of England's actions at the time? Had you spent time there when you were very young? You said you were born in Scotland.**

I was born in Scotland and left at the age of five. Apart from the odd holiday back to the UK with my parents from Bahrain in 1949 and '51/'52, when it was decided that I had to leave Bahrain Island because of educational facilities, I actually went back to Scotland for sixteen months. I couldn't stand the climate, so I wrote to my parents and asked them to export me to South Africa where my late sister had married a South African and that's how I went to South Africa. I went to Bloemfontein, which is also quite a cold place! Because in those days there was still a certain anti-English feeling within the country, and Bloemfontein was the heart of Afrikaner-dom in the country, I had to pass matric in Afrikaans. So my dad chucked me in the deep end and said, "mix in" in the Afrikaans speaking area, so it was a sink or swim situation. Our rugby games would be fights and it didn't do me any harm.

**And so you said that there was a bit of competition between different groups that were in Rhodesia?**

Yes, I would say friendly competition. Apart from the normal sort of dispute over a beer in the pub and a fight round the back, I didn't really experience any ill-feeling between locals and Poms, as we used to look on them.

**(00:21:05) And what about black Rhodesians in the forces?**

The African establishment of the BSAP was much larger than that of the European establishment. I don't know the exact figures here but I would say it was in the region of 8 to 1, possibly even higher. I found that when I was training up African dog handlers, they were very receptive. The one thing, which did worry me initially, was how kind they would be to the animals. We trained our dogs on the basis of developing a love of the dog for its handler, and in my experience a lot of Africans were quite cruel by nature. But I must admit I soon changed my thought on this when I saw how devoted the African handlers became to the dogs and vice versa. I've always looked on a dog as being a better judge of human being than another human being and when you see a dog starting to love an African then you realise there's something there.

**And so were there divisions in the force in that sense? What sort of ranks did Africans go up to?**

The African establishment had their own rank structure. Although they could reach the rank of Sub-Inspector by the mid 60s, they joined as Constables and could become Sergeants. The European establishment when I joined as a European was a Constable then he became a Sergeant and then went to Sub-Inspector then Inspector, Chief Inspector and Commissions from there. The African at that stage could reach Constable, Sergeant, Station Sergeant, which was the equivalent of a RSM as such. Initially he could only reach that rank but this was changed in the mid 60s. They were promoted to the rank of Sub-Inspector and by that stage the whole rank structure of the police was reviewed and Constable to Sergeant remained within the African establishment. But Europeans adopted the ranks of Patrol Officer, Section Officer and retained the Inspectorate ranks as well.

**It sounds like you were all in quite close proximity in your training school. What were your feelings about those sort of divides?**

There was a definite social difference between African police and the Europeans; I won't deny that for a minute. But work-wise, we relied heavily on them to assist with interpretation and the understanding of the African way of life. We were guided very ably by our African staff. Some of the African staff were absolutely fantastic and latterly when the war started coming along, I had an African interpreter who I was more than happy to rely on to look after my back in the bush where people were messing around with rifles and things like that, we could really rely on them. Obviously there were some bad eggs, there always are but by and large the majority had been sorted out in their selection and training. Most of the bad eggs had been weeded out by the time they got to duty rounds.

**And in terms of the whites in the forces, people generally have the same sort of feelings as you did about UDI and wanting to fight for Rhodesia?**

(00:25:39) Yes. A few of the imported Poms were a bit worried about this and they thought perhaps Smith was cutting off Africa and were wondering about their heritage and their pensions and all the rest of it. But there were very, very few who resigned over it. As a matter of fact I don't think anybody in Bulawayo to my knowledge resigned as a result of the UDI. Yes there was a certain amount of consternation and the Commissioner issued a circular which was basically read out to all of us, saying, "you signed on the serve the Queen and we're here to police the country and let the politicians get on with it." Most, if not all of us, accepted that quite happily.

**So did you feel that you had awareness of the political situation? How did the police force link into and work with it at the time?**

We were apolitical, though obviously we all had our own personal feelings. I personally was very pro-Rhodesia and thought, and still do – and the way things have worked out I think I've been proved correct – that we knew more about Rhodesia's future and how it should be handled. When I say "we" I'm

not talking about policemen, I'm talking about the white European in Rhodesia who knew more about how to bring on the African, which was happening quite rapidly. Covering that, my wife was in African education and by this time, the mid 60s, they had done away with the Cambridge exam and they were actually on GCSEs, 'O' and 'A' levels and all the rest of it.

My wife and I actually, we didn't adopt the African, but there was an African child whose family was struggling to put him through school and he came and lived within the police camp at Hillside with us. Or rather he was given a room in the African accommodation there and he travelled to and from school every day with my former wife. Jothan went on to become a teacher, and we educated him and a lot of the Europeans and Africans did that. We didn't all have big sjamboks: Might have been south of the border there but not north. By and large the European gave the African a square deal I think, that's my honest view. In South Africa, when I ultimately left Rhodesia, I moved to South Africa and the fear that radiated from the European was very, very evident. And the dislike and hatred among the African for the European was very, very noticeable.

**It sounds like that's been quite important in affirming your identity as Rhodesian at the time?**

Oh yes. And the other thing, I always point out very strictly that I was in the British South Africa Police, not the South African Police. The South African Police we defined as a big gun with a small brain whereas when I joined were big brains with no gun. (00:30:14)

**So these were the South African Police who came to support?**

Yes.

**And that was happening at a particular time, wasn't it?**

Yes, that happened, there was an Operation in 1967/'68 where a large group of seventy odd terrorists came through from Zambia into North Matabeleland and there were some South African coloureds as well as blacks within that group. They were actually the first lot of terrorists who came in and stood and fought and they fought very well because they'd been trained well and they were led well and political indoctrination was of a high level. And South Africa realised that we couldn't stop terrorists getting through into Botswana, which was their intended route into South Africa; we didn't have the manpower to undertake a lot of operations of that size. So they decided in their wisdom to send policemen to assist. I had a fair amount to do with the going out and training of these South African policemen, and had a very low opinion of them. In my view a South African policeman would be fine until he was confronted by somebody else with a rifle and he would bottle out. There were exceptions, but they didn't have the moral fibre of the Rhodesian policeman, they didn't have the backbone.

**Can you tell me about that Rhodesian identity and what it meant to you?**

I think that UDI and sanctions really brought the country together, for the European businessman. I left the police in 1973 and I started my own little manufacturing business in fibreglass in Bulawayo and sanctions helped small industry in a very big way. Sanctions made Rhodesia more self-sufficient than it had been. Traditionally, something was made in Japan or the UK, France or Germany wherever and if it could be imported we would import it. When the sanctions arrived we ended up having to make a large percentage of what our daily needs were in industry and commerce and it helped local small businesses. It certainly helped me set up my business and it made Rhodesians become a very closely-knit community.

**It also sounds like there was a sense that the South Africans may have had it a lot easier than yourselves, and therefore they didn't have this industrious streak that the Rhodesians had? (00:36:06)**

In South Africa? The Rhodesians were very inventive of necessity. They were very inventive and they were very helpful to each other as well. If you could do anything to assist somebody, particularly if they were just starting up a business then you would do so. South Africa was a very rich country and they could have their big six cylinder cars and all the rest of it, whereas in Rhodesia we struggled to get car parts so we soon learned to make them. It was that type of thing which did us a lot of good.

**And what about other parts of the Rhodesian services at the time? Were you aware of other sections that were in Bulawayo? The Army or...?**

Well one of Rhodesia's major battalions was the Rhodesia Light Infantry and their training school was just outside Bulawayo initially, but it was moved up to Salisbury in about 1961. So the RAR, the Rhodesian African Rifles took over Methuen barracks, just outside Bulawayo and operationally we started getting mixed up with them quite a lot.

Break in interview

**You've just been filling me in then that you were in the dog section in Bulawayo but then you experienced a transition into a far more military role. Can you tell me about that time period and what was going on?**

After five and a half years I left the dog section, returned to duty branch and...

**What were your reasons for leaving?**

They wanted me to go to a small centre, a place called Gatooma which is in the back of beyond as far as I was concerned, to open a dog section there. I didn't relish the thought of going to Gatooma at all; I loved Bulawayo, so I applied to leave dog section and return to normal duty branch. I was posted to what was termed Bulawayo Urban, which is the urban area covered by the police in Bulawayo.

**And what year was that?**



That was 1964. I did normal police duties including charge office and patrol car driving and then I was stationed at a very urban station on the outskirts of Bulawayo, called Hillside. It was a lovely station. By this time terrorism had started to escalate. However I would like to say that at this stage of the terrorist incursion into the country they were mainly Africans who had been dragged off the streets in Zambia and were coerced/forced into taking arms, being trained, slung over the border and told to go and commit acts of terrorism. It was quite easy to round them up and they weren't very vindictive or (00:38:10) effective as terrorists. All incursions normally resulted in a riot squad being called out from Bulawayo and if you happened to be on the riot squad then you went out into the bush to take on, or find these terrorists and bring them to justice. Most of them actually were quite prepared to give up with no fight whatsoever. At the most they would try and hide but on quite a few occasions they would put down their arms and hand themselves in.

**What would happen when they handed themselves in? Was there much switching of sides and so on?**

Not at that stage of the terrorist war. Normally members of the security branch would be investigating their history and how and why they came into the country. They were mainly interested in finding out who was behind sending them in etc.

**So did you have a bit of involvement then with the security branch? Is this Special Branch?**

Yes.

**Did you have a lot of contact with them? In what ways were you working together?**

Only in as much as we would be handing over personnel. The man who was my best man and he'd been a squad mate of mine was a member of SB and he would bring me up to speed over a beer on what the situation was as far as he could interpret it. So the terrorist incursions weren't too bad until a very large contingent came in, in 1968, led by South African coloureds. They were members of the ANC and some 74 made the way over into the Wankie game reserve area where it was discovered and we started looking for them. The RAR with a couple of police dog handlers and an Inspector from Wankie were tracking these bods and walked right into an ambush and came under very, very heavy controlled fire from a well-trained determined group. One dog handler was killed, the other one was injured, the police Inspector was seriously injured and the African Regimental Sergeant Major at the time was killed, as was the Lieutenant Officer. This happened just on sundown and it was the first time that a pitch battle had taken place between terrorists and members of the security forces. The police personnel involved in that weren't very well trained at all. I was on riot squad duties in Bulawayo when this occurred and the next thing I knew I was being sent out into the Tjolutjo area as a part of a riot squad to go and assist looking for these people. The RAR morale took a big dip there. They had lost their leader, they had lost their Sergeant Major and they had lost a couple of their troopers. So members of

the Rhodesia Light Infantry were sent down from Mashonaland to come and assist and the group of terrorists bomb-shelled after this contact. Bomb-shelled is where they split in all directions, a bit shambolic the way that they did it. Some headed back to Zambia I believe, others made their way into Botswana and others decided they were going to (00:42:52) try and make their way through into South Africa via the Plumtree and Beit Bridge areas.

**It seems that this was a definite shift that you were experiencing in your station from having to take on a very anti-terrorist role?**

Well, it was certainly the first time we'd come across a bunch of terrorists who were well trained, well prepared, well armed and well led to fight, yes.

**So had your duties up to that point been far more civilian?**

Yes, although up until this time what had come in as so-called terrorists weren't in my opinion very inspired. They weren't really determined as terrorists; they were mainly conscripted, grabbed from their beds in Zambia where they worked on a mine and were told that their family in Bulawayo would have their throats slit etc. if they didn't go and fight. Up until then, in my estimation, they weren't really prepared to fight. This became known as Operation Nickel. It's got to be borne in mind that the search area for terrorists increases approximately forty miles every twenty-four hours. These people were very fit and although they carried heavy packs they were capable of covering large distances, mainly at night when we couldn't move. So we were playing catch-up all the time and the operational area was increasing on this forty-mile radius circle.

**And did you have a sense of whom you were fighting against at the time and what groups and ideals? It sounds like they had also changed; they were more definitely trained in what they were doing?**

We established after the contact that these were in fact led by members of the ANC from South Africa and ZAPU and they were determined to take on the security forces if necessary. Their aim was to get through to South Africa; or to split up and the ZAPU people remain in Rhodesia and the ANC people head for South Africa. With them bomb-shelling and spreading all over the place, the operational area just grew and grew and grew and we started picking up the odd bloke who had been injured and couldn't carry on. Some had decided to put down their arms and hand themselves in and one determined bloke and he was coloured, was down as far as Figtree, between Bulawayo and Plumtree, where he was shot on a farm. He had to be shot because he was holding the farmer's wife and children at the point of a Tokarev pistol. He was quite determined, Basil February was his name.

**So there was also a turn to being involved in much more violent situations? What was that like for you?**

The only violent contact I was involved in, in Operation Nickel, was at a spot on the Manzinyama river near Trig.point 222 (Map referral point), which the RLI and ourselves (00:47:22) took on as a result of information received to the

whereabouts of four terrs who were lying up sleeping during the day and one of them was on sentry. He opened up with a Tokarev pistol as the RLI were approaching and the RLI subsequently killed them all.

**So they were with you then?**

Yes. I was with the RLI more in an observer role than an active role, bearing in mind that this was definitely a requirement for an infantry role and I was just an ordinary copper.

**So how had you ended up in that situation?**

It was because we were on riot squad when the operation blew up and out we went in our riot kit. After Operation Nickel wound down, some of them got through into South Africa and some of them were subsequently arrested up in Umtali. It was then decided that there'd be a major de-brief in Bulawayo of people in the police who'd been along and the symposium was arranged to work out how to handle situations like this in future. A lot of suggestions were put forward and it was decided that the police would receive a certain amount of training. It was also decided that the police role would be mainly reconnaissance and information and intelligence gathering because of our ground coverage system and our local knowledge. The main role seen of the police was thought to be, in the future, that of "find the blokes and call in the Army to deal with them."

**How did you feel about that change, or the way it was heading?**

Because the country was so large, I didn't see it working all that well. It was a case of numbers. To have to get intelligence of the presence of three or four terrorists who needed for the want of a better word, taking on by military, we just didn't have the military power to cover the country in an adequate way. So I foresaw that the police role would be getting mixed up with the Army and it would become, in my opinion then, a role of whoever was around would have to deal with it and I thought we should be trained accordingly. They decided as a result of the de-brief of Operation Nickel that we would take on instructors who were more qualified to train for this role and that our equipment would be sorted out accordingly. We would be issued with camouflage kit, automatic weapons, a decent amount of ammunition, proper carrying packs, proper footwear and get away from the baton and handcuffs attitude that we had up until then.

**And what about training then? You were given this equipment, and were you trained to use it?**

Yes, the police employed an ex-member of the SAS who had seen service in the LRDG and subsequently the SAS, by the name of Reg Seekings. Reg was very, very good and he moved around the major centres from Salisbury, training PATU sticks. It was decided that groups of four sticks (00:52:07) would be formed and that each stick would consist of four Europeans and one African as an interpreter; and each group would consist of four sticks. Our transport had to be re-thought and we were given short-wheel-based open

backed Land Rovers with no doors, stripped down. More of a fighting vehicle with proper rifle racks, long range tanks, extra water facilities etc. so that we became self sufficient in a stick working from one Land Rover.

**That must have been quite reassuring, having been in quite unexpected situations that you hadn't been prepared for before?**

Yes.

**But did you feel better equipped for what you were doing?**

I felt that they were going in the right way but where you're going out and you're thinking, "well I could get slotted," you always think you're not well enough trained, you haven't got enough experience, you haven't got enough ammunition. It escalated from there and that's how we developed from baton and handcuffs into being more of an infantry role. This business of working as recce sticks didn't really work because as I said earlier on, it was a case of who was closest, do something about it because we can't get the Army there, we haven't got six helicopters to help you out.

**This is the PATU sticks?**

Yes. So if we were out and came across signs or information about the presence of terrorists, we just had to do something about it ourselves and to that end I felt that we should continue with more and more training. There was one operation I was on where I was in a stop line with the mortar platoon of the RAR, near the Gwaai river confluence with the Zambezi. Their Lieutenant got gippo guts and he had to be flown out; and I was in charge of a mortar platoon, which had four MAGs and eight Mortars and I didn't have a clue on how to minister them. The RAR traditionally were European-led and looked to me, "well what do we do now?" and I didn't have the answers and I felt I should be trained to have the answer.

**What did you do in that situation?**

I called the African Sergeant, took him away out of ear shot and I told him he was in charge and whatever he thought was required, to do it and to let me know what he needed via way of supply and I would sort out the re-supply of food, water and cigarettes for him. I think I still owe the government out there for about thirty thousand fags. They asked me about that about six months after that operation. I was called in, "what's this about thirty thousand odd fags?" (00:55:54) that I ordered. They would ship it in with food and water and all the rest of it and "here's fags for the RAR," "yes, alright, how long are we going to be?" "I don't know, you'd better send..." So they sent me a big carton of fags "here, help yourselves" and I counted eighty odd dollars worth of stuff.

**So you just had to go with the situation.**

Yes, you just had to do what had to be done and that was it. There was an area Kamativi Mine (points to it on map), mainly Dutch owned, but there was

an airfield near there, which although a strip airfield, it was quite good. Every time I was in an operation formed up in this area we would base ourselves at Kamativi airstrip and there were a lot of smaller operations taking place along the shores of Lake Kariba and the Batoka Gorges between the Falls and Binga area. They decided after the Operation Nickel symposium that they were going to institute a JOC system, Joint Operation Command. This was because of what had happened in Malaya and the theory behind: That when an operation started, the most senior member of the Police, the Army and the Air Force all sat in the same tent, all making mutual decisions no matter what rank, and handling the operational method adopted and controlled, as members of the security force. So Kamativi having an airstrip was quite good, it became very popular and was used frequently for the small operations up in that area. Also the police reserves at Kamativi were all very good to the members of the security force and would always give you a beer and wash your kit for you and feed you. So this area was quite "hot." Kariangwe Mission up here, I picked up two terts there on one operation, from Binga. That was quite hairy, one of them shot back at us. So we actually arrested him. We were told that he was a political commissar and they did want to speak to him, so we managed to get a hold of him and take him back.

**And while we had a break earlier, you were saying that there was a situation where you had taken some of the stock...do you mind saying?**

I don't mind.

**But you did return it.**

Yes, I'll revert to this business of kit and the feeling of insecurity going out as a riot-equipped copper and finding yourself in the middle of battle,

**Yes, I think that's a key point because it was a big transition.**

At the Manzinyama contact during Operation Nickel where four terrorists were killed, these terrorists had actually looted quite a lot of the RAR's supplies from (01:00:38) the contact area, equipment, ammunition and magazines, all sorts, even an FN rifle. At this contact I took some grenades from the dead terrorists and spread them among the guys who were in my riot vehicle. My reasons for doing this were pretty obvious in as much as if we came across some bloke who was going to be exploding that type of ordinance at me I wanted to be in a position to take him on. A few weeks later when we were called back to Tjolutjo, which is where the headquarters of this operation were, on arrival I was seen by a senior member of the CID who informed me that at the contact in Mzingwane a fair amount of kit had gone missing and that they wanted it and that if it appeared on his desk while he was having his lunch, nothing would be done about it. Now I spoke to the guys and we decided to hand the kit in and I duly put the grenades and a few other little bits and pieces like bayonets and things like that back on his desk and a short while after lunchtime I was called to his office again where I was told that it was an offence under the explosives act for me to be in possession of grenades and I was grilled as regards why I had taken them. I think his mentality was entirely that of a chair-borne, city-dwelling policeman who didn't

have a clue what we were against out in the sticks. Subsequently, I was also seen by another senior officer on return to Bulawayo and asked to account for my actions for having taken this ordinance. It wasn't a case of trophy hunting; it was a case of self-preservation, which is why I took them.

**And was there a fair amount of, not competition perhaps but disagreement between the ranks, between different levels?**

I'll speak for the guy in the field, it was felt very strongly that officers who had no training in infantry tactics, in war situations should be quickly trained or kept out of theatre. They didn't have a clue what was going on and their decision-making was useless and junior officers who were sent out on the early operations just did not handle things correctly. There were quite a few occasions when quite a few of us had to get very noisy with some junior officers. In one particular case we lost four terrors as a direct result of a junior officer not being prepared to make a decision there and then. There were lots of appeals where we knew that the terrorists had made their way back into Zambia and there were lots of appeals for "please can we go over and hammer them?" which were understandably turned down and any incursions out of Rhodesia were carried out properly by properly trained members of the Rhodesian security forces, which I'm sure you know happened on certain occasions. But yes, there was a feeling of frustration when you've tracked a guy for thirty to fifty miles and you see wet footprints going into the Zambezi river and smoky fire on the other side of the river you want to go and get stuck into this. But it never happened, to my knowledge, at ground level. Any decision for that retaliatory type, shall we say, was made at a very high level.

**You were trying to maintain consistency and peace within Rhodesia, and it sounds like there was a sense of everything coming into the country, rather than it being factions within the country that you were fighting against. How did you perceive the threat? (01:05:48)**

I think I know where you're coming from but in my experience there were no training cells set up in Matabeleland before I left the police. Whether that took place after I left I don't really know. When I left I stayed in Bulawayo for another three and a half years before I left to emigrate to South Africa and a guy who had been my best man was a member of SB and we used to meet up quite frequently for a beer and he would update me on it because by then I was a member of the police reserve. Prior to my leaving the country, once Mozambique, Portuguese East Africa handed over, the number of terrorists within the country escalated and to me, it became evident that we wouldn't be able to contain it, which was sad but true.

**And were you listening to different media, the radio and television and so on? What was your perception of the outside view of what was going on in Rhodesia?**

Because of the fact that we knew that the terrorists' HQ was in Zambia, we were listening to security force broadcasts and to our national radio and television broadcasts, as were the British government down in Francistown. We tended to keep operational information to a minimum in normal

communications and this did affect the normal daily news media on both TV and newspapers. But among the European members of the security forces and civilians there were high hopes that we were winning. Until that Mozambique border went, we were on top of it.

**And what sort of political discussions did you have with friends in the forces at the time? Did you all have a similar view on where it was going?**

Yes, I think that it's fair to say that most of the European members of the police force that I entered into discussions about this with were as hopeful and as confident as I was that we could handle it. I had an African interpreter, Magodi, who was attached to my PATU stick and he was one fifth of my firepower. He was a great man, a great friend and sadly he was murdered post independence for his loyalty to members of the BSAP. He fitted in with our stick and everybody accepted him totally as an equal and that was it. Magodi came everywhere with us and he was one fifth of us; he drank with us, he ate with us, he slept with us, everything, absolutely no reason whatsoever to question his loyalty to me or the country. As a matter of fact he was the very first African policeman to be given a FN rifle and he was given mine; I gave him my rifle to use in the bush and trained him how to use an automatic weapon. He'd been trained with a shotgun and that was not considered adequate and I trained him and I carried a Sterling sub-machine gun by preference. (01:10:39)

**So was that quite unusual for you to have forced that through?**

Oh yes, and rapidly other members of PATU undertook it. I haven't explained what the group situation was, do you mind if I digress on to that and we'll come back to that point?

**No that's fine.**

In Bulawayo we had four groups. Each group was allocated a colour and also consisted of four sticks. Each stick was expected to be self-sufficient and capable of working independently of the other three. The group leader was normally an Inspector and his role was to go along to the JOC representing and looking after the interests of his four sticks. If we needed a re-supply of ammunition, water, food, had a broken down truck, half shaft gone or something like that and we needed a radio fixed, we got on to him at JOC and it was his role to look after each of the four PATU sticks operating in the field. The group system was that we would do a calendar month on one-hour standby, not from the police camp as a riot squad, but we had to be at the armoury ready to draw our rifles within one hour of being called out. This necessitated us advising the police information room of our whereabouts at all times whether on duty or off. After you'd done a month one-hour standby you did one month four-hours' standby, which was the secondary back-up; if the first group was called out, you were brought forward from the four-hour standby on to one-hour standby. The other two groups were supposed to be on rest but if both groups were called out another of the other two groups would come forward.

**Quite demanding.**

Yes, it was nothing to be sitting in a cinema in Bulawayo and just have it flashed up on the screen, “so and so, and so and so, call your office.”

**It would come up on the screen?**

Yes, during the film. And you knew damn well you were being called out, you didn't even bother; you just went round to the police station and said, “what's the crack?” Some of us even just went straight home and got into our camouflage kit and we had to keep our kitbags ready with fags and water and a few days food in it.

**And you were married at the time?**

Yes.

**What did your wife or your family think of that?**

We didn't have any children at that stage; we only had a son after I left the police. It didn't do my marriage any good; my marriage broke up about five years after I left the police. (01:14:06)

**What were your wife's views of what was going on?**

Oh, she was a Rhodesian born and bred girl and was very satisfied that somebody had to do it. She thought that it was me so frequently but she was a very loyal Rhodesian and thought we were doing a good job.

**You've also mentioned that you had a translator with you. Did you make use of the African cultures; things like Spirit Mediums and so on?**

Magodi was very helpful. He taught us a lot about African customs and particularly the day-to-day African way of life. I'll never forget being on a patrol in an operational area where we came across a village and nearby were some thorn bushes, which had been birdlimed. Do you know what birdliming is?

**No.**

They make up this sticky substance that attracts birds, smear it on these thorn bushes and the birds come along, it smells nice to the birds but they stick there and they die. Now this to me was not very nice I mean you're walking in the bush and you come across a couple of thousand Kwelia birds, hanging there in different stages of death. We came across this birdlime and I made my way to the local kraal, very, very cheesed off about this and I got Magodi to call the headman and took him down to the birdlime trap and said “look, this isn't on.” We ripped all the branches away because they break branches off trees and stack them all in one spot and we broke up this birdlime trap and I



told him that we would be back in a few days time and didn't want to see any more evidence of it.

About ten days later, we happened to be in the area so I said, "we'll go and have a look and see if the birdliming had stopped." We got there and it had been put together again so I then went nuts. I was being very strict and cross about this so I went into the village – there were only about five or six huts in the village – and I put a bullet hole through everything that could contain water. The nearest water was half a mile away and I put a bullet hole in all their basins and their containers. It really irritated me. A few days later the op finished and we were up in Wankie and we were in the Baobab Hotel sitting in the garden having a beer and I said to Magodi "what did you think of that patrol?" and I've forgotten his exact words but it was basically "do you remember the birds in the tree?" I said "yes, we sorted those bastards out didn't we?" and he said "I want to tell you that those birds were eating their rupoko crop, which is what they live on and they did that to protect the food for the kraal and what we did was wrong." That was a very humbling lesson that I learnt and Magodi taught all of us things like that. As regards witchcraft, we didn't come across it and I was very much aware of (01:18:25) African customs. Most of us were because we realised that we had to understand the African and we used our interpreters as much as possible.

### **Had you learnt any language yourself?**

Yes.

### **Were you speaking Ndebele, would it have been?**

I would say half and half. Have you heard of Kitchen Kaffir?

**Yes, I have.**

Most of us spoke Kitchen Kaffir, which is a mixture. You've heard of Fanagalo?

**I haven't, no.**

Oh right, Fanagalo is "fana" is "this way," "lo" is "this" [points hands to signify pointing to something]. They developed Fanagalo for use on the mines in South Africa. A lot of the indigenous from Rhodesia were there on contract in the mines and had learned to speak Fanagalo. They taught all the Europeans and Africans who worked on the Transvaal mines to speak Fanagalo so there was a common language and it got the nickname Fanagalo because it was a general expression of when they're training somebody you've got to drill a hole in here, you hold the machine..."fana" ga "lo." Different words developed and most of us spoke fanagalo. In Rhodesia it was called Kitchen Kaffir. Incidentally 'Kaffir' is an Arabic word, do you know that?

**Well I've heard that it was used to communicate?**

You're talking about Kitchen Kaffir; I mean the word 'Kaffir.' Everybody thinks "oh a very, very rude way of describing an African," it's not. It's an Arabic word for 'infidel,' a 'non-believer.' So we're all 'Kaffirs.'

**And did you have any awareness of the international environment at the time? Particularly in terms of the Cold War and communism?**

Yes, we were very much aware of the fact that there was a fair amount of communism behind the training of the terrs coming into our part of the world and because of that we tended to pay as much attention as we could to the Cold War. I think it's fair to say that 999 out of 1000 Europeans in Africa were very aware of communism.

**And how did you get information about the wider situation?**

Well you come across some terr that you've slotted and you open his pack up and out comes a little book, *Thoughts of Mao Tse Tung* and all the rest of it. (01:22:14) You tend to look at the political commissar and indoctrination literature they were carrying.

**Did you have to communicate any of that when you handed them over? Would you give them to Special Branch?**

Oh yes.

**You'd have to inform them?**

Yes, you've got to bear in mind that because of the operational area (refers to map) we covered everything that side of the main Wankie/Bulawayo road up to the end of the Chete game reserve. So if we met and picked up a couple of terrs here and SB wanted them, they would send in a chopper, the bods would go back and we would do the follow up work like look for where they'd cached their kit. It was invariably three or four days, up to two weeks later, that we would find their arms cache so we'd have ample opportunity. They'd sort of say "oh right, next time you need fuel, drop it all at Binga police station and we'll get it collected from there." So it could be two or three weeks before we handed it in.

**So if you did come across terrorists you would report it very quickly to Special Branch?**

Oh yes.

**How would you do that, was it all on radio?**

Normally. Mainly by radio.

**And you were reporting whom you had?**

Radios were part and parcel of the equipment that we had. Traditionally we had VHF – very high frequency, line of sight. Now in a country like this, which

is very broken and hilly, VHF is no good so the VHF portables that we had were more than useless so one of the things that they brought in was single side band portables TR28As. Alright they were a pain in the backside in as much as you had to stop, put up a Di-pole aerial, throw aerials up into trees and all the rest of it, but you could speak to Cape Town on those things. Another thing that did happen with VHF was that once an operation started and if most of the ground forces still had VHF, which, all our vehicles had VHF fitted, we would put up what was called Telstar, have you heard of these?

### **Would this be a sort of mobile aerial?**

It was an aircraft, police reserve air wing would put up an aeroplane who would act as a relay. So we're here and want to talk to the guy there with VHF, the aeroplane's flying around here "hey George let Percy know that we need (01:25:55) another fourteen rolls of toilet roll" or whatever. And latterly, after Op Nickel, they started arming these Telstars: Police reserve air wing guys started having light armaments and they carried grenades to chuck out the window. Believe it or not, one thing that they carried that was very, very handy as a way of marking...if we were following somebody and we had this police reserve air wing aircraft up and we sort of said are you heading north from here, he would fly north and see if he could see them on the ground, which would give us an indication of how far we could run or whether we were about to walk into an ambush and what they were doing. Once they'd found them they'd tell us on the radio, "I'm right above them now" and he'd heave out a toilet roll and you'd see this thing flashing down through the skies, "there they are," that's how we heard!

### **That's incredible. You've mentioned briefly that some people in the forces had been in Malaya. Was there a sense of having to learn tactics or share operational experiences from Kenya as well as from Malaya?**

Specifically in Bulawayo we had one bloke who's dead now, Lester Bredner, who had seen service in Palestine and in Malaya and he was taken on as a supernumerary. He was a professional police reservist on instructional staff and he would go out on training exercises. Reg Seekings would come down to Matabeleland once a year and take out each group from Matabeleland; but we had monthly training sessions of our own where we would go out, do weapon handling and use our rifles, become more proficient handling them and do tactical training as well. Lester Bredner was on the training staff based in Bulawayo doing that.

### **So was some of that knowledge from Malaya shared with yourselves?**

Yes. Of all the training that we had, Reg Seekings was "God," that's indisputable by any member of PATU. Some of them wouldn't like admitting it because an ace was an ace; if you weren't any good you failed it. He stuck around on the training exercise and a friend of mine leant his rifle against a rock. He was getting water from the dam and Reg stuck a bullet about two feet in front of him! "Stay near your weapon at all times, don't leave it like

that.” He was hard but very fair, very good until he started drinking at night, a font of information and knowledge.

**To what extent did you feel that the war created a Rhodesian identity?**

Rhodesian identity as regards the war? (01:31:15)

**Yes.**

It brought all the Rhodesians closer together; there was a feeling of national unity behind the war effort. You got all sorts of people doing all sorts of things in industry trying to help the war effort: Blokes playing around with different weapons started manufacturing weapons and developing things. When I left the police, to give you an example, I was playing with bullet proofing for the helicopters in fibreglass and things like that. By and large there were very, very few white Rhodesians who thought that the place was going down the pan until the Mozambique border went.

**And if we come to the end of your time there...you actually left the forces before the end of the war, didn't you?**

Yes.

**What motivated you to do that?**

It got to the stage where I was spending so much time out in the bush that my marriage was suffering. I applied for a year off PATU work and this was turned down on the grounds that I was needed and I decided to leave. I had a little back yard business in fibreglass going and I started my own little company in Bulawayo. I left the police and went into business, which because of sanctions was very successful because we had to manufacture a lot of stuff that traditionally had been imported. Sanctions certainly helped me.

**So what year was it that you actually left?**

'73. I ran my little business in Bulawayo and it was during that time that Mozambique handed over. I'll never forget, I was exhibiting at the annual trade fair in Bulawayo South; I had a stand there. When Mozambique, well the Portuguese, threw the towel in, a lot of the Mozambiqueans were Portuguese East African and the gloom and doom that went around that trade fair was unreal. It was that which made me realise the country was going to go. So I sold my business and I moved to South Africa and I was general manager of a company in Louis Trichardt, just over the border near Messina.

**What year was that then?**

I moved to South Africa in '77 and I was in Louis Trichardt. That's where my marriage broke up and I left my former wife, moved to Jo'burg, got divorced and met and married my second wife who was a Bedford girl. I personally thought that South Africa was going to go the same way as Rhodesia, so I decided to come over here. We moved to Bedford and I worked at Lucas Aerospace in Luton. I got quite a good job there but I got itchy feet and I went

and worked in the (01:35:14) Middle East. I was in Saudi, Bahrain, Qatar and Abu Dhabi working in the construction industry.

**So you actually returned to where you'd been brought up?**

Yes and unfortunately my second wife contracted cancer and we'd had two children. So I came back here, she died and I had to look after the kids. I met my third wife and my kids are off my hands, flown the nest etc. so we decided to retire to Cornwall. One aspect I think I should point out is that most people who've lived in Africa have Africa in their bloodstream. I loved Africa and I would not like to go back and see what's happened to it.

**Have you been back?**

No, I don't want to go back to what's now Zimbabwe. I wouldn't mind going to South Africa on holiday to see what's happened there. I have a very good friend who I worked a lot with on PATU who lives in Durban, he's been over twice.

**What year did you actually move to Britain then?**

I moved here in 1980.

**I was going to ask if you had experienced the elections in the 80s and what you thought of that?**

By then it was obvious that Ian Smith was hanging on. Can I put it a little bit bluntly? He was sucking the hind boob wasn't he? He'd lost it. Summing it up, I used to ride around with a sticker on the side of my motorbike, which said "I hate Harold. A friend of mine in Bulawayo owned a paper mill and one of his products was toilet paper and he set up a machine and sold to friends only rolls of toilet paper with a photograph of Harold with his pipe and all, on each page. One thing I will say is that over here I found that unless people have travelled internationally, it's best to keep quiet about my African experiences, my world experiences, because they don't believe you. A typical example in my opinion is sport: If you meet a rugby player here – I'm a member of the local rugby team – we go down there and they say "did you play?" "Yes I used to play." And in conversation you'd say "well I was playing squash one day and got hit in the eye by a..." "You play squash as well?" "Yes." And next conversation is "I canoed once from Katambora down to the falls and that took me three days and I went over a waterfall and goodness knows what." "What, you canoed as well?" Most people in Africa, in Australia, try everything and they've got a wide range of experiences whereas over here going back to sport, if a bloke played, it's one thing only. He's never thought of (01:39:35) squash or a canoe or shooting a rifle as a sport. I used to be into archery, I wrecked my shoulder and had to have an operation and I can't draw a bow anymore so I shoot a crossbow.

**There are two more questions that I want to cover and one of them is to what extent you felt that the war was, or perhaps became seen as a racial war or a civil war?**

Within Rhodesia do you mean?

**Yes I mean within Rhodesia.**

I think it was seen as a political war, I don't think it was seen as a racial war at all.

**Or a civil war even?**

Yes, civil war came later. There were racists, I don't deny that for a minute. There were people who walked around "I hate blacks;" very few and normally the ones who shot their mouths off were mainly alcohol induced and they weren't much cop and weren't listened to very much. There's goodies and baddies you know in all races and as far as we were concerned coming in with a rifle and having a go at a farmer, you're a bloody baddie, you don't deserve space. But the guy who works on that farm deserves looking after, which is what we were trying to do.

**And the last question then, did you feel that it was worth it, worth fighting for?**

Yes.

**In the end?**

Oh in the end?

**Well, what you're feeling now; perhaps there's a difference between then and now?**

I feel now that we didn't buy Ian Smith two minutes and that's the sad thing about it, it didn't buy him two minutes. At the end of the day it was sorted out by the gloss of politicians. If you turned around today to the African in the street he would much rather it was a white man running the country. And today every African out there apart from ZANU-PF would agree.

**So you feel that it happened anyway?**

(01:42:30) Yes, it was inevitable that it was going to happen because of all the pressure and it was just sad that they wouldn't listen to Ian Smith because that country would still be self-sufficient and exporting and it would be a lovely place to live. Not any more. In my view there was only one country that proved that an African could do it quite quickly and that was Hastings Banda in Malawi. The rest just make a mess of things, South Africa's going the same way. When I left South Africa, I said ten years: I've been proved wrong but it's going to happen, it is going, no two ways about it, sad.

End of interview