

Fred Punter – Part One

Grew up in the UK. At the end of school, aged 19, Fred joined the BSAP and emigrated to Rhodesia in 1952. Returned to the UK to marry girlfriend three years later (1955 - they are still married now) and they returned to Rhodesia together. Left the police force in 1982 and left Zimbabwe for the UK immediately afterwards.

This is Doctor Sue Onslow interviewing Mr Fred Punter, formally Senior Assistant Commissioner and Officer Commanding Midlands Province at the London School of Economics on Tuesday 1st July 2008. Fred, thank you very much indeed for coming along on a hot summer's day to talk to me. I wonder if you could begin by describing why you decided to emigrate to Rhodesia to Southern Rhodesia?

It was entirely a whim. I had, I was at school and I had been deferred from military service to take high school certificate again to get higher levels and I had my 19th birthday at school. In December 1951 someone gave me a brochure for the British South Africa Police and it seemed a good idea to go down to Rhodesia House for the interview and somehow I got carried along and went.

So no-one else from your school was thinking of joining the BSAP?

No-one else from my school was thinking although we had one very old boy who was in fact in the massacre at Shangani. I didn't know this until after I had even left the police. And there was one other chap that had joined about five years before and I didn't know but I met him when I got out there

What did your parents think of your decision?

I had an elder brother, two years older and he was at Leeds University and we were just ordinary working family. We had both won scholarships to public schools and really my parents couldn't afford for me to go to University. So quite frankly, they were quite chuffed when I decided at 19 to leave home

So where was home in the UK at this time?

Home was in Sandy in Bedfordshire

Right, so where you've come back to?

Where I came back to because my parents and I married a Sandy girl and her parents were there, so it was the obvious place to come back to

But when you went out to Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia at 19 in 1951, you weren't married? You were single?

No, no I was single, yes. I actually went in for the beginning of 52 by the time I'd been for the interview and medical and they wanted to put me on a boat before Christmas and New Year, I said "you must be joking?" and I didn't go until January, sailed January 1952 and unfortunately King George VI died whilst we were on the voyage

So what did that mean for your...?

(00:02:59)

The whole ship just shut down and was more sombre and no farewell parties at Cape Town and all that sort of thing. Yes, it was a bit miserable

So you went, you came from Cape Town on the train up to Salisbury?

Four nights on the train, second class, six in a compartment eating grapes all the way and playing cards

Doesn't sound too bad? So how many travelled with you to join the BSAP?

There were a total of twelve

So that was an average recruitment?

An average recruitment, about every two weeks and they were from all walks of life. We were not peas in a pod. We were absolutely as different as they come

Do you remember, of the other eleven what were their backgrounds? Where they came from, what type of person, what schooling?

Yes there was one chap, a very superior had been a junior officer in the navy and came from a very well connected family. There was the guy who was a farmer's son who'd gone to the Bluecoat's school in Reading I think it is? There was another chap who was very well educated but he ignored the signs on the boat about diving into the swimming pool and dislocated his neck and was invalided out. I read, he did six months and was invalided and sent home and I read recently that he was the Mayor of Brighton

Really?

Yes

Interesting

A guy by the name of Watkins

So people from very different walks of life?

Absolutely, although a lot of them, in fact the majority of them had some connection with Rhodesia. I felt a little bit sort of... not alone but I felt that

why was I going and I didn't have anybody out there or know anybody and yet all these other guys had

Did your brother contemplate joining you after...?

No, not a chance. No he was at University and he ended up as an eminent metallurgist
(00:05:28)

Yes and your parents didn't contemplate emigrating from austere Britain?

No, no my father was a very ordinary sort of guy and he would never...

What was his trade?

Initially he was an agricultural labourer and then just about six months before the outbreak of World War Two, he and mother bought a bicycle shop and that was their living throughout, you know until I left so I was brought up in a bicycle shop. I could assemble bicycles when I was eleven

A very useful skill. I wish my son could do that. Fred, were your parents political working class people?

Not at all, not at all

So yours was a very apolitical upbringing?

Absolutely

The reason I ask this, after all, the whole history of Southern Rhodesia, Rhodesia becomes intensely political so...

No, no they were, and my brother is, staunchly Labour supporters but that is something that he acquired in his years at University and that sort of thing but he is a wealthy Labour supporter

So he can afford his principles?

That's right yes. But no politics, my father was a couple of pints in the pub and down to his allotment and that sort of thing and a game of cards with the guys. Very, very basic

Conservative with a small 'c' working class origins?

Yes, very much so

Happy that you went to Southern Rhodesia - I mean how could you correspond with your parents? Is this regular letters?

Yes but compared to today it was slow. An air letter took ten days to get there and about another ten days to get back, even the air service to Rhodesia in those days was very, very slow, I know this is going off the point, but in 1955 when I signed on, everyone had to sign on initially for a three year contract. which I did and, for you signing on, they said we will pay your fare out to Rhodesia, no expense and at the end of three years we will give you six months leave: three months on full pay and three months on half pay, you don't have to take it if you don't want to. But in 1955 which was the end of my three years, I (00:08:29) decided, I'd been corresponding ... I had quite a few girlfriends in England and I'd been corresponding with one in particular and we decided that we would meet up when I got back and if circumstances were right, we'd get married which we did. I flew home and it took four days, three night stops

So were would you stop? Salisbury?

We'd left from Salisbury, it was in a Vickers Viscount, Vickers, not a Viscount, a Vickers Viking twin engine aircraft which served no meals in the air. It was not pressurised and could only fly at seven and a half thousand feet so you came down for lunch and evening meal and stayed the night in the hotel and off you went the next day. So we came down the first night was Entebbe and then Wadi Haifa, which is now under water, and then Malta. But in between you came down for lunch, places like Khartoum. In fact, after leaving Malta on the last leg we came down in Nice for lunch and probably to refuel or something like that. So I came home, met up with this girl, we decided to get married and we got married in August and she then came back on the plane with me and we've been married 53 years

Congratulations! So this is ... did you feel that this is still the heyday of empire? The way that you're describing coming back, was it 'home'?

It was coming home. Yes, definitely coming home. I had agreed to sign on again and I think I then, for agreeing to sign on I think I got another month on full pay and then two months on half pay but I took the whole six months and then went back. Yes, it was the heyday of the empire. I mean, we had a super time during that first three years. 1953 was the Rhodes' centenary exhibition in Bulawayo for which I was a policeman there and either I was holding the crowds back from the royal visitors or I was attending the shows at night. It was fantastic

This was also of course the time of the creation of the Central African Federation?

Subsequent to that, yes

1953 was the era of the CAF, 53 to 63. So how much do you recall feeling that you were an upholder of the empire? Did you feel that you were part of a white Dominion?

Yes, oh yes, I think initially we were disappointed that the Federation formed in the way that it did, that it didn't become a Dominion. I think one of the problems was that the law applying in the different countries would prevent the police force from being amalgamated into one group, whereas the prison service was and defence was. But we weren't, so we were a little bit apart but I think we always felt that we were there doing the job

What to you, then, in the 1950's did empire mean? Could you put words to it?

(00:12:25) I think we just felt that we were looking after an outpost of England or Great Britain, the United Kingdom. You didn't get the feeling that you were in a club with Canada and Australia or anything like that. You were just, perhaps a little bit self centred in your own sort of little area

Well, how much of that was actually being part of the BSAP which after all had its own sense of autonomy and distinct identity? You've just described this administratively. But I'm also talking about an ethos within the BSAP?

Very, very loyal to the Crown. Very, very loyal. In 1952, my squad in the training depot and another squad in the training depot were the right of the line for the first Queen's Birthday Parade in June 1952

Well that's the honoured position, yes

I mean I'd been in the cadets for, at school but I was never a very keen cadet I must say. But there was the six months in the police training depot in Salisbury were the best thing that could happen to anybody

Why?

It instilled a sense of belonging, it instilled a sense of discipline, it smartened you up, it taught you to ride a horse, not just sit on it and ride but to almost gymkhana standards and foot drill, firearms, self defence all those sort of things that you felt more of a complete man when you came out and you felt some belonging to that organisation without you know, ... it's hard to explain but...

No, I understand totally what you mean. It's a sense of identity with one particular iconic institution of empire, that you are protecting something and valuing cultural standards. Feeling, as you pointed out, more of a man but also part of the group: there's a construct of masculinity there

Yes, because we never had any females at that time. They came later but I think if you spoke to any of the females who came later they would say the same thing about the training depot. Whether, I don't think, the majority of the women squads were taught to ride horses, they may have been but I wasn't in the training depot with any squads of females, so I don't know

So just to go back: at this point in the early 50's, the BSAP was recruiting in Britain? Were they also recruiting local Southern Rhodesians or was this principally from outside?

Principally from outside. We had one genuine Rhodesian guy who joined our squad, a guy named John Nicholson and we had one English guy who had gone out, not with us, he'd gone out to be a tea planter or something like that. Whilst he was out there he'd decided he would join so our squad lost the guy that dived in the pool and so we were reinforced with these (00:16:49) other two guys. One of our squad, an Irish guy that was a little bit older than all the rest of us was in fact a qualified tradesman carpenter and he transferred before the end of the training course into the section of the police which did works. It was called the Pioneers, the Pioneer Branch. But don't confuse it with the Police Pioneers: they were the guys that did bricklaying building and plumbing and all those sort of things because the police was very much a self contained unit in everything.

And that would reinforce that sense of this group identity?

Oh yes, it had its own electricians and plumbers and saddlers who made the saddles and got sides of cow leather and made your Sam Brown and all those sort of things. There wasn't a trade that we didn't have

How numerous was the BSAP in the 50's? When did it start to expand?

I suppose it started really in the mid 60's but even when I joined I suppose there were 2000 whites

And it was principally white or exclusively?

No, no there was this rank structure for whites and a rank structure for blacks and there were two training depots alongside each other. In fact they were only separated by the Salisbury prison; but the road ran past the front of the prison and the African police training school was down there and the European one was there

But you didn't train together?

No, no. The basic uniform was the same but hats were different and certainly accommodation facilities were different. You did sport together: the football teams were multi racial and inter provincial competitions were. Every year there would be an athletic match between the teams for all the provinces and that would be very much a multi racial affair

So of your colleagues, how many tended to stay in the BSAP in the 1950's. You said that you signed up again. Were you the norm?

No I think about half of the squad signed on. It varied from squad to squad. I think the squad before us, they nearly all signed on whereas the squad after us, I think only about two of them signed on. So it was very much a sort of an

individual choice. I don't know why I signed on. My intention was not to stay. It was to go there, do three years and move on: Hong Kong, Bermuda, some of my friends went on and joined the Nyasaland police and went to Hong Kong and various other places. That was my intention but I went home and got married and that sealed my fate

That drew you to a certain path?

(00:21:16) That's right, yes. I thought you could sit for promotion to Sergeant after two years, but it had to be two years on a certain date and I had not got two years in at that date. So I had my first opportunity to sit for promotion was just before I'd finished my three. I passed the written exam but I was not selected, after the...you sat the written exam and all those that passed the written exam were sent back to the Salisbury training depot for two weeks on a course where you were, you had to give talks and drill squads, a sort of a selection process. I failed that and so I, one of my colleagues wrote to me whilst...I didn't hear about that until whilst I was on holiday. Nevertheless I still stayed on and of course I passed the next year and I suppose I through dint of self study and that sort of thing, I got promotion probably after that quicker than most. In fact a lot quicker than most

How much had you been posted around Southern Rhodesia in your first three year stint?

After the six months training depot, nearly all our squad were posted to Bulawayo because the central African trade fair was coming up and they wanted as many policeman down there. So I was down there for about eighteen months and I applied to join the CID which you could do after two years, I think it was. They'd said no, I wasn't suitable for the CID for some reason; another guy in my squad, we were great mates and he got the CID and I didn't. So I then decided to apply for a transfer out of Bulawayo to go to a district station and I think they were quite pleased to get rid of me in a way. I went down to a place called Kezi which is 65 miles south of Bulawayo and I was down there for two Christmases. It was there for about eighteen/twenty months, something like that, and did quite a few extensive patrols camped out in the bush. Of course that area was where Joshua Nkomo's home kraal was and I met him fairly early on in, say 53/54. It was also a great mining area, gold and nickel and lithium and things like that and also a border post going down to the Botswana border

Do you remember what you thought of and how you viewed African Nationalism in those early years?

I didn't have very much idea about it at all. It really hadn't surfaced or if it had it had not been brought to my attention. Obviously subsequently yes but in those days we were more oriented to crime, knowing what was going on, things like stock theft and movement of cattle between Botswana or what was Bechuanaland in those days and cattle being stolen and taken across the border, illegal dealing in gold and things like that. It was a crime...

Policing?

Yes and there was little or no sort of highlighting of nationalism. Nkomo used to call at the police station and see some of the African police on his way down and there was never any suggestion of "you've got to watch that bloke"

So do you remember when this started to feature, that you recall?

(00:26:29)

Yes, I was then back in Bulawayo and that would have been in the 62/63

OK, so a good ten years after you'd arrived?

Yes from Kezi I went back to England and got married and when then there wasn't a married house at Kezi so we went to Plumtree. We were there for, I suppose, a year or so and then we went to Victoria Falls - happiest days of my life

Beautiful place

And my wife got a job in Livingstone and we had two years there and excellent time. But by that time I was promoted to Sergeant and had to move and I was posted to Nkayi which is sort of headquarters of the Shangani reserves. They called them reserves in those days and that was in 58. Although I did say nationalism didn't feature until the early 60's, really it started coming in then. The commissioner at that time was Harold Jackson and he had a staff officer who was a very good linguist and they visited. I had a commissions inspection whilst I was there and they visited and he was talking to the African police and gathering information to a certain extent. In fact it was when I was at Nkayi that the system of what they called ground coverage - gathering of information - had just first started. There always had been what they called the Kuyedza club, have you heard of that?

No, I haven't

K-u-y-e-d-z-a: that was a African police wives club which was started by one of the commissioners wives, to encourage them to raise standards of cooking and housekeeping and to give the African police wives a more sense of belonging and that sort of thing. It was at this time, 1958ish, that they started a police guild for African policeman. There was always a regimental association which was open to all ranks and all colours but very few blacks would join; but now they started this which was exclusively for former black members. They brought out a little tiny triangular blue enamel badge with a gold police badge on it which were issued free of charge to these former African policemen. The idea was that they would form a eyes and ears in the rural areas and the Nkayi area in Shangani reserve was, I suppose, the start of the hotbed of nationalism, from a Matabele point of view, and the former African members were loathe to wear the badge. I think that the offer to take the badges was unpopular. When I arrived at the station there was a box full that had not been taken up. The guys wouldn't be, the former members would come in and talk and they would talk to the African policemen who went

out on patrol quite happily but they didn't want to be seen to be "I'm an informer" which is really what it boiled down to. So yes, having more thought about it that is when nationalism first started to raise its head when I went to Nkayi

(00:31:39) So with the gathering breakup of the CAF, the Central African Federation, and the deteriorating security situation in you say, 62/63?

Yes, I suppose it had started to deteriorate but there was no aggressive sign of anything. I can't remember when the first terrorist incursion started but I think that was sort of quite a bit later

Oh the terrorist incursion in 1966 in Wankie: are you thinking of that with the ANC ZAPU brigade? And then of course it started to gather momentum

Yes but prior to that of course there had been unrest in the townships in Bulawayo which I was quite involved in, in my first station after leaving the depot was in the African areas. One of the first jobs ...having done a few ordinary police jobs at that station, I was then given the job of being in charge of the beer raiding squad. It was illegal to brew, to home brew in the urban area and so one of the jobs was going around

What did you call it? What was it called in Rhodesia? We call it Chang'a in Kenya

Well it was called Kaffir beer and of course the upmarket, well not upmarket but the stronger more vicious stuff was Skokiaan and that was highly fermented and much stronger, but there wasn't so much of that about. There was a lot of home brewing of what was called Kaffir beer and then out beyond the actual council area into the sort of near farming area they were allowed to brew for their own consumption. But of course they would then brew very much more and the guys would go out of town and there'd be the equivalent of a rave. You know, that sort of thing and so and the farmers would complain and say "this is going on, you'll have to come and stop this". So that was one of the jobs I did and so I had a very good knowledge of the area from that point of view. When I came back to Bulawayo after leaving Nkayi I went to an African station as well; so I had a very good knowledge of the area and..

And the language by now?

Matabele?

Yes

Yes, I never took a language exam. There was a bonus but it was piffling and it was the custom to use your African constable as an interpreter. However you had to know enough to know that he wasn't giving you the run-around, but generally, you know I have to say this, the African police were very, very loyal and really great guys. You could trust them and they were reliable and I

had a lot of time for them; they did a very good job and some of them the sort of, you would ... a white constable or sergeant would get the job of investigating, preparing dockets, typing out statements because there was no word (00:36:03) processers in those days, typing out statements and preparing the cases for court. There were some, not a lot, but a few African members that would do that as well and would have motorbike licenses and would be riding motorbikes; and for all intents and purposes were equivalent to their white counterpart. But of course they didn't get as much money
I was about to ask what was the discrepancy with pay scales?

Oh it was huge, a great gulf

So this is the years in the run up to UDI, do you recall how you regarded the political situation. Where did your loyalties lie? You've talked about being very loyal to the Queen as head of the BSAP institution and yet...?

It was very difficult and I really wasn't in favour of the declaration of unilateral independence. It was, there was this good old Smithy and all that sort of thing and I liked Ian Smith. I think he was a good guy but you could see that there were going to be problems that were going to be difficult to overcome. However I'd just been on leave again and I'd just got back from six months leave in Europe and I was married and I'd got a child and I was on a good pay scale; I was an Inspector and I had my own house, I'd bought a house with a government loan and so I was really tied in

Golden shackles?

Yes, I was tied in and well not only golden shackled, but maritally ...

The emotional bonds: that's what I meant by golden shackles. The emotional shackles too, tying you to the place

Yes so it was a question of, well, let's try and sit this one out and see how it goes

What did your family think? You'd talked about your brother being a passionate socialist by this point?

"I told you so" - that was his attitude. "I told you so, you can never trust them, now there's going to be a..." and in fact everything that has ever gone wrong with my sort of career where things have gone wrong, yes "I told you so" which he didn't

That's older brothers for you!

Yes and then after you'd got over the initial happening and things started to settle down and the prophecies of doom were that there would be shortages, that there would be difficulties, we would soon be with our backs against the wall and all this sort of thing. Of course it never happened. The local entrepreneurs started producing food stuffs as good as Heinz and HP and all

those things and our sanctions busting people must have done wonders because..

(00:40:00)

Were you involved at all in that?

No, no that, I never entered that aspect at all, but I had friends who were involved particularly on the tobacco side. But there was a time in Rhodesia during UDI where a Alfa Romeo motor car was cheaper in Rhodesia than it was anywhere else in the world. I think they were imported in lots but there was local content and when it was assembled it was cheaper so the sanctions did absolutely no good. In fact they did good

Oh they stimulated the local economy. I mean it's classic import substitution: external barriers to trade providing protection for the local market. Then there was South Africa stepping in to the gap in the market - with all those commercial opportunities

Yes, so and so you just went along with the flow really

Do you remember how you regarded South Africa in the 1960's?

As a place for a holiday, not as we were part of it. Although, we wanted to be part of it, we were certainly absolutely separate and didn't want to be joined to them. One of the things was the language, the Afrikaans language which was apart from down in Cape Town this was predominant throughout and you would get greeted in, certainly in Johannesburg, Pretoria and places like that in Afrikaans. But no, we didn't see our salvation there at all but undoubtedly there was apartheid down there. I think that it has been portrayed as ... they select pictures of segregated seats and guys – whites - coming out of this door and blacks coming out of that door deliberately to enhance the situation. Whereas I've stayed in hotels in Cape Town - four star hotels in Cape Town, I suppose this would have been in the 70's where waiters were white, black and Indian and the people sitting having breakfast were also a racial mix and there was no question of "oh, well that table's got whites at it so a white waiter serves it". The particular hotel I'm talking about was one called the Townhouse in English and quite a swishy hotel and there was no question of racial barriers there at all

But how far did you feel that Rhodesia was different, that the way that you treated the African population was better? Or did you differentiate that you recall?

I don't think that we really gave much consideration to how they treated the blacks in South Africa. You know my only experience of South Africa were holidays and so you get a completely different aspect you know sort of the favourite place was Umhlanga Rocks and the hotels there predominately Indians all around you, waiters and that sort of thing and a) you didn't see many actual Africans, blacks and b) you had no real communication with them. So it was, we didn't know and we didn't care

Insulated society?

(00:44:56) Yes

OK, within this insulated society, how hierarchical was white society in Rhodesia in the 60's? Was it as stratified as the class system that you'd left behind in England?

I think there were not. There were poor whites and I suppose there were whites on a lower earnings scale, but generally I would say that there was one strata of white society with a few exceptions. I mean you would go to functions and there would be sort of wealthy or eminent people, but there was no suggestion of they were in a different class to you at all

So it was a much more egalitarian society than the one you'd left behind in England?

That's right, yes. If you can afford it, you can have it and I think that was the majority of whites. There were a few who were not in that fortunate situation but generally the majority of the whites were ... I wouldn't say they were upper class but they all mixed at the same level

So is this really a middle class society you're describing here, going to be hierarchical?

Yes

So what, to you, made a good Rhodesian? Did you feel yourself to be a Rhodesian by the late 60's?

It's hard to say

You talked about going home?

Yes, it was always going home, but I think that was just a use of the word rather than considering it as home. I always considered Rhodesia was my home but I didn't consider myself a real Rhodesian because I wasn't born there. But I felt that that was where I belonged. That was my country and where my allegiance was and...

How did you square that with the BSAP and the Queen?

Oh as soon as UDI came they took the crowns off the tops of the badges and I would say 90% of BSAP guys were disappointed

They really were monarchists? They weren't republicans?

Yes

So what happened when Rhodesia was made a republic in 1969?

I think by then we'd sort of got used to it and went along with the flow
(00:48:04)

I'm just wondering, to deconstruct it, how much you felt that you were rejecting socialist Britain, but remaining true to the - I'm not being trite here - boundaries of the empire of which the Queen was the epicentre?

Well I think that is the case. We did value our sense of belonging to the British Empire

And that endured?

Yes, oh yes

So if you start thinking about what made a good Rhodesian...by the 1970's with the acceleration of the insurgency which is really what I want to talk about, what made a good Rhodesian? Was it the war or was it actually shared values, what you were fighting for?

What we were fighting for

And what were you fighting for?

We were fighting to ... we saw and I think this, certainly I did and I think this was general, we saw those people coming across the border with guns as criminals and people that had no right to be doing what they were doing. It was our job to stop them, to preserve our country, to keep the peace in the country

So to keep the peace but what peace? What values? I mean, peace could be kept through oppression?

Yes it was not, I don't think, oppression. We didn't feel that we were oppressors. I think we just, I think the majority just didn't like the idea of people coming in with guns and shooting farmers and...

So you saw them as external criminal deviants?

Yes, yes

So you didn't attach any political value to what they were claiming to fight for?

We didn't really believe them

You didn't believe them?

Well, I think we didn't see initially... we didn't see it as that sort of thing, they were... We were concentrating on the fact that they were guys who'd come in with guns, they were shooting people, and our job was to exterminate them. It's as simple as that.

(00:50:41) **So you differentiated at this point between the “Terrs”, as you call them and the broader African population, the broader Zimbabwe population?**

Oh yes because generally we saw them as being on our side

The broader swathe of Rhodesian/Zimbabwean indigenous population

Yes they didn't want these guys either

How do you know?

Because they would pass information to us, even in the urban areas that these people were around and not for money or anything. They would come in or they would pass this information through members of the African police

So during the 1970's from 72 to 79, where were you stationed?

Up until April 68, I was in Bulawayo and I was promoted to Superintendent in April 68 and transferred to Salisbury. I was in Salisbury central: one of my jobs was looking after Ian Smith's, the guard at Ian Smith's house, the guard at parliament, things all to do with the centre of Salisbury. I was a newly promoted Superintendent and I would have a Chief Superintendent and Assistant Commissioner above me. They were my little tasks and then after about eighteen months of that, I was transferred down to the Salisbury South command which was where the majority of the African townships were. I was down there for a while and then I was transferred to police headquarters as a staff officer

Responsible for? Still policing duties?

No, responsible for welfare and the organisation of sport within the police force. It was the Deputy Commissioner, the administrations who was a fairly religious guy, a guy named Bailey and it was his plan that the force should have a Padre Corps and the Padre Corps would be the welfare side of things. But we had always had a Staff Officer for welfare and sport but I was posted there. He told me that I would soon be out of a job because they were going to get a Padre in to do the...

So you weren't appointed for your religious convictions yourself?

No, no and I don't want to make the police seem very disorganised but no-body was chosen or no-body appeared to be chosen for the ...I mean we were junior Staff Officers. We were at the Superintendent and Chief Superintendent level but we were not chosen for our aptitude in any direction. I had been involved in motor racing and I'd studied the tuning of fine performance engines and I could take a BMC'A' series engine to pieces blindfold just about and I'd taken part in motor races and all sorts of things. I would, I thought, be ideally suited to be the Staff Officer of transport but no, no

(00:55:09) It's a bit like the Foreign Office where you're a fluent Spanish speaker, so they send you to Singapore

Yes, so I ..., and again with no pushing or suggestion or encouragement at all from within the police force, I joined the Rhodesian marriage guidance council and went on their years long part time training course one night a week

Why did you do that?

Because the war was going on and we had a lot of marital problems. I just felt that I would be able to understand the problems and perhaps be of greater help; also the training course gave you a sort of insight into empathy and there were quite a few guys getting killed and going around telling widows or wives that their husband had just died or just been killed or something like that. So I thought it would be valuable and it was. The normal thing was that if you joined, if they agreed that you joined, then you had to repay that service by being a marriage guidance councillor afterwards. I agreed that I would do that but only within the police force and but they said well would you also agree to go with another one of the people on leading discussions in senior schools and things like that? I did that for a couple of years for them as a repayment for the training course and so I was Staff Officer for welfare and sport for three years. I shouldn't have been; it should have only been a two year posting but they were going to keep getting this Padre who it never happened

So after that three year appointment, what were you moved into?

I was then promoted whilst I was doing that to Chief Superintendent and on leaving there I was sent as the Commandant of the African police training school. Again it was a non active police role but I think I did a lot of good there and got a lot of changes and organisations

What sort of changes?

Improvement in accommodation, improvement in feeding facilities

Improvements in pay?

No, that was outside my portfolio. No I had no input on that sort of thing and the police band were about 150 guys with three/four white band masters down there and that came, that was at the African because all the rest were African, you know the bandsman and so on. That was at the African police training depot and I had input on that as well. From there I went to, back to Salisbury Central until 1974, that landmine photograph

Yes, the photograph you've shown me

That was 1974. I was a Chief Superintendent and I was at Salisbury Central and everyone had to do their turn at the front and I...

(00:59:49) **How long would a turn be? Are we talking a six week stint or...?**

It depended. My stint was going to be ten weeks. It lasted 24 hours

Because of the landmine?

Because of the landmine

How badly were you hurt?

I broke every metatarsal in my left foot starting at the outside break one, that one, 2 breaks, that one 3 breaks, that one 2 breaks and that one 1 break. It looked like... the x-ray looked like someone had been chopping firewood

So you were medic backed to Salisbury?

I was helicoptered out and then flown back by fixed wing. I was casevac-ed to the forward hospital, the army hospital, tented hospital at Mount Darwin and then into a light plane with about four other injured casualties flown back to Harare

So you had been just on an ordinary police patrol?

I was sent out there as the JOC commander and I was taking over from the previous guy, a guy named Eric Saul and he said "right, tomorrow morning first thing we will go out and I will show you where our bases are and things like that". He said "we'll get a helicopter to take us round", so I said "look I'm new, these guys are going to say "oh bloody hell here they come in a helicopter, we have to travel on the roads but they don't". I said, we will go the same as they do, we'll go in a mine protected land rover" and then we had this escort stick of four guys behind in one of these mine leopard or whatever it was and we'd visited about three bases and chatted to the guys. I was getting to know what was going on and that sort of thing and then this happened about eleven o'clock. So I was back in Salisbury hospital by about half past two on day two

And how long were you convalescing?

I was in hospital for about ten to twelve days, and I was on crutches then for about twelve weeks

So were you returned to duty?

Oh yes and performed just normal duties thereafter. And then in 1975, I was posted to Bulawayo and I was in Bulawayo Central and then I was promoted to Assistant Commissioner. By this time all the wounds had healed and I did two more stints I think Christmas 76 and Christmas 77, I seemed to get Christmas I did at JOC as an Assistant Commissioner as the JOC commander there

(01:03:24)

When you say JOC commander - I mean were you responsible for forensic police work, or intelligence gathering principally at this time or...?

The JOC comprised police, Special Branch, army, air force and sometimes INTAF, the internal affairs. Whoever was the senior member was the JOC commander and so if the army guy was a Lieutenant Colonel he was in charge. If the policeman was an Assistant Commissioner he would be in charge and you would then...it was the strategic planning for that operational area. The Special Branch guy would give the intelligence and the army guy would say what forces they'd got and what they were involved in and it was a combined..

So what would the BSAP do?

We had bases out in the areas, we were patrolling, we were back up to some of the Special Branch units and generally joining in - the sort of everyone in it together sort of thing. Obviously when the army and the air force took off in a major Fire Force activity, then we wouldn't be involved in that although the Special Branch may or possibly would be but the guys out in the bases would be patrolling from the periphery of their base area and we would be back in the JOC area getting reports and deciding what to do about everything that was going on and occasionally going out on the patrol yourself

So were you involved in information gathering, interrogation?

Personally, no. I was a bit too high up the ladder by that time you were getting the reports of what had been done but no actual face to face contact with captured terrorists or anything of that nature

So who took responsibility for that? Was that military intelligence?

Special Branch

Special Branch, ok. And so even though you said it was everybody in it together, there were still highly delineated roles between the various security services?

Yes there were. But at the same time there was a great deal of co-operation. There was a sort of integration between the Special Branch and the military particularly the Selous Scouts and that sort of thing. There was a sort of integration between the ordinary uniformed policemen and Special Branch: they seconded some of the normal duty branch police guys across as aides assisting because obviously gathering the information was a vital thing and Special Branch were not that large in number at that time. So they were getting guys from uniform branch into that and then you had the duty uniform PATU guys which... Police Anti Terrorist Units which were quite highly trained in the tracking and chasing, physical contact and shooting and that sort of thing with terrorists. So they were integrated with (01:08:18) the... well not

integrated but operated separately but alongside the military. There had to be a great deal of co-operation and co-ordination so that there wasn't a question of the police putting forces into an area which had been sealed off for any particular time. You know, you had these pseudo gangs, the military guys who blacked their face and grew their beards and that sort of thing, if they were operating, the last thing you wanted was our guys going in there and shooting them. So that was the sort of co-ordination that the JOC did to the military or the Selous Scouts or someone would feed in to the JOC that they wanted to operate there. The JOC as a whole would consider whether that was a good plan or say, "no, hang on there's something else happening over here" so it was a strategic planning centre - the JOC - and then having decided what was going to happen, then the individual members of the JOC would then pass out to their forces what was going to happen and hopefully, generally you didn't tread on each others toes. I mean, it did happen

Of course. Yes, the potential for treading on each others toes with fatal consequences, I should think was pretty high?

Yes, but it didn't happen very often

Did it happen on your watch?

Not on my watch, no luckily

Yes I can see why an element of good luck would factor into it. So how long did you do that for Fred?

I went to JOC Mtoko in as I said I think it was Christmas 76 and again in Christmas 77 and they would have been about six to eight week stints. On both occasions I was the senior officer and outranking the army or air force guy. I lived in the air force officers mess as a courtesy and so on one Christmas we had a visit from General Walls and on another occasion we had a visit from the head of the air force so it was my responsibility to stand up at the lunch party and welcome the guests and give the speech and that sort of thing because I was the senior man

What did you think of General Walls?

I liked him. I think he was quite a nice bloke but I never really, I never had anything to do with him on a working level. Socially yes, coming out and he would come out with his caravan and park it round the corner near the JOC tent or something like that and stay a couple of days because it was Christmas; and he'd gone out to see and he would visit the troops and that sort of thing. But I never had anything to do with him in a sort of direct command sort of situation. As a guy, I liked him but what he was like in a field commanding position I don't know because I'm... you know, my first ever JOC experience was quite a bit earlier than that, even before the landmine at Centenary where I was the JOC officer and not the senior man. The JOC commander was Hickman, John Hickman he was then a half (01:13:05)

colonel and I think I was a Superintendent and that was quite early on in the days and I didn't like him.

Well, personal animosity does factor into professional relationships

It wasn't ... I knew his father well who was Commissioner of the BSAP. I didn't know him. I mean, he was Commissioner whilst I was serving but I was so far down that I never had anything to do with him but after he retired and I was at police headquarters, I had some social contact with him and I got on very well with him. I thought he was a very nice bloke but I didn't get on with his son

What did you think of your commanders generally or your superior officers, I should say?

It's a hard one. At the time that I joined a lot of the senior officers were pre-war, they had joined prior to the war and were older and they had not in our opinion moved with the times. We felt that they were still in sort of the situation of the old colonial days. They hadn't moved with the times but then as soon as the war, the Second World War ended and there was a move I think jointly by UK military and by the Rhodesian recruiting to get some of the ex-war guys into the police and offer conditions that made it advantageous like "we will count your war service towards your pension" and that sort of thing. So just after the war, 1946, there was a very large influx of former ex-UK soldiers, sailors and air-men. I think the first squad was about 100 and these were the Fleet air arm pilots, ordinary squaddies, Lancaster tail gunners you know, everything you could think of, some good and some bad, but some very, very intelligent and some very eager to make progress within the police force which they did. As they came through then there was a bit of a change and I think the majority of us just saw those guys as good guys. There was one particular guy who had been a glider pilot at Arnhem and...

End of tape

You had respect for these guys and generally they were switched on and the odd guy that wasn't up to it but the majority were good guys and you had a great deal of respect for them

At what point did you start to feel or did you ever feel that the insurgency was gaining momentum and perhaps there was something more to African nationalism than you had initially recognised? Or did you remain pretty fixed in your views that this remained a criminal deviant external...?

I think that I suppose in the mid to late 70's, we realised... I realised that this was a bandwagon that wouldn't slow down. To a certain extent, you thought that you could win in the military way. When they built Caborra Bassa and you saw this huge lake going up that to a certain extent was shielding more of your border it's easier to detect people coming across an expanse of water (00:01:38) than it is coming through the bush. So we had the loyal Portuguese

all down our eastern side, we had South Africa supporting and not wanting any crossings from there so we had that little bit between Caborra Bassa and Kariba and then Kariba and then down the Botswana/Bechuanaland border so that was going to be a great asset. But of course before that filled and came to fruition the Portuguese all threw in the towel and suddenly the whole of the eastern border was open and..

Had there been any liaison with the Portuguese authorities though the Rhodesian military authorities or the policing authority?

Between us and...?

Yes

Oh yes, oh yes we had guys in Lisbon fluent Portuguese speaking guys at the Rhodesian Embassy

The diplomatic mission...?

Yes and there was guys who were specifically charged with continuing liaison with the Portuguese on the eastern border there. I know a guy Ron Pilborough for a long time and that was one of his jobs and there was a great deal of co-operation between the police and the Rhodesian military and the Portuguese but they all..., that was 74 wasn't it?

Yes, April 74 was the coup and then of course that's when Mozambique became independent. Then of course the war in Angola really ratched it up

I went on holiday to Lisbon just before that I had ten days

Was this a working holiday?

No, no it wouldn't happen. No, it was because Portuguese Airways were offering a very good deal and by that time I had two children and they offered accommodation; you could break your journey and they offered a certain amount of free accommodation and that sort of thing. So we stretched it and we had ten days in Lisbon and then went to England and had a holiday in England and then flew back via Lisbon because that was part of the treatment. But of course Lisbon was a completely different place

Wait a minute, you were a senior member of the BSAP of a renegade regime and you went on holiday to England?

Yes

How?

Easy
(00:04:39)

On your British passport?

Yes

So it was never rescinded?

No

And did you manage to renew it regularly?

Yes, yes

How did you do that?

I renewed it on one occasion at the Embassy in Pretoria but I had a Zimbabwe one and I had a Rhodesian passport as well but...

But didn't they ask you what your profession was?

Oh it was down there, police officer

And there were no questions asked?

No, the only... this might be sort of going off the line a bit. Whilst we were in Lisbon on... this is on the trip over our two children were reliable kids and about six/half past we went in an apartment in Lisbon and about half past six I would take them down to a café down round the corner and give them a prawn omelette or something like that. Margaret would get ready to go out and then we would say to the kids "ok, you can watch the television or you can read a book, we're going out to dinner". Anyway on this particular occasion a guy said to me - I was getting the kids their dinner - and this guy said "oh it's good to hear someone talking English" with a strong American accent. I said "yes, well we're on holiday and that sort of thing" so he said "oh, we're with the American Fleet". He said "I'm the exec officer on USS something" so I said "oh" he said "look, here's my card, why don't you come and bring your family on a visit to the boat?" They were all tied up there and this was a missile carrying boat so we go down, I said "ok well we will come" he said "don't worry, I'm there all the time, just come and you've got my card just ask for me and I'll make sure you get a conducted tour". What I didn't realise is that all the boats weren't tied up along the quay. There's one boat tied up and then one tied up to that and one tied up to that and USS whatever it was, was the third in line, guess what number two was? The British boat so we cross the first boat and you know "halt who goes there?" and so I said "oh we've come to see so and so" "oh we want to see your passport. No you can't, you're a rebel, you can't come across"

Really?

Yes

(00:07:40)

Fixed bayonets?

Yes, they wouldn't let us come across. So I said "look this is the exec officer of..." because he's about the second in command, isn't he? I mean he was a big noise, I mean if you want to get in trouble, because this was a Royal Marine Lieutenant. I said "if you want to get in his bad books I want you to write and say on this day at this time you wouldn't let us cross your boat". "We will escort you across" and we were marched with armed Marines either side across this boat and as soon as we got to the other side a big black American with stripes like you've never seen started, piping away. There we were on the boat and we got a conducted tour of the whole of the boat and I got to sit in the Captain's chair on the bridge and everything

Was this guy from the South? Was he an American from the southern part of the United States?

Oh I wouldn't know

I'm curious because there was quite a, shall we say an affinity among a sizeable white community of the white population in America in the South that was sympathetic to the Rhodesian cause

Oh, some came across and joined the police

Oh did they?

Oh yes

So you had American colleagues?

One or two. Yes I'm still in contact with one of them

Well, I knew about the American mercenaries but I hadn't realised that some of them had been recruited into the police

Oh yes

So at this point the BSAP is still a volunteer force in the 1970's?

Yes

So there was no conscription? That you had the opportunity of going into...?

They started National Service and all those National Service people initially for the first, I don't know how many years, all went into the army. There might have been a few went into the air force but after a while it was agreed that some of them could come into the police force and they were called national service patrol officers - NSPO's for short. They came in to the police force (00:10:11) on the same conditions: the same conditions of time of service as they would have done if they'd gone in the army. If they then signed on to

become permanent members and lose their NSPO rank they got the same pay as a regular member and quite a lot of them did.

Right, ok so were there other nationalities besides Americans who volunteered to join the BSAP? I'm going to come on to the South Africans in a minute but...?

Yes, but not in large numbers but there were others

Do you recall what they were? I mean, did you inherit Portuguese police officers after the end..?

Not to my knowledge, no. Whether they went anywhere that I didn't know about but certainly we had Americans, I think there was the odd Dutch guy, I think there was the odd French guy

German?

Not to my knowledge, no

Greek?

No

I'm just thinking of the other communities that might have been in Rhodesia by this time. Italian?

No, I had very good Italian friends and still have in Zimbabwe. Well they're not there now. Their sons are but I was very much socially involved with the Italian community and I would have known if there had been any Italians but there was one American had his hand blown off in a hand grenade..., I still correspond with him by e-mail

How about the South Africans?

Well of course, during the war. We've said that our recruiting was mainly UK based but as time went on quite a lot of South Africans were recruited into the police force and a few former South African policemen who decided that they would come up and join the BSAP. I can't quite think when but in the 60's I would imagine that half of the guys joining were South African born

Really?

Yes, quite a lot of them and so they were BSAP. Once they'd joined they were us and whether they'd been born in Cape Town or Natal or, they were us. However when the war was in action and South African police units came up, they were different. They were definitely not and we to a certain extent looked down on them and thought they were pretty useless

(00:13:41)

Oh really?

Yes

Why? Why were they so useless? Was it a language barrier? Was it a question of training?

Training. They, the South African as I saw it, the South African government said “we will help you, we will send these squads up”

Which they did, in 1967

We will send these squads up because it was going to be a jolly good training so they probably thought what they’re dealing with now, we’re going to have to deal with later on. Let us get our guys on the ball learning what it’s all about up there, learning from the Rhodesians and learning on the ground themselves. So they hadn’t had an awful lot of training, it wasn’t necessarily their fault but one of the things if you’re going to go into these forward combat zones is that you don’t make yourself smell highly of men’s perfume and all this sort of thing. You don’t want distinctive European smells. Of course they hadn’t had that training and I think to a certain extent they were thrown in at the deep end because my opinion was South African government or South African police saw this as their training, throw them in at the deep end, they will learn and generally they weren’t that great

Ok so what level were they? I mean, were these the lowest South Africans SAP recruits that were coming in, being trained in techniques...?

I don’t know what sort of length of service they’d got, but they were the lower ranks. Obviously they had a rank structure within the unit and in overall, we had senior South African Police Officers based in the country who were in overall command of them, but there was just about no integration between South African Police and that is your place, don’t leave it, you know sort of...

So were they operationally at all useful? Or is it the political solidarity that they conveyed?

There was that, but they also occupied a section of the border

Guard duty?

Yes, well if the Terrs cross here, we’ve got somebody watching that so they were...

But you didn’t think much of them anyway, so how useful were they?

They were useful in that they could be trusted to a certain extent to be a deterrent for a sector of the border. That is really about all

(00:17:18) **So yes, as you say it wasn’t...**

I visited some of their camps in... I'm responsible for welfare at this time and we had a lot of entertainers, volunteering to entertain the troops both within the country you know some of the local Rhodesian entertainers but also world wide, girls coming, singers coming from America, I've come to entertain the troops. One girl, absolutely gorgeous and strummed the guitar and sung just like Joan Baez and I took her around it was my job was to facilitate the trips, I didn't always go with them because sometimes there were too many but you'd get a fixed wing to Kariba and do a night's entertainment for the troops at Kariba and then you'd get a helicopter, South African police helicopter or South African air force as they were to then ferry you along the border and do a couple of concerts on the way and the night stops sort of further down and I would take these

So all part of maintaining troop morale out in the field?

Yes

So was that accompanied by a political indoctrination as well?

No, not at all

So did you see the BSAP as an apolitical force? From my readings it seems very much to me and from Rhodesian military men I've talked to they regarded themselves as apolitical

Yes

There were there to do the job. It was not their responsibility to make the judgement about whether it was desirable or not? It was whether it was possible?

Absolutely, that's right exactly. We did consider ourselves apolitical

In a highly politicised situation?

I suppose, yes

I mean, did you have political discussions with your mates that you recall?

Yes discussing the pros and cons of UDI and...

I mean, were you a natural Rhodesia Front supporter?

No

So you would have supported Alan Savoury?

(00:20:01) No, I didn't support anybody

Did you vote?

I didn't vote for the Rhodesian Front

Right, so, and you didn't vote for the Rhodesia Action Party that appeared in 1977?

I can't remember who the candidates were, I would have voted for the candidate rather than the party

Right, ok, I'm just aware that the Rhodesia Front itself was indeed a broad movement with its crazy wing, yes, but its more moderate elements

I definitely would vote for the candidate rather than the party

Right, I'm not going to press you on what you voted

It's not that I don't want to say. It's just that I can't remember

OK but after UDI and after all the 1969 constitution enshrined that there would be racial equality of political representation, not that there would ever be one man one vote, it was always the structure of that constitution said it would be a power sharing arrangement between the racial communities. But never that the majority that would assert political/economic control. Did you agree with that?

Yes I suppose I did, yes. I wouldn't have said "Never in a thousand years" but certainly I felt and certainly a lot I think the majority of my sort of colleagues felt that the black rulers were not ready for it

Why? Because you looked around and saw what the track record was post decolonisation or post independence I should say?

Yes, and they just did not have the experience. They didn't have...they just didn't seem to be the right calibre to do the job. I was probably more pro integrating blacks into the white ranks that a great number of people in the police force. Prior to becoming a Superintendent I was Inspector in Bulawayo at Matabeleland police headquarters and that would have been 65/66 something like that. The rules of recruiting into the police force were that if you had 'O' levels or its equivalent, you could join as a patrol officer because they decided that. I joined as a constable. I was a white constable and he was a black constable so you had constables getting that pay scale and constables getting that pay scale. And this constable was senior to that constable; I could order him about so they then changed it and said all constables, all white constables would now be called patrol officers and all white sergeants would be called section officers. So you had a new rank structure. Well you had constable, sergeant, sub inspector, patrol officer, (00:24:16) section officer, inspector so it was an ascending order of ranks - no question of white constable, black constable. The theory was that there were now two points of

entry into the police force, one if you had a lower standard of education whether you came as a constable and went to the African police training depot which the name was changed so it wasn't African police it was called Tomlinson depot; and if you had 'O' levels or equivalent you joined as a patrol officer and went to the other, the white training depot. It was my view that we should integrate more blacks more, and to a certain extent the police headquarters were in favour of that. They saw it had merit, and that it would have to happen eventually - let's get it on the road and the first stage of a guy applying to join as a patrol officer irrespective of colour was a spelling test and write a short essay on his life. You know, so then from there you could see roughly what the situation was and we had a few quite good black and coloured male and female come along and say "I want to join". As far as I was concerned, they were suitable material and certainly suitable material to be considered by the recruiting board in Salisbury. Not one went

Why?

Because the Rhodesian Front said it was not, they would not allow it

So I'm wondering whether that was a political decision?

Yes

Not a bureaucratic one?

No, no it was not a police political decision. I mean as well as doing that recruiting job, I was also responsible at that time for press and public relations and one of my jobs was also to organise, you see..., you'll think I didn't do any police work

Well I'm beginning to wonder, Fred, what you did do!

The other job was to organise the police stand at the Bulawayo Trade Fair and do that on behalf of the staff officer at police headquarters. So obviously I had to go to police headquarters and liaise with him. So whilst you're liaising with him on the trade fair you're also talking about the recruiting side and that sort of thing. It was from him, it was definitely not a police headquarters thing. It was a political decision

Do you remember when this was taken, this decision was taken?

Well I was doing this job in 1966. You know the schools were all racially divided and there was a coloured (you know that we have blacks and we have coloureds and we have whites, coloureds being Indian and mixed races and things like that). The coloured high school in Bulawayo was called Founders high school and a very good school with quite a good academic record of achievements in exams and all that sort of thing and the (00:29:25) Headmaster was a coloured guy, quite a nice bloke and his daughter was University material. She was very intelligent and she applied to join the police force and I gave her the spelling test, I told her to write an essay. You know

you couldn't fault this girl. I mean, she was so intelligent and sensible to talk to about everything, Well the papers went up to Salisbury with my recommendation "you must take this girl". No way

And did that never change?

Never changed, never changed whilst I was doing that recruiting

Did it change afterwards?

I don't know whether it changed just before or at independence

I wonder if it changed during the short Muzorewa government?

The Muzorewa government? Yes it probably changed during then

The acceleration of the auxiliary reserve?

Yes but ...I would discuss this with some of the guys and some of the South African born guys would say "oh we don't want blacks in our mess" and that sort of "oh well I'm not going to share a room with him" sort of thing or I wouldn't do that". But a lot of them were "yes, fine if they're good enough and if they maintain the standards they can come in and yes". In fact we had I suppose at one of the stations in Mzilikazi we had half a dozen black constables or sergeants that we treated as whites; they were accepted but they couldn't eat in our mess. In 73/74 when I was Sub Officer welfare and sport we invited the Malawi police down to play football inter police force and we had all these, we had those inter police force matches with the South African police, boxing, rugby, cricket, tennis but this was the first time we'd done this with the Malawi police. A short while before, whether the year before or not I don't know, it was the anniversary of the Malawi police force some celebration and whilst I was doing organising the inter force competitions one of the jobs I'd have medals made for all the places in the... They were brass, copper and silver, and chrome rather than, but anyway, and they hung on police ribbons and this sort of thing for the sport and getting trophies and all this sort of thing. I was a bit of a wheeler dealer as well and into all sorts of things and the commissioner wanted a gift for the Malawi police. Now I'd got a friend in the copper trade; he had a huge big copper factory and he drew out this design of a fire screen. In fact we got someone in Malawi to measure the fireplace in the officer's mess and he designed this fire screen with the Malawi badge which is that rising sun with a, I think it's a leopard on it. He made in a combination of a copper background and a brass inlaid on top of it, absolutely super and I showed the drawings to the commissioner who I think it was Bristow. He said "yes, fine go ahead. Money no object, don't care how much it costs." I mean, you know "get off my back. Just get the thing and he then went up to Malawi for the (00:34:28) celebrations and took this and presented this to the officer's mess. So now the Malawi police are coming back to this football match; they were all junior African ranks so I said "right, we will..." we had a couple of combination blocks in the Tomlinson depot which used to be reserved when the occasion needed for females, black females who had been

recruited so they were set apart from the men. It didn't always work I'll tell you which was another one of my jobs, the issue of condoms

Was that part of the recreation aspect of your job?

Welfare

OK, just checking

And so I said, ok well all these guys can go in there. We can tart the place up and that'll do for them. But there's a Senior Inspector and a Chief Superintendent coming, both black, one of them had been the, as well as being the Inspector and coach for this football team he had been the manager of the Malawi Olympic team. So he'd, you know, widely travelled and the other guy, the Chief Superintendent he had been on courses at UK police training colleges and things like this, two super blokes. I said to the Commissioner I said "so and we'll put these two guys up in the mess, in the officer's mess" which was very nice "no way, Jose, we're not having black men in there"

Ok you're talking about they refused to have Malawians or black men, black Rhodesians, black Zimbabweans of equal standing. Was this a question of professional attitudes, or just these were ingrained racial attitudes?

Ingrained racial attitudes

What was the general feeling within the BSAP about interracial sex then? You talk about condoms. What about social attitudes?

Oh definitely frowned on

So was the BSAP then reflective of white Rhodesian society in that way?

Yes, oh yes, there was the white man that had a sexual relationship with a black or a coloured was, he was beyond the pale

[Deletion]

You mentioned about women, women appearing. Were women actively recruited into the BSAP, or was this a question of gradually (being recruited) just because of the dynamic of the war?

No they were intentionally recruited from way back. I mean, there had been females from pre-war, not in great numbers

And always consigned to auxiliary roles or were they permitted in fact to have proper positions?

No they never stayed long enough to get to Chief Constable or anything of that nature

Were they obliged to resign, though, if they got married, for instance?

No, no

That was a practice in the Foreign Office in the 50's in Britain

And they would perform the same duties as their male counterpart in that rank but they would not be involved in fighting riots or anything of that sort or sort of picking up their gun and going off to the war

So they weren't seen in an active combatant role?

No

So it was very much field support?

Basic police work, investigation of crime and patrolling and driving police cars and doing the things that policemen do

Do you have many former women members of the BSAP in your organisation now?

(00:40:15) Yes, not a lot but a few. I'm in contact with a few of them in fact I saw one of them only less than a couple of weeks ago

Because Fred I'm very keen indeed to talk to a cross section of BSAP, if they would be prepared to be interviewed

Yes but you see the sort of thing I'm getting at the moment is "yes, I'll agree but I didn't have very much to do with the war, I did a stint at so and so and that's you know I was not actively involved." I think that the particular girl I'm thinking of at the moment; her name is Cynthia West. She's Cindy Waters as far as I'm concerned: she was in my athletic team and a super girl, really nice. Well, she's a lady, she's married and divorced now but and she's down at Chichester as a school matron, super girl. I'm sure she would agree to be interviewed if I spoke to her but she wouldn't have much input on the war as such

Well, I'm interested Fred - as I hope you've been seeing in the discussion - this project is very much the personal recollection. I'm not asking you about particular ops. I haven't asked you a lot about techniques. It's your personal experiences because how people remember a conflict

I will speak to Cindy

Please, that would be very helpful if you wouldn't mind

Where were we?

We were talking about the role of women in the BSAP generally

But we were talking about the Commissioner saying no

Before then we were talking about the ceiling on the level to which blacks could rise or be recruited

But to go back to this, the Commissioner said “no way, we are not...” I said “but you will invite them and have a lunch with them?” “no”

Just refused point blank?

Point blank. He said you can put them in the best hotel in town, I don't care how much it costs, and I don't care what you do with them. But they will not come into our mess and I said to him “but you've just been up there”

And treated...?

I'm the Commissioner. You are a junior Staff Officer

But that's interesting. How much do you think that was his individual racial prejudice? Or was it, was he reflective of the thinking in the BSAP hierarchy?

(00:43:12)

I think that was individual, plus the fact that he would believe that other senior officers would be upset by it

Ah, so he was definitely erring on a side of caution there? Was it seen to be too bold a move for integration

But when I said to him well ok I'm going to put them into the so and so hotel, I can't remember the name of it...Well, I know it but it slips my mind, we will pay all expenses no problem and he said “I want you to give them a super time, take them out” he said do what you like”

They just can't stay in the mess

I mean I took them to Meikles Hotel one night with my wife. I mean, there were other black Africans there. This is, we're talking 73/74 there were other blacks dining in the restaurant. It was in the top class restaurant. There were other blacks in there, but a table of four altogether? To see two blacks walk in with a white woman and a white guy - I mean we were all in civvies so they don't know what our connection is. I tell you we got a few stares but it was “I don't care what it costs I don't want them here” which was quite, that really shook me

How much were attitudes changing by the end of the 70's?

Very slowly

By that point do you remember feeling the insurgency is lost? Now we have to cut our losses and try and make sure that the right people...?

Yes, yes. Well, I I'm not trying to be wise after the event but I saw even before then, before the war was even at a stage where we didn't think we were going to lose it. I thought we needed to bring the blacks on side to drag them up to our level. Sounds bad, doesn't it?

Yes it does

But that is how we thought. Or encourage them to come up to that level but it wasn't on. There was just, it wasn't a class ceiling. It was a black and white ceiling

How much did you see Bishop Abel Muzorewa's UANC as an authentic Rhodesian/Zimbabwean nationalist movement?

Well I met Bishop Muzorewa on a number of occasions and he was a complete idiot

Yes, not a politician

I mean he was a proper nana and so that obviously coloured my judgement of his organisation. I didn't see it as going anywhere or being successful (00:46:43) because it was not. The leader was not the right man. I mean, he just had no idea at all, no idea at all

How much did you see the Patriotic Front as being the stooges of the communists?

All along we had, I could see or it was my opinion that the incursions, the terrorists and the parties that they supported were all communist backed. Nkomo from Russia and ZANU from China

So what about the Cubans? After all, they were training ZAPU forces at Boma and also elsewhere in Angola

Yes, and there were training camps (in Tanzania) and there were training camps everywhere. I didn't. I never saw the Cubans as a major influence. If the Cubans were doing it, they were doing it because somebody else...

Because Moscow said?

Yes, that's right. And the same with the Romanians. They sent a load of people to Romania to be trained and they were only doing it because they were told to

So how important do you think was the international environment of the Cold War to shaping your attitudes of what was going on?

Really the world scene, the world Cold War scene really was somewhere else

That's interesting. So you didn't see Rhodesia as the front line in the Cold War, which was all part of the Rhodesian Front's rhetoric?

We saw it as stopping the advance of communism but what was happening elsewhere really we had, we were tunnel vision to a certain extent

Well, it's also how you understand the Cold War. If you saw it as the battle between the Americans and the Soviets, you wouldn't necessarily see it playing out in Rhodesia. But you've just talked about Rhodesia being a front line...

Stopping the...

Stopping communism, yes. "We're the front line in the Cold War"

No, no we are stopping the communists coming into Africa into our part of Africa

Yes, so that makes you part of the Cold War

(00:49:30) Yes but we didn't see ourselves, I would never say "oh we are the front line". I mean, I never really got involved in that until after I'd left the police force until I came (here), sort of really saw the real global picture

When did you leave the police force?

82

So were you still in Zimbabwe then?

No I came straight home

Did you? What in 1980?

82

Right, you came straight back?

I was the Officer commanding Midlands Province when they attacked Thorn Hill. This is after independence when we believed saboteurs from South Africa came up and blew up the planes. The situation, my situation then was untenable. I had major rows with Perence Shire, Minister, and one or two others and I left straight away

Had you believed at independence, obviously it would be possible for you to stay?

Oh yes

There was a future for a multi racial Zimbabwe?

Oh yes, yes I saw myself as becoming Commissioner. There was no-one younger than me senior to me in the police force by three years and I could look at the list and say “well he’s gone, he’s gone and he’s gone I will be Commissioner”

How much of an exodus was that from the BSAP at independence?

Not a lot. A few, but not a lot. Looking at the list you could see that you had to retire aged 55; so you could say “well he will have gone and he will have gone” by age even if he didn’t leave by any other means and there would be Fred. I should be the last man standing. Well, not the last man standing but I will be the senior man at that time. But of course I wasn’t because they promoted all these Africans

So you came straight back here?

I came straight back

Straight back to Sandy?

(00:51:50)

Yes, well because that’s where my family were

But how did you find it?

Well it was 82 and...

Before or after the Falklands?

Just before

Right, so before April 82

No just, can’t remember just before or just after but it was, the Falklands was a thing of the time. I came back in September 82, I can’t remember when the Falklands was

April

But I was here for the miners strike and of course unemployment was very, very bad at that time. And here you have a fifty something guy who’s got no UK experience suddenly wants a job. So it was not easy so I found the first year was a struggle. But in the end I got a job with the Ministry of Defence and was a vetting officer and did that for sixteen years

Was that drawing on Rhodesian experience?

Well it was drawing on investigation experience and compiling docketts and understanding human frailties and also to a certain extent drawing on my

marriage guidance training, of one to one interviewing and getting people to trust you to give you information

Yes, I'm sure you were very good at it. So you did that for sixteen years?

Yes

How did you find Britain? You talked about coming back into the miners strike, rising unemployment. It was a period of substantial inflation, the early part of the 80's; Mrs Thatcher wasn't going to be necessarily a political certainty in 1982 for the next election. In 1983 she won with a thumping majority. How much was this returning from empire also...?

It was definitely an uphill struggle. Fortunately I had a very good pension from Rhodesia, from Zimbabwe and it was sufficient to live on. I don't get it at all now

No, you wouldn't

(00:54:48) But it was sufficient to live on and so for the first year I was comfortable and I got some temporary jobs and that sort of thing quite interesting temporary jobs. But I couldn't get with the Ministry of Defence until I'd been in England for two years to establish background for positive vetting but my work then was obviously, the Cold War was part of that

Yes, very much so. After all the second Cold War kicked in with the intensification of the early 80's and then Detente

Yes and then there were times when we worked closely with the CIA. Where I live we had Chicksands; we had the American spy base Lakenheath not far away various other bases. In fact we were surrounded by them

Installations of...

So and I mean not that we didn't concentrate on one thing at a time. It was just as the circumstances rose but I would find myself at Chicksands or at Lakenheath doing interviews for one reason or another. So yes I got to see a much broader brush of the situation

Which you hadn't had that sense of at all in Rhodesia?

No, that's right because we were isolated and when we came back ... I mean I used to come back on holiday every three or four years for six months and tour around but you were on holiday so...

You were always going to leave. No, it's a very different connection and engagement to when you live in a place. Looking back then on the insurgency in Rhodesia in the 1970's, what do you think of it? Was it worth it? Because that's a question that has come up with a number of

people I've interviewed: white Rhodesians who fought are divided between yes it was worth it and that no it wasn't. Is that fair to make that distinction?

Yes I think it is fair to make that distinction and whether it is worth it or not is a really vexed question. It's the same question that you'd have to ask relatives whose people are being killed in Afghanistan and Iraq, is it worth it? Those who have lost lives would say no. If any of them gained anything from it they might say yes but I think we thought that we stood to gain much more, we were fighting in our country, we were fighting for our own country and I think we probably saw a greater, yes, it's worth it at the time than those families with people who are fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan at the moment.. At the end of it I don't know whether it was worth it because I mean look at them, in the sorry situation they are

Murderous mess

Yes I mean this latest

Oh what was in the paper this morning?

(00:58:45)

Yes and it was on Channel 4 news last night. This guy Freeth who was British Army BMAT training out there so he married a local girl, a Rhodesian girl and settled down there and you know they've gone through bloody horrendous hell, haven't they?

They have. Looking back at that war, the insurgency, calling it a war you, from the way you describe it you didn't see it as a civil war a black against black. You seem to have, from the way you describe it, to me you seem to have seen it as principally originally a criminal deviant element manipulated and supported from outside?

Yes

Did you see it as a racial war? Do you think actually there were aspects of race that affected how the war was fought, the techniques used, the growing atrocities on either side?

I wouldn't say it was a racial war. There were I mean the opposition were all black, one can't...

Yes but they weren't, shall we say, of the same ethnicity?

No but treating all ZANU and ZAPU, ZIPRA as one unit which they weren't they were all black, our forces were multi racial. We had probably more blacks fighting for us than we had whites. I don't know what the balance of numbers were but in the support unit which did an awful lot of fighting; they were mainly black with white commanders and the same with some of the African regiments were entirely black and with black officers and coloured officers. So

you couldn't call it a racial war in that regard. I mean, there was a hell of a lot of fighting between ZIPRA and ZANU

Oh I know. The perennial in-fighting that was going on must have been the despair of the Front Line leadership: of regularly feeling they had to smack people's heads together to get them to...

You know, it's like when you're a police officer and you attend a brawl, a drunken brawl and said "well, they're not going to punch me. Let them punch themselves to pieces. Then I'll pick up the pieces and take them away". And to a certain extent that was one of the things we did; we sat back and let them fight each other

How much do you think there was an insidious process though, with the growing violence against both black and white Rhodesians, that this helped to reinforce the white community's racial stereotypes?

Yes, certainly when those first farm attacks occurred

The Elim massacre?

(01:02:16) Yes that's right, in which defenceless missionaries were slaughtered. There can only be, absolute revulsion against the black men that did it

But how much were you, as the police, also monitoring what the missionary stations were doing and from the degree of collaboration and support for...

There was that monitoring. You know, when I talked about the day that I was blown up going round visiting teams, those teams were based near some of those mission stations in the Mount Darwin area. One of their tasks would be to monitor and see what's going on. We weren't blind to the fact that...but how much was due to pressure and how much was just a willingness by the missionaries to toe the line as it were? Probably there was more of that, more coerced into helping than...

But you think there were levels of intimidations as well rather than voluntary support?

Yes, oh yes. Well you get the Elim missionary massacre and I think there was another one as well down in the Fort Vic area or Chibi or somewhere down there, then the next missionary who is approached by a Terr group thinks "well, perhaps it would be a good thing to go along with the flow sort of thing" so there may have been some who were out and out just wanted to support them but I think that was probably in the minority. The Catholic missionaries: I mean I'm not a Catholic but I've met and dealt with quite a lot of Catholic missionaries and the majority of them genuinely fair guys who would help an CT if he had a problem. But at the same time would not go out of his way to help them in a war situation, in my opinion anyway

Just picking up on that point of religion, how religious would you say Rhodesian white society was at that particular point?

Quite religious, yes and across a broad spectrum of religion very strong Catholics and then very strong Anglicans, Jewish, a very big Jewish community and a few Greeks so there was a...

And also Dutch, I mean the Afrikaans speaking community

Yes, the Afrikaans church as well, I'd forgotten them but I would say that I mean I'm not religious

Well you are, coming to rugby!

But the majority I would say the vast majority of Rhodesians and that goes for black and white were strongly religious. I mean, the African churches used to be packed

(01:06:07) I have one last question: how much do you recall that the techniques of the BSAP actually echoed British police forces, empire police forces in other insurgency situations? Malaya, Kenya?

Well we sent guys to Kenya and they came back with information. We didn't send any policemen to Malaya but the Rhodesian army had been involved in Malaya so you very naturally got lessons learned from there. I really don't know enough about the Mau-Mau or the Malayan situation to say how near or how far we were away from their methods but we certainly had input from there

Assimilated rather than necessarily following a text book of this works if we're going to deal with villageisation or...

But I think the Rhodesian war threw up an awful lot of new ideas. You know, sort of things like mine proof vehicles that the British Army are still struggling to cope with

What about protected villages? Were you involved in their policing? Or was that a sign of the administration assigned to something...

Initially we were, but that was then taken over by the Guard Force which was, which I had something to do with the recruiting of and providing initially, training because when I was commandant of the Africans training thing. That is when the Guard Force started training their Guard Force and they came into our, we got rid of some of our recruits and then we took some of their guys into the same accommodation to help initially, sort of their initial training period was with the police

So what did you think of that particular approach of PV's?

They said it would work. I don't know if it did

Was it assessed whether it was working? That you recall?

It was and it was assessed. I think the general consensus was that it was working

Ah from the point of view of containing possible infection?

Yes and...

Rather than actual winning hearts and minds?

Yes, that didn't win hearts and minds

No it didn't

And Martial law was another thing I mean I never had anything to do with Martial law at the time. When I went to Gwelo... of course I went there just as (01:09:44) independence was happening so I got the leftovers of the problems from martial law. You know, the sort of some of the bills to pay for feeding the people who had been incarcerated as a result of martial law and disposing of the cattle that had been confiscated and all that sort of thing. It was a nightmare because the guy who'd done it had left the force and gone. I arrived there to take it over, probably that happened in other places as well but my arrival there was just at that unfortunate time of where the war really sort of just finished although I got involved in the thing at Connemave where the ZIPRA guys, you know they had the...After the, what do they call these surrender points?

Well, the assembly camps

Assembly camps. After the assembly camps they then assembled units comprising former ZIPRA, former ZANU and a few former Rhodesian services, army services into units and put them in camps and that was going to be the basis of the Zimbabwe army. One of them was at Connemave and this was at the time when they were finding these arms caches and the ZIPRA guys, the pro Nkomo guys, broke into the armoury at Connemave turned their hats inside, their berets inside out so that they were identifiable to their friends and then made war against the bloody ZANU guys and also set up road blocks on the main road. I got involved in sorting that squabble out and I tell you I did manage to escape with clean underpants but it was very, very close. Very, very close. I owe my life to a coloured Captain in the, of the what was the Rhodesian army who, we negotiated down the main road. We said we'd leave our weapons behind and they'd put their weapons down and we went up three of us. It was scary and we were starting to have this pow-wow as to how we could resolve this situation and this coloured Captain said to the main ZIPRA guy "don't you come to..." and barked in the Sergeant Major's voice "don't you come to attention when you see and salute a senior officer?" and this guy did, came to attention and saluted and he said "you can't salute with your hat the wrong way round, turn it the right way round" I tell you he just took the initiative

Asserting authority?

Yes

Pulling rank, literally

And it wasn't me. It was him. He pulled my rank

Brave man, very brave man

And it just collapsed. As soon as they'd turned their hats round the right way all their supporters thought "it's over", you know, and we said we will walk now with you, unarmed, back to your men. Talk to them and ask them if they will now go back to barracks, which they did

(01:14:08) High-wire stuff, that is high-wire stuff

Apparently this incident is described in one of these two books that have just been written but whoever wrote them doesn't describe it correctly. I haven't read it but I've been told

Are you thinking of the Paul Moorcraft/Peter McLaughlin book?

No, no the, it's an African word, it's...

Chimurenga?

No, no there are two books, one is The Saints and this is the other one for the African regiment, the RAR

Right, yes. It's 'Masojda'.

They are £50.00 each and I haven't bought them

I've got The Saints book but I don't have the other one

The other one apparently had this incident in but apparently it doesn't say that but that is, I was there

Well they aren't necessarily lying; they're telling their truth from a different standpoint. Fred, were you involved in supervising the policing for the 79 and the 80 elections?

In Bulawayo?

Yes

Yes, I was involved in the welcoming of the UK police uniformed guys who went out to various posts and where they to be allocated. We told them where the posts were, where the voting areas were and the British supervisor, the

guys that were supervising, they, those uniformed guys decided who would go where. We didn't do that, they did that but we then facilitated their transport and their sort of getting them into the right situations

So yours was a support capacity?

For that, yes. Then there was the former police, former UK police officer monitoring the force but part of the overall monitoring force, now I had a lot to do with them

I think, since you've been kind enough to talk to me for three hours, please may I come and talk to you again about that particular one. But Fred, is there anything that immediately that comes to mind that I should have asked you, do you think?

(01:16:57) No, I don't think so, there are so many things happened. I mean thirty odd years and it's a long time and lots of things and but for the purposes of this exercise I think that we have covered most of the situations and I've tried to be as honest. Well, I have been as honest as I possibly can be with the memory plays...

Yes, memories are fallible but this is also for me as an historian very interesting because you have tried to be as truthful as possible in recalling how you felt thirty years ago. But there has been a thirty year intervening period where you cannot necessarily totally recall how it was

No but I'm still in touch with one of those British monitoring force guys

Are you?

Yes actually it was. We had three and Canaan Banana was one of our, we were in Bulawayo. So Canaan Banana was one of the leading lights down there for the election and he came to police headquarters and this guy, John Lock his name was and he was a former Deputy Assistant Commissioner in the Met, had only just retired and he said to me after Canaan Banana, he said "I don't know how you put up with him"

Fred Punter, thank you very much indeed for your time

End of interview