

Jim O'Toole

Born in 1936. Grew up in the UK and went out to Rhodesia to join the British South Africa Police at the end of 1961. Met Joyce in 1964 and married in 1965. Left Zimbabwe for the UK in October 1984.

This is Annie Berry with Mr Jim O'Toole on Thursday the 19th of November 2009 in Morteheo, Devon. Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed.

My pleasure.

Could we begin by discussing how you came to be in Rhodesia initially?

Yes, I was born in Liverpool and just had a normal basic education and then worked in a store in Liverpool as a floorwalker or detective for a few years. Then the weather in particular, the way of life, the dreariness, caused me to look for something else. I saw an advert in the local paper in Liverpool saying basically, if you can ride and shoot, there's a job for you in the British South Africa Police. So I applied and had an interview in London and then I went out on a boat with about 15 other guys.

Would your interview have been in Rhodesia House?

It was in Rhodesia House, yes in London. I had a medical as well and then off we went.

What year was that?

The back end of '61.

So you'd grown up in Liverpool through the war years?

Yes.

What was that like? You say it was very dreary?

Well I mean it wasn't dreary when I was a kid. I was born in '36 so I was 8 or 9 when the war finished, so I've got some recollection of it. I've certainly got plenty of recollections of being bombed. We had a whistling bomb in our back garden on one occasion. Many, many nights we'd either wake up in the night and knock on the adjacent bedroom walls to get the people next door out or they'd knock on our bedroom wall and we'd all go down to the air raid shelters and sing songs. I remember quite a lot of that. We used to do the same at school, we'd go into the air raid shelters, I remember going to school one day and the school wasn't there, it had been bombed and about two thirds of it just razed to the ground. Another occasion, local shops round the corner which were about 400 yards away, half of them had been obliterated by bombs. So I have recollections, I remember once seeing a parachutist coming down from

an aircraft and I remember seeing dog fights fairly often. But the big thing was collecting shrapnel, of which there was loads and loads around, yes I remember that.

(00:02:57) So it became a bit of a hobby?

It was very much a hobby and we lived about five miles out of the city centre, away from the docks. My grandmother who lived right at the docks, she used to collect very elaborate exhibits of shrapnel and save them up for me. But apart from that, I don't remember a great deal about the war.

What sort of values would you say your education instilled in you?

A certain amount of what's right and what's wrong. I think I told you, my father was a very religious man, my mother died when I was only six years old, during the war in 1942. I had a brother and two sisters – I had two brothers but one brother died during the war as an infant – and my mother's mother looked after us because my father was in the Army in Africa. Then when he came back, he was in Europe for the duration of the war so my mother's mother looked after us for that time. But I think you just learnt the basic sort of values of honesty, integrity, that sort of thing, to have a sense of what's right and what's wrong.

And what was your sense of Britain and the Queen and its place in the world?

I didn't have a great sense of it at all to be honest with you, I really didn't. I travelled a fair bit; I went to Canada for a couple of years just to have a look around and did any job I could get really.

What took you to Canada?

A sense of adventure I suppose, to see things. I'd been to Holland after the war, my father made friends with a family when he was stationed during the war and I went out and spent two months there in 1949. It wasn't too long after the end of the war but you see things, you meet people, I wanted to see a bit more, that was basically it.

What awareness did you have of Rhodesia before going out?

Absolutely none at all, I just got so fed up with the climate and what I was doing in myself, working at the store. I was living in New Brighton at that time so I got up very early in the morning in the winter and travelled by bus down to the ferry at Birkenhead, got the ferry across and I walked up to it. When I was working, it was going to work in the dark, coming home in the dark, it was cold, it was miserable and it was horrible and I thought there's got to be something better than this, at least I'll have a better climate. Then I saw the advert for Rhodesia, it sounded very good, at the interview the guy said "have you got a dinner jacket?" "What?" This was all very new to us, they had photographs of guys on horseback, guys on motorbikes you know, shooting, it

just sounded too good to be true so I was delighted when I got accepted and went out there. We had the boat out to Cape Town from Southampton, absolutely marvellous, just like a world cruise really and then (00:06:35) we got the train for two nights and three days I think it was, up to Bulawayo, and then went to depot for the training.

Which was in Salisbury?

In Salisbury, yes, in the main depot there, for about five months I think it was. I had the famous Ronald Trangmar as the depot chief inspector, wonderful man.

What did your father and your grandmother think of your decision?

Not a lot I think; it was all a bit of a mystery to them. They knew nothing about the country either, they didn't want me to go, my sister certainly didn't, she said "they'll kill you" because things were beginning to kick off, from the nationalist point of view, but I wasn't bothered about that. I was in depot training, I'd only been there about a month and we were doing a publicity stunt so these guys came from the press and took a photograph of me on horseback. Then about a week later, that huge photograph, a half page advert, appeared in the local press at home and my dad came home from church, collected the newspapers, opened his paper and there's a photograph of his son on horseback with a big heading 'Lawman in Rhodesia,' and the whole thing about what I could be doing within a year, doing this, doing that, doing the next thing. In those days you used to do horse patrols, which could last for six weeks. I didn't personally, I was a town man but the rural police would go off with a horse and a five ton truck would go and drop all their gear off and then their constable and they'd go and visit all the kraals, all the farms, liaise with them and all the local people in the district.

So did that publicity photo give your adventure a bit of credence with your father?

Oh I think it did, yes, but at the same time, things started kicking off. Unrest and nationalism started and I think my father thought I was largely responsible for the whole thing, you know, in Africa. It had been quiet until I got there and then everything suddenly kicked off.

What was your sense of African Nationalism at the time? Did you have a sense of what it was for?

Initially none, none at all. I was very naïve, I was very innocent, very ignorant. But when you're in depot, you were being dragged out of depot and equipped with riot gear and sent to the townships and you'd have big mobs of people demonstrating and becoming a bit aggressive and throwing rocks and what have you, and you were there to sort of quell the riot and try and maintain law and order. But you didn't really think because again, in the BSAP, I can't remember the actual stats but it must have been that about 90% of the police were in fact black African personnel and you worked with them. You didn't

really –well I certainly didn't – have a great consciousness of the aspirations of the nationalists and what they were doing, not in the early days.

(00:10:13) What was your sense of Rhodesian society when you went out? It must have been quite clean and well developed in the towns?

It was beautiful, the contrast with the UK was unbelievable. For a start the climate, it seemed to be almost brilliant sunshine, clear skies, big open roads, all the houses – certainly the European houses – were large houses of a bungalow style, quite a lot did have swimming pools, they had cars, they had nice gardens, they maybe had a garden boy, maybe a cook boy whatever, but the lifestyle was very, very attractive. Of course you did your duty but then you had plenty of time to socialise and a lot of socialising went on.

I get a real sense of leaving a post-war Britain and...

Well it was well post-war, it was '61/'62, but yes the contrast with the lifestyle, the people seemed to me to be far more open, far more relaxed, seemed to have a far better work/leisure relationship or balance; it just seemed to be a far better place in every respect, I couldn't believe it.

What did you think of immigration to the country? Was there a lot at that time?

There was a lot, yes, certainly in the police, I would say 70 or 80% came from England or from Britain anyway, mostly Scotsmen and Welsh really, Irish and maybe 20% from South Africa and then a few from other countries as well; very cosmopolitan but international.

What was the sort of make-up of your...

The squad?

Yes, the squad you were recruited into.

It was something like that I would think. Probably about 60% would have been ex-UK and then as I said, the bulk of the balance would have been South Africans and then a few from maybe Kenya or places like that; and locals.

What was your sense of divisions between African and European at the time?

You mean black and white?

Yes, was there...?

Well initially you didn't have a great deal to do with them, you really didn't. In fact I remember the day I arrived in the training depot, a lot of black Africans – I'll call them "blacks" but I mean black African guys as opposed to white

African guys – were lined up there and you were more or less told (00:13:09) to go and get yourself a batman. I walked over as everybody else did and saw a smiling face there so I said what's your name?" he said "so and so" so I said "I'm Jim," I shook hands with him and that really raised a few eyebrows because you didn't normally, in those circumstances, shake hands with the blacks. But it didn't bother me, you know, they were a fellow human being, that has been my attitude.

Was that something that changed for you? Did you have to learn where to behave and certain protocol?

Not really, I've always been a little bit my own man and I do whatever I want to do and I feel is right. I wouldn't offend people consciously by doing something which was inappropriate but by the same token, if I want to shake hands with a guy, I will do it and that's what I did. But then once you sort of left the depot and went to a police station, then as I say, the bulk of the policemen on your station, on your relief if you wish, were black. So you may have say 15 to 20 black police guys and maybe three or four white police guys but you all have your own jobs to do. I was just accepted, the black guys basically would do the patrolling by bicycle or foot and the white guys would do more of the investigation and such, with a senior black man who had a bit more experience and a better command of the language. But that was it, I personally didn't question "how come I'm a Chief here and he's an Indian," that was their job, that's why they joined.

Was it something that you questioned, perhaps later on, when people said that the ranks should have been raised sooner? Some have said that, haven't they.

Oh some have, yes. I think a lot of it is being wise after the coup. Like today, you hear all these white South Africans over here being interviewed, none of them seem to have ever supported apartheid, I don't know who ever did support it because everybody you speak to over here was totally against it, like quite a lot of Rhodesians say that they were totally against Ian Smith. But at the time, he was seen as 'The Man' to do the job in the circumstances.

So you said that you were an urban policeman?

Yes.

What sort of people would have gone to the rural areas and did you have a say in that decision?

Well it was a matter of luck really. Technically, when you finished your training you did your pass-out and then the top three guys in the squad were given a choice as to posting. I came second so I was given a choice, I opted to go to district, I wanted to be a rural policeman in the district and I was posted to district. But when I arrived at a place called Umtali, to go to Umtali district, the boss man there said to me, "well why don't you stay here, just for a short while, a couple of weeks." I had played in the police football

(00:16:34) team and they needed a footballer for their provincial team so I ended up staying in town and didn't get to go to district ever.

Because of your footballs skills?

Yes, such as it was, that was basically the reason. But it was a question of, I don't think you could look at a guy and say "district/town," a lot of it was just luck, you went where you were posted. But some guys had a better flair for district work; they were more inclined to want to go into the rural areas, on patrol, more or less on their own. Those who were more independent than the town guys, who wanted a bit more of a social life, a lot of it was just luck or bad luck.

What was your training like?

In the depot? Well I had nothing to compare it with but I thought it was quite good. You had the full range of the skills, everybody had to ride a horse, certainly all the white guys did, and we had over a hundred horses in the depot so a lot of it was animal husbandry and every day you'd ride a horse for an hour and a half, maybe three hours. You had to learn to drive, learn to ride a motorbike, you had to learn police procedure, you had to learn the law, you had to learn musketry – although you didn't carry a firearm – you had your annual musketry to do, and radio procedure, first aid, all that sort of stuff. I thought it was good, given the limited time, you know, they want you out doing the job.

Did you learn any African languages?

Yes I learned ChiZezuru, which is Shona. Actually later on, I went to the college and did my basic, intermediate and advanced Shona. Couldn't speak any of it but I did it anyway, in fact the tutor who was a black African, at the end said to me "you're my best ever student" and I said "yes that's fine, but..." I can now say things like "chipungu, chibururukwa mu deliga," which means 'the eagle flies high in the sky.' I don't want to know that, I want to be able to say "hey listen, where are the bloody terrorists," that's the stuff I need. But when I later joined the PATU and you would patrol through the kraals, I'd have a black African with me as interpreter. Gradually he would teach me more and more of the language so then I could ask the questions myself, which was useful. I think you got a £20 award if you did pass the civil service language exam.

Oh I see.

They want you to be able to do it, it's in the interests of everybody.

So there were incentives?

Yes, so I could speak it to some degree but certainly not very well.

(00:19:48) And how about African customs and beliefs, was that something that was part of your training or something that again, you picked up?

It was but it was very lightly touched upon, it wasn't insisted on much. They would tell you the basic forms of greeting and things to avoid at all costs. Like you would never shake hands with your left hand but you never give anybody anything with your left hand, or receive it because that hand is for other things. They teach you those basic things, but as you went around you picked it up. But you were always told you didn't just walk in and start questioning somebody, there was a proper greeting to be done. You'd ask them about "how are you?" and "how's your family, how are your children, how are your cows and goats?" and what have you, the weather, and then you'd get round to asking what you wanted to know.

With the training, did anti terrorism or counter insurgency tactics come into it in the early days, or was that something that...

No, not in the early days, you did riot training because riots had been going on for a while, but that was things like, riot guns and what we called 'cup dischargers,' which would fire a CS gas canister, puke gas it was called. You'd be taught how to fire that from a .303 rifle or the riot gun and of course we were taught baton and shield drills, as they are in the UK and anywhere else. But there wasn't any indication of people with firearms in the early days, certainly not in my early days. I'm not sure but I think that started about '65/'66.

What did you think of National Service and conscription, though I guess you were a regular?

Yes.

So National Service people would have been trained separately.

There wasn't any initially, there was none at all, no National Service. The army was a very, very small army; in fact you've probably heard that the police held the right of line, because they were the only viable sufficiently large force in the country. So when any big problems came, the police were far better able to deal with it than were the Army. The Air Force was very, very small and it wasn't really equipped to deal with the riots and things we had at that time. So yes, they were just riot training. Then somewhere round about '65/'66 there was the first incursion of armed terrorists, you may have heard of it, I think there was a vehicle stopped at a roadblock in Shabani and a Thompson sub-machine gun was found in the boot of that with some other firearms and that kicked it off. Initially we started what they call the VATs, V-A-T, which was Voluntary Additional Training and again, that was entirely voluntary. If you wanted to train to be prepared for armed incursion then you joined VATs. That hadn't been going very long when they turned it into PATU, police anti terrorist unit. The idea (00:23:40) there was basically VATs,

but better training, and you had to be prepared to deploy to other parts of the country. VATs were purely for your own local defence.

I joined PATU. I was on the first deployment, we actually deployed into the bush at Sipolilo in, I think it was Operation Hurricane, I can't remember what it was called now, but we actually were wearing town riot blues in the bush because we hadn't been given camouflage. We weren't ready for it. I think about 17 terrors came in and they all got eliminated in three or four days. In those days, they came across the Zambezi and the local tribe there, the Batonka, were very much on sides to the government and they shopped these terrorists almost as soon as they came in. There was a rapid deployment of troops in the area, Army and Police, and they were quickly taken care of.

There is certainly a sense that in the early days things were very quickly and successfully dealt with.

Yes, because of very good cooperation from the local people, especially the Batonka. I can't remember the sequence of events but it gradually built after that and the training of PATU became more intense and better quality and we had guys who were ex-original SAS like Reg Seekings, he was a fantastic guy, he was in Stirling's original SAS.

And he did a lot of the PATU training?

He did most of it, him and a guy called Bill Bailey, he was LRDG, Long Range Desert Group. Then there was another ex-SAS guy who was in the Army, but he would train us as well. So I think we had a very good standard of training by then with Reg and this other guy and Bill. It was along the lines of the SAS but obviously not at all in any way to the standard, because we were just part-timers really, we were policemen trained to do minimum force, but in this role it was maximum force. The purpose of the PATU was not to go and kill people, it was to go out and find them and then call the Army in and they'd kill or capture them if necessary. But the very nature of the job meant that you'd see them and they saw you or whatever, so whatever happened, happened.

Just to ask a bit more about your arrival in the early days. Where did you see as your 'home' once you had arrived and more or less settled in Rhodesia?

I think after I got myself settled in, I had no intention of coming back here: That was going to be my home forever. Obviously I'd come back and see my family but I met Joyce out there in '64, so I hadn't been there very long. I met her and then we got married in '65 and that was going to be our home then.

So you were able to come to Britain at points throughout?

Oh yes, well you had to pay your own fare. Northern Rhodesian police were just a few miles up the road, they were definitely contracted to the (00:27:18) British Government and they were taken back to the UK, paid for and everything.

On leave?

On leave, yes, for long leave every two or three years. We could come back but you had to accumulate the leave and you had to pay your own fare back.
So your initial contract would have been for three years?

Yes.

And you'd made a decision to stay on?

To stay on permanently, yes.

Do you remember the time of UDI?

Yes I do.

Where were you?

We were in Durban on honeymoon. In fact, we shouldn't even have been allowed out the country because we got married on the 6th of November, UDI was declared on the 11th and of course the authorities had wind that this was going to happen and they closed the borders and all the security forces, especially the police, were required to be there in case this thing kicked off. We were very lucky to get across, we crossed the border on the 7th and UDI was declared on the 11th and we were actually in Durban when UDI was declared.

What did you think of it?

Well to be fair, I didn't really know what it meant. I wasn't interested in politics, I was in the police, this was the police job and if it meant part of it was going out and patrolling in the bush and whatever, I was dead happy with that. I didn't have any great affiliations politically speaking. I wasn't particularly bothered to tell you the truth, one way or the other. I was going to do what I was told to do.

Did it have any implications for you in terms of Britain turning its back, perhaps, on Rhodesia?

No it didn't. In fact, just after UDI, Wilson, who was the Prime Minister over here then, wanted to send British troops over there to sort it out and I can distinctly remember the talk amongst my guys was "let him bloody come, we can give him a hell of a rough ride." We were then in training anyway for PATU and we knew the area reasonably well and we knew just how extremely difficult it would be for any force, from any country, to come in there. OK, they might take over the airport and the city (00:29:57) centre but there's no way in the world they'd ever control the rural area, which is the main place, very, very wild and mountainous. So we knew, without experience and training, they'd have a hell of a job to pin us down. That was obviously a lot of bravado

because you know how good the British Army is, but nonetheless we felt quite confident and “let them come.”

A sense that you're perhaps a cut above them almost?

Well we thought we were. I can remember my sister, who was still in Liverpool wrote to me and said “do you realise, if this goes about, you could be fighting Brian Clayton?” Now Brian Clayton had lived round the corner from us in Liverpool and he was my friend before I left, and had been since childhood. I said “yes, let him come.” Because then I was very much pro-Rhodesia, you know, the country and what I was beginning to know. I suppose it wasn't a very sound reasoning, but we were happy.

So once you were aware of the incursions starting and so on, what was your sense of the different security services and how they established themselves and began to deal with things?

Well taking the Air Force, the Air Force was fantastic. It was a very small Air Force. It had been bigger because hundreds if not thousands of Brits, Royal Air Force, had been trained over there during the war, so they had a lot of professionals within it, but fairly few resources. I think they had old things like Canberras, Vampires and stuff like that, old aircraft. But quite early on, in fact in about '64, they got these French Alouette 3 helicopters, which were ideal for troop deployment into the bush, so they were great. And they had aircraft which could do some reconnaissance; and the old Dakotas they could use for paratroopers and what have you, they were very good. The Army, as I say, was quite small although they did have 22 SAS there who were as good as any. They were SAS, so they were fantastic and of course their specialists were deployed in small numbers to cover the ground and find out what was going on and the Army gradually began to build up a little bit and the Police were beginning to specialise with the Support Unit, which was the military wing of the BSA Police, they had basic police training but were especially trained for anti-terrorist work. They had fairly big weapons for policemen, like MAG machine guns and mortars and grenades and stuff like that. I think the police and the security forces, well the Army and the Air Force, fairly quickly got their act together, with Internal Affairs who were the ground coverage section.

There was a certain rivalry because we had Special Branch in the police and Special Branch did what Special Branch do here, they had the best int [intelligence], and they were reluctant to tell you, because “if I tell you what I know, you know as much as me and where's my advantage?” Then rivalry between the Army and the police, especially the police Special Branch didn't particularly want to give all their best int. to the Army so the army, after a while, started their own intelligence (00:33:49) thing, Royal Army Intelligence Corps or something like that, which really was a bit of a waste of time, the whole thing. Then the uniformed police started their own, what did they call it? Ground Coverage and they would send out, we used to call it Operation Platform. They'd send out a team of European and African police into an area with the idea that they get into the local surroundings and the people and just

find out what was going on, so gathering intelligence was basically the idea. All this would have been fed back to headquarters where it would be evaluated and disseminated to the guys who were doing the job in the field. Because obviously it's a vast country, one and half times the size of the British Isles, a very small security force, so you had to be very dependent on the intelligence. You'd know where the terrorists were incursing, you'd know what their pattern of behaviour was, where their anticipated movements might be and you'd try and ambush them before they attacked a farm or something.

You mentioned a bit earlier JOCs?

Yes.

How well do you think it was coordinated in that sense?

I thought the JOCs worked very well. When I was in PATU, after a while you got to be what they called the IC Oscar Base and Oscar Base was the PATU headquarters in the field. So you go out there for maybe two or three months and the sticks, which were only four men anyway, they'd come in to you. They'd come in for R&R and you'd be in radio contact and give them information on what was happening and what you thought might be going to happen in future. I thought that was well done and there were about six main JOCs, joint operational command. We had the Army, the Air Force, the Police and ground coverage and then below that you had the sub-JOCs, you might have two or three in one JOC. I thought that was well done, I really did. Then you had Com-Ops at the top of the whole thing, Combined Operations, in Salisbury. Whether they were all professional military men, I don't know but I thought it was well done. All the usual cock-ups that everybody has and gets and all the usual criticisms, but basically, given the resources and given the extent of the problem, I thought it was pretty well done.

Were resources an issue at all between the different elements of the security services, in terms of perhaps one form of intelligence getting the resources they needed, whereas others wouldn't?

Well there's always rivalry, there is here in the UK isn't there? There's always going to be, basically it's human nature at the end of it. But from my sort of low level, I thought things were done as well as could be done. Initially, as I say, we had our .303 rifles which were single shot, pretty obsolete for the job, but very rapidly we got FN rifles which were excellent, as good as anything at the time, even the AK47, but certainly (00:37:25) good enough for the job. Then initially we were allowed to dye, by ourselves, at our own expense, a set of riot kit into some form of camouflage to use, because there wasn't any camouflage either. As I say, our first deployment was in blues, riot blues, which is exactly what you didn't want really. But then very quickly they got on top of it and we got proper camo, as per the Army; and eventually got proper boots and proper webbing and the water bottles and all that sort of stuff. I thought it was quite well done.

That's reminded me of a question about camouflage. Was it something that you only wore when you went out in sticks or did it become something that you wore off duty as well?

Oh no, you didn't wear it in town. What would happen, basically, say in Support Unit, you do your training all in camo stuff and then you'd be deployed in big trucks out to a base. I think there were about four Support Unit bases in the country. If you were in the head quarters then you might be there for six months or whatever, but if you were going out for a normal deployment, you might be there for a month, so you'd have tentage in the field and then you deploy from there out into operational areas.

What, at the time, did you think that you were fighting against?

Well communist terrorists was what we were told. It manifested itself in different forms, it was sort of mixed with nationalism and rabid terrorism but as a guy on the ground, you could see what was happening was the terrorists would come in and, you know the whole sort of communist theories about 'as fish swim in the water so the terrorist moves in amongst the people' i.e. total dependency. Obviously we wanted to keep the locals on our side because we needed the information from them and traditionally they were on our side, we were their government after all. But the terrorists wanted them on their side so that they'd get all the information they wanted and the protection and food and this, that and the other. But then they would resort to terrorist activity and devices to subdue the population. The ways the communists did in China or Russia or whatever, is that they take out all the intelligencia, so they'd knock off the chief and the headman and the kraal head and the teachers and the doctors and the professionals and then the religious; anybody with authority who would challenge them. Then it got worse and worse and they started really physically mutilating people to intimidate them and terrible, terrible atrocities. You've probably heard about it already. So as far as I was concerned as a policeman, I wasn't thinking in terms of "the west here fronting the advance of terrorist communists into the country," which it was, but you didn't think so much in terms of that. You thought more in terms of "we'll get these bastards who are doing this to our people," and that was the idea and the motivation, that's what I think anyway. Plus it was your job, you just got on with it.

On the other side of that, what do you feel Rhodesians were fighting for?

(00:41:17) Well initially for independence because that's what UDI was about. The other surrounding countries had been given independence and they were far less developed than Rhodesia was at the time. We had a terrific university there with a preponderance of black students and we had a high degree of professionalism amongst the black community, doctors, nurses and teachers and all that sort of stuff. I think we were fighting for the maintenance of that way of life. It's been argued back and forth about whether in a thousand years the blacks would ever rule themselves or not, but you look at Zimbabwe today, they've had over thirty years, it hasn't progressed very much has it?

It's gone right back and prior to the advent of the white man there in 1889. They'd had over thousands of years and done nothing with it, so I don't really feel guilty about all aspects of going over there and starting the colonies or empire or whatever you want to call it, that inevitably had to come. You've got to be pragmatic about it; that's how things were done in those days. Not just by Brits, by the whole of Europe, wasn't it, and to us, going back further. But I think we were fighting really to stop the atrocities which were happening to the people, you could see that on a daily basis. To maintain the establishment, conscious of the fact that obviously this wasn't going to go on forever, but that the black community would be brought on gradually, that was the idea. When independence was on the cards, round about the late seventies, everybody could see what was happening, including the Army and the Police. I can speak from the police point of view, I was at police headquarters then and we selected twelve of what we considered the very best of the black policemen for rapid advancement to senior rank because it was obvious they were going to be taking over the force and the government and the Army and everything else. I was part of the team that selected these guys and trained them for months and months, you know, into a managerial role and appreciation of investigation at high level, even sent them over here to the UK. They came to the UK and went on courses here, so a lot was done. But despite all that, the first commissioner Wiridzayi Nguruve, who had been one of my sergeants in the early days, when he became commissioner, he went inside for seven years for theft and fraud and misuse of authority, so did his deputy, a guy called Govati Mora. So it wasn't an entire success you know.

How much do you think the international environment at the time, particularly the Cold War, played a part in the war environment?

Well most of the world was against Rhodesia so in a way that gave us a spirit of togetherness. We went very strong because just about everybody was involved in some element of the security forces, men, women, everybody did something, so you had that homogeneity. I think I said, then, 90% of the security forces were black anyway and again, it was like a vested interest there. They knew that if we lost, then their life wouldn't be that great in the future either, which in fact happened.

Did you have a sense of the different opposition groups as it were, for example ZIPRA, ZANLA?

(00:45:49) Yes, in fact when I was down at Shabani with Support Unit, I was there for six months and one of the areas there, we didn't even bother going in because we actually had ZIPRA fighting ZANLA in our operational area and there were contacts between the two elements (ZIPRA, which is Nkomo's outfit and ZANLA, which was Mugabe's). At that particular stage they would fight each other, they would go into contact. So we were aware of that but of course there were all sorts of negotiations going on where Smith very nearly reached an accord with Muzorewa, and another occasion with Nkomo, which people said might have been better. So we were aware of that and we were aware of the main faction, which was ZANLA.

You've given that example there of how it did, but did it affect how the war was fought in terms of whether ZANLA and ZIPRA were viewed differently? Because you left them to it?

Well I don't think it went on in much of the country but it certainly went on in the Shabani area towards Beitbridge, but ZIPRA, for most of the time, as far as I know, were outside of the country. Their philosophy, they were Russian backed, their idea was to build up massive troops with heavy equipment, transport and heavy weapons, and they were going to invade the country as an army. Whereas ZANLA, Mugabe's lot, they were in there in penny packets and sticks of somewhere between 8 and 20. They were on the ground, they did far more of the work than ZIPRA. ZIPRA, as far as I knew, did very little of it and of course they're basically Matabeleland anyway, so for me it was the other side of the country, but we were aware of the fact, yes. For example, Britain had an oil blockade at Beira and there was this tanker, the Iona V, which I remember was trying to deliver oil to Mozambique. We had a pipeline from Mozambique through to Umtali, which the terrors tried to blow up and eventually did blow up one of the main oil depots in Salisbury, but the British had Royal Naval vessels stopping this stuff getting to us and nobody would trade with us openly. South Africa would, Israel would and to some degree France would, for their helicopters. But apart from that, it generated a lot of internal 'do it yourself.'

And the sanctions busting of course as well.

Sanctions busting was very, very strong, yes. If you've got what the world needs, there's always somebody who's going to get it off you. A lot of that went on.

The Byrd Amendment, so the Americans even amended their sanctions in order to be able to...

Yes that's right. Funnily enough, at Shabani we had the deepest asbestos mine in the world and they had the long fibre asbestos, which was pretty unique. There weren't many places you could get it from and the Yanks needed it for their space programme so behind the scenes, they used to buy that as well. There were lots of things went on and again, the more I (00:49:45) think about it, although at the end I was quite a senior officer you know, the more I realised I knew buggar all about what was going on really because it was all done behind closed doors. Things went on the ordinary Joe wouldn't know anything about.

What would you say your sources were in terms of how you found about...?

For trade?

In terms of what was going on in the war? Perhaps there were different levels in a way...

Well there were sub-JOCs and JOCs, and there was Oscar Base, which was operational headquarters in the field for PATU. Support Unit had their own bases, which were on a sub-JOC anyway. But there was a lot of liaison and Ian Smith and members of his cabinet, Chiefs of the Army and the police, the Air Force, would come around and visit these bases and there'd be an interchange of information. You had Special Branch, you had Ground Coverage, you had your own troops on the ground, you had the locals, so there were a lot of people, a lot of sources of information, and a lot of the skill was in the evaluation of that information. Captured terrs were a great source of information.

On the other hand, from a civilian point of view, how much information do you think there was?

Being disseminated to the public?

Yes.

It's difficult to say, it really is. When the war was going badly, almost every night you'd get on the six o'clock news, "security force headquarters regrets to announce the deaths of..." and they'd give you, a bit like here really, but relatively speaking we had a lot more casualties. The Support Unit is quite a small unit. All those guys there [points to Rhodesian Roll of Honour on the wall] were killed, including my number 2. There are 99 names on there and they were all in the Support Unit, which was a small outfit, they were all killed and because so many people were involved, or were related to people who were involved, there were lots of sources of information coming back. So I don't think you could sort of hoodwink the public a great deal, there were too many people in the know at a level on the ground. Diplomatically speaking it was a different picture. Whether Smith was negotiating with Nkomo or Mugabe or Wilson, you wouldn't know that; and we did have this American who was chief negotiator at the time, he was going around. Of course because we were a member of the commonwealth and we got suspended, there were lots of negotiations going around all the time and you wouldn't be aware of that necessarily. But certainly what was actually happening on the ground, you had a pretty good idea because people will (00:52:50) talk, whether they're told to or not and as I said, people were either involved or related to people who were involved.

A very close community.

Very, very close, yes. So I think personally, I don't think you would be able to hoodwink the population generally on any great basis because they were too close to it to be taken in.

Do you remember any particular operations or engagements that you...

Were involved in?

Yes.

People say to me, “why don’t you write a book?” and I say “well the only reason is, I can’t remember anything.” I am hopeless, I mean you weren’t allowed to carry a camera in the operational area, that was just one thing and you certainly didn’t carry a journal or a diary or notebook. I can remember once we were all on a massive deployment into a place called the Masoso TTL, up on the Portuguese border in the north east, looking for a guy called Moffat Hadebi who was supposed to be a leader of a big band of terrorists. He was supposed to be in there en masse and we were supposed to go and find him and capture him or kill him, but I never saw him or I never even heard anything about him. I honestly couldn’t give you any detail. For many, many years I was involved either in Support Unit or in PATU, even Ground Coverage on one occasion, you just sort of...quite an enjoyable life really. Because in PATU, you were quite often deployed and moved round by helicopter, it could only carry four passengers. The PATU stick was only four strong but you’d get deployed out somewhere for maybe a fortnight and given a big area of land and that was your operational area. You had radio communication, but you just used to patrol most of the day basically and maybe ambush at night-time or forlay or something like that. Because of the countryside you were in, it was wonderful, absolutely wonderful and you move generally very quietly. You didn’t cook stuff, you didn’t shave or clean your teeth or any of that and you generally kept a low profile because you were supposed to be there clandestinely. You came across quite a lot of game, depending on where you were, you’d sleep under the stars, I just thought it was a wonderful life.

Presumably there were differences between the different areas you worked in, for example when you were in PATU and then doing Ground Coverage? What was that like?

You could be deployed anywhere, it didn’t matter what you were in really. They’d have what they called ‘frozen areas,’ where Special Branch or the Selous Scouts or the SAS were operating, that was mostly on a level of intelligence. If you’ve got some really hot intelligence then you (00:56:18) want the experts in there and that was the SAS or the Selous Scouts. Basically the main job of the PATU was what they called OPs, observation points. You’d try and get into an area clandestinely, get into some feature where you could keep an eye on a river or a kraal or a hill or whatever it was, and you’d stay there for maybe two weeks, just watching what was going on so that you could establish the pattern of behaviour of the area; then anything which was unusual attracted your attention. Occasionally you get deployed sometimes at two or three o’clock in the morning, have a long walk in through the bush in the dark, get up to some prominent feature, and then first light, just very quietly sneak up and have a look around and see all the people in the kraal looking up at you, so you’re totally thwarted! Or the little boys would drive the cattle up there and chase you out or reveal your presence. That was the idea, and then if you got a good sighting, then you could radio in for the Fireforce and if it was available the Fireforce comes. You might get it, sometimes you did, mostly you didn’t.

Were there situations when you were let down perhaps by...?

Oh yes but it was just resources.

And did that ever become an issue, that your security was compromised or your safety was compromised?

Because of lack of back up?

Yes.

Oh yes, I'm sure it did, but unlike the Brits here now out in Afghanistan, God bless them, whinging about they haven't got the right boots, mother's got to buy the boots and haven't got this body armour. There you just accepted the fact that you wore what you wore, this is it, you get on with what you've got and that was it. I'm not bulling you, that was very much the philosophy, you just accepted it and if you had to have an old pair of boots, which were totally unsuitable for the job, you just accepted it and got on with it. You knew there were severe limitations so you knew that if you got a sighting, the chances of calling the Fireforce and getting them were very, very slight. You knew that somebody else might have a far better claim, a bigger sighting, a bigger group, better chance of getting them. Sometime you'd get them and sometimes you wouldn't get them. You just did your best in the circumstances.

How long were you out on patrols for?

With Support Unit I was there for six months at a time. With PATU, it was usually two weeks at a time. You'd get deployed, sometimes by helicopter, sometimes by road, and then you might just work from home, out for two weeks and back for two weeks. Or you might go out to a base and work at the base for a month or something like that; it depends on the requirements and how desperate the situation might have got.

(00:59:35) Were you aware that you were being sent out for much longer?

Yes, well not so much for the duration. Because of the nature of the job you can only do it for so long because you tended to patrol most of the day. It depends on time of year, say 4 o'clock in the morning you'd get up, you didn't have tentage or anything, you just had a sleeping bag, you'd roll it up and start patrolling first light for maybe three hours. Then you'd stop and get tea and something to eat and then you'd maybe patrol on for a bit and then stop in the heat of the day, lie up somewhere and then carry on a couple of hours in the evening. Then of a night time you'd probably ambush somewhere but even if you didn't ambush you had to always have at least one guy awake because you're only four. And you weren't eating properly, you didn't have a lot of water necessarily, it was quite exhausting work and a bit nervous as well at times, so after two weeks you probably needed a bit of R&R, so you'd probably go back. But the frequency... at one stage I was running the Central Investigation Department in Salisbury and I think I had about twelve Europeans and about forty African investigators and those who were in PATU

were out for two weeks, back for two weeks, out for two weeks, including myself. So we were trying to do the crime work and trying to do that as well as you could; the demand was increasing more and more. But everybody just accepted the fact that this has got to be done and got on with it.

It's quite an interesting case of the police in terms of how acts of terrorism almost were intermingled with the everyday crime.

Well they had to be investigated you see. If there were acts of terrorism they had to be investigated with witness and complainant statements and the recovery of all the doppies, the shells and things, it was massive. The armament section which the police had would collect all these doppies brought in and they would put them all through tests and check for what they called the lines and the grooves, the markings on the shells.

So they could link them to the gun?

They could link up and say where this weapon had been and possibly who it belonged to, its history etc. Because terrorists went to court, they were tried for murder or terrorism or whatever it was and if it went to court, you had to have the evidence, you had to have statements from the people who'd been intimidated, it was a lot of police work, matching weapons, scenes and persons.

How much did the police work then become...

Terrorist orientated?

Terrorist orientated as opposed to perhaps standard...?

It certainly did in the rural areas, very much so. Because as soon as you open a normal docket, somebody might have been mutilated for example, but you had to collect all the physical evidence from the complainant, (01:02:52) evidence at the scene from witnesses, and prepare all the statements so that if you ever got the accused, they would go to court. There was a lot of work from that point of view. The army didn't do the same, it wasn't their job, they just fire-fight and pick up the dead and that was it.

I imagine that it must have been much more intense in that sense in your training, in terms of...

It was a lot of work.

That you not only had to engage the opposition but you had to look for clues and gather evidence?

Well it would depend on the intensity of the conflict but if you were on PATU and you were patrolling and there was an incident or a contact or something like that, you wouldn't do that. You'd move on with the action and the local police or the CID usually would come out and they'd collect the evidence for

the prosecution. But it was a lot of work, there was a hell of a lot of work and then towards the end, we did have National Service, so people who were between certain ages were called up either into the Army or the Air Force or the Police or Ground Coverage.

How did they integrate?

Some of them extremely well, some of them not at all, some of them were hopeless and this was one thing I always felt very strongly about at the time when I used to make my thoughts known. In my humble opinion, so much of the effort was a waste of personnel, materials, weapons and ammunition, transport and everything because what would happen is – in my opinion again – because it was felt everybody had to participate and we did need bodies, they'd get everybody in. Now not everybody is physically and mentally suited to become an anti-terrorist fighter and so some didn't really have the ability and definitely didn't have the mental attitude and they didn't want to be there. So everything that went with that, all the material support, weaponry, training, transport etc, was pretty well wasted. What I wanted to do was, say the SAS or Selous Scouts, RAR or RLI, PATU, Support Unit, really cosset those guys, pay them well, give them the best of everything you can have and let them go and do it. They wanted to do it, mentally and physically they were ready to do the job and they would produce far greater results than having this army of non-coms trudging round doing little. Typical example, for more than a year, we used to get South African Police and Army come up and help us. Now from the police point of view, I was at one stage in charge of PR & S, Police Reserve and Security training. What would happen in Salisbury is, South Africa would these volunteers from the police, they'd train them in basic PATU work, they'd send them up to us and then my team would take them into the field and train them for maybe another month, just to really get them going. Then (01:06:29) some of us would deploy with them in the field to do the job. Many were useless, well I'm generalising, but often they were useless and disinterested.

I have heard stories about that...

They really were. You couldn't inculcate into their minds that 'these terrorists are dangerous.' Again generalising, but a lot of the South African Police had the attitude "bloody kaffir, they're no threat to me, bloody useless, can't do anything at all." "They can," some of them were very, very good, "a lot of them are better than you, so don't walk around with your rifle over your shoulder because you're going to get nailed," and a lot of the South Africans got killed. Obviously I'm generalising but we found it very difficult to make them have the right attitude and quite often you'd deploy them and then you'd travel around for a week or two and visit them in the field. If you're visiting our guys, the BSAP, PATU, you'd have trouble finding them because they were sneaking around; and you'd go towards the South Africans and they were sitting out sunbathing there, unreal. That's why, I think, had we concentrated more on getting the specialists in the field, doing the job, even put a bounty on captures, so much for the head, bring them in, that's what it's all about

because somebody's going to get them eventually and professionals do it far more efficiently.

How much were you able to discuss ideas like that with your commanding officers or with other colleagues?

You could do but they were political decisions, they were not made by the military. You speak to several police or army – and I used to do this quite a bit through JOCs with the army guys – and they would agree that it was probably a good idea, but the politicians decided “this is what's got to be done.” But I think a lot of effort was wasted really; they could be called up to do other things. One of the worst jobs of the lot, and it was for the police to do, was what they called Bright Lights, have you heard of them?

Yes I have, the city people who were...

That must be one of the worst jobs in the world because you take a guy out of the town who didn't want to know anything about all this, give him a uniform and a gun and take him out to some bloody remote farm and say, “now ok, you're going to stay here for two or three weeks but all the Europeans are clearing off, you're on your own pal, just make sure nobody attacks you and if they do, fight back.” “Me?” That must have been horrendous.

It's quite peculiar when you think about that, were was the sense...

Well again, it's a question of what are you going to do with these guys. What was even worse, and I say this in all truthfulness, it is a fact that they would often take a farmer from his area and deploy him in another (01:09:37) area and then send the Bright Lights out to look after his farm, which to my mind was nonsense but that did happen.

I've certainly read of cases where local farmers did want to join in with PATU sticks...

Oh yes a lot of them did.

...but then sometimes they were seen as getting in the way on occasions.

The farmers generally were some of the best PATU, they really were because...

Eventually they were used, but perhaps initially they were seen as interfering or that they were getting too emotionally involved in dangerous things, putting themselves at risk. But eventually I think they were effectively used within PATU sticks.

Oh yes, I mean they were far better trained.

Once they were trained.

They all had their own guns anyway and they knew the farms in their own areas and what have you, they knew the African, they could speak the language, they had a lot going for them. Some of them were very very good, excellent. But yes, there was the danger initially that they take the law into my own hands and “I’ll go and get them myself.”

Yes, that’s the sort of thing...

And then they were exposed to danger themselves, plus they could be accused of illegally behaving, so there was that. But generally speaking the farmers were a big asset to the security forces, they really were, they had a lot going for them.

But like you say, it made a lot more sense for them to work in their area where they knew...

Absolutely, I mean those poor Bright Lights, we used to have to brief them before they went out and you could see the look of horror on their face, you know; can you imagine? You’re going to be there, you’re going to try and sleep in the day if you can and overnight you’re going to try and stay awake, in a strange farmhouse, all the noises and the creaks and what have you, no thank you. I’d sooner be in PATU where at least I’m with people who’ve got some training you know.

What sort of effect did the stints and the increasing time you were out working with PATU in sticks, have on your family life?

(01:11:56) Well it’s an interesting point really. Obviously I was aware I was out quite a lot, but it’s only recently, over the last ten years or so, in the family, I’ve got a married daughter down in Plymouth and my son lives in the village here. Quite often we’re talking to people and they say “do you remember that dad?” and I don’t, and I wasn’t there a lot of the time really, so I suppose I missed out and they missed out. I don’t know how much, but certainly it’s happened quite a lot because I didn’t always want to go, they didn’t want me to go, but that was the job, so you get on with it.

When we were having lunch you mentioned with your wife being in the Army, you did once actually encounter each other, in work, as it were?

Yes we did, that’s exactly how it happened. I’d been in Shabani about four months already, just a routine JOC meeting for me and they said “there’s some bloody women down from Salisbury” and we went into the bar there and she was one. My first thought was “who’s looking after the kids?” they were with her mother but she was in camo [camouflage] and so was I, about 200 miles away from home. That only happened in the bush once but it did happen occasionally that we’d both be out in the field together, well not together, but at the same time. But for all families it was pretty much the same.

So it had its toll in a way, but then it was something that was perhaps accepted as part of the effort?

Yes I think we were very accepting of the fact, it's got to be done. Special Branch would get intelligence, I remember one occasion that intelligence came through, there was a terr section in Harare or in Salisbury as it was and they were intent on ambushing a crèche, they were going to attack this crèche and kill the children and the parents as they were coming out, all Europeans. We didn't do it very often but the PATU guys in plain clothes just happened to be parked somewhere in the vicinity in private cars with loaded weapons there, so if it did kick off, you were already there to do something. Things like that happened, and we had loads and loads of hoaxes. We'd get a phone call somewhere saying there's a bomb in such and such a building, you couldn't ignore it because there were some bombs like Woolworths, that killed 11 people. So you had to go down, clear the whole building and search the building. You knew pretty well it was a hoax but you had to do it, so it was very disruptive from all aspects of life. But I think the overriding feeling was, "well, this is what it takes, we're going to get on with it." Then towards the end we had the chicken run, you know, whites who were leaving the country who had just had enough.

What did you think of the emigration?

I quite enjoyed it because I spent about three months as a convoy escort commander, which was the best time I ever had. What (01:15:28) you did, if people wanted to leave the country, and they did all the time, they invariably went to South Africa and they'd go with their car and all the gear they had. So we didn't let them travel on their own, it was too dangerous, so you'd get a convoy together and they knew it started at 7 o'clock in the morning, there'd be an assembly point and then anyone that was going, some days you'd have 34/40 car loads of people going. You'd be there with your escort team and you had the Bren guns on top of the Land Rovers, and of course a lot of the people who were going had their own weapons anyway so you'd brief them as to the convoy procedure: "This is what happens if you do get attacked..." or "this is what happens if you do break down or you get a puncture..." In my case, it was Umtali via Birchenough Bridge to Fort Victoria to Beitbridge, so you're talking about 200/250 miles all told; it was a long way to go. They're all equipped with water and food and all this, that and the other. You were going down the main road but it was still fairly narrow tar through the bush [tar strips on the road]. Some of them, they did get attacked by the terrs, so in a way, you didn't openly call them 'cowards' or anything like that; you understood, you knew the situation.

But what was that like for morale in the sense that so many people were leaving?

Well it certainly didn't gee your morale very much at all.

And it's fascinating that they were almost supported in their departure?

Well they had to be looked after because they were very vulnerable. You'd say to them, among other things, "when we go through..." let's say Moody's Pass, which is one of the danger areas, "...if you do hear machine guns firing, don't worry about it, it will just be us testing the weapons or something like that." We hoped it would be us. I enjoyed that because on a night-time when it was all done, I'd go to one of the bases along the route and spend the night there and get a few beers and a good laugh.

Did you come across protected villages at all?

Oh yes.

What did you think of that as a way of working?

I spent a few months in a protected village called Dendera, up towards Mtoko, Murewa, up in the northeast. Again, it was a British concept, actually it was probably from well before the Boer War, but the Brits had protected villages in the Boer War, which were concentration camps in a way. Depends what you call it but certainly from my point of view, the idea was two fold. One was to deprive the terrorists of the support of the locals, and secondly to protect the locals from the terrorists, and it worked to some degree but obviously it's going to be criticised. The idea was you'd have a security (01:18:47) fence around an area and inside you'd have Internal Affairs personnel and you try to provide the basics, food and water and that sort of stuff. The people had to sleep in there during the nighttime, be in there for a curfew and then they could go out in the day and tend their lands. It certainly wasn't perfect, it did offer some protection and they were occasionally attacked by the terrors. But by the same token, a lot of people were not very happy about it because you were restricting their movement. It's one of those things that we tried. It was tried in Malaya I think; it wasn't an idea of ours, but it was used.

You mentioned some time ago about your use of language and particularly with questioning locals and being able to follow up leads. How did your interaction with locals change with time as the war went on? Was it something that you noticed changing?

Oh yes, initially they were forthcoming; in the early days they would come to you, especially the Batonka, and report the presence of terrorists. When the terrorists began to intimidate them with greater and greater violence and they would indoctrinate them.... It's such a vast country, the security forces weren't everywhere by any means and on occasion, these terrors would come in and they'd appoint what we called 'Mujibas,' who were youths and they were sort of local intelligence. They would maybe have a gun, but they'd intimidate the people then they'd make them sing revolutionary songs 'Pamberi ne ZANU' and 'Pamberi ne Mugabe' and 'pasri ne Smith,' all that sort of stuff, make them do all these things whether they want to or not. So in a way they became reluctantly part of the movement and like the people are there now, they're totally cowed in many respects. They frightened them and not only would they not go and volunteer information, they wouldn't even give it; even under interrogation they wouldn't give it. There were cases where a

bossboy would actually feed terrorists during the night-time and then deny it like hell but if he was found to be guilty of doing that, he would be prosecuted and face the consequences in some cases. But you can understand it, they were in a terrible predicament. We'd go there and threaten them with this and they'd go there and threaten them with that, they didn't know which way to turn really, they had a very hard time of it. And of course ultimately they didn't know who was going to win, so what are you going to do?

Were the tactics or questioning and the way you worked with them changed, to combat the fact that people weren't being so forthcoming?

How did you get round it?

Yes and were things perhaps, in your opinion, getting more violent or aggressive from the security services' side?

(01:22:22) I can't speak for everyone here, I really can't but certainly I and the people around me never, I can honestly say, to my knowledge, I never got involved in intimidating the locals. You just didn't do it because you knew how important they were and plus, most of your people were black anyway and they sympathised, they understood the situation. They had families – this was another problem – many guys in the Police and the Army, they're serving in the Army but the family are back in the Tribal Trust Land in the area. If the terrors came into that area and through interrogation found out that this family had a son in the Army or the Police, they would be very severely beaten or even killed.

Were you able to discuss the situation with your black colleagues?

Oh yes, very much so. As I say, in a Support Unit – and they deployed in sticks of about 11 – you'd only have one white guy and ten black guys for example. He's out there in the field and he's spending his whole time, he's got a Sergeant Major with him, he might only be a Patrol Officer, which is the most junior European rank, and the guy might be a Sergeant Major, which was the most senior black rank at the time, and they're going to discuss everything. Then you may have one or two friends amongst them, so they talk things over and they've got their concerns and so have our guys. I'm not saying everybody was buddy, buddy, they weren't, everybody knew their place, but I'd say there was quite a lot of fraternisation.

In terms of the opposition and black Rhodesians, how much were you able to differentiate between those who were with Rhodesia and against?

Well the only obvious guys that were against it, not only were they pointing a gun in your direction...so you didn't have any sympathy with them. I think we were very sympathetic towards our own blacks because we knew what they and their families were going through. Of course when the weather's really dreadful – and it can be dreadful out there, it can be bitterly cold in the highlands, it can be wet for a long time – if you're in the field and all you've got

is what you're carrying on your back, it's pretty miserable. Up at Shabani we had torrential rain for weeks and weeks at one stage there and it was utterly bloody miserable, even in the base camp, never mind out in the field. I can remember on one occasion we sent trucks out, there were about four trucks in a convoy, blown up by landmines. They came back and the guys were very disinclined to go out again, they didn't want to go out and they were reluctant to go. "Get them out, get them out, get in the trucks" and what have you, they didn't want to do it. In the end, one night on that deployment, I said "I'll drive the first truck," and I did. We went out through the TTL with these men, nothing happened fortunately, but it's not funny being blown up by a landmine. A mate of mine, a guy called Guy Bekker, he got blown up and we went to casevac him in the truck and I went out and we put him in the back of this truck and I said to the driver "just go to the top and turn round and come back and pick me up" and he hit another landmine between here and the turn round point so Guy got blown up twice in the one morning! When a landmine goes up, it's pretty loud and (01:26:20) sometimes they put one on top of another one as well, so it's not funny. I know another chap who lost his wife and child in a landmine. It was just a plethora of different experiences and sensations.

How much do you think the war helped to sustain a Rhodesian identity?

Tremendously, I really think tremendously. You really did feel a terrific sense of belonging and that's one of the things that made it so much worse when you had to leave and go somewhere else. People would agonise for months and months about should they leave, should they stay and if they leave, when are they going to go. An old mate of mine who was in fact my boss at the time, he decided he was going to leave. He couldn't make up his mind whether to go to South Africa, come over here, go back to Wales, try and go to Australia and he'd come in day after day, "what am I going to do Jim? Tell me what to do." I said "it's up to you, what do you want to do?" "Well I don't know, I can't make up my mind." Not just him, his family as well, and it was absolute heartbreak to have to leave the country, especially when you hadn't intended to do it. Unlike Kenya to some extent, a lot of those people were expats who were there on a contract; they had no intention of making that their home and then staying there. Lots of people in Rhodesia, they'd moved there to live there and some were third or fourth generations, so that was their home and to be kicked out, not very amusing.

What did you think of the interim government period that started to happen in the 1970s?

Zimbabwe /Rhodesia?

Yes, and Muzorewa?

Well Muzorewa, funnily enough, the pension I did get was called 'the Muzorewa pension,' because it was actually a short service pension, but you were given it as an inducement to stay on while Muzorewa took over. In fact he didn't, as we know, but that was the plan. Mugabe and Nkomo were never on side to that anyway, they were never going to accept him. Muzorewa was

nothing, he had a certain following amongst the people but he was a religious man, he wasn't a politician and he wasn't a terrorist, at least not overtly. Just to support him in his power struggle there, they started this outfit called Pfumo re Vanhu, the spear of the people. Again, it was just another auxiliary force; they were ill equipped and very badly trained, pretty useless really, but still a large part of your men. It's the old story, you give enough guys enough weapons, sooner or later they're going to get lucky you know. So you had that which was never really going to work to be honest, and then you had the guys in the field who were doing the real fighting, ZANLA and ZAPU who wouldn't accept it. So I think it was a non-starter.

Were you working with any of these auxiliaries? What did you think of Pfumo re Vanhu?

(01:30:01) Well I was at a place called Goromonzi outside of Harare at the time, where funnily enough, Muzorewa actually ended up below ground; he had an underground cell at one stage. But I think my only involvement there was trying to recover stolen weapons because security was so bad, lot's of weapons were being stolen from this Pfumo re Vanhu and some from the security forces as well you know, because there was the odd policeman who defected to the terrorists and the odd soldier, but I didn't have anything to do with them, I saw them in action but nothing really.

Was this defection by officers something that increased, to your knowledge?

I don't know, I think it was very rare. One of the first things ever happened was the Crocodile Gang at Nyanadzi Police Station and there was a police constable involved in that, and that was one of the first things that ever happened, certainly in Manicaland. I was there at the time and again, Special Branch got information there was a terrorist cell operating in the area, hadn't done anything, but they were there. The plan was they were going to ambush a certain road, the Melsetter Road, and kill a European on that road. Again, for about 4 or 5 nights, we had about 3 or 4 private cars with four policemen in from our police station, all in civvies, all fully armed, just patrolling up and down the Melsetter Road at different times to see if we could provoke any action, and nothing happened. I think it was about 2 or 3 nights after it was stopped, a guy called Obeholzar and his family went through a road block and he was killed.

I hadn't realised that patrols had actually started before it happened?

Yes, I was on those patrols between Umtali and Melsetter on a road called the Skyline Road because as I say, Special Branch had int [intelligence] that this was going to happen. They came along late at night, in the dark and there were rocks across the road. He got out to try and move these rocks, they tried to shoot him and didn't do it for some reason or other and they stabbed him quite viciously. I actually took him to the mortuary; they'd stabbed him in the back of the head and the shoulders and neck and everything, he was a very big man too. Then his wife and two kids were in the car, they poured

petrol in the car and tried to set it on fire but it didn't go on fire and they survived but obviously they saw their dad/husband killed. That was one of the first major operations and I was a policeman involved in that.

So how did your time in the police begin to end, if that's the right expression?

Well the police were trying to get more and more professional all the time so they decided to send a couple of men down to South Africa to Pretoria University College, and I was one of those that went down. We did the three months course in Organisational Work Study Methods and Procedures, and then we went back to Police Headquarters. Then, for quite a few years really, I was at Police Headquarters for my latter years (01:34:08). Then things began to deteriorate in the country, especially within the Police force, you could see factions were developing and polarisation was taking place within the force and within the country. Security was deteriorating, and fraud was becoming a lot more evident. The kids at school, the education was beginning to drop off, in fact our daughter was then about 16, doing A-levels, and the school teacher called us in and said "look, she's got the ability but she's in a class of 34 and about 29 of them don't have English as a home language, she's not going to do it, so if you want her to progress academically, you'd better take her somewhere else." That was only one reason, but I could see in the Police force security was falling apart, corruption was getting worse, the same in the Army. The new regime were paranoid. The Army Headquarters and Police Headquarters, you couldn't have more than two Europeans seen talking together anywhere at any time, otherwise it was conspiracy, all that sort of stuff. And the health and welfare were beginning to deteriorate, so we just thought "stuff it."

We came here to Rhodesia because it was good, but it's no longer really that good, so we decided to leave. But it was over a long period of time, a lot of our friends had gone and I remember Sally saying to us one day "nearly all my school friends are gone" and this, that and the other, so we just thought it was time. We left in 1984 but we had stayed with Mugabe for four years and I can remember when the first black policeman was commissioned to Superintendent rank. We had him in the officer's mess, and it was a question of "hey look what we've got, a black superintendent," and when I came to leave it was total reverse "look what we've got, a white police officer!" That's an exaggeration; it was going on that way, so we just said "bugger it." I then had a small section of about a dozen Organisational Work Study personnel working in the police, but Joyce and I decided it was time to go so we just organised and came. We probably would have gone to Australia if we could have got in but we didn't think we had any qualifications so we didn't even apply. We didn't want to go to South Africa because as far as we were concerned, further down the road would be the same thing. So we came back here because Joyce's mum and dad were still here, well her mum was, and I still had family up in Liverpool.

In terms of finishing up in the police, you mentioned earlier on that you had been involved in training some of the black officers to progress. How did that fit in? Was that at the end of the seventies, or earlier?

That would have been about '78 I would think.

So there was some attempt to...

Oh yes, I mean it went on for about 8 or 9 months I would have thought. They came over here for a couple of months to be trained by Hendon Police here in the UK and at Police Headquarters there. You'd have specialists from the different departments of the Police and the CID, who would give lectures on various aspects of police and management and quartermaster stuff. One police (01:38:05) guy, a black guy, said to me, towards the end, "do you know what, I don't see why you are an Assistant Commissioner," which I was, "and I'm only a constable, I've been in longer than you have, I've got the same experience as you." I said "well actually, you haven't, I've got 25 years and I've been this, I've been that, I've been this, I've been that, I've been the other;" all things like quartermaster, IC Traffic, Public Prosecutor, drugs, traffic, all those things. I said "you've been in the police 30 years but you had one year repeated 29 times because that's all you've done, you don't know anything about policing really, all you've ever done is ride a bicycle from A to B or stand outside and protect," which was true. So although they'd been in a long time, they hadn't been trained in those specific things. Some had, some were excellent, but by and large...so he wanted what we considered to be the best posts, and they were trained quite intensively for a long period of time, went to university on courses, personnel management and documentation and all this. So I think every effort was put in to try to do it and at the same time, lower down, other guys were being advanced up the ranks from Sergeants to Inspectors and Chief Inspectors etc.

How was your departure perceived by the force?

Well funnily enough, I remember my boss – who at that time happened to be a black guy because as I say, we stayed for 4 years with Mugabe – he said to me "I hope you're not going to drag your tail behind you," so I said "what do you mean?" He said "well I hope because you're leaving, all your guys aren't going to leave" so I said "well that's up to them, but put it the other way round, because I'm still here, they're still here," which was true as well. Unfortunately or fortunately they all did leave; nearly all of them left when I left. But I was dinned out by the Officer Corps, given a presentation; I've got my silver salver up there. We had a jolly good piss-up with all the guys; I don't think there were any hard feelings. Some were delighted to see the back of me; another vacancy, another opportunity for promotion for them, another inhibiting or controlling block removed. Because towards the end, with my job, I used to have to travel around the country a lot to see what these guys needed and what we could do for them. You go round the country and you go to Provincial Headquarters, there were only five provinces in the country, you go into the top man who's an Assistant Commissioner or above, and occasionally he'd be sat behind his table there, a big posh table, a big office and a

photograph of Mugabe, a photograph of himself in uniform, a nice table, in-tray totally empty, out-tray totally empty. So you'd go "hi, how are things?" "Fine." "Any problems?" "No." "How's crime?" "Fine." "Right, and personnel?" "yes, fine." "Transport?" "Fine." But he had the bloody Mercedes car, some didn't give a toss about anything else and it was 'fine' because he didn't know, he didn't even want to know, he was either too high, too important to refer it up, or too many others referred it down. Some did little, not all of them obviously, but generally they just wanted to swan around in a nice car with their Sam Browne. In fairness to them, a lot of them didn't have the ability or the training in depth to do the job, it was a very, very difficult job to do. To run a (01:42:25) couple of hundred policemen, every aspect of it, all the courts and the prisons and all that, the investigations, the admin...

You came to the UK immediately afterwards?

Came straight to the UK, yes.

What was that like?

Horrendous, did Joyce tell you, it was absolutely horrendous. We went straight to Liverpool, Merseyside where our families were based, but we were very conscious of the fact that the kids were out of school when they shouldn't have been. We didn't have a job, we didn't have a house, we didn't have a business or anything at all. We did have some money we'd been allowed to commute and we had the idea that we should buy a little shop or a pub or a post office. So we were living in Liverpool with family and friends and commuting down here looking for somewhere to live. Eventually, because we had limited resources, we took a little village store in North Molton for five years but it was very, very tough, it really was. The kids weren't very happy. We were told because Sally was born overseas, she was treated as an alien and if she wanted further education we'd have to pay for it, we didn't have any money anyway, so she ended up in the police.

That's perhaps one way, but how else did you find yourself different to British citizens? It must have been very obvious with your daughter in some sense, but for yourself as well?

Well this shop we bought, it was patently obvious that property wise, it was quite a good buy. It was a big place while we were paying for it, but it was obvious also that the business wasn't going to be much cop so we both realised we'd have to have other jobs as well as the shop. I had half a dozen or more jobs over a period of time to try and supplement the shop but the weather; '84 it was a terrible winter down here. Terrific snow and we had no furniture, the furniture took about four months to come over so you're just living on lilos which my sister had lent us. We couldn't afford to put the heating on, it was a huge barn of a shop and the house and we suffered terribly, we really did. My poor son who was then aged 11 or 12, had to go to a school and he didn't know a soul in the school. He had a funny accent and he was a foreigner, he came from Africa and he had a hard time, but he did so

well. It was very, very tough for all of us and we didn't have a car, it was a real sob story really. But hats off to the family, they did exceptionally well and just got stuck in and got on with it. I think part of that was, we could have gone on the dole and just done nothing at all, but we came down here and got on with it. Our son's now a master technician, our daughter's doing very well in the CID, we're happy here, very lucky, but it was tough.

We actually made enquiries about going back when we first came here. I got a job as a milkman in the next village which was South Molton and the guy who owned the dairy said "if you get here at half past four in the morning then you'll be finished by about ten and then the rest of the day's yours." So I was getting up at four o'clock in the morning, hoping the (01:46:28) car which we'd bought for £115 would start, drive to the next village, get the truck out, load it with all the gear and it wasn't just milk, it was orange juice, bread, eggs, yoghurt and all this sort of crap, so I had to deliver it round this huge area, 201 drops I had. Of course they were all names of cottages and what have you, no numbers, bitterly cold February mornings. I was sometimes finishing that round about two o'clock in the afternoon, I was shattered, I'd go back to the shop, Joyce had been up from six because she'd had to get the papers arranged for the shop and take the kids to school and she was absolutely frozen stiff, stood in the shop. I'd come in about two in the afternoon and I'd say "well my darling, the rest of the day is your own, go and do the washing, the cleaning, the ironing, the cooking," it was tough. I said "oh stuff this, let's go back to Zim, at least it's warm" you know, but we didn't, we stuck it out. We couldn't have really gone back. I know we didn't want to leave but looking at it now, we had to leave. Our Godson had a farm there, his wife was beaten near to death and he was hunted and kicked out of his farm. We were very lucky.

What did you think of the end of empire, as it were?

Has it ended? We've still got the Isle of Wight haven't we?

Having come back to Britain after Northern Rhodesia had gone, you'd seen it go bit by bit. What was that like in the sense of coming back to a Britain that was no longer an Empire?

Well I suppose it was Macmillan's Winds of Change. There was an inevitability about the whole thing, wasn't there? I don't know really. I've never been an apologist for Empire. Again, speaking pragmatically, that's how things were done in those days and the whole of Europe was in a big race to get what they could in the third world. Yes, there was a lot of expectation, but there was a lot of stuff which inevitability had to come, like education, transport, railways, roads and modern technology, it would have come some way or other, in one fashion or another; and that's the way history goes, that's how it came about. But you can see with the upsurge of nationalism that they obviously wanted to run their own country, make their own mistakes, but these things are typical. People were kicked out of Zambia before they were kicked out of Zimbabwe, kicked out of Mozambique, but those countries are now taking these people back and begging them to come

back, the white farmers, the technicians, so that they can build the country up again. I understand recently that in Zimbabwe, they're trying to get some white farmers back there too; and at the same time, intimidating those who are still there. They want them back for their expertise, but under their own terms.

I've got contacts in South Africa and I understand one white farmer a week is being killed down there; and the pressure to get the land, you can understand it. Prior to independence in Zim, one of the things that the terrorists did was build this crisis of expectation, "when we take over, you'll be in charge, you'll have the best jobs, you'll have the cars, you'll have the big houses, you'll have the swimming pools, you'll have this, that and the other." And of course it didn't happen, it couldn't happen, the same as South Africa, it hasn't happened (01:50:53) because of the logistics, inefficiency and corruption. But the people are expecting it, like here in a way. It's alright the government saying they probably now send how many hundreds of thousands of people to university, but what happens when they get out of university? No jobs. And of course this crisis, it's even worse over there because they've been promised the earth and they're not getting the earth or anything like it. The short answer is I don't really know.

What kind of war do you think was being fought? It's been called different things like a civil war, a racial war and an ideological war?

I definitely don't think it was a civil war. I think it was an insurgency the same as in Malaya and Malawi and things like that. It was obviously a struggle for independence; there were a variety of motivations. There definitely was a move by the Chinese and the Russians to grab a hold of what we had had in the third world, in Africa. Look at China now in Africa, they've got nearly all the natural resources in Zimbabwe and Zambia and Tanzania, they control those resources and I don't think it's totally divorced, one from the other. It's definitely in its national policy on the part of the east, to get what they could. But as far as we were concerned, we were in the police, this is what needs to be done, that's what we would do, I don't think we sort of searched our souls every day as to the political motivations and that sort of thing, we had a job to do and just did it. I don't think the guys in Afghanistan now who are doing the fighting exercise themselves terribly about the politics; they probably do to a greater extent than we did, but they're fighting for themselves and the guy next to them.

And the final question I want to ask is whether, looking back now, you feel the war was worth it?

That's a good question.

I mean it obviously doesn't have one answer

No.

But it's something that we're actually putting to everyone.

Yes, I suppose. Was it worth it in terms of what actually happened, i.e. the inevitability of black rule or Africanisation or independence? We thought it was at the time, that was the important thing. At the time we thought it definitely was worth it, we thought that if we could keep it going long enough, stop the incursion sufficiently well, then ultimately there would be a political settlement, the same as Afghanistan. There isn't going to be military solution there, it can't be, but if the guys can give enough to facilitate a political settlement, I think that was the same with us over there: They very nearly had it on many occasions, the Tiger talks and the Fearless talks that Smith entered into with the British government and Mugabe and Muzorewa. It could have gone on but I think in retrospect, is Zimbabwe a far better country today than it was 30 years ago? I don't think so. And if you were able to impartially and objectively ask every adult black in Zimbabwe today, which they would like to have, this or Smith, they'd want Smith back; not for who he was, but for the stability, employment and prosperity they had at the time. Let's face it; before I went there, it was a wonderful, wonderful country. I'm not saying I'm responsible but it was a wonderful country at the time and innately, it had a very high degree of social structure and morale and morals as well. In their own way, they were a very civilised people and very happily disposed people. In fact, I've just read a book, you may have read David Lemon's book, *Two wheels and a Tokoloshe* is his latest one.

Oh no I haven't actually read it, he travelled around...

Yes, he rode from Nairobi to Cape Town on a bicycle, 5,000 miles, but he'll tell you that even today there, the African in Africa is a very happy person. Obviously some politicians are gangsters. He said that he noticed going through all these countries, in Zimbabwe today they seem to be really cowed and not as forthcoming and as happy and relaxed as other countries in Africa.

Well thank you very much Mr O'Toole, I think I'll turn it off now.

End of interview