

INTERVIEWEE	Hennie Heymans
DATE OF INTERVIEW	25 th May 2007
PLACE OF INTERVIEW	Rietondale, Pretoria



Question	Answer
<p>How did the building John Vorster Square come about?</p>	<p>Johannesburg was the commercial hub of South Africa, so it needed a new police station, Marshall Square was too small, and so they had to build a new Marshall Square. The same happened in Scotland Yard, they got a new Scotland Yard.</p> <p>I have to digress and go back to the escape of Braam Fischer. The day he was caught, I incidentally spoke to the man who arrested him, for history's sake I tried to ascertain who actually arrested Braam Fischer, and I got those facts. That evening there was a cabinet meeting and John Vorster went to the Cabinet meeting with his police blazer on and Dr. Verwoerd said, "Why are you dressed like this?", he said, "We caught Braam Fischer, today."</p> <p>And, one of my friends in the uniform branch who was a Brigadier, I was only a Lieutenant at that time, told me that John Vorster as Minister of Justice - he later became Minister of Justice, Police and Prisons - he was happy when it was suggested that the police station should be named after him. He said that would be a good monument for him. Because at that stage things like airports were named after people, and so that was named John Vorster Square.</p> <p>It's a pity for history's it wasn't named New Marshall Square because Marshall Square had a very nice ring to it and those people at Marshall Square were well known just like Scotland Yard.</p>
<p>Isn't it unusual to name a building after a currently serving minister at the time?</p>	<p>It does, because you don't name anything after a living person. History has shown us what has happened in South Africa and in other parts of the world...Ja, you don't do that.</p>
<p>The state of the art building was put together and became the Witwatersrand central branch of the security branch?</p>	<p>The Divisional Commissioner of Police sat there, the District Commandant himself sat in that building and then there was the commercial branch, the gold branch, the diamond branch, all the various branches were in one building.</p>
<p>Was there a sense of pride in that building?</p>	<p>Yes, there was, because it was a new building and it looked good from the outside. While on this subject driving on the freeway many times I always thought why didn't they shoot a rocket into this place, because it was a very easy target. And then of course the barracks was there, messes, the officers' club for Johannesburg, so people were very proud of it.</p>
<p>Do you remember your first</p>	<p>Yes, I can remember driving past there, people</p>

<p>time seeing the building?</p>	<p>showing it to me. Then when I was working in Johannesburg I had the occasion to visit John Vorster Square. It was a very big police station and it was awe-inspiring. Cape Town had the old Caledon Square and Durban has a new police station. Also, you must remember in South Africa most people are in Johannesburg, so it follows logically that most of your suspects and perpetrators would be there.</p> <p>I remember one incident when Mr. Timol fell out of John Vorster Square and that reflected badly upon us, it's not a thing to be proud of. You must look at the scoreboard you must remember that history is there, and everything that happens is recorded, so yes, that was a very unfortunate incident.</p>
<p>John Vorster Square has a / negative reputation in a number of circles, because of cases like Ahmed Timol How do those kinds of allegations affect the security branch and members and perhaps you could talk about how you feel if that was a true reflection of what the branches were really doing?</p>	<p>Yes, that's a very difficult question to answer. You must remember that there's a lot of strain on the policemen sometimes. It's not our fault that a bomb goes off sometime. On the other hand there's a lot of strain on policemen (we're only human) to investigate, detect and find the perpetrator and we are working with humans. And, some policemen transgress the boundaries.</p> <p>I got my schooling in the Durban Special Branch and our Commander later became a Major General, Frans Steenkamp, who was a very "good man". He didn't drink; he didn't swear he was a very civilised man. He was also highly intelligent. He was a former Durban Murder and Robbery Investigator and made his name in the Joy Aiken case where Clarence Gordon van Buuren was found guilty of her murder. General Steenkamp made an indelible impression on my young mind as a policeman. He was a man you could look up to He wrote letters and I've got one of the letters that he wrote, instructions on how you should treat people. He always said to us, treat a person decently and intelligently and know your answers before you ask the questions. And Durban prided itself on its record as far as deaths in detention were concerned. I think there was one, when I had left Durban and it caused a very big hoo ha and the man had died of natural causes.</p> <p>Coming to Johannesburg the pressure was tremendous: firstly, being close to head office and also people were expected to produce results and the police are driven by success. Success breeds success. You must remember that we were in a war; we were combating a threat and the scoreboard is there to show if we</p>

	<p>are doing our work. Life is not fair and policemen also break the Queensbury rules sometimes. Fighting a revolutionary war is much more difficult than fighting ordinary criminals. You must remember that you are fighting sometimes against the crème de la crème; the best brains available in this onslaught are your opponents. You have to be one step ahead of these people. In retrospect it's unfortunate that these things happened. If my opponents look back it's also unfortunate that certain policemen were killed in bomb explosions and in attacks on their houses. But both sides have to prove a point and you have to be result driven</p>
<p>On that note, you were operating within a legal framework and your intelligence investigations and interrogations were geared towards producing winnable cases in court. As the security situation intensified, it got more difficult and complicated during the late 70s and into the 1980's; the capacity to build cases that would pass in courts became more difficult. I wonder if you could talk about that evolution and some of the pressures associated with that?</p>	<p>Yes. At one stage, I was stationed in Maritzburg, after I'd been at head office. I was two years in Maritzburg There was tremendous pressure, even political pressure on the police to contain this. We were there for the preservation of the internal security of the Republic. So sometimes it was very, very difficult.</p> <p>We had legal machinery to combat this but we also needed intelligence and we focused a lot on getting intelligence, getting informers, sending them to university to infiltrate various organizations. One of our great successes was Craig Williamson who went from NUSAS, he and Derrick Broom, from NUSAS. We had many black policemen who we asked to abscond and go and join the freedom fighters because we needed information. We needed information timeously so that we could act. I agree with you that some of the detentions that were made could be seen as punitive.</p> <p>If we go back to John Vorster. You must remember that he was detained without trial and General [Hendrik] van den Bergh was detained without trial. When they had to fight they used the same methods that the United Party had used. They learned from their detentions and they used the same methods to get the guy in detention, to get information from him. Because you must remember that the lives of people were at stake and that is why, unfortunately people were deprived of their freedom.</p> <p>The Bureau for State Security was established to coordinate intelligence. Van den Bergh became the advisor to the Prime Minister. The State Security Act was passed. Slowly but surely the secureocrats were born. In the 80s I was transferred to the secretariat of the State Security Council, which was a very interesting</p>

	<p>phase. It was run by P.W. Botha and by the army under the auspices of national intelligence. National intelligence funded it. There were three branches there: the intelligence branch, the communications branch and the operations branch. To try and coordinate the onslaught where various departments could get together and talk about what they were going to do. Because this became not only a police matter, it became a national security matter.</p> <p>It was a very difficult task facing us. I remember in 1987 in the police yearbook, Minister of Law and Order Adriaan Vlok wrote that everything would be done to stop the revolutionary onslaught. So we tried to gather together our best brains to make the best plans. But you know what they say about the best-laid plans of mice and men. We were confronted with a very serious security situation. Did we feel beleaguered? Yes, some days we did feel beleaguered. But at least we tried to contain the situation. Unfortunately, in the townships they felt it more than we felt it. It was relatively safe in the white suburbs. It was relatively safe on the borders. Then resolution 435 was passed in Namibia and there was tremendous pressure brought to bear there. Rhodesia became Zimbabwe, Angola and Mozambique got their independence so it was South Africa that was left.</p>
<p>What sense of political support from the politicians did the security branch feel during the late 60's, 70's and 80s as the situation changed?</p>	<p>You only have to go the police magazine. Every Christmas the Minister of Police (at one stage it was the Prime Minister himself) would write the Christmas message. Yes there was support. But when you grow up in the police and you further yourself, later on you come to a position where you meet the minister. I met Adriaan Vlok the first day that he started to work on the State Security Council. You will remember he was appointed Deputy Minister of Defence and Police with a special duty to look at the National Security Management System and I met him there. He was very dedicated.</p> <p>There was tremendous pressure on the police. Every day we had a security meeting. It was attended by National Intelligence, by the military and others. Once our meeting was finished they went off to their departments to report back. Apart from the ordinary criminal things that happened every day there was also a security report every day and sometimes it was quite bad. Some days it was quite frightening to see the onslaught just from the police side. But this</p>

	<p>was a multi-dimensional onslaught. There was a sport boycott, a weapons boycott, a cultural boycott so if you put all these things together the picture was quite bleak. But I want to say that Adriaan Vlok stood strong, Magnus Malan stood strong. I remember reading a <i>Sechaba</i> where Ronnie Kasrils said that the pillars of white supremacy in South Africa rested on the SADF and the SAP.</p> <p>So some days it felt as we were riding on a tiger and at some stage we would have to let go. In retrospect we had a tough time. We all had to write threat analyses and security surveys and they had to be sent to the branch.</p>
<p>Do you think you could perhaps tell us whether the role and the history of the security branch in the South African police force has been fairly told?</p>	<p>The history has not been completely told. I think that once the public knows the full history of the South African police's Security Branch, they will get a different view of the Special Branch.</p> <p>We've always tried to act impartially. Whether it was the AWB or the ANC, it didn't matter. If the law was transgressed the police had to act. I think that a lot of people are ignorant of the role the South African Police played in, for instance, World War II, in South West Africa. After resolution 435 was passed and 99 percent of the SADF had left the country, it was the SAP who saved the day when they held their own against approximately 1600 SWAPO people who came across the border fully armed. So the SAP was there to enforce the requirements of the resolution.</p> <p>Coming back to South Africa today. The police have managed this change. You have to remember what happened when De Klerk took over. Look at how he was supported by his police and army chiefs. They could have rebelled against him but they stood behind him and they managed that change. Sometimes I think that De Klerk didn't know what power he had behind him. But he managed that change and I think the ANC respected us for that. You must also remember that with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Communism was no longer a threat. The Cuban surrogate forces had left Angola. We were in a quandary but we managed the country up to the end of Communism and then we transferred power to the ANC and look at the infrastructure and the country that they inherited. The country was not in anarchy when they took over. There were incidents of anarchy at that stage but if you look at the broader picture you can see that they</p>

	took over a well-run country.
Do you think that in the process of trying to deal with issues from the past in this country that the Security Branch has been unfairly treated?	<p>Yes. Especially if you go back to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I think there was too much truth and too little reconciliation.</p> <p>As an amateur police historian I feel that something should be done to paint an objective picture of the police because they were not only bad. Yes, as there are bad people in South Africa, there are bad people in the police but I would like an objective, fair picture of the police.</p> <p>Remember that we were under tremendous pressure, remember that it was a difficult situation, remember that the law cannot make provision in all circumstances for everything that you have to do. Not everything is prescribed and sometimes we had to act in an emergency for the betterment of society.</p>
Can I ask you a little bit about the racial dynamics inside the police?	<p>I would venture to say that we had better race relations then than we do now. I can understand why it's happening today but in those days we had very good relations with our colleagues in the police. Of course, we had very good discipline.</p> <p>I can still remember the names of the guys who were in my van crew when I drove a police van in Durban. Those guys would give their lives for me and I for them. You didn't eat if they didn't eat.</p> <p>I can remember one night when we drove past The Bluff Drive In and I said to my crew, "Have you ever seen a movie?" So we drove the van into the exit of the drive in and we parked there for five minutes and then I said, "Well that's what the drive in is all about," "Oh is that all?" So we drove out.</p> <p>The camaraderie was fantastic; it's something we all miss.</p>
How do you feel John Vorster Square should be commemorated?	<p>The idea that springs to mind is that they should bring John Vorster's bust back, put it in the entrance hall. It's part of our history, it was named after him, put it there so that we can remember it for whatever reason you may have. Don't call it Johannesburg Central. Call it New Marshall Square. What will the country look like if we eradicate all our monuments? Put John Vorster back, it's part of our history.</p>

END OF INTERVIEW