

INTERVIEWEE: PAUL ERASMUS

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Q: Now when you joined the security police here in 1977 was it this relatively large staff or was it a fairly small entity of the security police. Can you describe also the numbers, if you could remember, that were operating here?

A: At that time Johannesburg Security Branch, or Witwatersrand Security Branch, was Johannesburg and Soweto. In fact, all security matters relating to Soweto operated out of mainly this building. And as the struggle intensified the Security Branch ballooned staff wise and more and more people were brought in the whole time. I think in the next 10 years, from 1977, the staff in this building alone probably quadrupled if not more than that. What happened then is that they started to diversify office wise, operating out of the building and a lot of this was to do, relating to being compromised. So we had safe houses and buildings outside here. In Alexandra Township, which stayed exclusively the domain of the Johannesburg Security Branch, the guys were operating there out of a warehouse. The Soweto branch broke away and become its own division, Soweto Security Branch Division. So the staff compliment increased radically.

Q: Operating in White Affairs was there contact and communication with other sections?

A: Oh very much so. Obviously it wasn't, because of the nature of the beast we were dealing with, and you must appreciate that at that time White people were not supposed to mix with Black people. I mean 99 percent; in fact all of the White suspects we dealt with were in contact with Coloured people or Black people, or Indian people. So there was obviously this interrelationship between the two, a lot of joint operations. We operated as a huge team but specialized into certain areas.

Q: Maybe you can give us a taste of the kind of operational work that you were involved initially?

A: I think for the first couple of months, certainly in the first year there wasn't much going on the intelligence gathering side of things, but as the struggle intensified our means of operating, certainly mine, changed as well. It wasn't just a matter of reading a piece of information and writing a report on it. Information that was obtained by postal intersections, telephone tapping or by bugging which was then relatively low key. But the focus moved to us actually going out and recruiting people in different organizations with a way to getting so called "A1 intelligence," from the horse's mouth as it were and I was very good at this. I think I had a bit of an advantage being English speaking and having something of a liberal background and I excelled very early on. I had for a lot of time on the so called White Affairs, I had the best agents, informers if you will, and I was getting fantastic information.

Q: Did you have a sense of moral rectitude in what you were doing that you were fighting a good cause, perhaps you can give us a sense of what it was like for yourself and amongst your colleagues

A: I've got no doubt in saying that I was a more committed ideologue even than many of the guys that I worked with. Much of the influences that influenced me to doing what I was doing went back to my high schooldays; I was very involved in church and very influenced by the writings of people like Pastor Richard Wurmbandt, they had this thing called Christian Missions International. They were talking at schools and we were all praying and collecting money to send bibles to the communist world and it was very much this East, West type of conflict. I was very much a child of that era; you know, "Stop them at the 45th parallel! Blast those Reds to Hell!" you know, those types of slogans. Much of what we learnt at school as well, once again via the church, was that the communism was out to rule the world, our country would be, they were after the Cape Sea Route and the gold and I really believed for many years that somewhere along the line, somewhere in years to come we would actually fight, physically fight the Communists, the Russians specifically.

Q: So working inside John Vorster square then was a positive contribution?

A: I felt very positive about what I did.

Q: Was that a general spirit amongst people here?

A: Well I can try and distinguish between a committed ideologue but if you looked at the Security Branch and right through the history of it, the easiest way to get trustworthy people into the system was to use family of the existing policemen or somebody that was politically safe. So without insulting any of my former colleagues, a lot of them weren't committed, it was simply accepted that their father was a policeman so the son would follow in his footsteps.

Q: I'm wondering whether there was a packing order in that some units had a higher profile or were more regarded within the force than others were?

A: Well I think if you just look at the police force as a point of departure, being a security policeman immediately made you a cut above everybody and anything and everybody else and there was a lot of bad feeling at various times between the uniform branch and the security police.

Q: How was that different?

A: I think I certainly regarded myself as being a cut above the rest. We tried to nurture this very sophisticated James Bond type attitude especially on the White Affairs staff and I think a lot of the friction that started between various units was like the Terrorist Tracing Unit; these were the guys that actually went out and caught these people. So I suppose yes there was minor sort of frictions in the branch itself. From our side on White Affairs the system worked like this, we would gather the intelligence, everything went to security branch head office, a decision would be made to pursue a case in a certain direction. If people were arrested that would be the exclusive domain once again of the Investigation Branch and at John Vorster Square this was a unit that operated very much exclusive from the rest of us namely because their commander was a Colonel by the name of Cronwright and he was a terrible right-winger and there was times where a guy like myself was actually banned off the 10th floor because he regarded us as a security risk. The White Affairs guys who had this party everyday, beers

every night and here were these hectic guys doing these interrogations and everything. So from time to time there were clashes.

Q: But you would provide I mean in terms the relationship between White Affairs and investigations was that you provided raw material. Did they not include you in interrogations or investigations, or would they then task you to collect additional information?

A: Effectively the easiest way to divide the two units was: we gathered intelligence or information but when a docket was opened, that was the domain, in other words when legal action was gonna follow against the person or the organization being investigated that was the domain of the investigation branch. They did the actual arresting and for a long time although a lot of people were co-opted into the investigation branch to do interrogation and so on as happened to me, initially that was their sole job, was to take a set of information or circumstances, open the docket and prepare the whole matter for court.

Q: When did you first become aware of some of the less savoury techniques of interrogation that were being utilized here at John Vorster Square?

A: Well, when I walked through these doors I was taken on a guided tour and shown the actual window, by the gentleman that was showing me around, where Ahmed Timol, the security detainee, "fell" out of the window on the 10th floor. And in the rest of my time here I was to witness another two deaths in this building, Matthews Mabelane and of course Dr Neil Aggett. Neil died in the cells here, where we are now, a couple of floors above us.

The first time I ever sort of witnessed any, I suppose brutality, was going on raids very early. In fact right from the start I think I might have been here about a month. Information was received about a terrorist in Soweto and the entire security branch, all the units including the I

Investigation Branch simply because they obviously needed man power, armed ourselves to the teeth and we raided a succession of houses in Soweto and a lot of suspects were arrested and I saw the interrogation then first hand, no niceties. The guys were caught and they were immediately beaten to hell. I witnessed a Black security policeman crushing somebody's testicles. But the follow up investigations from that I wasn't really a part of for two reasons: It was a "Black" affair and it was exclusively the domain of the Investigation Branch.

Q: Was it well known in this building that this is what was going on, on a routine basis during that time?

A: You know the general sort of rule was the need to know principle was applied, you know the whole, "Big mouths, big targets." We never really sat, we talked amongst each other but we would never go to the police canteen over the road here and say, "Hell guys you know what we did last night? We got a suspected terrorist and we crushed his testicles." You would have come a cropper very quickly. Loose talk was absolutely bad although this place effectively leaked like a sieve for many years and I think a lot of that was due to bad training, ignorance, a lot of it.

Q: There was a considerable amount of corridor talk, our conversations, it would seem, one of our conversations 10 years ago at the Truth Commission when we were just talking of Stanza Bopape, was what had you heard about who was involved and in fact the names that you heard about were actually people who subsequently applied for amnesty in that case. So it appeared that certain things would do the rounds in terms of rumours at least even if one wasn't actively going out to find out who did what and who was responsible for what.

A: Throughout, the rumour mill would very much churn out stories. I mean it just never ended. Some of them true, some of them half true, some of them pure speculation.

Q: What did you find some of the greatest challenges about being a security policeman?

A: I think the biggest negative influence that I ever had as a security police was the frustration. You were working in a system that couldn't accommodate operating outside a very much Victorian, established, Teutonic system. My first clashes with the hierarchy came in intelligence gathering. I battled once, and somebody that listens to me saying this would find this hard to believe, to obtain ten measly Rand from the government secret fund for one of my informers to join the organization. I had to write almost a sworn statement to prove that I wasn't gonna pocket ten Rand. I mean it's bizarre. That did change.

Q: Did that kind of difficulty contribute to some of the methods that were used by some people to finance their operations?

A: Very much so. I think by the early, going through the mid and the late eighties I was probably a more accomplished conman than even my bosses were because the secret fund was then supplying us with everything. I was paying my personal accounts. In fact, in my case, it got so bad that couldn't distinguish between my finances and government finances and towards the end of the eighties I was involved in Stratcomm, working full time as a Stratcomm operative I was carrying around, in my briefcase, sometimes ten, twenty thousand Rands money. Our general sort of feeling at that time, although once again to the listener it might sound like we were a bunch of thieves or whatever, was the incredible hours that we were working, the difficulty in running these operations and eventually the sort of standard feeling was anything was justified, legal or illegal, if it was "Vir die saak," if it was for the cause, if it in anyway benefited our mission or mission statement, you could do it firstly and secondly you could get away with it.

Q: Were there any periods or moments that you can recall where you felt that this is just not worth it?

A: There was. You know, I started developing nervous problems, as such, in the early eighties after I went to Namibia to the bush war and I came back, I think a totally different person. I had the classic vestiges of early stage posttraumatic stress or I don't know how bad it was but it was never acknowledged then there was no counseling for anything like that. But I was a different person, my own father who went through a second world war, found it hard to relate to me and he'd had similar experiences having being in combat or whatever, not that I was any hero on the border, far being from that, but I couldn't easily or readily adjust to a civilized way of life in a city after having been in

Ovamamboland and being involved with Koevoet and security branch up there. I think that affected me for lot of years, it affected a lot of people.

And I think certainly if you look at what happened later years like Vlakplaas and Eugene De Kok, these people were ripe to take from a situation like that and put them in a more orderly situation and it was in effect a recipe for chaos. I mean hence Vlakplaas people going berserk, Eugene himself getting away with murder literally and this sort of phenomenon of taking people that should have been deprogrammed, certainly in Eugene's case maybe even in my case, all of us that were exposed to the barbarity of what we saw up there to come back and readjust wasn't easy and there was no mechanism. The only thing that you could do then because God help you, if you said, "Look I have a psychiatric problem," you're in trouble, they would have posted you off to Pitsonderwater and you would have rotted away there without any promotion for the next thousand years.

The sort of standard feeling about post traumatic stress as what it was in the Second World War where you had a guy that had been in combat, couldn't handle it anymore or went to pieces and they called it lack of moral fibre and the South African police had very much the same thing. If you felt that you couldn't cope anymore you had to go and see the dominee and in my case there certainly wasn't any Methodist minister that I could go and speak to, firstly, and secondly what could you say to them because whatever you said would relate to the Official Secrets Act? So everybody kept his bottled up.

But to get back to your question I think in the mid eighties, the State of Emergency, I started to get weary firstly, it was like we were climbing this mountain that had no peak whatsoever and I mean then the struggle for liberation had intensified to the point of a situation that you had to be literally a bloody fool to realize that this wasn't going to end up in chaos somewhere or we were gonna give the country to the liberation movements. I remember one of the UDF rallies here in Johannesburg not far from where we were, standing on a rooftop and looking at like a hundred thousand demonstrators, I mean this whole city was just full of people demonstrating, and this wasn't just the odd suspect that had Communist leanings from a couple of years earlier on, this was the population of this country and they wanted their freedom. A lot of us, if you had a good friend, you know we would sit sometimes and drink and you would convey to people, I remember my very close friend and colleague who died recently, saying to me one day that "We're not gonna win this". He said, "We must get the hell out of here" and I recall saying to him, "You know that's fine, but where do we go?" Anyway getting back to the point, in 1988, in my case it was so bad I wanted to leave. In fact I went and I started a business. My son had serious health problems and I couldn't but there was another aspect to this, I knew too much and it was a major decision to try and get out of this. My marriage was under pressure, I was starting to fall apart, I was drinking like a fish. Lost friends, the rest of it, just focused on this work and it was killing me but any indication and certainly in my case, when I started to rattle cages about, "I'm going to apply for a discharge, I'm going to leave," there was, "Ja, but you know but what about what you might say after

you've left here?" So there was a definite threat and once again the rumour mill churned out stories, it was like the Hotel California, you know, "You can check out anytime you like but you can never leave," type of stuff. I remember one of my bosses at that time, I went through a period where the business looked like it was gonna succeed and I was about to leave, saying to me "You'll still be involved here, even if you go and run a business or whatever, because of what you know." So as it transpired I eventually just came to some sort of conclusion that I would have to stick it out but I did do something radical, I went to see a psychologist, under an assumed name and you might find this interesting, I didn't even mention the police, although he kind of gathered that, being a very astute old man. I said to him that I work for a very secretive organization and we are involved with politics and stuff like that and I told him that I was having nightmares and I'd had this exaggerated startled response and some of the classical manifestations of Post-Traumatic Stress and he sat back and he said to me "My boy, you are complaining about your feet, when your shoes are the problem," he said, "Leave, get out." And even from my own family and from my ex-wife they were very anxious to see me get out of the system but I didn't think it was possible.

Q: These all sounds like factors that contributed to a lot of people that had experiences in the past not feeling free to express themselves and talk about this. You are one of a handful of former security policemen that have been able to speak fairly freely and openly about your experiences. What makes it different for Paul Erasmus to be able to come and talk about these things than to so many others who remain silent on many of these things, at least publicly?

A: You know if you look at what happened to me, I never actually formulated a conscious decision to betray the security police, steal documents, anything that I was accused of in later years and I'm still accused in various quarters of doing that. I simply got into a conflict situation with my bosses, my commanders, and came to a stage in my life where I couldn't take, or be part, of this corruption anymore. I couldn't handle Johannesburg and this stinking John Vorster Square and I applied for a transfer down to the Southern Cape thinking that, "I want to get the hell out of this." I had blood on my hands, I had been involved in more crimes than we'd ever arrested people, certainly for criminal stuff, it was every night, we were throwing bricks through the windows. It was endless mayhem, stealing money from the government, everybody was lying, it was this bullshit world and I had to get out of it. So I took a transfer down to the Southern Cape, thinking that this would be an idyllic little place, the quietest security area certainly in the country. And I got down there and walked into a hornet's nest. My commanding officer (I was head of technical services) was tapping, for personal gain, the boardroom of Mossos and they were into more dirt down there. I'd sort of gone down there with this picture of none of this happened. I had to cut my hair when I arrived there and every morning he would pray longer than we normally prayed. You know standing procedure in the police you started off everyday, you know, it didn't matter what you were gonna do, who you were gonna kill or torture or whatever, they started off the morning with prayers. And when I got down there, the prayer time was normally about half an hour but I mean this guy was into every bit of corruption and filth that you can think about. He'd molested one of the typists and you know it was endless grunge. And I think at that time somebody possibly him, the story filtered back to head office because they wouldn't give me a transfer, that I had the capability of opening my mouth and I had documents and that was when my life changed

very radically because the same system that I had been so loyal to, turned on me. And the information as I had it, I was in this conflict situation, they were trying to kick me out of the Security Branch, I was dealing with this drunken brigadier, this boss of mine who had significantly the name Rommel van der Merwe, I mean Rommel in Afrikaans is rubbish, I think that says it all. He put pressure on me to the point that I ended up in hospital repeatedly. I mean I was really falling apart. And the one day I got a phone call from a former colleague in Pretoria and he said to me, "Don't just drive your motor car," and he told me that apparently Eugene de Kock had been given an instruction to do a Motherwell on me and my family and that was the day my life changed. I turned 180 degrees on them and decided, rightfully so, that I had wasted my life, literally. The same people that I had been loyal to, all the commendations that I got for good work and that, and they were out to kill me now as well. So the same documents that I did have and my case books and that, actually I believe, saved my life because when I heard this and my telephones were being tapped, I mean did this sound familiar, I'd become like one of the people that I'd investigated here in Jo'burg.

Q: And so you knew what they were capable of?

A: Ja. And I also knew that the CCB and Vlakplaas and all of that was reality and I'd been involved in a lot of the stuff myself. So I put the word out very strongly that if anything happened to me, I'd already sent these documents out of the country with instructions for them to be released to every newspaper that they could. And at that time it was significant because nobody knew what had happened in this country and what was happening. So they tried different tactics. They first tried to buy me off, my ex-boss and later head of intelligence in the police, Alfred Oosthuizen, offered to use a secret fund to pay my house bond off, they tried to then rectify the damage that had already been done. He dispatched a couple of people down, people that he knew that I respected, senior policeman, came down to see me in Mossel Bay. They tried little things, which I found offensive as well; I had one night where I was taken out for drinks and plied with alcohol in an attempt to find out what I was going to do. And I ended up carrying the same guy out of the restaurant and helping him to the car, he was too drunk to breath. I stayed one step ahead and survived that part of the process anyway, and when I felt it was safe enough and I'd been boarded from the police for medical reasons, I then went to see doctors openly and told them what I'd been involved in without divulging specific details and I applied for a medical board for post traumatic stress and depression, left the police, never read newspapers again, was living in Knysna and then the queue process started with Judge Richard Goldstone and I was the fourth person that was implicated so I had to pack up my idyllic little life of not reading newspapers and watching SABC news and my ex- wife phoned Judge Goldstone. And even then, it took them three days to convince me to start talking. And three months later I was still not talking, per say, it was almost a game and then I had to leave South Africa because of the threat on me.

Q: You mentioned the three deaths in custody while you were here at John Vorster I wonder what you can recall about Matthews Mabalane?

A: I didn't witness his interrogation myself but I was on the 10th floor at the time he was being interrogated. And he apparently at some stage looked out of the window and if you look on the North side of John Vorster Square, the windows have got a parapet and it is something of an illusion and I know this might have come out at the inquest, but he climbed out of the window and thought for some reason that he could walk, you know there's lateral walls, or parapets, or cornices, he thought if he jumped onto that ledge, he could run and get onto the highway. That's the official story that went out on the day that it happened. But it wasn't the fact that he jumped out of the window. He ran up and down and the two Black policemen that were looking after him at that time while the interrogation was taking place by Arthur Cronwright and company, tried to persuade him for a long time, we were on the 9th floor, a lot of us guys who were on the 9th floor heard the shouting from the 10th floor, with these big windows that were open, you know like, "Come back, jy sal val!" you know this type of stuff, and in that case I can certainly say that he slipped and fell or, alternatively, was so desperate at that time because here's ten policemen hanging over the window trying to persuade him to come back inside, that he lost his balance and fell. But as to being picked up and thrown out of the window, I don't believe it; I mean I must be honest with you.

A: Can I tell you a very funny story? It's not funny because there's the tragedy of somebody's death behind it. The office above where the deputy head of the Security Branch sat was the office where Mabelane was being interrogated. Colonel, later Brigadier, Jack Olivier was on the phone at his window talking to the head of the Security Branch, somebody at Security Branch head office, about Mabelane and his detention and Olivier was saying to this guy, "We've just started interrogating him," I can't remember, but he was talking about him when Mabelane came past him, he was at the window and he heard the shouting and somebody ran into his office and said to him "Colonel, Mabelane's just fallen out of the window," and here he is talking on the phone and saying, "Things are going hunky dory, we'll break him in a day or two." But I saw his body, he landed on a policeman's car at the bottom and I must say that, look he was being interrogated and I mean we can go into the reasons of desperation or whatever, but I think that was a genuine escape attempt.

Q: In terms of Neil Aggett's story which you became subsequently very involved in, in relation to what happened in Somerset West and the break-in at the Aggett family house, perhaps you can take us through Aggett's death as well and the reaction to that and what subsequently happened inside the branch?

A: I mentioned to you earlier that I became quite proficient at intelligence gathering, I had some good agents and I also became very proficient at breaking into places, I got into a lot of suspects' homes without them knowing it, started photographing documents, helped on occasion the technical guys get into places and plant bugs and so on and I had this sort of reputation. I was sitting in my office in 1982 when a lieutenant that I had no time for, from the investigation branch, Steven Whitehead, walked in and said to me, "Me and you are going on a trip," and he told me the whole story about the Aggett inquest. I never personally had anything to do with Neil while he was in detention. I saw him on occasions on the 10th floor being taken into an office. I did know from talk that was going around that there were 24 hour round the clock interrogations taking place. But as to being personally involved, absolutely nothing. Apart from that I was sent on this mission to prove that Neil Aggett was suicidal,

literally, from the day he was born. That was the state's way of handling, what was it, the 58th, 68th death in detention? And they sent us on a lunatic mission. Whitehead was exactly my opposite; he was too scared to do anything, had no field experience per say, he hadn't learnt much of tradecraft about intelligence gathering in the field, let alone driving into an area that wasn't our area, the Western Cape, on a mission to prove the impossible: try and find evidence that could help the state at the inquest, that Neil was suicidal prior to been arrested. Anyway I went grudgingly but as you mentioned I was caught in Neil's parents' home in Somerset West and subsequently convicted of illegal search, not house breaking that was a set up. It was an arranged trial and what happened subsequent to that was that I lost all my promotions.

Q: So you had to plead guilty?

A: I was told the day before in Pretoria by General Johan Coetzee, later Commissioner of Police that they had organized with the magistrate, prosecutor, everything. I was to plead guilty to the lesser charge of illegal search and I would be fined R200 or six months. So it was an arranged trial, I went down, a lot of media attention. The deal was they dropped the same charges against Whitehead, I pleaded guilty, the Aggett family were reasonably satisfied and it opened the doors for Whitehead who was Aggett's principle interrogator, to face the inquest. There was attempts then from the state advocates to leave this out of the inquest and George Bizos in fact brought it up as you know it was a major part of the inquest was this search. Whitehead and I became friends after that, close friends, we were sort of in the soup together and I believed that Neil was never physically harmed although I did come to the conclusion, and if you know anything about interrogation, sleep deprivation drove him to committing suicide. I now know that with the benefit of hindsight. Whether it's murder per say, is not for me to judge, but I don't believe that anybody took Neil and hung him in that cell, but driven to it, definitely.

Q: What can you remember about the Stanza Bopape case?

A: I can tell you the first time I ever heard Stanza Bopape's name was from one of my agents that was involved with a very tame; they were affiliated to JODAC, an organization called Free the Children Alliance. And this agent whose identity I don't want to reveal, almost every second night we'd meet somewhere and she would give me some information. She took me on quite strongly and she said, "Who is Stanza Bopape?" I said I didn't know who Stanza was. She then actually told me the story, and it was that well covered up, and at a later stage, we continually argued about this because there was this whole campaign and where is Stanza, they were making it into a media thing and the one night here in Fordsburg they were making up posters and they were gonna have some function at the Carleton Centre, I think with the End Conscriptio Campaign, I can't remember the facts. But she'd learnt a little bit more about Stanza Bopape and said to me, "You guys killed him!" and I got highly the hell in, I said to her, "Are you calling me a murderer? I said I've never heard, I told you from the word go." I never heard anything in the passages or at the tea table or in pubs or anything. I later learned that information had being released, I think to the Mail and Guardian, and in fact I was accused by some of my former colleagues right up to the TRC, of actually having spilt the beans about Stanza. I didn't know any of the pertinent facts apart from what I heard and what came out in the newspapers and what the source of that information was, I still don't know.

Q: So by and large people within the Security Police kept their information to themselves?

A: If you look right at the end of days we were all taping each other, it got that bad. Nobody trusted anybody. You had maybe one or two people like your colleague or your best buddy. But I would walk into Oosthuizen's office and I knew damn well and I saw this even at Mosselbay, there was a tape recorder in his desk. You were given instructions in the corridor, not in your office because you might have had a tape recorder there. And then this double speak of which the TRC concentrated on so much. I mean, I put and I admitted to it, 3 or 4 names on the so called death list for permanent removal from society, and those were the words that were used and I was subsequently asked by the TRC, "How did you interpret this?" Look, I had a damn good inkling that this meant something a little bit more than permanent incarceration but at the time I was happy to think, "Look, somewhere along the line they are goanna set up something like some sort of huge concentration camp or whatever," because the onslaught was so big at that time, it was hard to keep a finger on anything, let alone control what we were actually dealing with. But the words "permenente verweidering van die samelewing", to me meant *possibly* death. But I didn't at the time attach even that much importance barring that one of my bosses came into my offices and said to me, my nickname was Porky, he said "Porky, you know these bloody White suspects more than anybody else." He said, "If you had the opportunity to put names on a list... I want names from you for people that we will permanently remove," he actually used that phrase. So it was a double speak type of thing and they were astute enough to know it, that if somebody was brought to account afterwards, and this is exactly what happened, as you know. We were according to General Coetzee, a lot of idiots that misinterpreted the whole thing, his hands were clean, he simply said permanent removal from society but he didn't mean that, it was halfwits like us, you know, the rank and file down below, I suppose the bourgeois, but anyway, I suppose the idiots, that misinterpreted this. But the reality is that we had laissez-faire to kill and plunder on a scale that was unbelievable and you knew you could get away with it and that's exactly what happened. And I think it's maybe a credit to the Security Branch per say and I don't include myself in this line, that a lot of potential chaos didn't happen because there were some pretty good people in the system. There were a lot of security policemen that didn't know that any of this was happening. The need to know principle was, in the later years, very, very rigidly applied.

Q: And a lot of work that you were engaged in, you spoke about some of the dubious sides of it but a lot of it was standard security work. Can you describe some of the more ordinary aspects of your work?

A: Ja a lot of it was standard enquiries. There was lot of guys in this building that did admirable work, the bomb disposal guys with whom I had plenty of dealings. They were actual, even in today's terms, actually heroes for what they did, it wasn't that they did anything in disposing a bomb for an ideological reason, that was their job. They were very brave guys. They went out and they worked with these things and I think very successfully so and it took a lot of courage. Somebody had to do it whether it was a security policeman or a normal policeman.

Q: Was there a around colleagues that were killed in the line of duty, I wonder whether you remember, a specific incident at the magistrates court when the bomb went off there and a member of this police station was killed when that subsequent bomb went off?

A: You know I watched that guy go to his death, in fact, I'll show you later, in fact in our office, there was two explosions, and me having had paramilitary training, a lot of police never went the border or whatever, when that bomb went off and our windows cracked, and it's diagonally in line of sight of the magistrate's court, I looked out of the window and saw the pall of smoke from the first explosion and I shouted at the guy in the office with me and I said, "Hit the deck, flat!" that was my training and the two of us lay there. I mean how long can you lie, like an idiot, I mean you are lying on the floor and I got up and the police van stopped and I watched that guy and I will never ever forget this sight, I mean I was looking straight at... and I said to the guy with me, "Look at that bloody fool!" because standing instructions were you don't go to where the explosive was, you clear the area, you get everybody and yourself the hell out of there. And I said to this guy, "Look at this bloody fool!" I used stronger terms than that, and then the car bomb went off and I saw that blue uniform like this, I mean it was like a piece of paper, thrown like this, out of it. And of course this whole bloody building emptied and everybody charged across there. In fact our bomb disposal guys had a harder time clearing inquisitive policemen away from the scene. Inquisitive badly trained policemen. Our training was disgusting throughout. Nobody should have run there to have a look so they could tell their friends about the bomb that went off, I mean that was taboo. Ja there were a lot of strong feelings about that, to watch a guy in a uniform killed is terrible.

Q: And in terms of your time here and your own survival as a police officer you were involved in dangerous incidents. What were your concerns about your own life preservation? Were these issues for you?

A: I am still in awe of, I don't why, I never really got hurt. I got shot at many times, many, many times. I was involved in 17 government accidents. Not 50 meters from here a PUTCO bus drove right over my car and I got out without a mark on me. Towards the end of my career I had a second name, Lucky. I was always in, the brown stuff, but always somehow got out of it, unscathed. I don't now why. I got attacked with knives. I saw a lot of death and mayhem and that right through my career including on the border and I never really got hurt. I didn't get hurt physically. But I can tell you this, I would rather have got hurt physically than got hurt emotionally and I think that's what actually happened, not only to me, but to a lot of us.

Q: What does this place mean to you when you come back here?

A: It took a bit of courage to come back here. It doesn't hold that many good memories for me, I must be honest. Simply because I can relate to so much unpleasantness, through what happened in this building.

Q: Do you think it's a place that should be rehabilitated? Do you think it's a good thing that they've tried to keep this place on and develop a new image for it?

A: I think so. You know if you know what's actually in this complex, I think the cost of starting again somewhere else would be the wrong choice but yes I see there's a lot of changes that have been made and specifically the name, I think it's important, and there should be a way that people can remember what this place actually symbolized.

Q: Do you recall any anecdotes around the building?

A: You know what was amazing, after the liberation movement, the ANC, started to attack police stations, that's when these fortifications went up and the screens on the windows which cost the Public Works Department a fortune. When they'd finished the job we heard that the whole thing was a total waste of money because an RPG would have gone through that screen like a... they spent I think 7 million rand or something, I can't remember there was a lot of talk at that time about fortifying and looking after. We were all given fire extinguishers to take home and I promptly tried mine at a burning car about a week later and it didn't work, it was old stock, you know the police force really looked after us, our seniors. But these screens were put up as anti RPG measures. The fear being that somebody could stop in the highway at night and lob RPG's into this building. And then on a lighter note, the weight of our filing system nearly collapsed that wing of the building, in which case 200 000 personal files marked Top Secret would have fallen out onto the M1 highway, that's another funny story that happened here There was a huge flap about not writing too much paper, they started to move files out and the guys that worked in that wing, this bloody building was about to collapse because of the weight of those files. I had friends in the filing department, as we all did, they'd sit there and they'd say, "One day we all gonna end up on the road," type of stuff. The system there was immense but that was just some of things on the lighter side that happened here.

Q: How did that filing system work?

A: You know it was very tedious. We had these old rollerdex units with strips in and it worked something like this: you went out and you identified somebody that was of, the keywords, "Possible Security Interest," so you went and you opened a file and it would go through various stages and the actual files meant something, it was like a category. And then if head office then saw fit to open a file, the status of your file at local level would be elevated because now head office had a file as well and then you had to cross index. So for example I attended a UDF rally, or meeting, I identified 300 suspects while I was sitting there, I put them in the identification list, a copy of that report would go into each of those 300 files. So you can see how this all interlinked and how vast it was, the volume of paperwork was unbelievable.

They did try to computerize but because of sanctions in the late 80's, early 90's, there was no ways that police, who were buying technical stuff, senior policemen, obviously generals or members of their families were going to the Far East to buy technical stuff and get past the sanctions and they installed this for the security branch, a computer system which never worked and they sent guys around the country and they would of course start from Pretoria and immediately head for Cape town so that they could enjoy the holiday as best as possible and the last stop would be Jo'burg. They arrived here one day and found out why this whole system refused to switch on and, I actually witnessed this, the guy pulled his desk up and he said " Oh is that what this is for?" he held the one key and these guys had spent a month running around the country. Point is nobody was really stupid it's just that we didn't have the expertise and because of sanctions, to take all of this crap and start computerizing.

Q: What sort of relationship did the police have with the local community around John Vorster Square?

A: We had pretty good relations with them. We'd regularly get our bags of samoosas from one of the Indian, Oriental shops here. If you walked in there, they knew, and obviously there were little Chinese shops and Indian shops and so on, the traders, they knew you looked like a cop and you were from the building out of the road. They always gave you a little bit extra on your curry or your deep fried prawns and of course the clothing shops. I think it was sort of, they were thriving on the fact that here in the seedier part of Jo'burg as it was then, you had all these guys living in the single quarters here as well and of course, a thousand odd policemen, I can't remember how many people were actually stationed in the building. Then of course, the prisoners, the prison side of it, you know buying snacks for family that had been locked up and so on.

Q: Can you tell us about the Marion Sparg bombing incident?

A: Marion Sparg was in the ANC's Special Ops. Came back from exile and in disguise placed a bomb at Cambridge police station in East London, which went off and didn't hurt anybody, in the ensuing investigation Marion was traced to Hillbrow where she was subsequently arrested after she placed a bomb in this building and nearly killed the District Commandant who was sitting on the toilet at the time when said limpet mine went off. I didn't witness that personally, I was in the building and we all got one *hell* of a fright, but I did hear from reliable sources as to the state of this man, who was not very popular, he was a Brigadier I think and then he become a General, he was sitting on the can in the area where this bomb went off and what he looked like and what he was covered with. But she placed another bomb in Hillbrow police station and I will show you a photo just now of me photographing that limpet mine lying on top of the wall and which we set off in the courtyard after the building had been cleared. We had more security policeman here than the head office in Pretoria. And this police station was obviously of huge security interest. They never really implicated a system that worked and it's the fact that just because she was a White woman Marion Sparg had walked through all of the security and put a limpet mine right under the noses of the security branch and set it off.

Q: Did that result in a change in procedures on access to the building?

A: Well they put up this boom at the back that cost the poor old P.W.D a fortune but I mean you had hundreds of policemen going in and out. Anyway we had to all line up for photographs, have coloured coded ID cards to get in there. And I think it lasted a day until a policeman under the influence drove the boom and the pole and everything right off the ground and it was pretty much back to square one. Very difficult situation to have things of strategic interest, linked to a place where there is a lot of "community policing" as well and guys that had nothing to do with this. You now we were right in the middle of this so it would have been better to have a building, I suppose, on our own. But then it would have attracted, of course, immense attention.

Q: Maybe you could give us a sense of some of the kinds of characters that worked in this building?

A: I had many dealings with Colonel Cronwright, Arthur Cronwright. Firstly as somebody that was terrified of him; I think generally everybody was scared of Colonel Cronwright, small man. It was only

later, after I'd been through a lot with him that I actually worked on his section. He took over control of White Affairs when I think for political reasons, what was going on, on the 10th floor, just became too much for them and they had to shake the staff around and I then became personal friends with him and I then photographed his, I think his third wedding or fourth wedding, I was the only policeman invited to it, myself and my son's mom. And he was actually, there was all the legend and everything surrounding Cronwright, he was very lonely and very much a sad figure, but his hatred of the left came from an incident at Wits University where his back was broken in a student protest. There was a confrontation between the police I think in 1973, many years before I started working here, and policemen that were on the campus were cornered at one point and were cut off by a lot of students and there was a lot of trading of punches and Arthur Cronwright ran down the stairs and some guy tackled him and he injured his back and he used to refer to that many times during interrogations and he would go absolutely apers. Once again he shouldn't have been in the situation, as far as I'm concerned that he was in. Where he had this incredible control and also harboured this terrible hatred for everything that was outside the national values. You know he was terribly anti-Semitic, anti everything. So it's hard to judge a person like that if you know the whole story and I think that happened with a lot of people like Eugene De Kock, if you look at their backgrounds, there's more to it than, "This was a natural born killer." Somebody that grew up wanting to crush somebody's testicles. It's not just easy to judge somebody.

Q: Were there any senior officers who you found truly inspiring, that were role models for you?

A: Definitely, our first commander here was Brigadier Hennie Muller, a gentleman to the core. And I worked on many senior officers that were absolutely fantastic, that took like Hennie Miller did, and I can tell you something that I found out about him while I was here in fact. He was the head of the Security Branch when the Soweto Riots started and "Oom Hennie", as a lot of people called him, had gone repeatedly to government at that time and he said "This thing about languages at schools is the catalyst that is going to spark off mayhem, blood and destruction," and he was ignored. You know a little change of history there and a guy like Hennie Muller could have prevented so much tragedy, given a different order of working but I mean as invariably happens the politicians, just ignored. We all know from history what happens when a government ignores, what they have been warned, what's in their faces.

END OF INTERVIEW

