

**STATE LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

**J. D. SOMERVILLE ORAL HISTORY  
COLLECTION**

**OH 796/1**

Full transcript of an interview with

**ROBERT BOSCECE**

on 12 October 2006

by Meryl Skelding

for the

**SOUTH AUSTRALIAN POLICE HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

Recording available on CD

Access for research: Unrestricted

Right to photocopy: Copies may be made for research and study

Right to quote or publish: Publication only with written permission from the  
State Library

## NOTES TO THE TRANSCRIPT

This transcript was created by the J. D. Somerville Oral History Collection of the State Library. It conforms to the Somerville Collection's policies for transcription which are explained below.

Readers of this oral history transcript should bear in mind that it is a record of the spoken word and reflects the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The State Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the interview, nor for the views expressed therein. As with any historical source, these are for the reader to judge.

It is the Somerville Collection's policy to produce a transcript that is, so far as possible, a verbatim transcript that preserves the interviewee's manner of speaking and the conversational style of the interview. Certain conventions of transcription have been applied (ie. the omission of meaningless noises, false starts and a percentage of the interviewee's crutch words). Where the interviewee has had the opportunity to read the transcript, their suggested alterations have been incorporated in the text (see below). On the whole, the document can be regarded as a raw transcript.

Abbreviations: The interviewee's alterations may be identified by their initials in insertions in the transcript.

Punctuation: Square bracket [ ] indicate material in the transcript that does not occur on the original tape recording. This is usually words, phrases or sentences which the interviewee has inserted to clarify or correct meaning. These are not necessarily differentiated from insertions the interviewer or by Somerville Collection staff which are either minor (a linking word for clarification) or clearly editorial. Relatively insignificant word substitutions or additions by the interviewee as well as minor deletions of words or phrases are often not indicated in the interest of readability. Extensive additional material supplied by the interviewee is usually placed in footnotes at the bottom of the relevant page rather than in square brackets within the text.

A series of dots, .... .... indicates an untranscribable word or phrase.

Sentences that were left unfinished in the normal manner of conversation are shown ending in three dashes, - - -.

Spelling: Wherever possible the spelling of proper names and unusual terms has been verified. A parenthesised question mark (?) indicates a word that it has not been possible to verify to date.

Typeface: The interviewer's questions are shown in **bold print**.

Discrepancies between transcript and tape: This proofread transcript represents the authoritative version of this oral history interview. Researchers using the original tape recording of this interview are cautioned to check this transcript for corrections, additions or deletions which have been made by the interviewer or the interviewee but which will not occur on the tape. See the Punctuation section above.) Minor discrepancies of grammar and sentence structure made in the interest of readability can be ignored but significant changes such as deletion of information or correction of fact should be, respectively, duplicated or acknowledged when the tape recorded version of this interview is used for broadcast or any other form of audio publication.

**Interview with former Sergeant Robert Boscence conducted by Meryl Skelding on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 2006 for the Police Historical Association Oral History Project of the State Library of South Australia.**

DISK 1

**Today is the 12<sup>th</sup> October 2006 and I'm interviewing Robert Boscence, RFD<sup>1</sup>, retired sergeant, and my name is Meryl Skelding and I'm the interviewer.**

**Robert, could you perhaps start with telling us how many years you served with the South Australian Police and when you retired?**

Yes. I served for forty-one and a half years, I retired on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1999.

**And when were you born and where were you brought up?**

I was born on the 14<sup>th</sup> November 1941 at Whyalla. I spent early years in Whyalla completing grade six before moving to town after the parents had split up. I did twelve months attending Prospect Primary School before going to Peterborough to live with my grandmother, and I did my high schooling at Peterborough High School in the Mid-North.

**Okay. And could you talk a bit about when and where you joined the South Australian police force, and your early training?**

Yes. It was rather interesting. Like most young boys of my era, when you grew up you wanted to become an engine driver or a police officer, having a father and a grandfather who actually *were* engine drivers, and my father was dead against me following his career, and when I told him I was going to join when he said that, I came home one day and I said, 'I was talking to the local policeman', and he thought I was in trouble and also gave me a cuff on the ears. He said, 'What were you in trouble for?' I said, 'I was asking him about joining the police force.' Seeing I wasn't going to become a train driver, I ended up becoming a police officer, and eventually started my career on the 19<sup>th</sup> May 1958. So I arrived at the police barracks on a Monday morning, along with five other people, including Bill May and Neil Kipling, both from Victoria. Can't remember the names of the others.

---

<sup>1</sup> RFD – Reserve Forces Decoration

**This is the Thebarton Barracks in Adelaide, is it?**

Yes. Where we are at present. On that day I became a junior constable, or JC as we were called at the time.

**You mean when you completed your cadet training?**

No; from day one.

**Oh, right, from day one. And how long was the cadet training for?**

The cadet actual course was for nine months. Initially, before you started the cadet course or were allocated a cadet course our main jobs were in the stables. The usual duties including mucking out the stables and all the duties associated with horses. Never got to ride the horses till later on in our career, of course, but our main job was looking after and polishing gear and just looking after the horses in general.

**That was the Mounted Police Division?**

It was known as the 'Mounted Cadre' in those days.

**And so were there any other duties involved, apart from cleaning the horse stables?**

No, it was mainly in and around the horse stables. The usual work included shovelling horse manure – we had another word for it, of course. I stayed in that job until the 30<sup>th</sup> June 1958, when I was overlooked by a mistake, I was told, to commence my junior constable training as a member of B Troop. Seeing I'd missed out they took me out of the stables and I commenced duty in the Advanced Driving Wing – Sergeant Bert Kohler[?] was in charge at the time. At that stage my job included riding a large industrial polisher around the floor, keeping the floors highly polished and all the exhibits clean. It was while I was in the Advanced Driving Wing that Sergeant Kohler began taking me out on lectures when he used to go. He instructed me in the use of a 16mm projector. Later on he was to encourage me to ride the motorcycle outfit around the parade ground, and that's where I learnt to ride a motorbike. When I wasn't polishing floors and motorbikes were standing idle on the parade ground, I had the opportunity to ride a motorbike around circles on the parade ground. Thoroughly enjoyed it.

**Could you talk a bit about being a member of the Police Band, when you joined that and your duties at that time?**

Yes. It was after I'd done my JC training, which commenced on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1958, and I became a member of C Troop. After we graduated on the 19<sup>th</sup> June 1959,

I was able to wear a blue uniform with a patrol collar, and at that stage we were farmed out to do various jobs throughout the Department. One of the jobs I ended up doing was I was posted to Henley Beach for a short time and I worked there mainly filing and frequently driving the outfit around, driving the members of the staff down in the Henley Beach area on inquiries. At that stage, after I've graduated, we registered for National Service, there was a group of us that registered.

And also part of our duties included school crossing monitors as a police cadet. We used to go out to the various schools and monitor the school crossings, both morning and night. The crossing I became involved with was the one at the Marryatville Primary School. I used to get dressed up in uniform, catch the trolley bus from out here at the Barracks, up to Marryatville, do my duties in the morning, come back, get changed, go back into the stables, after lunch get cleaned up again and go back out and do the afternoon duties.

It was around about this stage that [I was] looking at other duties around the place. It wasn't until after I'd done National Service – because in August 1959, those of us who had registered for National Service were called up and we attended Woodside. National Service intake three of '59. We were posted to 4 Platoon, four of us, the other two went to one of the other platoons. The four of us became regimental police and assault pioneer training, which we thoroughly enjoyed, of course, that was entailing explosives – how to set charges and various things that go with that. We then finished National Service and came back to the Police Department. And at that stage looking for new adventures I was persuaded to join the Police Band, where I became a side drummer for a while and later on progressing to the tenor drum. That was in November of 1959.

**Okay. And you lived at Thebarton Barracks for a while and then moved, is that right?**

Yes. My place of residence while I was doing the training was in the Barracks. It wasn't until after we graduated from our junior constable training that we were allowed to live out. Shortly after that time, my father and grandmother who I'd lived with at Peterborough had moved to the city and I moved out and lived with them down at Henley Beach.

**And how many years were you a junior constable before you became promoted to the next level, probational constable?**

I commenced my adult course in June of 1961 – actually, course eighty-one. I commenced actually ahead of time, mainly due to the fact I was still a member of the

band at the time and the band was due to do a trip of Tasmania. Because of the trip coinciding when I was normally going to do my adult course, they put me on the course early so that I could do the trip to Tasmania. On the 13<sup>th</sup> October 1961 I graduated as a probationary constable, I think it was on a Friday, and on the following Wednesday we left the barracks here at Thebarton for a fortnight's trip to Tasmania. Toured the isle of Tasmania, had a very enjoyable time, got to see the island, and returned to Adelaide on a Friday morning, actually, on the Overland Express. Next morning we were marching in the Christmas Pageant, and that was my last function as a member of the Police Band, and that was basically on the beginning of November we actually marched in the Pageant, and on the 14<sup>th</sup> November 1961 I commenced duty at No. 9 City Division, General Duties Police Officer, doing general patrol work.

**And what was your posting after that?**

After that, well, I stayed in the city up until January and my main duties there, being a junior officer, was to walk the beat. Occasionally, very seldom, you got to ride in a police car. I remember one incident where I actually was working on a Sunday afternoon and we had an FC Holden, and we got call that there was a young kid, he was trapped in a drain at the end of Prospect Road, on Grand Junction Road. I remember the officer with me, he was driving, and we're going up around the S-bend past the Cathedral and the Children's Hospital there and he was going so fast he went around sideways, a couple of those corners up past into North Adelaide. Was all good fun in those days, I was young and wild and looking for adventure and the adrenaline was running fast. It was the end of the first week that I commenced general duties that I was given the news that I was being transferred to Whyalla towards the end of January.

**Nineteen sixty-two.**

And on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1962 I transferred to Whyalla, No. 21 Division, Whyalla was my home town so glad to go back up there, I had relatives there. We moved into the single men's quarters above the station. I remember the sergeant in charge was Sergeant First Grade Bob Clark, a very nice, very jovial type of character, and the other sergeant was Sergeant Third Grade Ron Schmerle. Inspector Blyth was our divisional commander.

**How many police officers approximately do you think were there at Whyalla at the time?**

There's four CIB<sup>2</sup> members and I think there was only about fifteen or twenty uniformed officers. At that stage there was no night shift. Being in the single men's quarters, after everyone had finished duties we had the phone switched to the on-call member and when you got called out at night you woke whoever else was in the single men's quarters up to come out and give you a hand with the job. Didn't happen too often.

**Have you got any memories of your time based at Whyalla that you'd like to talk about?**

Oh, yes, got lots of things I could tell you about Whyalla. I suppose the first thing that sticks in my mind is the single men's quarters down at the BHP<sup>3</sup>. Every pay night they had a very organised gambling night, mainly two-up and card games, and this particular night, because of the complaints and that we put in a big raid. Police officers came from surrounding towns and we had a few new arrivals and they were planted down into the playing group and at the appointed time we raided. The quarters I remember at one stage there I had a foot on one person, I had a person in each hand and didn't know what to do. When I realised I had a foot on I took my foot off and he ran away. I don't know who that was. But I ended up with two offenders that night by the time I got back to the station.

Perhaps a very vivid occasion in Whyalla was my first fatal accident. It was the first Christmas Eve I was up there. It was in Jenkins Avenue. There was a carload of seven people going home after the night's entertainment, they were members of the local Scottish band. They hit a Stobie pole and three occupants of the car were killed. It was rather interesting because the force of the impact forced the tail shaft to bounce back something like about seventy paces from the point of impact. It was very, very concerning, especially when we found out that there was, of the three killed, there was a common name: one was called Hynde and the others were Hyndman. It turned out that the Hyndman were a husband-and-wife couple newly-arrived from Scotland, and they had an eight and eleven year-old at home on their own, and I remember in the early hours of the morning when we got around to it we had to go around and tell them that their Christmas present was Mum and Dad had been killed in an accident, drawing straws who was going to do the job. And the woman police officer, Rosie Dale at the time, was involved, she became involved in

---

<sup>2</sup> CIB – Criminal Investigation Bureau.

<sup>3</sup> BHP – (originally) Broken Hill Proprietary Company.

the job, and unfortunately for her she drew the short straw and she had to go around and tell them. I always remember that.

Whyalla was building up fast at that stage and growing population. We were very busy. I suppose part of the time, being single, we used to get some of the perhaps good jobs or bad jobs. Prisoner escorts were probably very interesting because frequently we used to have to go down to meet the patrol from Ceduna. We'd drive from Whyalla down to Wudinna, pick up a prisoner or two, take them up to Port Augusta Gaol, which was commonly known as 'Greenbush', deposit them there and then back to Whyalla, and that was a day's duty. Frequently did that. Other prisoner escorts were by ambulance when any mentally defective – or MDs, as we called them – mental patients had to come to Adelaide, we'd always put them in an ambulance and drive to Adelaide. Frequently we used to do driving for the ambulance as well, mainly for trips to town when they wanted a driver, because at that stage they were all volunteers, like the fire brigade and a lot of other organisations up there, and they could not afford the time away from Whyalla because they had jobs to go to next morning. And perhaps the ones closer to my heart were - we used to catch the bus at six o'clock in the morning. Especially if you're single, they'd wake you up and say, 'You've got to do a prisoner escort.' You'd end up with a prisoner, a stack of paper, catch the bus around to [Port] Pirie, hop on the train, halfway to Adelaide change over at Bumbunga, the train going north, the escort from Adelaide would come on and take over your prisoner and you'd hop on the train and go back to Whyalla, get back about four o'clock in the afternoon. It was a long day.

Perhaps another incident at Whyalla comes to mind. Another fatal accident I had up there was a hitchhiker, he'd actually been picked up somewhere in Victoria. The car he was in rolled over about seventeen miles out of Whyalla on the road to Cowel. Because he had no ID<sup>4</sup> on him, we couldn't go through the process of the undertaker, couldn't take charge of the body and that, and he was in the local morgue for something like three weeks before we were able to identify him and it turned out he was a hitchhiker from Great Britain.

### **So what was the process of identifying that person?**

We had to go through Immigration, Foreign Affairs, all the government departments, to find out who was missing, basically. We did send off blood types, what was [?P-

---

<sup>4</sup> ID – identification papers.



apps?] – we didn't call it 'forensic' in those days, later on it became known as 'forensic', but we did send off samples of blood, descriptions.

### **That was to Adelaide?**

To Adelaide and they went through to Canberra and other places. Eventually we found out who he was.

Some of the other duties we used to do at Whyalla: it was rather interesting, especially on nightshift when we did do a nightshift, we had to clear the airport runway for the mail plane to come in in early hours of the morning, because it was out in scrub and frequently kangaroos and other vermin would run up the runway when a plane was due to come in. The plane would buzz the airport but frequently, if we were able to, he'd radio for us to go out and we'd go and run up and down the airport – high speed, of course – get rid of the kangaroos. And that, we used to enjoy that. We'd sort of blow the cobwebs out, especially on the boring nightshift.

### **So any other memories of your time in Whyalla?**

Yes. Perhaps on a lighter note, because I'd done National Service I continued with my CMF<sup>5</sup> training, and the nearest CMF depot at that stage was Port Pirie and I used to travel from Whyalla round to Pirie of a night for training. I used to join up with the group of lads from Port Augusta and we'd go down to Pirie. Because there was a group from Port Augusta increasing, we eventually opened up a depot at Port Augusta, which made it a lot easier for me travelling from Whyalla. Here I made corporal, got my first two stripes, and by that stage I'd done a bit of recruiting and there was quite a few carloads of us going from Whyalla up to Port Augusta and the Army asked me if we could justify a bus, and they supplied a bus for us to travel from Whyalla to Port Augusta for parade nights. 1963, because we were quite a large group travelling to Port Augusta, they asked us to look at identifying a possible depot and eventually Whyalla opened up as an Army Reserve depot at the Viscount Slim Hall.

### **In those days it was called CMF, was it?**

Yes.

### **Citizen Military Force, and later became the Army Reserve?**

That's right. I was promoted, picked up my third stripe, promoted to sergeant, when we returned to [Whyalla].

---

<sup>5</sup> CMF – Citizen Military Forces

### **This is in the Reserve forces?**

In the Reserve forces. That was the CMF training. Perhaps back at the police work, mid-1962 working nightshift, I was the first member to work a nightshift at Whyalla, mainly because we used to finish about two o'clock in the morning and switch the phone through and you were on call. I remember the inspector wanted an early-morning call at five a.m. and when he found out that there was no nightshift there to give him an early-morning call that quickly changed, and I was told, 'You're not working late afternoon, you're working a full nightshift.' I used to work nightshift on my own.

Perhaps some of the other things at Whyalla stick in my mind. Because it's an industrial town and the shipyards were still going, a lot of the ships were prefabricated by industrial businesses around Whyalla, and when a section was completed we used to escort the wide, long loads from the engineering firms down to the shipyards. They were rather interesting.

Also while I was at Whyalla I ended up going to Woomera for two weeks, relieving. That was interesting because in those days the communications, the country communications, was *via* the Traeger radio. One particular night at Woomera we couldn't reach Adelaide, we couldn't reach anyone else in the State. However, on the same frequency we were able to talk to Launceston and Hobart who, by a similar freak of nature, were unable to talk to each other. But they could talk to Woomera. It turned out that Hobart were talking to Launceston *via* Woomera. I remember halfway through the exercise we had to change channels, and the old Traeger set was not a matter of switching the dial, it was a matter of pulling out two metal square boxes, used to turn them over and push them back in, and that's how you'd change channels.

### **So there were no radios inside the police cars at that time?**

Whyalla had radios inside the police car. Woomera had a couple of radios, we were able to use the radios, but that was only a base set. But this was the country network.

### **Were there some other experiences in your civilian life as part of your time there?**

Yes. I eventually married and moved into married quarters at 6 Fisk Street – that's a tongue-twister – with a new wife and commenced married life. I played football for North Whyalla, who was the team I barracked for when I lived in Whyalla as a young lad, and I played cricket for West Whyalla, who were 'Green and Gold'. North were 'the Magpies'. While at Whyalla, I joined the Freemasons Whyalla Lewis Lodge,

Father having been a Freemason he encouraged me to join. My eldest daughter, Anne-Marie was born on the 27<sup>th</sup> November 1965 in Whyalla Hospital. At that stage our main entertainment were the open-air theatres and drive-in theatres.

Perhaps a thing that does stick in my mind as far as the police duties were concerned is point duty every morning and every night. We had to go and do point duty on the Port Augusta Road where it came into Whyalla, it sort of came in over the bridge, over the railway line – – –.

### **What's point duty?**

Traffic duty. And for about half to three-quarters of an hour, morning and night, there was a steady stream of traffic, either into the town or out of town, people going down to the blast furnace, the shipyards, and at that stage the rolling mills which were under construction. There was endless traffic, three roads feeding into this one road down Port August Road over the bridge. It was all good fun.

I also witnessed the demise of the shipyards while I was at Whyalla. Having impressed someone in my CMF days I was selected to attend OCTU 1 at that stage.

### **What's OCTU 1?**

That was the Officer Cadet Training Unit. But I was unable to commit fully to this and didn't last very long.

Perhaps one other thing that sticks in my mind at Whyalla was a religious group who did not believe in blood transfusion, a lot of fun and games we had with that. A woman and her two babies, twins, refused blood transfusions and, needless to say, they died. But there was quite an inquiry to do over that, and I think that was the beginning of the legislation and the steps to make it law for blood transfusions to be administered in saving life.

### **Okay. And then after Whyalla you were posted to Gladstone?**

Yes, on the 29<sup>th</sup> September 1966 I transferred to be the second man at Gladstone Station. It was a two-man station. At that stage, Senior Constable Laurie Bryant was the OC<sup>6</sup>. Shortly after arriving, Laurie went on three weeks' leave. I was left on my own. It was a new experience. Part of the prerequisites to going to one- and two-man stations in those days was that we had to use our own cars for police duties. Hadn't been there very long, I remember it was on the eve of my daughter's first birthday. On the Friday afternoon I was talking to Laurie at the front gate of the

---

<sup>6</sup> OC – Officer in Charge.

police station, he'd just returned from leave, and the local fire siren went. Not knowing my way around, Laurie suggested I follow the local CFS<sup>7</sup> chief, he knows where he's going, and so we went out of town to Treasure's Farm. They had a crop fire. It was on the way to this fire that we came across the Georgetown CFS Unit, thrown a fanbelt, on the side of the road, standing there watching the fire burn through this crop, and when we arrived at the scene the car I was following, the Chief Fire Officer, we picked up the crew and knapsacks and away we went. He went over a hill and I followed him, and I didn't realise that he had seen a cocky's gate and he came back. Slammed his Hydromatic into reverse and came straight back into his dust, and I came over the hill and hit him.

**So a cocky's gate is – – –?**

Is a farmer's gate, it's just a break in the fence line.

**So it was a way for them to get into the field.**

Yes, get in the field. And I hit him and damaged his car and pushed him down the road. As a result, all occupants of the car, we were all in a pretty bad way and myself in particular, and I can vividly remember and still recall what my car looked like, and there was a lot of activity at the front wheel of my car. And as it turned out this was an out-of-body experience, because apparently, by the time the local Gladstone CFS unit arrived with the local chemist on board who looked at me and stepped over and he said, 'Oh, he's dead', it wasn't until the local gaol unit came along that one of the prisoners – a young lad, apparently – took the time to check me, he said, 'No, he's still alive.' And by that stage they started to administer first aid. Well, I can tell you all about that activity. Next thing I know, I woke up on the operating table at the local hospital. Two of us end up in hospital, and three transferred to Adelaide. We were in a pretty bad way. Apparently I was too bad to move, along with the other chap. I ended up with thirteen stitches across my forehead, eleven in the right eye and four across the bridge of my nose. Brought both knees up into the dash and bent the dash of the car, really made a mess of it. But the scary thing is the out-of-body experience: I could tell you what the front of my car looked like. Doctor told me I'd never walk again, but I proved him wrong and went on to play football for a little while. Couldn't run and didn't make my football prowess any better, so I ended up

---

<sup>7</sup> CFS – Country Fire Service.

giving that up and took up umpiring instead. Played tennis locally for the local team, and enjoyed that.

Gladstone was an interesting posting. During my time I was there, four and a half years, we had three escapes from the local gaol and we featured in the capture of all but one prisoner who actually got through the Adelaide Hills. I remember one in particular, found him wandering around town, exposing himself at the local swimming pool, took him up to the local gaol and knocked on the door and, much to the keeper's surprise – they were in the process of doing the head count and they didn't realise they had one missing until I marched the prisoner in.

A lot of major accidents, serious accidents I attended, and perhaps the one in particular that sticks in my mind was a person from Pirie who was addicted to Valium, apparently, and she used to go around to all the chemist shops and get as much Valium as she could. And she'd been warned off many towns around the area, and this particular day she'd been to Jamestown, from all accounts. She was coming through and because she was affected from Valium she actually, going round a bend, took out a Stobie pole and took out the main feeder to the Mid-North, two hundred and twenty thousand-volt wire hooked under the front of the car, the car burst into flames and she was incinerated. By the time we got out there with a fire appliance from Gladstone we had to stand and watch the crop burn, watch the car burn and the occupants burn. It was beyond our recovery of trying to save her. And we weren't too sure whether the wire was dead or alive, but as it was it had shorted out but we weren't to know that at that stage, we were waiting for the electricity people to come out and tell us it was safe, because we didn't want to cook ourselves. It was rather interesting because, following that, by the time we resolved everything and we went back into town and the locals had helped us, that was the only time then the officer in charge, who was Col Lord at the time, he and I went to the local hotel and the group that helped us, we all went in there for a drink and we shouted them a beer and said, 'You deserve this.' And it's the first time I ever drank in police uniform in the front bar of a hotel, but I think we were excused because it was a nasty experience to see the – – –.

At that particular stage, the only way we could identify the woman, the passenger and what was wrong with her was there was a very small, minute contents of the body that hadn't been charred, enough to cover about a ten-cent piece. That was sent to town and they were able to identify cause of death and what she'd been taking, the whole works. Bit of forensic, again.

**Amazing.**

Also learnt about crush syndrome, where a person who's been crushed, they can be alive and nothing wrong with them but the moment you lift the weight off a person, sudden pressure released in the heart, and the heart pumps the blood and actually drains itself of blood.

### **Such as people in car accidents?**

Car accidents. Come across two or three of those, my first experience of that.

Another thing, while I was at Gladstone the forensic autopsies were done at major hospitals but there was a big hooah, a lot of the major hospitals refused to do them except the local doctor at Laura. He took great delight in doing autopsies, and as a result all the autopsies from the district around Pirie, Burra, anywhere around the place, used to go to Laura, and every autopsy he did I had to go up there and witness, and invariably he'd ring up around about tea-time: 'You'd better come up, I'm about to do an autopsy.' Nothing to do one or two a night.

Did a lot of relieving from Gladstone: relieved Laura, Wirrabara. As I said, played tennis, football and took up umpiring while I was at [Gladstone]. Made many close friends while I was at [Gladstone] and they're still friends today, very close friends to us today. I joined the .... Freemasonry Lodge while I was at [Gladstone]. And on the 30<sup>th</sup> December 1966 my second daughter was born.

Also at Gladstone took a great interest in disaster planning and I developed a disaster plan for the area. To test the disaster plan out, I staged an exercise involving the Scouts, the local hospitals. Got a lot of media coverage and it was a great success. And it was rather fortunate, because a matter of three days later there was an ore train coming down from Broken Hill, just out of Jamestown, and it was derailed in a major derailment, and the train following behind that was the Indian Pacific passenger train coming through. And because the ore train had derailed, closed the line – it was a weakness in the line – who knows, the Indian Pacific could have been the train that derailed and we could have had a lot of casualties. But the local press got hold of it and said, 'Timely disaster plan tested for the area.'

I think the interesting part, going back to just after we got to [Gladstone], when I was laid up in hospital recovering from my accident, wife and the local police officer's, OC's, wife were together there and they were mining the shop, because Laurie right at that stage was away playing bowls, he was a great bowls player. He'd locked up someone during the day, in the afternoon, and he went away for a couple of hours to play bowls, and when he came back his wife told him promptly that the prisoner was playing up and he wouldn't quieten down so she did the usual thing to

quieten him down: opened the inspection hole and hosed him down. (laughter)  
New experience.

Also at Gladstone I've witnessed the first Indian Pacific train through the town. I was a foundation member of the local Lions Club, and continued my CMF involvement at Port Pirie, and while I was there I commenced officer cadet training with the Adelaide University Regiment.

**That was based in Adelaide.**

Yes.

**And after that I believe you transferred to Mount Pleasant?**

Yes. From Gladstone in March of 1971 transferred to Mount Pleasant, single-person station. Again used my own car. It was interesting because the station was *very* dirty when we moved into it and I remember the first night [after] the other person, the other officer moved out, all his effects going out, we had to scrub the walls because we had a five year-old and a four year-old daughter, and before we put them to sleep in their room we had to scrub the walls up above their reach so that in their cots and beds they weren't going to touch dirty walls. I remember waking up, getting called at five o'clock next morning and I had to go to the front door, and as I got up to go to the door to switch the light on to see where I was going I could feel this squelchy stuff under foot, switched the light on to find the room was covered in slugs. The quarter round had been moved, there was no quarter round between the floor and the skirting and they were all crawling in from under the station. First experience to Mount Pleasant.

First three months at Mount Pleasant I got into trouble. The boss was on my hammer saying, 'Cost of running the station the last three months has been more than it was for the last four years.' Went through the books and found out that I'd done some work, much to his surprise. He said, 'This station was due to be closed.' Proved him to be wrong: by the time I left they were looking at putting a second man at Mount Pleasant, the work had increased that much.

Major incidents at Mount Pleasant at that stage were major accidents, because we were on the main road through to Sanderson and Mannum. We had a lot of accidents, I would get called out to a lot of accidents.

**Car accidents?**

Yeah, car accidents. One in particular stands out. I'd been to town for the weekend, came back on the Sunday night just as the phone rang and said, 'Someone's, looks

like they're punching sheep out Tungkillo way.' So I went over to the Tungkillo, couldn't see the offenders, and on the way back I could see out front a car come out on the side track and start knocking down the white posts, deliberately. So I took off after the car and eventually got up alongside it, tried to beckon it to pull over – at that stage I had a hand-held little police sign in my car and I showed that to him, and he took off. And high speed. I knew where he was heading so I backed off, and came in round a corner, suddenly in the middle of the road there's a – all I could see is the block from the motor and it's sitting in the middle of the road, smoking. I parked the car, put the lights on, on the crest of the road to slow everyone else down and went looking. Actually found the occupants of the car: it was a young girl, she's only just turned twenty-one, she'd been thrown through the fence and the fence had sort of taken her clothes off, and she virtually died in my arms because I was sort of bending over her, and she was moaning and groaning. But I think she was already dead, actually, but the last breaths or the air was just coming out of the lungs, sort of moaned and groaned, so I don't know whether she was actually dying or she had already died and that was the last coming out. Found the driver of the car, I'd actually been walking over him. I found the cabin of the car about a hundred metres down the road.

### **Wow.**

It was a horrific accident.

Probably the next thing that stands out is down at Sanderson, I did an accident down there where there was two cars hit. A local farmer witnessed it. He was reaping. There were no survivors of that one. One was a Peugeot and we couldn't work out which was the Peugeot and which was – well, I forget the other car, I think it might have been a Commodore. A Cortina. Couldn't work out which is which, because of the extent of the damage. Put a report in on that particular scene and suggested they look at the scene and look at altering the road, and it was twelve months later to the very day, virtually to the very time, that there was two members of the Department of Transport pulled up to have a look at that road, sitting down. Before they looked at it they thought they'd have a cup of tea and they pulled out the Thermos, from all accounts, and saw a semi approaching the intersection and a car approaching from the intersection – exactly the opposite directions to this one that I had witnessed previously – and the car ploughed into the semi and a woman and two young kiddies were killed. Needless to say, the Department of Road Transport



people quickly put a tick of approval to realign that intersection. But they were two accidents that stand out.

And perhaps the other one that really affected the *whole* town was I'd been away again on the weekend, came back, just out of Mount Pleasant saw a car out the middle of a paddock. When I got back into town, again in the station, just to check up I rang the local hospital to see if there'd been an accident and they said, 'Oh, yes, there's been a local accident', and one of the local lads had been killed. And that was a horrific accident. From all accounts, he had left the road at a speed of around about the ninety miles an hour. The passenger, who survived the accident, was able to tell me the last he looked at the speedo it was doing ninety miles an hour, and that was just before he left the road and became airborne.

Mount Pleasant was interesting, because it was one of those situations where I had to use my own car and having just got there there was a fire just out of the town. Wife had the car, she was up the street doing the shopping, I couldn't go out to the scene. Local fire units are going out and one of the chaps knew the car was up the street, stopped one of the fire units and said, 'You want to go to the fire?' I said, 'Yep', so I hopped on the back of the fire truck and went out to the scene of the fire to do my investigation.

Saturday night dances were – – –.

### **You were saying about using your own car?**

Yeah, we used to use our own car. Because of the number of accidents we used to attend, and the local crash repair joker from Gumeracha was the crash repair man used to come to the scene, and for the chap at Gumeracha and myself he made an arm so we could put a blue dome on it so we could hook that up to the top of the car and plug it into the cigarette lighter instead of having – – –.

### **Had a siren too, did it?**

No, never had a siren, just a straight blue dome. And that was quite good, because you could put that on – especially if you were going in a hurry, you wanted to let the town know there's something on. (laughs) Stir them up.

I suppose Saturday nights was the one night you never had off, really, because there was always a Saturday night dance, at Gumeracha or Mount Pleasant, Birdwood or somewhere round the place, and we always used to go out to do the Saturday night dances. One particular night I was relieving Williamstown, had to go over to Mount Crawford to a dance – never forget this night. I'd been chopping wood in the afternoon and had an accident, as a result I had a hand bandaged because I'd

just stuck a piece of wood through my hand. And I had an overcoat on at the dance and a big bandage on and had my hand in my pocket. And this one lad was causing quite a problem at the dance and he was egging me on and doing the nasty things, trying to get me to do something I didn't want to do, and I couldn't handle him because I had my hand bandaged and just managed to stop the bleeding. So I knew who the lad was and acting on what a policeman told me years ago, 'Your best ally is a typewriter' at that stage. So when I got back to the station I managed to type up a report and a summons and he never got away. Like a real Canadian Mountie I got my man and went back and served the summons on him to attend court next Monday. When he came to court next Monday the local JP<sup>8</sup> happened to see the incident, knew all about it, so give the young lad a message. So there's more than one way to skin the cat, I always remember that one.

Mount Pleasant I became actively involved in the town, which you had to do as a one-man station. Because the local Freemasonry were down on their numbers, Talunga, both the Mark and the Craft, I became the Master of the Craft and the Master of the Mark Lodges there, for twelve months of each.

Another incident at Mount Pleasant – I know this is not quite in sequence – we had a farmer up at Eden Valley. He had about seventy acres and he had about seventy-five head of cattle, mainly milkers, on his property and he used to sit on his veranda up on top of the hill and he used to herd them in by firing his .303 rifle behind the cattle, the cows, and drive them up into the milking shed. I'll never forget this, because one particular day I was heading out there, told the wife I was heading up to Eden Valley, had to go and see this chap. I'd left the station and she received a phone to say not to send 'your husband up here because if he comes up anywhere on my property I'm going to shoot him. I've had a gutful of him.' So she frantically began ringing all the farmers around the place to try and get a message to me not to go near the property. When I rocked up at the property, opened the gate and drove up to the joker and had a word with him and sorted him out, the problem I had with him, and when I got back to the station my wife was rather pleased to see me. No-one had made contact with her to say they'd found me, nor had I made contact and she was pleased to see I'd returned safe and well, and she relayed the story to me.

Perhaps Mount Pleasant was full of instances, because we had petrol rationing while I was there in the '70s.

---

<sup>8</sup> JP – Justice of the Peace.

## **Do you know what that was due to?**

Yes, petrol strike, I think it was in relation to the refineries, I think. I'm not too sure of that. But anyway, police stations in the country issued tickets, the ration coupons, and a local farmer lived down the road, he knew I was on petrol rationing and I was walking around the place and walking up and down the town he offered to tether a horse out the front for me if I wanted a horse to go and do my business. He had a spare horse there. I said, 'No. Thanks very much, but if I need it I'll bear that in mind.'

Of course, the wife, they weren't sworn police officers, they were just – my wife was just there as a wife and mother, doing the usual housework around the house. And I remember during this petrol rationing a chap came through and he became very demanding why she couldn't issue him with a ration coupon for petrol. Very abusive, really upset her. And being upset she didn't know what to do and he drove off towards Gumeracha. So in the meantime she rang, warned Gumeracha, the chap at Gumeracha, he sorted him out, the chap from Gumeracha. Also, because the wife was upset, very upset, and they couldn't make contact with me and I was away for quite some time, they rang the boss, the Inspector at Nuri[ootpa] and he became involved in it. I believe the chap concerned, he was from a reputable firm, it went back to his boss and I think he sort of – I'm not too sure whether his employment didn't last much longer after that.

Also at Mount Pleasant my wife was responsible for making sure I was fed as well as when I had prisoners she fed the prisoners. And invariably if we had a prisoner, which was on the odd occasion, if it was near tea-time and my tea was on the table, my tea ended up with the prisoner more often than not, and I ended up with what was left over – generally, a tin of baked beans, if I was lucky.

One particular prisoner, I remember, was a female. Took her off the bus and she was rather under the influence of alcohol. Put her in the cells and young four year-old daughter was looking out through the window, watching what was going on, and this woman was using the usual language, four-letter words, and daughter learnt a lesson which she still to this day remembers. When I came back in she said to me, 'Is that lady in gaol for using those naughty words?' I said, 'Yes.' She said, 'I won't use the words again', and she never has. (laughs) She always remembers that.

On a lighter side of it, while I was at Mount Pleasant, hadn't been there very long, and I passed my commissioned officer's course with the Adelaide University ..... and I received my commission as a second lieutenant in the CMF in those days.

Still got many friends from Mount Pleasant days and quite often, frequently, run into them. It was a great experience, running your own station. Do you want to change the tape? On the 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1975 I – – –.

**Also when you're in Mount Pleasant you developed a disaster plan.**

Oh, yes. I developed a disaster plan in Mount Pleasant and just prior to its being completed we had a major fire, just out of the town. It took off from the Sanderston Road and it went through to the Tungillo Road, where it was eventually stopped. Everyone breathing a sigh of relief. I'll never forget this one, because we're all down a bit of a gully. 'Oh, we've stopped it.' Reassessing what's going on, and there was a pine cone from a tree up on top of the hill. It exploded, it had caught fire and it went from the top of the hill, across where we were to the top of the hill on the other side of the road, and the fire took off, and it wasn't for another seven kilometres down near Woodside–Harrogate that the fire was eventually stopped. My first experience of a flying, burning pine cone.

**Okay. Is it okay if we stop the tape now –**

Yep.

**– and put a new disk in?**

Yep.

**Thank you.**

END OF DISK 1: DISK 2

**This is the second disk of the interview with Robert Boscence on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 2006 at Thebarton Police Barracks. Robert, you were just telling us, talking about your experiences being posted at Mount Pleasant Station as the Officer in Charge. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about your experiences there?**

Yes, perhaps finalising my stay at Mount Pleasant, it was a very enjoyable, a very rewarding posting, from all perspectives. Perhaps the thing, one of the things that comes back to me, is especially when I relate and think of the fires that we had in and around Mount Pleasant. It's rather interesting because, on one particular fire incident, it was threatening the town. It came across the top end of the town on the Springton Road and threatened to cut the town off. It broke out on a Saturday afternoon, just after lunch, and I had just on the Friday received my new stripes as a senior constable, first grade – that's two stripes with a bar across it. Having completed my sergeant's exams I was entitled to wear the new rank, and my wife was

busy sewing the stripes on my shirt. I was rather proud to get these new stripes. And when the fire broke out and they wanted me up the top end of the town in a hurry, so away I went. I had a police shirt on with my old rank of senior constable, which is just the two stripes, a police hat, and I think I had a pair of shorts on, and there I was directing traffic, trying to stop traffic coming into town. I never had a chance to get anything else on, I just grabbed the shirt as I was running, and I don't even think I had the shirt done up. I just put that over the top of a t-shirt I was wearing at the time, and there I was doing traffic direction. It was after we'd cleared and I went back home that the sergeant from Woodside, Sergeant Colmer from Woodside, had come across and said, 'There's a number of fires down -- --', and he'd come to pick me up and we're going out on patrol over towards Tungkillo and the back roads, and by that time my wife had my new stripes on my other shirt and I had a chance to get dressed fully in uniform.

Mount Pleasant was rather interesting because when I went to Mount Pleasant initially I was only wearing the one stripe, as a first class constable, having attained that rank just before leaving Gladstone. After four years you receive automatic rank of senior constable, which I'd received, and I had those stripes on my arm. And having passed the sergeant's exam I was entitled to wear the other stripes and this all happened very quickly: suddenly I'm wearing the third set of stripes, and all within four years I'd had the three ranks up. Rather proud to reach senior constable first grade at that stage.

Fires were very prevalent in and around Mount Pleasant. Perhaps one of the other fires I do remember was a chap – I believe he was in his thirties, if I remember right – he was having personal problems on the home front and he did not or his wife did not want any additional family, and I believe that for one reason and another their physical relationship and marriage had dried up and he didn't want to go down the step of going down Hindley Street for the naughty ladies of the town. It was all too much for him so he drove his Volkswagen up into the Hills, to a quarry on a farmer's property, doused it with petrol and set fire to himself and the car. Never forget that, because I got the call for that one, it was on a day I'd got changed and I was ready to go across to Nuriootpa to sit for an examination for senior sergeant promotion at that stage, and instead of doing that I was tied up all day with a coroner's investigation.

But all in all Mount Pleasant was a very enjoyable town. Family enjoyed it. And I found in particular with Mount Pleasant to be accepted in a small community like that you have to meet the community halfway. They will then come to meet you

halfway and you get on extremely well. And I believe that I did that at Mount Pleasant.

Because the children were growing up and the options of getting a posting where I could get schooling, I was looking for the options and on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1975 I had transferred back to the city, I was posted Region D Patrols at Para Hills. I believe I left my mark in the country stations where I'd been to, in both Gladstone and Mount Pleasant. I took a great interest in the local communities and in particular writing disaster plans for the areas. I believe in both instances the disaster plans existed for a short time. No doubt they've been put into archives and never to be seen again over the period of time.

While back in the big city, big smoke –

### **At Para Hills?**

– at Para Hills, I was on the road for nine months working shiftwork. My main patrol area was the Prospect area and I was teamed up with an offsider, a chap, Geoff Whitford, and he was a very keen, very jovial chap and Geoff and I got on quite well together and we were a team for quite some time. He had CIB aspirations, which were great, and between the two of us we got to know the local criminal element in and around the area, and between us we were responsible for help increasing the clear-up rate in the Prospect area to around eighty per cent for a short period of time, which was greatly appreciated by all concerned.

It was great fun in some respects. We had our moments of when you didn't like it so much, mainly when – I think the worst thing was domestics, always having to go and sort out domestics, I think that was the worst job a patrol officer could do. Because you were damned if you did and you're damned if you didn't. You were always right in one eye but you're wrong in the other. You never, ever get it right.

After nine months on the road, I had the opportunity to move into the administration side of it on the 23<sup>rd</sup> October '75. I moved into the Region D secretariat, which is the administrative side for the patrols. I stayed there for a short time and it was during – – –.

### **What's involved in the secretariat?**

It was mainly the administration. You do the rostering, making sure the timesheets are correct, a lot of vetting and – – –.

### **Vetting?**

Vetting. Checking the reports. You handle getting stores in, equipment, and just the normal administrative work to keep the patrols and the station running.

Early 1976 Holden Hill, which had been up to this stage just a police station from enquiries and CIB were working out of became a patrol station and on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1976 it opened up as a patrol base. I had the job and the task of setting up the secretariat for this Holden Hill patrol base and I had this up and running by the time the patrols started on the 1<sup>st</sup> July. At this stage, I realised shiftwork was preventing my continuation of community work and at this stage took the hard decision to pull out of the Lions and to pull out of Freemasonry, because I could not put the hours into these organisations which I wanted to participate fully and do the right thing by them.

Secretariat work wasn't that interesting. I stayed in this job until the 20<sup>th</sup> March 1977, when I got the opportunity to transfer to a section called Operational Planning and Support Unit. It was part of Operations Command.

**Which is in –**

It was in the city.

**– at Angas Street Police Headquarters.**

In Angas Street, yes. I became part of a team writing the first state disaster exercise, which was Exercise Shake-up. It was during this exercise writing that I got to liaise with all other services throughout the – – –.

**Before you go onto that, Robert, could you mention why it was called 'Exercise Shake-up'? What was the scenario about?**

Oh, the exercise? That was based on an earthquake, because Adelaide has a number of fault lines running through it, the main one being the Eden Fault Line, runs along the foothills, Hills Face Zone, and it was based on the scenario of the 1956 earthquake – '54, '56 earthquake – in the city where we had a major earthquake. And the scenario was that the Eden Fault Line would rupture and when you look at what impact that would have on the infrastructure of the city and surrounding areas it was rather devastating, especially when you liaise with engineering departments, the waterworks, your gas companies, electricity, your emergency services such as your fire, ambulance hospitals: surprising what impact a major earthquake along that fault line would cause. We spent quite some time examining what the impact would be and then what we did is we then wrote into the exercise those particular problems, and we based our exercise on a sizeable earthquake. I just forget what the Richter Scale reading was going to be.

**And you were just about to mention, a while ago, about the different groups involved in liaising with the police on this disaster exercise.**

Yes. State Disaster Plan involved the amalgamation – or not the amalgamation; the co-ordination – of what at that stage was twelve major structures. One was the police; one was the health – health included hospitals, ambulance, general practitioners, anything to do with health; catering, because if you have a major disaster you've got to look at catering, that became a major [issue]; welfare, and that included a lot of your church groups, Salvation Army and all that, how they would become involved, because the Red Cross in particular have a major role to play, in particular with their disaster registration involvement; you had communications – obviously is vital if we have a major disaster such as an earthquake, you're going to lose your communications, that became a separate entity; engineering, obviously the engineering, that included your water, gas and all the infrastructures.

**The roads.**

And each of these twelve participants in the State Disaster Plan had their own state control centre, whereas the Police Department as the major combatant – or the responsibility of co-ordinating a major [disaster] or any emergencies, was housed the Emergency Operations Centre, which housed or contained a focal point for each of these state control centres to feed information into. And the heads and the people who could make decisions for each of these organisations were always at the EOC.

**Operations command.**

Emergency Operations Centre. And that was established – part of this exercise was to establish that, and we established that on the eighth floor of the old Police Headquarters Building.

**In Angas Street?**

In Angas Street. And we could turn that into Emergency Operations Centre with phones and each service having their own individual area as well as a command area in about thirty, thirty-five minutes, we could gut it with chairs and set it up with tables, phones hooked up and having it running.

**Okay. So when you were transferred to the Operation Planning Support Unit, you were on the team writing the State Disaster Exercise –**

Yes.

**– Exercise Shake-up – and were there any other duties involved being part of that unit?**



As a follow-on from Exercise Shake-up, a part of our duties was then to review major disaster plans and in particular the police role in those particular plans. The exercise writing team then, after Shake-up, more or less split. The mainstay of that was Superintendent Ernie Aston[?], who became a chief superintendent shortly after. His offsider was Brian Lancaster, who had been a member of the State Emergency Service shortly after he joined the job as a police officer, he was there, and he was more or less Ernie's offsider. And so they came down here to the Barracks at Thebarton, and I stayed up as part of the Operational Planning and Support Unit under Ops Command<sup>9</sup> with Superintendent Storch, Harry Storch. Now, our duties at that stage became, while reviewing the disaster plans and the involvement of the police role, what we then looked at and we were responsible for is VIP tours coming and people coming into the state.

### **That was before Star Force was formed, isn't it?**

Yes. Ernie Ashton and Brian Lancaster, they came down here to the Police Barracks and they became State Emergency Service, the headquarters of State Emergency Service. I stayed up there in town, Operational Planning.

Now, one of the major visits we did, when Prince Charles first came to Adelaide, his very first visit to Adelaide. Superintendent Storch and I, between us, we developed that whole structure of what was involved, that whole involvement, we wrote the operations plan for that and it went into something like in excess of a hundred pages. That involved the advance party coming out six months in advance, Prince Charles's personal bodyguards coming out, a couple of chief inspectors from Scotland Yard coming out, we walked through everything. And the interesting part of it, we had a taste of the menu and we had to go around and sample all the menus. That was beaut, that was absolutely fantastic, all these posh places, getting a freebie! And he had to write off, the Chief Inspector had to sign off on those. In the meantime, what we did, we then wrote the operation order for that particular visit. Star Force hadn't become an entity at that stage and Superintendent Storch and I had to – we actually drove the car in front of the royal car, and we controlled and did the close security for that visit, and we controlled the whole operation from that car in front of wherever he went. It was rather a long day. I'd start about seven in the morning and about half-past eleven at night we ended up back at Government House. Prince Charles and his bodyguard with him decided that it was rather a

---

<sup>9</sup> Operations Command

warm night, they weren't going to bed, they were going for a swim, in the pool at the back of Government House, which was in itself okay, but it meant that we had to make sure extra security was on and we thought, 'Oh, beauty. We don't have to start until probably nine o'clock, ten o'clock in the morning, at least I'll get some sleep.' And just before we were finishing off, the word came through they decided they were going to breakfast, I just forget who with, next morning out at Norwood. And that wasn't in the original plan. Needless to say, we got very little sleep and we were rather busy.

Other VIPs, we did operational ..... .., I think it was Prince Hussein of Jordan. I think he's now the King of Jordan. He was coming out to look at dry farming. And that operation was rather interesting in as much as we had outriders, motorcycle escorts, we were going down through North Adelaide, up O'Connell Street, down the Main North Road, and we got to Scotty's Corner and we were supposed to turn left and go down the Main North Road. For some unknown reason the escort turned right at Scotty's and went up Northcote Terrace onto the North East Road. We continued on the main road, which we were supposed to, the escort had to quickly go up (laughs) along Hampstead Road, down Regency Road and catch up with us, and we weren't slowing down for anything. And they did it. How, I don't know. But they managed to get there and come back and pick us up. But it was rather interesting: suddenly the escort's going that way and we've got to go that way. (laughs)

We had many other overseas visitors. We used to do for – a Prime Minister came in. I did this one on my own, the Superintendent was unavailable.

### **This is Prime Minister Fraser?**

Fraser. We actually had to go out to the Barossa Valley and we're coming back through Mount Pleasant, and just short of Mount Pleasant the police car, the escort car out in front, came round a corner and got into some loose gravel and skidded and rolled over. We quickly stopped to see if he was okay, and the Prime Minister and all the people got out and they were very concerned and they all helped and we pulled the joker out and took him into the local hospital. In the meantime, pulled all the electronics out of the police car because we had to leave that on the side of the road, ring the local policeman: 'Get your butt out here because we've got to get going.' (laughs) Which all turned out for the good in the long run.

At this stage, two daughters had become involved in netball and being a rather vocal parent I used to go along and barrack and abuse umpires, like everyone does. And then I was told that you can't abuse umpires, especially at netball, so either be

quiet or they'll give me a whistle. Needless to say, I ended up with a whistle very quickly. And I started coaching and became involved in umpiring netball.

**And the next stage of your [career]?**

And the next stage was I applied for promotion and I'd actually won two positions for promotion to sergeant: one was with the State Emergency Service and the other one was on General Patrols. Because of my interest in disaster management I elected to take the State Emergency Service and I moved to the Barracks here –

**At Thebarton Barracks?**

– at Thebarton Barracks. Brian Lancaster had left at that stage and he was moving on to Red Cross, taking a leadership role there, and I became the State's Operation Officer for the State Emergency Service.

**Was the State Emergency Service still run the same as it is now, or was it different in those days?**

No, basically the same as it is now, it's just expanded. State Emergency Service was originally the Civil Defence. It was part of the police force and it was run by police officers. State Emergency Service has since become, in latter years, public service. It's still its own entity, but it is to a certain extent, I suppose, responsible under the *State Disasters Act* to the Police Department in some respects. But it's its own entity in that.

**Now it is.**

It is, yes.

**So you became a State Operations Officer with the State Emergency Service.**

Yep. I hadn't long been in the chair and the first major incident was Ash Wednesday I, 1980. It started early hours of the morning, normal shift, and I was still working at five a.m., the Superintendent – Superintendent Ashton – and myself. At that stage we had the authority and I had the authority to call out Defence Department resources after going through a National Disasters Organisation in Canberra. It worked very well, because of my experience with the defence force and the Reserves, I knew a lot of people and I was able to speak firsthand to them, and I was able to then get their involvement and get them interested so once the word came through from NDO in Canberra they were prepared and ready to run.

I remember Ash Wednesday I we lost a lot of homes, we lost a lot of lives – or not as many lives as we did in Ash Wednesday II; but a lot of stock was lost.

### **That was in the Adelaide – where was the Ash Wednesday fires?**

It was in the Adelaide Hills, more or less a precursor to Ash Wednesday II.

Shortly after that, Superintendent Ashton and I wrote the second state disaster exercise, Shake-Up II. Superintendent Ashton and I directed this exercise. This [was] different from the original Shake-Up, where it was only a command exercise at state control centre level; this actually went one level down, we actually set up a field operation centre that fed information back into the state control centres, back to the Emergency Operations Centre. And we set up a forward command structure if it was at a scene of an emergency. It worked quite well.

Part of my duties at State Emergency Service was to attend seminars at Mount Macedon, run training seminars here in South Australia. We ran a seminar for the emergency services at Port Augusta and I ran that, went up to Port Augusta, lived up there for a week, and we ran a seminar for the emergency services on the Eyre Peninsula, the Yorke Peninsula and the Mid-North.

### **What were the seminars about?**

It was on disaster management. Also an opportunity for emergency service people in the area to get to know other people and to appreciate what capacity each organisation had in an emergency.

I also attended a number of training sessions at Mount Macedon, which is the Australian Counter Disaster College.

### **And which state in Australia is that?**

That's in Victoria. Initially, when I went to Mount Macedon, we were accommodated, our accommodation was in Braemar College, which is on the other side of Mount Macedon itself, the Mount, which you could actually look down over onto the flats back of Woodend to Hanging Rock. A lot of the exercises you did on these courses were actually in and around Hanging Rock.

### **You're referring to what was filmed in the *Picnic at Hanging Rock*?**

Yes, that actual rock. Some say it's a bit of an eerie sensation. Had a bit of an eerie sensation being around there.

Also while I was at State Emergency Service there was major flooding in the Adelaide area and I was involved in that, co-ordinating all the activities. That was a major event.

And also State Emergency Service provided a lot of equipment to the South Australian Film Corporation who were actually involved in filming of the film

*Survivor* up at Pasadena. One of the main stars of that was Joseph Cotten and I think it was Jenny Agutter, they were two of the lead roles in that. And that was interesting, seeing how they developed the film, how they shoot a film and how it comes out on the screen, because quite often we'd go and see the rushes. It was based on a 747 crashing and the pilot survived when in actual fact he didn't; and what he went through, his character went through, in the short period after the accident. But it was interesting to see how they simulate fires and crashes without actually crashing something. There was a number of tankers of LPG<sup>10</sup>, I think they went through about fourteen tankers of LPG on the scene, just to create a fire of a crash. It was interesting the way they did it.

### **So you were involved in being filmed.**

And at one stage there they wanted some extras for one of the scenes with Joseph Cotten and they looked around and all us who were liaison officers for our various emergency services were asked to stand in the front rank just behind Joseph Cotten so we actually filmed, I appear on film. (laughs) No wonder the film didn't achieve anything. (laughter) They took one look at me: 'Throw it away!'

After almost three years, I could see that there was no real future for me in the State Emergency Service and then I applied for a transfer back to the Police Department and I was transferred to the Firearms Section on the 15<sup>th</sup> November 1982.

### **Where is the Firearms Section based?**

In those days it was at the Hindmarsh .... It's now in the ground floor of the Police Headquarters in Flinders Street. I was in charge of the enquiries section, and our job was just to follow up enquiries in relation to unregistered firearms; make enquiries into people who require firearms licences, dealers; inspect firearms pistol ranges, just make sure they comply with the law. I supervised a team of four people and we covered the whole state.

In April, 4<sup>th</sup> April 1985, again on my own initiative, I applied for and was transferred to general duties in the city area and I became a general patrol officer.

### **Is that based – when you say 'city', where was that?**

Based in Adelaide at Angas Street. We worked out of Angas Street and I became one of four Patrol Sergeants on Team 3. And my patrol area at the time was the city and

---

<sup>10</sup> LPG – liquid petroleum gas.

North Adelaide area. There was two sergeants and we used to share that between us. The other sergeant in the city area, he concentrated mainly on Hindley Street–Rundle Mall areas. In 1986, I think it was – I’m not too sure of the date when it was – it was decided then that Hindley Street, the beats – we had not only patrols, we had beats coming out of the city, out of Angas Street – that all beats would move to Hindley Street and they’d set up a station in Hindley Street.

### **So “beats” is the foot patrol?**

Foot patrols. And the foot patrols covered Rundle Mall, Rundle Street East, from down Hindley Street right down to West Terrace, North Terrace, in and around the Festival Theatre. We do Currie Street and Grenfell Street and we concentrate on day shift, who are involved in shoplifting enquiries. And that was our main job: just walking and patrolling the Hindley Street area.

Hindley Street: mysteries. You don’t know what Hindley Street, the bright lights and the façades of Hindley Street hide until you actually work the area. It was a very demanding area at the time in Hindley Street. You became hardened. And in particular we used to get a lot of phone calls from concerned parents, especially of young girls, who said, ‘My daughter is going with a group of girls to Hindley Street, to Rundle Street: what do you recommend, what are your recommendations in relation to where they should and should not go.’ It was very hard to tell them not to – (laughs) ‘I wouldn’t send *my* daughter down there. Don’t go.’ But we had some interesting times. Plenty of fights, plenty of brawls – and I’d say ‘fights’ different to ‘brawls’. You name it, probably witnessed it in Hindley Street. The imagination covers everything, it was there. Even to, dare I say it, the underground nasties such as the Mafia and that sort of thing, that sort of influence was there and you saw it all in Hindley Street. It was an experience.

Nineteen eighty-nine, the opportunity arose for me to go back on patrols and I elected to go back to patrols. I’d done my beat work, worn out a few pairs of shoes in the meantime; I wanted to go back, drive a police car. I was back and I worked Hindley Street from a patrol car as opposed to beats, and we’ve always backed up our beats in Hindley Street: when you’re working the city you’re never too far away from Rundle Street, Rundle Mall or Hindley Street, there was always something going on.

Police in trouble, code was always eight-oh-one, and it was nothing unusual for us to attend, in particular Friday and Saturday night, at least one or two in the early stages eight-oh-ones.

### **What are eight-oh-ones?**

That was 'police in trouble – help'. You dropped everything and ran.

The opportunity came in 1992, on the 14<sup>th</sup> May 1992 I transferred to Tea Tree Gully Patrols. Here was an opportunity for me to again write some disaster plans. I elected to write a disaster plan to cover the schools, specifically just the schools, in the area. And there were something like, in the Tea Tree Gully patrol area, there was something like about fifty-two schools – private as well as public schools. Wrote disaster plans for each of them.

Hadn't been at Cudlee Creek that long, there was a flooding – – –.

### **You mean Tea Tree Gully station?**

Tea Tree Gully, sorry. I hadn't been there very long when there was major flooding in the Cudlee Creek area – that's where I'm getting 'Cudlee Creek' from; excuse me – floods came down and filled up Kangaroo Creek Dam very quickly. It got to the stage where the Cudlee Creek Caravan Park was being flooded. I arrived at work half-past six in the morning, nightshift sergeant greeted me with the news that Cudlee Creek Caravan Park was going under water, and he was still waiting on further information. As soon as my crews came on, as they walked in the door I hurriedly gave them their gear and told them to head up the Cudlee Creek area. The water was such that I've never seen – when I got up there, later on in that morning – I've never seen water like it. The bridges at Cudlee Creek, the water was lapping those. Coming over from Chain of Ponds into Cudlee Creek area there, there's a fairly deep ravine. The water was boiling through that area and it was covering that whole ravine, and it was frightening. I remember going to Gumeracha and the road out to Foreston, out the back of Gumeracha, where the River Torrens crosses the road, there's a ford there and there was a stainless steel large tank, and it was probably about a three or four thousand litre capacity tank, that was wedged in a tree. The floodwaters were that high that it actually carried this tank down from Birdwood, wedged it in a tree. Now, to get to that tank they had to use an extension ladder when the water had subsided. Two people were washed away and they found their bodies later on that day when the water subsided. Down through Cudlee Creek, Kangaroo Creek Dam filled up from about half full to overflowing in a matter of three or four hours, there was that much water coming down. There was a major coronial enquiry in relation to that, and I remember the nightshift sergeant, Jim Whimpress, he come under a lot of criticism as a result of what he had done in that initial stages of that, and it affected his health later on in life, unfortunately.

While at Tea Tree Gully I went on to relieving senior sergeant's positions. I ended up relieving at Payneham, Holden Hill Police Station as a Station Sergeant, then I became Relieving Station Senior Sergeant and I did that for eleven months, then I went back to Holden Hill Patrols, Payneham Patrols. It was while I was in the senior sergeants' positions that I became involved in crime prevention committees in the Tea Tree Gully area. Served on a number of crime prevention committee sub-committees. I became involved in Neighbourhood Watch, helped start Neighbourhood Watch Surrey Downs – Area 363 was what I was involved in. I became involved in the latter stages umpiring the Police Netball Team, because the number of girls in the police force decided to create their own netball team, the Blue Jays, and I became an umpire for them.

And I was continuing working shiftwork up until I retired. I remember the Sunday before I retired there was a shooting in our area and the chap was running around with a loaded shotgun. And we were chasing him all over the place, and I remember I called in home so the wife – I would probably be a bit late coming home because of the problem we had, and I took the opportunity for my two year-old grandson, take a photo of him sitting in my police car with my Polaroid camera, and at that moment the radio called for my urgent attendance at a place not far away where the chap that we'd been chasing all day was heading with the gun, and I was the only patrol available in the area. Thinking to myself, 'Oh. What a way to end a career. Which way is it going to be? Who's going to get there first?' And as I took off I was thinking all these things, you know: 'Am I going to come home again?' Fortunately, he'd gone by the time I got to this location, he'd gone down to Port Wakefield Road where two patrols eventually caught him with a loaded shotgun in the car. Ready to use.

On Friday, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1999, with another chap I'd worked with on and off through my career, Trevor Carter, he and I hopped in a police car and went down to the people down at Netley, handed in our books and all our gear we had to hand back in, to the Police Department and say, (speaks slowly) 'We have retired.' Went up to Police Headquarters and my identification was stamped and I was able to retain my police identification but it was stamped 'Retired', and I've still got that to this day.

### **That's after how many years of service?**

After forty-one and a half years' service.

During my career I have been awarded a number of medals. I've been awarded the Reserve Force decoration for services in the Army Reserve, fifteen years as a commissioned officer; the National Medal with two clasps, that's for both police and



Army Reserve service; the Efficiency Medal for twelve years' service to the Army Reserve as a non-commissioned officer; the National Service Medal; I have the Queen's Jubilee Medal; the National Service Commemorative Medal; and the Police Long Service Medal with a thirty-year clasp. The reason I got a thirty-year clasp for forty-one and a half years is that I was eight months short of a forty-year clasp, mainly because service as a junior constable did not count towards that medal. Rather disappointed in that.

**When did your service in the Army Reserve finish?**

That finished in 1988. I finished with the rank of captain. Qualified all but time in rank for major, but didn't quite get there. After Army Reserve service I went on and served the Army Cadets for ten years as an instructor in the Army Cadets.

Since retirement, I have continued service on the Crime Prevention Committee through Tea Tree Gully Council as the Chairman of that committee, and I have also joined the Police Historical Society and have been responsible for establishing the current Police Museum, part of the team. Take great enjoyment meeting up with the members who I've served with and establishing the Museum, which hopefully, once it's finished, will highlight the history of the Police Department, which I believe is also the history of the State.

**Robert, is there anything else you'd like to add, or are there any other things you'd like to talk about before we finish the interview?**

Probably once we've finished the interview I'll think of a thousand and one things. Meryl, I don't think so, I think we've covered everything. You've put up with my dulcet tones long enough, no doubt.

**Okay. Well, thank you very much, Robert, and I think we'll close off there. Thanks for your time.**

Thank you very much.

END OF RECORDING.