

A proud Record

1890-1953

by

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The British South Africa Police has played a part second to none in the settlement, the pacification and the good government of Southern Rhodesia . . .

That quotation is an extract from the Foreword, written by an ex-Governor of Southern Rhodesia, to Colonel Harding's *Frontier Patrols*. In 1889, when the Charter was granted to the British South Africa Company, authority was also given to the Company to raise and equip its own Police Force, and the British South Africa Company's Police came into being. Into this Force many of the Bechuanaland Border Police, which had been founded in 1885 for the purpose of keeping the road open to the north, transferred.

A year later, the Pioneer Column, protected by the Company's Police, crossed the Shashi River and began its long trek to Mashonaland. The expedition arrived in Salisbury on September 12, 1890, and took formal possession of Mashonaland in the name of the Queen. A Fort was established and named Salisbury in honour of the then Prime Minister of Great Britain. During 1890 and 1891 the Police were engaged in several border incidents, and in 1893 they saw service in the Matabele War. This began with a raid by the Matabele on White settlers in the Fort Victoria district. The raiders were finally attacked and defeated by a body of Police and volunteers. After severe fighting, in which a number of Police and settlers lost their lives, the war ended with the occupation of Bulawayo by the Company's forces and the

extension of the administration to Matabeleland.

In 1896 the Police again saw service in the Rebellion. It was during this campaign that Major Randolph C. Nesbitt, of the Mashonaland Police, received the Victoria Cross for the outstanding part he took in the rescue of Mr. Salthouse and his party from the Alice Mine, some twenty-seven miles from Salisbury, after they had been attacked by thousands of armed Natives. This was the first V.C. to be awarded to a member of the Rhodesian Forces. It will be seen that the first few years of occupation of the Colony involved periodical fighting, but, apart from this, the life of the Police of those days was an adventurous one. The country had been peacefully occupied, but the safety of the hundreds of pioneers who came in search of gold and diamonds, or began farming in the untamed veld, had to be protected. Police Troops of mounted men were established at each main settlement and in the outlying districts small outposts were maintained, each manned by an N.C.O. with several Troopers.

The duties of the Police were primarily of a military nature, but they were varied by the multifarious tasks that might be expected in opening up a new country. A legal system based on South African Law had to be introduced to a Native population, which up to that time had known only the authority of Native Chiefs.

Sickness also took its toll. Blackwater and malaria fever were responsible for many deaths and the large number of "Isolated Graves" in the outlying areas, includes those of many Policemen who died on patrol.

In the early days, criminal investigation was of necessity, elementary. A Policeman's life was lived in the open air, travelling through unmapped territory, where game was plentiful. This unusual way of living attracted men from all walks of life.

While many continued to serve in the Corps, and eventually rose to senior rank, many left after a few years and took advantage of the opportunities existing in the new country. Some transferred into the Civil Service, which was expanding in relation to the development of the country and later became administrators, many of them retiring as Native Commissioners. Thus developed the tradition that the B.S.A. Police was an excellent method of bringing new blood into the country.

At the beginning of the century, with the outbreak of the South African War, the B.S.A. Police again saw active service, when some 300 men took part in various actions. Re-organisation of the Police took place during the next few years resulting in a reduction of the strength. Since that time they have been employed chiefly on police duties, although provision still exists whereby the Police Force can be declared to be on Active Service in the event of war or other emergency.

This marked the end of the real Pioneering epoch and, as the territory developed into a prosperous self-governing Colony, Police work became more varied, involving assistance to other Government Departments in carrying out many duties. This included the establishment and maintenance of cattle cordons when disease broke out, the collection of Native Tax, and the like. Regular patrols to all farming communities were essential, as the telephone system had not extended far beyond the towns, and the visits of the Police at intervals, usually every month, kept many of the early settlers in touch with civilisation. This system of patrolling has continued to this day, although mechanisation has taken much of the leisure and romance from the job.

In order to overcome the difficulties of patrolling the dry and often waterless country of the Gwanda District, a few camels were introduced just before 1910. They were not successful and were withdrawn from service after a year or so.

In February, 1913, Colonel A. H. M. Edwards (later Major-General Sir Alfred Edwards, K.B.E., C.B., M.V.O.), was appointed to command both the Police and the Volunteer Forces of the Colony, the new appointment bearing the designation of Commandant General. A few months later, the old organisation of Troop Headquarters which had been originally established at strategic positions, was abolished and

the District system of policing was introduced. The influx of population after the pacification of the country, resulting in the growth of towns and quietening down of the Native population, made it necessary to establish Police in the areas where population, both European and Native, was greatest. The new Police Districts under the command of senior officers were formed to coincide as closely as possible with the Magisterial districts, and these were divided into sub-Districts under the command of an officer, warrant officer, or N.C.O. At the same time a specially selected staff was appointed at the Training Depot in Salisbury, where courses of instruction in Police duties for recruits and promotion candidates were instituted.

When the First World War began in August, 1914, the only regular permanent force in the Colony was the B.S.A. Police. With a fine military tradition already established, it was natural that the serving members of the B.S.A.P. anticipated that they would be the first to go on active service. At the same time it was essential that the policing of the country should be carried on efficiently. It was, therefore, the unhappy lot of the majority of the Force that they were compelled to remain at their posts - in the towns, in the mining centres, and on the lonely outposts. At later dates, some members of the Force were released for active service, but before referring to these, mention will be made of a Police patrol into enemy territory, a few days after the outbreak of the war.

Early in August, 1914, a small force of the B.S.A. Police and Northern Rhodesia Police, under the command of Major A. Essex Capell, D.S.O., left Victoria Falls with orders to capture Schuckmannsburg, a small German outpost in the Caprivi Zipfel, together with adjacent territory, and this was accomplished without resistance on September 21, 1914. This was one of the first German posts to surrender and the captured enemy flag is now in the Regimental Sergeant's Mess at the Police Depot, Salisbury. The 2nd Battalion, Rhodesia Regiment, was formed in November, 1914, and two months later Major Essex Capell was appointed as its Commanding Officer. A number of other Police officers as well as other ranks were seconded to the Regiment which left for active service in East Africa in March, 1915. The Police suffered many casualties before the remnants of the Regiment returned to Salisbury after two years of hard campaigning.

The urgent need for reinforcements in East Africa resulted in the formation of the B.S.A. Police Service Column, commanded by Lieut.-Colonel R. E. Murray, D.S.O., D.C.M., of the B.S.A. Police. Other officers and men from the Police were seconded to the Column, which performed valiant service in East Africa.

In April, 1916, the raising of a Native Regiment was authorised, the B.S.A. Police and the Native Affairs Department supplying the entire European personnel. It was designated the Rhodesia Native Regiment, and with 54 Europeans and 456 Native soldiers, under the command of Major A. J. Tomlinson of the B.S.A. Police, it left for active service in East Africa in July, 1916. It took part in many actions and suffered numerous casualties. Those members of the Police who were seconded for active service with other units, served with distinction and many received honours and awards. Amongst these was the award of the Victoria Cross in 1917 to Captain F. C. Booth, B.S.A.P., who earlier in the same year had received the Distinguished Conduct Medal for conspicuous gallantry.

In 1927, a few experimental motor-cycles were introduced for the performance of patrol duties. The experiment proved to be successful, and this marked the beginning of the gradual replacement of the horse, except in Native areas, where it is still used to-day for area patrols.

In 1935 a number of European police were flown to the Copperbelt to assist the Northern Rhodesia police in the control of a strike by mine employees, this being the first occasion on which aircraft were used for such a purpose. A contingent of the B.S.A. Police represented Southern Rhodesia at the coronation of the late King George VI in 1937.

In World War II, members of the B.S.A. Police formed the nucleus of the Rhodesian African Rifles, some 29 European and 30 African police being drafted to that regiment to assist in its formation and training. A number remained with the regiment while others left to join Imperial Forces overseas.

In July, 1941, a contingent of European police was sent for service in Abyssinia and Eritrea, and later assisted in the formation of police forces and gendarmeries in those countries and also in Italian and British Somaliland. Other contingents of police left from time to time and served in Cyrenica, Tripolitania and other places in the Middle East. In all, 135 members of the police were released for service.

A Women's Auxiliary Police Service was formed in 1941. With a strength of 80, they performed such duties as traffic control, office duties, preparation of plans and court orderly duties. It was decided after the conclusion of hostilities to retain this service on a permanent basis.

The year 1948 saw the introduction of a Police Dog Section as an adjunct to normal criminal investigation. Since then dogs have been used with great success in a number of important cases.

In 1949, the Colony was, for police administration purposes, divided into the three provinces of Mashonaland, Matabeleland and Midlands, each under the command of a senior police officer, with headquarters located in Salisbury, Bulawayo and Gwelo.



The three main branches of the force to-day are the District Police, the Urban Police and the Criminal Investigation Department, but all recruits receive the same initial training, irrespective of the branch to which they may subsequently be posted. The District Police, as their name implies, are employed in the rural areas of the Colony. The police districts are sub-divided into station areas, each with its complement of European and African strength, according to its importance.

The patrolling of these district areas, which in addition to farming and mining communities, often include Native reserves, is carried out by truck, motor-cycle and on horse-back, according to the local terrain.

Foot patrols operate in certain areas where communications do not permit the use of any of these forms of transport.

The Urban branch perform their duties in the cities, towns and suburban areas. There are special Traffic and Inquiry Sections, which are responsible for the control of traffic and the investigation of offences.

The Criminal Investigation Department is recruited from members of the uniformed branches of the force. The department has a Central Criminal Bureau with special fingerprint, photographic and other technical sections, and is responsible for the detection of the more serious crime.

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