

**United Nations Oral History Project**

**Helmer Pettersen  
9 September 1999**

**Yale-UN Oral History Project**

Helmer Pettersen

Jean Krasno, Interviewer

September 9, 1999

Oslo, Norway

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**YALE - UN ORAL HISTORY**

Helmer Pettersen

Interviewer: Jean Krasno, Ph.D.

September 9, 1999

Oslo, Norway

**Jean Krasno:** This is an interview with Helmer Pettersen on September 10, 1999, and we're in Oslo, Norway. I'm Jean Krasno.

First of all, just to get a little bit of background on you, could you just say for the record where you were born and educated, and how you became associated with the United Nations?



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**Helmer Pettersen:** My name is Helmer Pettersen, and I'm a police officer in the Norwegian Police Force. I have thirty-three years of experience. I was recruited as a candidate for the Police Academy in 1966, and I left the Police Academy in 1969. I was involved in UN work actually in 1983, when I went to South Lebanon as an officer in the army. I have also a military education, and I spent two and a half years in the Middle East in 1983, 1984, 1986, and 1988. In 1989, I was involved in the peacekeeping operations as a police officer in Namibia.

**JK:** Good. You explained to me, when we were just chatting before, that you joined the UN civilian police in Namibia about in August. So you had not started at the beginning of the operation. You joined somewhat later.

HP: That's correct, because the operation started up in the first of April in 1989. The first group from Norway was deployed in early July of the same year. We had an additional group going to Namibia in early August the same year. I was a part of the last group. When I came to Windhoek, I was directly deployed as a station commander in Eenhana—that's a small station on the border to Angola in Oshakati-Ondangwa district.

JK: Okay. So at the time that you arrived, about how large was the civilian police force in Namibia at that time?

HP: It was about 800 police officers, but they increased in number to more than 1000 as far as I know. I do not have the exact figures here, but we were the last group, part of the last deployment of civilian police officers in Namibia.

JK: You were not the last?

HP: We were.

JK: You were part of the last deployment. I see. Did they intend to have that large a police force from the beginning of the planning for the operation?

HP: It was planned to deploy police officers in three stages. The number actually increased to more than was planned, so from the very beginning, they planned to deploy from between 700 and 800 officers.

JK: And then it ended up being somewhat twice that many?

HP: Yes.

JK: What kinds of problems did you face in, let's take, the first few months of your stay in Namibia? What were the issues you were dealing with?

HP: It was quite a shock, first of all, to travel to Namibia, because it was my first trip to Africa at all. So when we arrived, I knew from before we left Norway that I should be deployed as an ordinary military [servant] in Oshakati district. But when I ended up in the airport, I was met by a commander, and I asked him, and he told me that "You are not going to the district you were meant to go to, you are going to a police station, or to a CIVPOL station called Eenhana." And I asked where is Eenhana, and he said it's on the border to Angola. I asked him, "Who's the station commander in Eenhana?" "It's you," he said.

JK: You were going to be the station commander immediately!

HP: Right. I was a station commander before I arrived in Namibia, so if somebody told me to take the next flight back to Norway, I certainly would! It was quite an experience. We had a short introduction upon arrival to Windhoek—three days—and we were equipped with some communication equipment and then we were given three cars, and a map. From Windhoek to Eenhana it's about 700 kilometers.

JK: It's a long way.

HP: It's a long way.

JK: So then you just had to find your way.



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HP: We were brought there by our contingent commander. He had been once before. But when we crossed the red line and entered Owambo land, we were about half up to Eenhana, or to the Angolan border. We stayed overnight in that area, and the next day we arrived in Eenhana.

JK: So it's two days' drive.

HP: Yes, it's two days' drive. If you're asking what Eenhana looks like, I can tell you it's a cross of about three roads coming together, and that's Eenhana.

JK: That's it.

HP: The station was quite new when we arrived. I replaced a Swedish station commander in Eenhana, and I had fifty, near sixty police officers from eight different nations in the station. But everything was in a mess, because we were living in a camp built by the UN. We had two prefabs—that means small houses—as a small restaurant with other facilities. And then we had three of the same houses for accommodation. But the rest was caravans.

JK: Caravans, yes, what we would call in American English “trailers.”

HP: Trailers, yes.



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JK: So you lived in the trailers?

HP: Yes.

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JK: And then you had other kinds of prefabricated buildings for taking your meals, for the cooking, and so forth.

HP: Yes. And as I said, the camp was in a mess because there were no fences, and the whole civilian population were walking out and in from the camp. Since there was a problem with the water supply for the whole area, we were supplied by a water truck coming in every second day, and we had a water tank. And of course the civilian

population learned that they could catch water there. So we had a problem before we got a fence securing the camp.

But it was also an experience because it was local African countries taking part in...

JK: Right.

HP: Yes, and the tradition there is different from ours, and especially their relationship to the local population, because it was very familiar to them, and strange for us, to live among them in the very beginning. So we spent actually some days, weeks, before we learned to know their traditions and religions.



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JK: Sure. So what other countries were represented there among the police in your station?

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HP: It was Norwegians and Swedish in the very beginning, and then Ireland, Singapore, Ghana, Nigeria, Dutch. I think that's it.

JK: Quite a mixture of different nationalities.

HP: Yes, actually.



JK: What kind of issues or problems did you encounter in terms of the Southwest African police? What were your goals there? What was the purpose of having the UN civilian police there?

HP: We were supposed to monitor the local police. There was also a South West Africa Police (SWAPOL) station located nearby. It was about one kilometer from our camp. And this was a previous military camp, where they were located, but they didn't have any military units there. But a small military unit from Malaysia [was located there] as our backup force, just to take care of our security. So we had a close cooperation with the Malaysians, and we had also of course a close, not a cooperation, but since we were there to monitor SWAPOL, we had regular meetings with them. But you know, in the very beginning, there were a lot of problems, because you know when a police force from another country is coming into your country, just to monitor you, you don't feel good at all, because this is "my" district, and another officer from another country shouldn't be there just to control me, what I'm doing, why I'm doing this, and everything. So it took some time before we were able to get any understanding of our task in that area. But we had a campaign going on so we explained to them that this is a UN operation and we are here as UN police officers, and we are here just to monitor you. We are not here to control you and your work, but we are here to monitor you, and also because of the civilian population, and we are gearing up for an election at the end of the year. So the system in the north was that when SWAPOL went on patrol, they went out for five, six, seven days.

JK: Oh, they would? They would be gone out on patrol for five, six, or seven days?

HP: Yes. And we were not prepared to monitor them for five, six, seven days, because we were given the small Land Cruisers 4x4. My station was along the border, and I had actually seventy kilometers of the border that was my area of responsibility. It was seventy kilometers and about thirty to thirty-five kilometers as a square. So it was quite big.

JK: The roads up in that area are primarily gravel and dirt roads.



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HP: Gravel roads, yes.

JK: So seventy kilometers is a long way because you can't drive very fast.

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HP: Yes, but you know, when you left the main roads, the gravel roads, and went into the bush, there were no roads. The vehicles the SWAPOL used were called Casspirs, the big, armed vehicles.

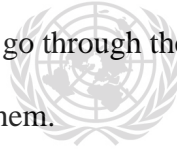
JK: Right.

HP: And normally, when they establish a patrol to go out for three, four, five, six, seven days, the patrol consists of three Casspirs. Two were carrying personnel, and the

other one was a supply truck. So the way they tried to get rid of us when we were patrolling—we came as the last car.

JK: So you would follow them.

HP: Yes, we were tailing them all the time. But when they came into the bush, the two first vehicles left the patrol and went in western and eastern directions and then we were alone with the supply truck. And we were not able to follow them, because the Casspirs could go very fast in the bush, and they didn't need any roads because they made their own roads. They could go through the bush and it was just a flat strip they left. We had no chance to follow them.



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JK: How many vehicles did you have, the four-wheel drives?

HP: Actually, we had a lot of vehicles, we had sixteen vehicles, and that's a lot compared to what they have now. So we had enough vehicles, but the vehicles were not good enough to go out in the bush.

JK: Were there land mines out there?

HP: Yes. Actually, it was because Eenhana district was the place...if you remember the first of April, South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) got very bad advice from some African leaders just to be on the spot on the first of April. If not, they

[said] will not be a part of the UN operation. So actually, the night of the first of April, SWAPO came in from Angola, and they entered Namibia at the district of Eenhana.

JK: Oh, that's where they had come across?

HP: Right, and then they walked directly into the camp [of units] from South Africa. They had a camp just on the border. And fighting broke out. I think it was nearly three hundred SWAPO who were killed.

JK: So it was exactly in that area.



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HP: Yes.

JK: So was there still a lot of tension along that area when you were there as well?

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HP: No, when we arrived it was calm and quiet, and all the South African military units were gone.

JK: The military units were gone.

HP: Yes.

JK: So it was the Southwest African police that were still there.

HP: Right.

JK: What about this unit called the Koevoet? Were they in your district?

HP: They were still there when we arrived, but they were confined to bases after a few months.

JK: Oh, they were confined to bases.

HP: Yes. So we had actually one base in Oshakati and another one in Ondangwa, where the Koevoet was; they were living there.

JK: Okay. So the Koevoet, at that particular time, as far as you know, were not working with the Southwest African police when they would go out on patrols?

HP: Not officially.

JK: Not officially. Unofficially?

HP: Right. But you know, when they went out on patrol, they had the so-called 'pathfinders,' when they went on patrol they had civilians also included in the patrol.

JK: They did?

HP: And this is, in my opinion, it was a part of Koevoet, because they had specialists who were put on the first vehicle, and they were looking for tracks across the border, because the borderline was just like a main road. And then they were sitting in front of or up on the vehicle, and they could control it [the border], where they could see if people cross from Angola to Namibia and back.

JK: Okay, so they had civilians sitting outside, on the front of the truck.



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HP: Yes.

JK: I've seen that in Africa, it's an interesting tradition. And they would watch to see if there were any foot tracks or wheel tracks from tires of anything coming across the border.

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HP: Yes.

JK: So in other words, they were trying to control what was going and coming across the border from Angola.

HP: Yes. And if they saw any footprints on the border, they would immediately follow and see where they went. And the procedure was that the civilians would jump

down and start to follow the track all the way. And it could lead up to a village. And if the track led up to a village, they would surround the village and search it.

JK: Okay. So they were looking for SWAPO personnel, let's say, coming across the border and then hiding, or something, in the villages. Is that what they were looking for?

HP: Yes, I think that was what they were looking for. But you know, for the Owambo's living in that area, they don't feel...there's no border for them, because the border has divided them in two. Both on the Angolan side and the Namibian side, the Owambo's are living. So they are crossing. They have family on both sides, and every night they are crossing.



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JK: Right. Or they take the cattle or goats or whatever across to graze in one part, and then come back.

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HP: Yes. And we had also a water hole near the borderline. UNITA, this organization in Angola, they were also controlling the borderline on the Angolan side. So during the nighttime—it happened from time to time—they crossed the border and took some cattle and brought them back. And they came also and took water from the water holes, because on the other side there was nothing. They had to define their own way to survive.

JK: I see. If the Southwest African police were really controlling who was coming over the border, or searching for people, how does that fit into a police mandate, in the definitions of what police do?

HP: Our mandate was to monitor the local police, and we didn't have any executive power. So our purpose was to follow them, and just make a report.

JK: Just make a report on what they were doing.

HP: Yes.



JK: Okay, so what kinds of things did you witness? If they had surrounded a village, what would they do when they would go into the village then?

HP: Normally, they searched all the houses in the village. It's not actually a village; the local name for a village is 'kral.' That means the small stick huts, surrounded by a fence. You have seen them?

JK: Yes. You were saying a 'corral'?

HP: Yes, but the local name is 'kral.'



JK: Yes, it's like a fortress almost—the sticks put in [the ground] vertically, surrounding the huts inside. But it could be all one family; it's not necessarily a village of different families.

HP: Different families.

JK: It can be different families as well. So if they would search, they were looking for a person who had come across.

HP: Yes, and they were looking for weapons.

JK: And weapons. So what would happen if they found something that they were suspicious about?

HP: If they found any persons, they were arrested. And of course, if they found any weapons, they would confiscate the weapons.

JK: And so you would make reports about that.

HP: Yes.

JK: Did you ever observe anything that you felt was improper on the part of the SWAPOL?

HP: Normally, when we were there, they acted actually in an acceptable way. But, you know, we were not able to control all the patrols. So the patrol we were monitoring was normally [fine]. We had only a few cases that.... But during the nighttime, they sent out a lot of other patrols. Especially, we could see when all the civilian trucks were driving around during the nighttime. It was quite crowded. Normally, by day, you could count five, six, seven, eight people. And they were visiting all the small villages. And it was [this way] especially close to the election. Because they had some political rallies during the daytime, and the same night they would have a visit from the civilians in the cars.



JK: By civilians, do you mean the police?

HP: They were dressed as civilians, but we were convinced that they were police officers going around just to...people were beaten up, and so on.

JK: So they would go out of uniform to villages that they suspected where there might be SWAPO people or weapons or something like that.

HP: Yes, and also after a political rally.

JK: After a political rally—a SWAPO rally.

HP: SWAPO, yes. During the nighttime, the villages could be visited from those people coming in civilian dress, and so on.

JK: And then what would they do when they got to the village?

HP: We got a lot of reports, and people were beaten up without any explanation.

JK: Were they kidnapped or taken away?

HP: No.



JK: So, by reports, who would tell you these things? Would they come to you? Would people from the villages come to your station and tell you?

HP: Yes, some would, but we had also independent patrols going out, so the area of responsibility was divided in several parts. So every day we sent patrols out to different parts so that in one day we could cover the whole area.

JK: So you had a couple of different activities: one is that you followed the SWAPO out on their patrols, but you could independently go and visit and ask questions.

HP: Right.

JK: Okay, so that would be how you would get some of this other information.

HP: Yes. We tried to investigate the incidents as far as we were able to investigate them, because we were dependent on the willingness from this significant population. If they were afraid, they would say nothing, but some, they came up with a lot of information. And we [then] made the report and sent it off to the district commander, and the district commander [would send it] up to the headquarters.

JK: Now one of the things that I'm interested to learn about this is what kind of...what you were trying to do, as I understand it, is to somewhat, by your presence, control the behavior of SWAPOL, because reports had been earlier that they were very repressive. And so by just your being there and making those reports, that did seem to make a difference, at least when you were with them, in that they tended to behave themselves. So what I was wondering was what else did you do to try to keep them in some kind of control. I mean, you didn't have the authority to tell them what to do, but just by being there and making certain reports, it did have an effect to a degree on them.

HP: In the very beginning, the SWAPOL commander—I remember he was a police officer from South Africa. It was the chief of the station and his deputy who were from South Africa. The rest were recruited from the area. They replaced the commander after six, seven, eight weeks, and the second commander who arrived there from South Africa was very cooperative. We had a very good cooperation. We had regular meetings, and he always gave us a daily patrol plan for one week at a time so we could also make our

plans just to follow them. In the end, when they went out on patrol, they came always up to our station, and they parked, and said, "We are going on patrol; do you want to tail us?" And so the cooperation was quite good.

JK: So when there was a change in command, the cooperation improved. And was there a change in command on purpose? I mean, did they want to place someone there who would be more cooperative with you?

HP: No, I think they had a kind of rotation system, so the last station commander for SWAPOL was there all the way up to the election and up to when Namibia got their independence. We had no problem with him. But the first one was aggressive. When you asked him what the population in Namibia is, he said (he always had an explanation) the population in Namibia is about 200,000/300,000, and we have 1.2 million workers.

JK: So as far as he was concerned, the black Namibians were just the workers, and not the real population.

HP: They were workers, right.

JK: But you mentioned that they had the Casspirs and you didn't. Eventually, did you get Casspirs up there?

HP: Yes, we bought some Casspirs from South Africa. And in Windhoek they had a factory which produced the Casspirs, so the UN made their own version of the Casspir, a smaller one.

JK: A slightly smaller one; and painted white. Now why did you decide that you needed the Casspirs?

HP: We asked for the Casspirs immediately, because we saw we were not able to follow them in a sufficient way. Because we could go out in the bush with our 4x4 vehicles, but the speed we were able to maintain was about five, six, seven kilometers an hour.



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JK: Right, because it's just impossible.

HP: Because we had the soft sand of twenty, thirty, forty centimeters, and you're sitting there riding over all the routes through the bush. But you know the Casspirs, with their big wheels, had no problem at all.

JK: I had also understood that the Casspirs, the way they were built, could also withstand landmines if they ran over a landmine.

HP: Yes, they can take a landmine.

JK: And were the UN ones also built the same way?

HP: Yes, the same way.

JK: Were you somewhat restricted by where you could go because there might be landmines? Or did you not have too much trouble with that?

HP: We never left the road, so when we went on patrol with SWAPOL, we were always the last vehicle, and we never left...

JK: And you never left the roads. So if someone was going to hit a landmine, it would happen with the first few vehicles. And then you didn't leave the roads because you knew that if you left the roads there might be landmines.

HP: There might be landmines, especially in the area where we were, in the Eenhana area, because on the border—Eenhana is a small place two, three kilometers from the border—but on the borderline, the military unit was posted just on the borderline. And in that area, of course, we knew there were landmines. So we never left the borderline.

JK: Was there any effort at that time to remove landmines? Did the UN get involved at all in landmine removal?

HP: No, they didn't have any programs. As you know, the unit in New York is educating the local population. For the time being, there was not any program for that.

JK: At that time. So then once you got the Casspirs, did you find that you could patrol better, that you could monitor them more efficiently?

HP: We were able to follow them all over. But you know, we had another problem, and it was quite a logistic problem, among our own police officers. Because when we set off on patrol for seven days, we had to bring all the equipment. And my impression was that when the police officers were deployed from one country, they left the country with one uniform, and that's it. They had no equipment at all. So it was very hard for us to put them on a patrol for seven days, because they had no equipment to bring. I mean an extra uniform or a sleeping bag, for instance. So they had to stay inside the Casspir twenty-four hours a day. They had to sleep in the Casspir and everything. But we brought a lot of our equipment from Norway. We had tents, we had the ability to make our own food, and so on. So we were able to stay there for days and weeks. That's why we also provided, or we gave our equipment to the officers going out on patrol. We supported them in a way.

JK: So officers coming from other countries, like Ghana or Nigeria or Singapore, might arrive and didn't have the same kinds of equipment as the Scandinavians might arrive with.



HP: Yes, because we never received any site books from the UN advising what we should bring, aside from some small details. But you know in Norway, we have been involved in UN operations since '48, '49, '50. So when we were deployed, or we left Norway, we had almost the same equipment as the military going out for UN operations. So that was an advantage.

JK: That was an advantage, yes. When you were generally able to follow them, you found that they acted properly. But what kinds of reports did you get, what kinds of things, when you weren't able to be out there watching them, what kinds of reports did you get of what was going on?



HP: Mostly intimidation of the civilian population from the civilians I mentioned to you.

JK: Okay, these plain-clothes police.

HP: Yes, visiting the villages during the nighttime. Because after a while during the daytime, when the organized unit from SWAPOL went on patrol, we didn't have many complaints.

JK: So the population, the Owambos that were living there, what was their view of the United Nations and the police there?

HP: I remember from the very beginning, they looked upon us as another force coming to control them. I mean, they didn't look on us as the UN, because they didn't know what the UN was. So when we showed up in white cars and the uniforms, different uniforms, they were confused, and said we were "another military force coming here to control us." But they had a very good program from the UN's side. On a daily basis, they had time on television and radio during which they informed the civilian population what the UN is, what the UN's task there was, and so on. So they sent a lot of information, and after a while most of the population knew what our main task was.

JK: Then they would be willing to come and talk to you, and to report to you things that had happened. They felt more confident to do that.

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HP: Yes.

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JK: You had mentioned that there were Malaysian peacekeeping troops that were stationed near you. In what way did you interact with the peacekeeping troops?

HP: As I told you, they were our backup force for security.

JK: Okay. In what way did they back you up?

HP: If we felt that we were threatened—from time to time a civilian could be a little bit aggressive—if we felt that the station area was threatened, we could just go there and

get support to take power, to take care of the security. But we also had a meeting on a daily basis, and we had joint patrols going out almost every day when we had the independent patrol. They were also a part of the other patrol.

JK: Did that not only give you security for your own camp, but as you would go out on the patrols they would provide you with some kind of security?

HP: Yes.

JK: Did that help you in terms of the cooperation of the civilians, I mean the people that lived there, did they feel that there was a greater sense of security for them as well, if there were the peacekeeping troops there?

HP: I'm not sure. They looked upon us as a UN patrol when we set up an independent patrol, because it was very hard for them to see [the difference between] a police officer or a military officer. When you set up a patrol with officers from different nations, you can see the different uniforms. And some of the uniforms were very close to the military uniform from other nations, especially if they are sending in officers from the gendarmes. So that was also a problem for us because the gendarme coming as a police officer—and they're supposed to live in a police station as civilian police officers—he brought his military uniform. It's not allowed; they're not allowed to wear the green military uniform anymore. If you find them in Yugoslav, for instance, you will see that they are wearing a normal police uniform.

JK: So in the case of Namibia, it was hard to distinguish that they were police.

HP: It was mixed. Our police force from Norway had mixed equipment, because we were not prepared for any UN operation. It was from one day to another that you had to live. And then we had to set up a police force taking part in an international operation. What are we supposed to bring? And that's why we faced the military, the UN military part. They had a lot of experience, and we got set up, but we saw that militarily we left a lot of equipment. So we put together a list and said, okay, we have this and we have that, and we have this and we have that, but the rest we had to ask for from the military part. If you see any photos from Namibia, you will see a Norwegian police officer with a blue shirt and green shorts from the military.

JK: What kind of communications did you have there, in terms of communications amongst each other [with] radio communication, or to headquarters in Windhoek?

HP: That's another part of the story, because when you crossed the red line, and came up to the northern part where you find Owambos, there were eight landlines that led from Windhoek to the Oshakati district—eight telephone lines. Only eight. So if you should make an international phone call, you had to go to the switchboard, and then you had to wait for maybe an hour before you got the line. But from the district headquarters to the headquarters in Windhoek they had quite good communication. But from the district headquarters to the stations, it was very bad. It took two months before we got...

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JK: You were talking about the communication.

HP: It took actually two months before we were able to call them by telephone in our district headquarters. And we had radio communication, but it was not sufficient, so we were not able to communicate with our district headquarters from the station. So I paid a visit in the district headquarters every day, every morning. After the morning briefing, I had to go to district headquarters just to have a meeting with the district commander. And it was the same for all the other stations, so we gathered twice or three times a week.

JK: One of the main problems seems to be the plain-clothes civilian operations that were going on. The reports that you made, did they ever have any effect on changing that?

HP: Yes, they were able to put pressure on SWAPOL.

JK: Who was putting the pressure on?

HP: The system is that when I got reports from the police officers, the reports go to the district commander, and the district commander sent them to the police commissioner,

who was located in Windhoek. And then you can bring it up, you can try to sort it out on that level, or you had to bring it up on the Special Representative level, because you have a certain level.

JK: So if you could actually go to Ahtisaari, if it needed to go to that level, it could go to Martti Ahtisaari, who was the Special Representative.

HP: Right.

JK: Would he then discuss it with the Administrator General, Louis Pienaar?

HP: Then you had to go to the local authorities and find the right level and the message would come back through the local authorities to the police. And that's the same system as we had.

JK: So the report would make its way, if you weren't getting any action, the report could get its way all the way to Ahtisaari, and then they would put some pressure on the police, the SWAPOL headquarters in Windhoek, and then the orders could come back down then to the local police.

HP: But it takes time.

JK: So you did see some change during the period that you were there?

HP: Yes, we did, but it took some time. But we were very active before the election, because we were also responsible to organize the polling stations.

JK: The polling stations, okay.

HP: So we had cooperation with the civilian part of the operation, which was also responsible for the election. We located polling stations and made some preparations in the area with the local authorities, and we had close cooperation with the civilian part. So when we deployed before the election, we were mixed on the polling station, with three or four civilian police officers, and the rest of the team assisting were civilians. We saw some changes because during this, when they held all the political rallies, they were very active, and they visited the villages during the nighttime. But coming up to the election, it was more calm.

JK: Right before the election it got calmer?

HP: Yes. But they were still there.

JK: In Windhoek in the weeks coming up to the election there were some assassinations that took place, and other kinds of more violent intimidation. Did any of that go on up in the north?

HP: No. It was calm and quiet in that area.

JK: It actually was. Interesting. Did you feel in the long run that it was important for the police to have peacekeeping troops as a backup? Would you recommend that that be the case in police operations?

HP: Yes, it's very important, and I can't see that you will see any operations where the police unit is alone in the area, because that was a problem in Haiti. When the military pulled out, they needed a backup force, and they brought in the gendarmes from Argentina as the backup force. And then going to Yugoslavia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, where you had this weapons control program, it was conducted by the civilian police, but a NATO troop was there supporting that as backup security. But the only place where we did not have any backup was the last part of the operation in Eastern Slovenia. But it's very important to have a backup force as a security.

JK: What level of force does this backup force need to have? I'm getting very technical and specific here, but what kind of...should they be armed, and at what level should they be armed to deter problems?

HP: That's a technical question. Our backup force was a platoon. They were armed with side arms and they had some armed vehicles.

JK: They had some armed vehicles. Did they have armored personnel carriers?



HP: Yes, they had a few.

JK: Now we're talking about Namibia.

HP: Namibia, yes.

JK: In Namibia they did [have them].

HP: They did.



JK: And that was more effective. What I'm wondering is did the appearance of that level of force tend to deter people trying to obstruct you or your goals?

HP: In that area it was sufficient.

JK: Okay. It was sufficient.

HP: But what you need depends on the level of the problems you have.

JK: It depends, okay. For example, if the Southwest African police or the level of military in some other kind of situation was more heavily armed, would your backup need to be equally [armed]?

HP: In the operations, when you have a mandate linked to Chapter VI, you will not find any troops heavily armed. But coming up to Chapter VII, they will be as sufficiently armed as you see NATO troops are. But going back to UNIFIL, where I took part as a military officer, we had these armored personnel carriers, APCs, the heaviest that we have in a UN operation.

JK: I've been asking you a lot of questions that really relate to the whole idea of coercion, trying to coerce them into behaving properly. Were there any tools that you had that were incentives; in other words, any way that you could encourage them by benefits that you might give them to behave properly? Was there anything like that that you as a police officer could hand out to people.

HP: No.

JK: Are there any kinds of tools like that that might be available to police?

HP: Going back from Namibia and up to Bosnia, for instance, you can see we are building up a brand new police force there. That means that we decreased the number from more than 40,000 down to 12,000 police officers. That's the level they should be on in Bosnia-Herzegovina. But on the other side, where you have the Croates and the Muslims, they were cooperative and we could start the work and it was working quite well. The benefit was that they were provided with new vehicles, and new uniforms,

armed with sufficient pistols, and so on—so everything was new. And from the other side, nothing happened, because they didn't like to see us there and then they refused to start to decrease the number of police officers. So you can see a huge difference between when you cross the line from the western part of Bosnia-Herzegovina to the Eastern part of ? . It was just like going from day to night.

JK: So in a sense, because they were cooperating with you, then you could give them the benefit of new equipment.

HP: Yes, because that was the aim: to build up a new police force and to give them a new design.



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JK: In Namibia, that wasn't what was going on, because you were preparing for an election that was actually going to change the government, and that would be the responsibility of the new government to reform the police. So you weren't really involved in reforming the police, you were just trying to keep them more or less from interfering with the elections and the whole process. So it was a different kind of goal that you were involved in.

The other thing that I wanted to ask you is from my interviews that I did at UNIFIL. One of the things that they spoke about quite a bit was that the off-duty UN peacekeepers were very involved in the community, and building all kinds of things within the villages, and that kind of thing, and developing a kind of rapport with the local people, and they felt that that actually enhanced their ability to function as UN

peacekeepers, because they really had a good relationship with local people. So in Namibia, did you find that the police monitors got involved in any way in the community, that in some way enhanced your relationship with the local people?

HP: I'm not sure about other areas, but in Eenhana area, and also in Mariantalu, where I was station commander in the second part, we were not, because we had a kind of rotation system. And we were mainly living in camps, all the way up north in Eenhana, Oshakati, and Caprivi, so we didn't have the possibility to get involved so close to the civilian population, unfortunately.

JK: Because you were doing patrols and were constantly moving.

HP: And we spent only one year there. And since we had the rotation system, it was from three to six months in each station, so that's why you had to move around. But in UNIFIL in South Lebanon, the Norwegians have been there since '78.

JK: Twenty-one years!

HP: That was quite different. And also since we were living in camps [in Namibia] we had no close connection to the civilian population. But going back to Bosnia and the operations going on in the former Yugoslavia, it's different because we are deployed as individuals, and we had to find our own accommodation, because we are provided with the MSA (Monetary Subsistence Allowance) from the UN. Then you had to find your

own accommodation, and you had to go out among the civilians and ask, “Do you have a room for me?” or rent a house or an apartment with someone. So in that way, you have a much closer cooperation, and really learn to know the locals in another way than we did in Namibia.

JK: You mentioned in the beginning that you had water tanks, trucks that were bringing water in, and this was really a valued commodity to have water. In the beginning, the local population was coming in and getting water from your trucks.

HP: Yes. It took about two hours to empty the water tank, and then you had to wait another two days before you would get more water. We tried to avoid them, we tried to refuse them to enter the camp, and we succeeded in the end when we got the fence.

JK: Because you needed the water.

HP: We did; we were fifty-eight officers there. So it was quite a problem; it was a problem. And when we got the fence and we were able to keep them outside the camp, you could feel the atmosphere was not so good. But they understood the problem after a while. It was a problem, because there were only a few water holes in that area. In the end, before you have the rainy season, all the water holes are almost empty. So they had a problem. The water pipe from Oshakati-Ondangwa was broken down, so they were not supplied by water, either. It was fixed after a while, but it took quite a while before they were supplied by water. So they were very eager to get hold of the water we had.

JK: We were talking earlier about communications in general. Did you find that you had enough information to do your job properly? Did you find that you were getting enough information, either from headquarters, or about what was going on in your region of responsibility?

HP: We had notes for guardians, for police officers, and an interpreter service. But enough information, no, but everything was new. This was the first time the civilian police was brought in to a peacekeeping operation in that huge number. We had a few times before, we had some experience from Cyprus and also a small unit taking part in the conflict in the Congo in 1964. But they were more linked up to the military police, so they had no experience and they didn't take...in Europe they didn't have any 'lessons learned' unit at that time. So the experience from Congo and from Cyprus was not sufficient enough. And that's why we had to find our own ways to deal with the problems. We had a mandate, and we had some guidelines, but it was more or less on an individual basis that we ran the station. That's why, when you came to see a station, where you had a Swedish station commander, you had the Swedish system, and with an Irish station commander, you would find the Irish system. And if you came to a station with a station commander from Nigeria, he had his own system. So it was built up on an individual basis.

JK: Did the local population, after they understood that you were police, expect you to carry out police activities? Did they come to you and ask you to intervene in different cases? Or did they understand that you were just monitoring?

HP: They understood that we were just monitoring, and we explained our task to them. So if they came to complain about intimidation, or something like that, of course we sat down and wrote a report. But then we took the report and the person and brought it all to the SWAPOL station and said, "Hey, listen, this person has complained about this case. Please start an investigation." And we were also monitoring not only SWAPOL on patrol, but we were also monitoring the work they did in the stations. We had one person sitting in the SWAPOL station twenty-four hours a day, and his responsibility was to follow up and see that they did what they were supposed to do, or if they didn't. I mean, if one civilian came and complained about intimidation, and if he was refused, we had to make a report. And if they took his statement, our police officer would sit next to them and see how they did it. And he would also follow up on all the cases, because we were viewing all the cases they had. So if we found that the investigation in this case is not sufficient, you had to do it once more. And if they didn't, we wrote a report and sent it up through the system.

JK: So ultimately, if you were not getting cooperation from their police station that you were monitoring, then that could be taken to a higher level of authority, for example, in Windhoek.

HP: Right.

JK: Now did you ever hear of, I know you didn't personally witness it, but did you ever hear of some kind of leverage being put on Windhoek from South Africa, for example?

HP: No.

JK: You didn't know whether there was leverage?



HP: No, I didn't know.

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JK: But you did find that there would be some kind of effect on what you were doing in that things would get better.

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HP: Yes, especially when we had all the civilians I am talking about on the trucks during the nighttime. We complained about them and it was brought up on a high level by the district commander, and then the result was that all these Koevoet soldiers were confined to bases. They had two bases in...

JK: Okay, so you suspected that some of these so-called civilians who were going out at night probably were the Koevoet.



HP: Could be.

JK: Could have been at some point. But then later they were confined to base. And then did these night visits somewhat diminish?

HP: They decreased.

JK: They did decrease; they weren't eliminated.

HP: We tried to follow them, but we were not able to do so in the darkness because we had also the security risk.



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JK: Right. At one point, and I can't remember exactly when this happened, but at one point one of the UN headquarters out in that area was bombed, wasn't it?

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HP: Yes, but it was before my time. It was in the early stage.

JK: In the early stages, yes. Did you personally feel safe where you were?

HP: I felt safe, yes, I did. Actually, I did. I was working alone because every night I used to run for an hour or an hour and a half, and I was alone in that period. And I felt safe.

JK: You felt safe. Just on a personal level, just a few questions. What about the health conditions there? Did anyone have any major health problems [such as] malaria, or other kinds of [ailments]?

HP: I know that one or two civilian officers got malaria. All the way up north, you are in the red zone for malaria, but coming south to Windhoek, it's like here.

JK: Right, so if you're in the Windhoek area, you don't have to take anti-malaria drugs. Did you take anti-malarials, did you have vaccinations and so forth before you went out there?



HP: Yes, we had all kinds of vaccinations, and we took anti-malarials.

JK: Were there any problems in that area with wild animals, with lions, or any dangers like that?

HP: Not a single one. I asked where the animals were, and they said all the animals are killed because of the war. So you had to go to the parks, Etosha.

JK: So they weren't there.

HP: I saw a few snakes.

JK: You saw a few snakes—are there poisonous snakes there?

HP: Oh yes, there are.

JK: But in general you felt pretty safe.

HP: I did.

JK: Then the elections took place, and in the days leading up to the elections was it fairly calm?



HP: At least in my district, it was calm. And we didn't have any problems at all during the election period, because in all the polling stations we had the officers living in the stations twenty-four hours a day. So they were responsible for the security of the station and also the ballot boxes. The election took place over the course of two, three, four days.

JK: That's right, yes.

HP: So my policy was to visit at least all the polling stations once or maybe twice during the election period.

JK: To visit each polling station in your district.

HP: And the ballot boxes were brought back by helicopter to Eenhana, and we had them gathered in the school. The school was secured by police officer—local police officers, civilian police officers, and also by the military unit.

JK: The peacekeeping unit. Actually, were you as police officers armed, or were you completely unarmed?

HP: We were supposed to be armed, but we confiscated all the weapons, so we were unarmed.



JK: Why did you decide to do that?

HP: Because in my opinion, and from my experiences, that's a part of life insurance—to be unarmed.

JK: What do you mean?

HP: The military service has the same policy. You will never find an armed military servant. Because first of all, what we are carrying is only a pistol or a revolver. And the parties had all kinds of weapons: automatic weapons, you name it. So as long as they know that we are unarmed...I mean, if a person has the bad behavior to kill an unarmed person...I mean, they have a kind of fence [or barrier] they have to break through [in

their mind]. But if they know that the person is armed, okay, then they are more or less justified, and there will be quite another behavior from a person [i.e., they will be more likely to kill an armed person].

JK: So you felt safer not being armed.

HP: Right.

JK: So when you say 'life insurance,' you mean just that you're safer. You don't mean a life insurance policy that you had signed.

HP: Right.

JK: Did you wear bulletproof vests?

HP: We brought bulletproof vests. They were in our vehicles, but we didn't carry them.

JK: You didn't really wear them. It's hot!

HP: It's hot. So the only place I used my bulletproof vest was in Sarajevo. But I never used it in Namibia. It was in my car, but I didn't use it. You mentioned armed or not armed. It has been quite a hard discussion going on in the UN, and also because it

was brought up in 1996 when they opened the operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Americans wanted to carry arms. So we convinced them that this is a part of our life insurance, and actually, they accepted that after a while. But now, we have a new operation coming up in Kosovo, and unfortunately, those police officers will be armed, and they will have executive power.

JK: By 'executive power,' what do you mean by that?

HP: They will have normal police power.

JK: So they can make arrests, they can do investigations...

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HP: Right. The other place we had armed police officers was in Haiti. But they have another mandate.

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JK: In Namibia, did you ever feel frustrated that in fact you couldn't make an arrest, or that you couldn't do your own investigation?

HP: No, I didn't, because we are not supposed to do any arrests. That is a part of the local police force. We are monitors, but we have no executive power.

JK: Right, I was just probing. Did you feel that the Southwest African police—was most of their activity [concerned] with preventing crime, or was most of their activity really politically motivated?

HP: In the part in Eenhana, yes, they did, but part of it was politically motivated, for sure.

JK: Particularly the night patrol. The night patrol type of thing--was that their primary motive?

HP: Yes. Because we could never prove that it was a part of Koevoet, or it was a part of the civilian police doing all those patrols during the nighttime, but the reports and statements we got from the local population were quite clear.

JK: Describe the Koevoet. I've heard a little about them, but who were they, and what were they supposed to do?

HP: They were recruited among the local population, and they were experts in fieldwork. When they built up the military...

[Person enters room.]

JK: Hello. I think that we're just finished for now.

**Yale-UN Oral History Project**

Helmer Pettersen

Jean Krasno, Interviewer

September 9, 1999

Oslo, Norway

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