

HISTORY OF SPECIAL INVESTIGATION BRANCH

Corps of Royal Military Police

(1945 - 1950)

NATIONAL SERVICE, GERMANY and the SIB

At the end of the second World War, in May/June 1945, when the Military Police moved into Germany, they set up their first base at Bielefeld. Detachments were sent to Hamburg, Berlin, Hannover and the Ruhr, to maintain law and order as the German Civilian Police were all disbanded, and responsibility for policing Germany was taken on by the Military Police. A Special Investigation Section was formed to investigate both civilian and Military crime, and that too was initially based at Bielefeld. The Provost Marshall was Lt. Col. K.G. Thrift.

In the Autumn of that year 89 Special Investigation Section was formed in Berlin and housed in very poor premises under the main stand at the Olympic Stadium. The Military Police section was housed next door. Over the course of the next few months, SIB sections were formed in Hamburg, 90 Section; Hannover, 70 Section; and in the Ruhr at Cologne, 83 Section.

Most of the staff in those early days were ex-civil Policemen who had joined the Army and served in various Corps and Regiments, and later transferred to SIB because of their knowledge of police work. An SIB training school started in Cairo in 1942, to train officers and NCOs for SIB work in the Middle East, but there was no specialist training elsewhere.

In the spring of 1947, when the Military Police Training School moved from Mychett to Inkerman Barracks at Knaphill, near Woking, Surrey, it was decided to include an SIB training school, and the first course of 10 men completed their six weeks training just before Christmas 1947. The school was housed in a building at the side of the Officers Mess, just outside the main barracks and students were housed in the four rooms on the first floor. Ablutions were very basic and as all students wore civilian clothes, they used the Sergeants mess inside the main barracks. They were all ex-civilian policemen, who had been recruited from British Army units cross the globe and at the end of the course, some of the senior NCOs were promoted to Lieutenants and went on later to become Deputy Assistant Provost Marshal's with SIB. One of those was Sergeant Tom Baker from the Kings Own Scottish Borderers, later known as the Border Regiment, who was promoted to Lieutenant and then six months later to Captain and posted to Germany, where he became Deputy Assistant Provost Marshall SIB at 70 Section based in Hannover. Six week courses were then held every three months under the Chief Instructor, Major 'Bill' Burcher, OBE, who was assisted by a CSM.

National Service conscription continued at the end of the war for all young men when they reached the age of 18, although for some, who were serving apprenticeships or in a reserved occupation, their two year service in the armed forces could be delayed until later. The National Service Act 1948, reduced the length of time served from 24 months to 18 months, although it returned to 24 months shortly after, with the Suez crisis in 1950. It also allowed some conscripts to volunteer to go into Coal mining where pay was much better than in the armed services. Conscription finally ended in March 1963.

About 10 National Servicemen served in the SIB. One of the first was Patrick Colson, who was called up for National Service on the 8th August 1947. He was a North Londoner who had worked in a City Stockbrokers Office from the age of fourteen. He was sent to a Primary Training centre at Central Barracks, Shrewsbury, the home of The Kings Shropshire Light Infantry and spent the next six weeks learning to be a soldier. Foot drill or square bashing as it was called, was an everyday exercise, and being the home of light infantry every move was double quick time. Small

arms training using that very heavy, but pretty efficient rifle, the Royal Enfield .303, was carried out in the butts halfway up the Wrekin, three quarters of an hours march at double quick time from barracks, and the three soldiers who shot the most bull eyes were taken back to Shrewsbury in the back of the three tonner everyday. It tended to concentrate the mind. Physical training in the well equipt gym, some basic first aid and plenty of boot polishing and blancoing of equipment made up the rest of the time, at the end of which he went in front of a selection board, consisting of a Major and two other Officers and asked where he would like to spend the next two years. He told them he was a driver and held a full driving licence, so he would like to go into the Royal Armoured Corp and learn to drive tanks. The Chairman suggested he would be of more use in the Military Police where his driving skills would be put to good use.

Thus, on the 3rd October 1947, after a weeks home leave he reported to The Corps of Military Police Training School at Inkerman Barracks, for the thirteen week course. His Squad Instructor was Sergeant R. Thompson. I will let Patrick tell you the rest of his story:-

“I arrived at Woking Railway Station with about 25 other recruits on that Sunday afternoon about 4pm, and we were driven to Inkerman Barracks in two, 3 ton Bedford trucks. The depot RSM. Percy Sedgwick, the highest rank in the Military Police at that time, apart from the Captain Quartermaster, welcomed everyone outside the main entrance in his usual eloquent style and one by one we were marched into the Guardroom to complete the necessary paperwork. We were then marched around the parade ground, nobody was allowed to walk across, until we reached an entrance to the main barrack block where half the recruits, or probationers as we were now to be called, were shown into a barrack room on the ground floor and the remainder went upstairs to a similar size room on the first floor. I went upstairs where a trained soldier made us stand in front of a bed for about ten minutes whilst he read out a list of do`s and don`ts. On the bed were two blankets, three straw filled paillasses, two white linen sheets, a white pillow case and a straw filled pillow. There were no chairs in the room and the ablutions were situated outside at the top of the staircase where there were six toilets, six washbasins and a bathroom. It was all very primitive.

Inkerman barracks had been a women`s prison, then called Knaphill Prison and the bars were still fixed across some windows which added to its foreboding appearance. The tall dark brickwork and no outside lights, apart from a light outside the Guardroom and a flickering bulb outside the Naafi, made the place even more gloomy at night. The walls of the barrack room had been painted with white gloss paint and on that damp October evening, the walls ran with condensation. We were told to hang our clothes on the back of the bed and if pushed up against the wall they would have absorbed most of the moisture. I asked the Trained soldier if we could light a fire in the fireplace at the end of the room. He had no objection, but had no idea where we would find any wood or coal. I noticed in his cubicle at the end of our room, he had an electric fire burning.

Together with the fellow in the next bed – John Dent, we went out in search of the necessary essentials and after about half an hour stumbling around in the pitch black, we came across a metal coal bunker full of coal, a pile of chopped wood and a metal bucket to put it all in. The noise from the adjacent building suggested that a party was in full swing, so I grabbed the bucket, scooped it full of coal, we grabbed a bundle of wood each and started to walk back to our barrack room. Suddenly, a door opened and bathed the whole area in bright light. Our friendly RSM, was standing at the door, silhouetted against the light inside shouting out a mouth full of obscenities. Within seconds the bucket of coal disappeared and we both found ourselves in the brightly lit Guardroom, standing to attention being told by the RSM, that stealing coal from the Sergeants Mess was a criminal offence and that within twenty-four hours we would both find out what life was like in a real Military Prison. It seemed that my new career as a Military Policeman had abruptly ended before I had even a chance to find out what a Military Policeman's life was all about.

That night we missed our evening meal, although the cell I spent the night in was probably warmer and certainly much more comfortable than the damp barrack room back in the main block. The following morning after washing and scrubbing all six cells out, we were marched in front of the Commanding Officer. I explained to him why we needed to light a fire to dry out the room, something I had not been able to define in words to the RSM. I also told him that hanging clothes on the back of the bed with the walls running with condensation was not how the Army advertised life in the Military and that a dry cupboard at the side of each bed together with a chair, was the very least I would have expected to find in such an elite training establishment. I would be writing to my Member of Parliament asking for him to arrange some sort of dry cupboard to hang our clothes. In fact my local M.P. was a friend of my fathers having served with him in local heavy rescue in London. He was also my Group Scout Master.

The Commanding Officer looked at me in discussed and told me how he hated barrack room lawyers, a characteristic feature I would have thought useful in a young Military Policeman. He then proceeded to give us a lecture on how young Military Policemen were expected to set examples to others, although when he asked me how the condensation got onto the walls, I felt he just might be trying to understand our predicament. Finally he made an order that we would both be confined to barracks for five days and that each evening we would report to the RSM at the Sergeants Mess where he would find an odd job for us to do. In my case the odd job turned out to be the green coloured, hot copper water tank, situated in the kitchen high above the cooking range which he wanted to see gleaming in the dark. I felt like telling him it was an impossible dream, but I don't think he would have understood. Four tins of Duraglit and twenty hours of hard labour certainly cleaned it a great deal but it would never look like a new pin. The consolation prize came about a week later when we all returned to our barrack room at the end of the day to find wooden wardrobes had been delivered to each bed space, and that week end, orders were issued by the CO that each barrack room would be supplied daily with a bucket of coal and wood to light a fire. Four wooden chairs also appeared in the room. Life wasn't so bad after all, and I hadn't even spoken to my M.P.

The next ten weeks proved to be very educational and I filled two exercise books with lecture notes. On the Friday of the tenth week we sat an examination and all those who passed were given a forty-eight hour pass and a railway warrant and told to report back by 9pm Sunday evening.

The final three weeks we spent learning to ride a motor cycle. As I had a licence and a motor cycle, a 1938 350cc Rudge Whitworth, two years older than the 350cc BSA's used on the course, I was given a test and then sent to Borden in Hampshire, the British Army Driving School for two weeks, where I passed a test for driving cars, trucks and light goods vehicles.

The course finished on Christmas Eve, 1947, and we were told that in future the Military Police were to be known as the Royal Military Police. We were given Lance Corporals stripes, RMP shoulder flashes, a weeks leave and a railway warrant, and as the snow had covered the Parade ground to a depth of about six inches, the passing out parade had been cancelled and that our postings would be sent to us in the next few days. As a result I have no idea where any of my colleagues on the course were eventually sent, although some years later I was told that a number of 1947 recruits were sent to Palestine, where more than 20 were murdered by Jewish Terrorists, whilst assisting the Palestine Police.

A brown envelope marked OHMS, arrived at my home address a few days later addressed to L/Cpl P. Colson CMP, the royal bit had yet to work its way through to officialdom. My mother gave it to me with a big smile on her face. It told me to report to the Commanding Officer, 193 Ports Provost Coy, Western Heights Barracks, The Citadel, Dover, by 1700 hours on Sunday 29th December, 1947, and a railway warrant was enclosed. Little did I realise then, that my great

adventure was just about to begin.

I arrived at Dover Station at about 3pm on Sunday afternoon and managed to find a taxi to take me to The Citadel. The taxi driver gave me a potted history of wartime Dover, The Citadel, the Military, the Castle and all the events he had witnessed during the war, and when we arrived at the main entrance he told me to look back. The view was breath-taking. The harbour was set out below like a child's model and the panoramic scene across the English Channel was a sight to behold. I have been back to that spot on a couple of occasions since and it still takes my breath away. When I turned back however, to look at the Citadel, my heart sank. I paid him off and stood looking at this historic building. It was almost as foreboding as Inkerman. I crossed the drawbridge, opened the small wicket door in the main gate and noticed the Portcullis raised high above my head. As I closed the door behind me I expected to be challenged - but to my amazement there was nobody there. I shouted out - but apart from my echo, there was no reply. I walked on for about 20 feet and saw a door on my right with a notice reading 'Guardroom' on the front, in typical Military Police style. I knocked on the door, but again there was no reply. I turned the handle and to my surprise the door was unlocked. I entered and looked around. The centre light was on and a Sergeants jacket was hanging on a coat peg. I looked over to a desk and noticed a large envelope with my name on the front. The message inside said:- 'Meet me here at 8pm and I will explain. There is food down at the cook house and I have left a light on outside your billet' It was signed - Sgt. Hawkins.

In the cook house I found a table set out with a single place, covered in a freshly ironed white table cloth, with a large plate of sandwiches in the middle. At the side was a metal tray with a single cup and saucer, teapot, bowl of sugar, a tin of tea and a jar of coffee, with a small note that read - milk in fridge. The fridge was huge and contained just about every joint of cooked meat you could think of, pork, beef, chicken, a container full of bacon, eggs, butter, milk, enough to feed a large unit. Outside in civvy street, war-time food rationing was still in place and one persons weekly meat ration was 4ozs. The cook house was as warm as toast and on a large black range a big black kettle simmered. All very civilised, I thought.

When Sgt. Hawkins arrived he explained that 193 Ports Provost Coy, had moved during the week before Christmas to Harwich, as the Military were now using the Parkstone Quay ferry to the Hook of Holland, but the Dover/Calais ferry still had to be manned until secure accommodation for those in custody had been built on the Harwich ferries. I had been sent to join him and Corporal Simmonds who ran the Guardroom and admin, as neither of them were officially drivers, although I noticed Sgt. Hawkins owned and drove a Ford Anglia. A Lance Corporal from the Army Catering Corp came over from Dover Castle every day and cooked my meals. He even asked me to tell him if I fancied anything special. This was some man's Army.

The Sergeant and I met the incoming ferry every morning at 6.30am, and returned at 5.30pm, staying on the quayside, monitoring any Military personnel that disembarked until the ferry left on its return journey at 6.30pm. During that first week we only spoke to two American Officers who both had diplomatic passes. On our return to the Citadel, Sgt Hawkins and Cpl. Simmonds would go home to their married quarters in Folkstone, leaving me as the sole occupant at the Citadel. One consolation was, there was always plenty of food in the cook house and I would never go hungry.

On the Friday afternoon it snowed and our journey back to the Citadel that evening was very dangerous. The Citadel is situated about half a mile from the main Dover/Folkstone road, rising some 300 feet with some very sharp 'S' bends. At the top of the hill the snow was nearly two feet deep and only the 15cwt Bedford truck we were using was suitable for driving in those conditions. The vehicle was normally garaged about 100 yards down the hill outside the main gate, but that evening I parked it under the archway inside the Citadel because the hill was so slippery. When

we saw Sgt Hawkins car it was almost buried beneath a snow drift, so they both decided to stay at the Citadel that night and we all went off to the cook house over deep snow to have supper.

The snow continued to fall all evening and about 9.30pm, Cpl. Simmonds volunteered to go off and make some cocoa. Suddenly, there was a lot of shouting outside and Sgt. Hawkins jumped off his chair and ran to the billet door. As he went through the door onto the steps leading to the snow covered concrete footpath, he slipped, fell backwards and struck his head on the bottom step. Army boots unfortunately, are not the type of footwear that provide a sure footing in such inclement weather. I was wearing a pair of civilian shoes with rubber soles and carefully went to his aid but he was completely unconscious. Slowly and carefully, I managed to get him back in the billet, laid him on a bed and covered him in a blanket. I then went out to find Cpl. Simmonds who had also slipped on the snow covered footpath and was lying in deep snow, moaning in agony. He had fractured his collar bone. With great difficulty, I managed to get the Corporal onto his feet and back to the billet, sat him on a chair near the stove and put a blanket around his shoulders. Up in the Guardroom I found a first aid box with some bandages, put a sling around the Corporals arm and examined the back of Sgt. Hawkins head, who was still unconscious. He had no open wound at the back of his head but his breathing was giving me cause for concern.

I returned to the Guardroom and dialled 999. I explained to the ambulance operator what had happened and where we were, but they were reluctant to attend due to the heavy snow and said they would try and get up to us in the morning if conditions improved.

I had two casualties who both needed hospital treatment, and the fact that the Sergeant was still unconscious, worried me a great deal. I decided I would have to take them both to Folkstone Hospital myself. I drove the 15cwt across the snow covered grass to the billet door. With his arm in a sling and a blanket wrapped around his shoulders, I managed to get Cpl. Simmonds into the cab. Then, with great difficulty I carried the sergeant and put him on a stretcher in the back of the truck and strapped him and the stretcher, to anchor points in the base of the truck. The journey to Folkstone, normally 25 minutes, took nearly three hours, in conditions that I doubt any other vehicle in those days could have made. The main problem was stopping every 10 to 15 minutes to check on Sgt. Hawkins condition who was still dazed when we arrived at the hospital. Although it was nearly one o'clock in the early morning, staff at the hospital were brilliant, and within minutes about twelve people were attending to both men.

I returned to The Citadel later that morning, told 193 Ports Provost Coy at Harwich what had happened, but they were unable to send any replacements, and I was instructed to manage on my own. I continued to meet the morning ferry and see the evening ferry out as usual.

About a week later I went off early to meet the morning ferry. It was a dark, wet morning and very cold with icy snow covering the ground. I parked the Bedford next to the Ports Police office which was still in darkness, so I tapped on the window to alert them that I had arrived and that it was time to awake from their slumbers. I walked down to the quayside and stood about 20 feet back as the ferry eased its way close to the quayside. About a dozen civilians walked down the gangway and headed across the dockside to the London train. I noticed a man wearing a raincoat about to get off, but when he spotted me, fully dressed, red cap, white belt and gaiters, loaded Webley pistol in its white blanched holster, standing looking at him, he turned around and stayed on board. I thought I had better have a word with him and walked up the gangway and crossed to the other side of the ferry. Suddenly, I turned around and saw him running down the gangway and heading off towards the London train. I gave chase and caught him as he was about to board the train and escorted him back to where I had parked the Bedford. I soon discovered that he had escaped over the new year from a Military Prison in Germany. I think he was glad to be caught, he was cold and hungry and had been sleeping rough for more than three weeks. I took him to the Military Police

unit at Shorncliffe Barracks in Folkstone, where an SIB Sergeant Wallace, dealt with the matter and he was escorted back to Germany a few days later by Military Prison Staff.

Sergeant Hawkins was off sick for about ten days and returned to work as if nothing had happened. Corporal Simmonds I believe was off for about six weeks but I never saw him again.

The Sergeant and I fell into a regular routine. I learnt a lot about the administration side of running a Provost Coy, and discovered many secrets about the unknown world that exists within the walls and battlements of the Citadel. It was the most fascinating building I have ever seen, having been in the possession of the British Army for more than 500 years. It was honeycombed with brick built tunnels, some going for miles, out as far as the Dover/London road, 3 or 4 miles out of Dover town and others as far as Shakespears Cliff where the WW2 Channel gun emplacements overlook the Straits of Dover.

During the first week of February, 1948, I received a telephone call from Sgt Wallace SIB. He asked if I was interested in SIB work as he had been approached by the Provost Marshalls office in London. That Friday I received notification to report to the SIB Training school, Inkerman Barracks the following Monday morning.

There were fifteen NCOs on Major Burcher's third SIB course, which lasted six weeks. I was the youngest, the only soldier from the Military Police and the only Lance Corporal. The other fourteen had arrived at Woking from all corners of the globe, or theatres of operations, and were either CSMs, Staff Sergeants, or Sergeants from various Army Regiments, who had either previous Police experience, or who had served with their Regimental Police. We were all issued with a navy blue civilian suit, white shirt and tie and a pair of black shoes, which we wore every day. We all eat meals in the RMP Sergeants mess within Inkerman Barracks, given a warrant card which stated, name, rank and number and the words '*SIB Investigator attached to the training school*'. We were billeted in four rooms, in the same building as the SIB training School, with fires in each room which were looked after by a room orderly. The beds were comfortable, the wardrobes had fitted mirrors on the front and there was a lounge where we could sit down and study. What a difference to the poor RMP recruits billeted less than a few hundred yards away.

One evening I was sitting in the Sergeants mess chatting to a couple of colleagues on the course when we were approached by RSM Sedgwick who offered to buy us all a drink. Obviously, I did not remind him of our little encounter four months previously and he certainly did not recognise me. I became quite popular with others on the course because I was the only one of us who had been to Inkerman before and knew my way around, especially places like the gym which were quite difficult to find in the dark. For some of them it was their first time in England since before the war and one week-end I showed them around bomb damaged London.

At the end of the course Major Burcher interviewed everybody separately and read out a report he had written. I was fortunate enough to have achieved the highest marks and he told me that I was going to be posted to Northern Ireland. He thought it would be an excellent training ground and that I was being promoted to a full corporal for six months and if I achieved the desired grade I would eventually get three stripes. I was absolutely delighted.

Some years later, in 1958, I attended an eight week course at the Detective Training School, Hendon. Major Burcher's course was far more instructive, much better put together, dealt with far more ways of both preventing and detecting crime, dealt with more specialist issues such as – taking plaster casts, examining finger-prints, removing fingerprints for photographing, how to use certain chemical aides, how to photograph scenes of crime, developing, printing and enlarging pictures and the whole course was far more comprehensive than the Met Police course.

I arrived in Belfast at the beginning of April 1948. The Deputy Assistant Provost Marshal in Northern Ireland District SIB, was Captain David Basnett, an ex-CID Detective Constable from Birmingham. Lance Corporal Waddington RMP was in charge of administration, Sgt. Ashley in charge of investigations and there were two other Sergeants, one of whom I never met as he was working in Lisburn Barracks. The office was situated in a first floor room above the garages in Victoria Barracks, and the vehicle fleet consisted of two large Humber Hawks, both painted green and a Hillman PU. I was billeted with Sergeant Ashley and a civilian family in a three storey house in the Antrim Road, near Carlisle Circus, about five minutes walk from Victoria Barracks. The man in the house was an ex-Royal Marine Commando, who had done everything and been everywhere, Dunkirk, the Loften Island Raid, the Dieppe Raid, the raid on St Nazaire, the Normandy landings and Arnhem. We all wore civilian clothes, but there were no handcuffs, truncheons, or weapons issued and even the small notebooks were rationed.

Captain Basnett hated driving and when he read that I was a driver, he immediately appointed me as his chauffeur. He lived in married quarters in the newly built Lisburn Barracks, where the new office for both RMP and SIB were being finished. I would therefore go to Lisburn Barracks every morning, pick him up and drop him off when he finished at night. We soon became friends and his wife would often cook an evening meal for me. Every Monday morning he would collect a diplomatic bag from the Government Office in Belfast and we would take it to the British Consulate building in Dublin. There was no food rationing in Eire, as there was in Britain at that time and I would park the Humber in the grounds of the Consulate and someone would load the boot with a box that would contain joints of meat, butter, sugar, jam, chocolate etc, and we would bring it back to Belfast where it was shared out with our married families. I have no idea how it was paid for, who was responsible for giving it to us and when I did ask, I was told to mind my own!!!!

Most of the serious crime committed in the six counties in those days was laid fairly at the door of the IRA. Bank robberies were the most common, but there were a few break-ins at British Army barracks where the poorly protected armoury's were mostly the target. When they were moved to a more secure building next to Guardrooms for instance, the break-ins stopped. A Royal Ulster Constabulary team of three, one Inspector and two Constables, were stationed at Victoria Barracks to assist SIB investigate these type of offences. One week-end a TA Hall in Belfast was broken into and all the rifles stolen. Fortunately they were training rifles and all the firing pins had been removed. The thing about being in Ireland I found quite amusing, were the stories that abound about Irish Paddys, which seem to be based on fact. For instance, at Hollywood Barracks where the Naafi was constantly being broken into. An empty wooden hut was placed near the Main gate which could be seen from the road, with the word NAAFI written in huge letters on all four sides. The sign outside the real Naafi building was removed. The empty wooden hut continued to be broken into whilst the real Naafi was never touched.

Another case I remember happened in Londonderry. A British soldier was reported to have been seen walking out of a departmental store with a till under his arm. The following morning Captain Basnett and I interviewed the female shop assistant, who had previously seen the soldier at a dance and knew exactly which unit he was from. We took her to the barracks in question and on the way, she spotted the till dumped on some waste ground at the side of the road. I put the till in the boot of the Humber and continued on to the barracks. There, we spoke to the Duty Officer, and he together with the Regimental Guard Commander went off in search of the soldier. About thirty minutes later they returned with the soldier and forty odd pounds, which they had found in his locker. In those days forty pounds was a lot of money. The soldier was taken to the local RUC Police Barracks and charged with theft.

I accompanied Captain Basnett on a number of investigations during the next six weeks, but I never

wrote a report the whole time I was there, so much for getting a lot of experience. During the middle of May, a telephone call, was received from SIB Headquarters in London, instructing me to report to Detective Sergeant Hassell at Lancashire County Police Headquarters in Preston, Lancashire, as soon as possible. I arrived the following morning, having caught the evening ferry from Belfast to Heysham, and was shown into a conference room with about 40 other people waiting for a Scotland Yard officer to brief us all. Eventually, Superintendent John Capstick – Capstick of the Yard – as he was known, took the stage. The crime was the Bolton Child murders. A newly born baby had been taken from the Maternity Ward at Bolton Hospital and it was found outside the hospital gates where it was presumed it had been killed by striking its head against the stone wall. A similar murder had taken place the previous year at another hospital in Bolton. A number of good fingerprints had been found at the scene of both murders and a good footprint, and every male who lived in Bolton and the surrounding area was going to be fingerprinted. DS Hassell and I, had to visit every Mental Hospital in a large part of South Lancashire and beyond, to fingerprint patients who were allowed out each day. Police Officers from other forces and SIB Investigators from as far afield as London and Scotland were drafted in to assist. In all more than 100,000 people were fingerprinted and after about four weeks, Guardsman James Griffiths was charged with the Bolton Child Murders, found guilty of the crimes and eventually hanged. The footprint, taken by an SIB Sergeant in soft mud, which he first sprayed with shelac to harden the mud, then filled the footprint with plaster of paris, matched one of Griffiths army boots exactly. The exhibit was on show at Scotland Yard's Black Museum for years.

I returned to London and SIB HQ, which was situated on the third and fourth floor of 47, Russell Square. The following day I accompanied SIB Sergeant Don Laing to Ashchurch Vehicle Supply Depot, near Tewkesbury in Gloucestershire, where a Bren Gun Carrier had been taken from a vehicle park and driven about 2 miles away crashing into a railway bridge. We left London just after 9am in a Hillman car, and as we had no map, and neither of us knew the way to Tewkesbury, I drove to my home in North London and borrowed my father's latest AA book. On arrival at Tewkesbury about 5 hours later, we were told by the Adjutant that the Bren Gun Carrier had been recovered and a driver had been arrested. It was thought he had been drinking. Sgt. Laing took a statement from the man and suggested to the Adjutant that the matter be dealt by the Commanding Officer. We returned to London.

A few days later I was asked if I would be willing to go to Germany. It was not the usual type of posting, close observation, was the term used and I would only go if I volunteered. 'Of course I volunteer', I told the DPM who was briefing me. I then spent about 3 hours listening to his words of wisdom and what I was expected to do. I was to be sent to a District Supply Depot in Hannover, as a Lance Corporal driver in RASC, who had just finished a Staff Drivers Course at Borden. They hoped I would then be appointed to drive one of the three senior officers at the Depot. The Supply Depot was suspected of being at the centre of large scale black market activities which could have only been achieved with collusion from senior officers, and whilst they already had sufficient evidence to make arrests, they wanted some concrete evidence to charge the big fish at the top. I was given a telephone number to remember if I had any problems, and told that I would be pulled out in about 4 weeks time.

I arrived at the DSD in Germany on a Friday afternoon and the embarrassing thing was, nobody had been told in the MT department that I had been posted there. The Sergeant in charge told me to get lost until Monday morning although he did find me a bed in a single room close to the garages. He was married and lived in quarters outside the DSD. I noticed he drove home that evening in an official Army Green Mercedes saloon car, the type normally used for driving Staff Officers. Over the weekend I had a good look around the DSD but I had no idea what I was really looking for. I guessed that stock was going missing, so I made a note of lorries coming and going through the main gates during the weekend but very little happened. On the Monday morning admin staff

admitted they had forgotten to tell the MT Sergeant that I was expected. The strange thing I quickly noticed, I was not marched in front of any Officer to welcome my arrival and the Sergeant told me to make myself scarce as he was away for most of that day and he would see me the following morning just before lunch time. I spent the next couple of days washing and cleaning cars, taking them to the pumps and filling them with petrol. On the Thursday afternoon he called me into the MT Office and said he had a job for me the following morning. He put me in charge of a convoy of six three ton trucks, which were carrying the weekend food supplies and a mobile kitchen for a Royal Armoured Corp manoeuvre on Luneburg Heath.

Halfway through the following week I was walking back to my billet after having breakfast one morning, when I saw a rather scruffy looking soldier with three stripes on his arm walking towards me. I was about to pass him when he said, 'Are you Colson?' I said, 'I am.' He said, 'Good, I've been looking for you for the past hour. I'm SIB. Go and get all your gear, you're getting out of here.'

That is how I joined 70 Special Investigation Section RMP in Hannover. He told me that together with local RMP, they had carried out a series of raids over the previous weekend and the CO at the DSD, the Adjutant and three Officers, together with a number of NCOs and soldiers had been arrested and charged with black market offences. A number of German civilians had also been detained. He said, 'I suppose you were wondering when we were going to pick you up, when you heard what had happened?' I said, 'I've heard nothing.' Thinking back however, I realised I had not seen the MT Sergeant since Monday morning, but I had not heard any rumours going around that all this activity had taken place. He then surprised me by saying, 'Your contribution has been a great help.' I should have said, - what contribution, but I just smiled and said nothing.

We arrived in Hannover and parked outside a detached, three storey house in Grunewald Strasse in the Buckholz area of North Hannover. This I was told was 70 SIS combined Officers and Sergeants mess. I was shown into a first floor bedroom where all my kit had been carefully laid out on a bed. In a wardrobe were hanging my other jackets and overcoat and I noticed that three stripes had been sewn on each arm together with BOAR flashes. I learnt the following day that sergeants pay had been back dated to the day some three and a half months previously when I finished the SIB course. As a matter of interest, Sergeants pay was 10/6 per day, plus 3/- per day Corp pay and SIB were paid weekly expenses which had to be claimed for. These included a night away from base allowance which was 3/6 per night, a contingency allowance if you worked more than eight hours in one day and a travel allowance, but in Germany we were all supplied with a vehicle. My weekly pay usually worked out to about £10 per week and paid in a little brown envelope on a Thursday morning in BAFs – British Armed Forces money. In Germany in those days there was very little one could spend money on, everything you needed was supplied, including the alcoholic drink available in the mess.

I was then taken to 70 SIS Office situated just around the corner at 8 Holbien Strasse, where I was introduced to Captain Tom Baker, Kings Own Scottish Borderers, the DAPM SIB. He was an ex-Detective Constable from Huddesfield. He thanked me for my assistance over the past two weeks, congratulated me on my promotion and hoped that I enjoyed my time with them in Germany. I smiled, as if I knew exactly what he was talking about, we shook hands and I was then introduced to the remainder of the staff. His deputy was Lieutenant Roseberry, an Officer seconded to SIB from The Green Howards, RSM Jack Burton, CSM 'Smudger' Smith, who was in charge of investigations, Staff Sgt. Cooper, the Chief Clerk who ran the administration, Sergeants Jonny Parr, Tom Morris, Corporal Anderson, an ex-Police Constable from Wales who had joined the section two weeks previously, and a German speaking interpreter, Sergeant Sanders.

The house at 8 Holbien Strasse, had been used by a Field Security team from the Intelligence Corps

until February 1948, when they moved to Hamburg and 70 SIS moved in. It was a detached two-storey property with a very large garage under the house, which was approached via a slope at the side. One of the small store rooms in the front of the garage had been fully equipped as a dark room, enlarger and all. The house inside was very modern and built just before the war, with a solid concrete floor in a very wide hall and a matching terrazzo staircase with stainless steel banisters. On the ground floor were five rooms, a toilet in the hall and upstairs were four double bedrooms, one with a large outside balcony overlooking a well kept and sizable garden. The bathroom was very modern with a large sunken bath in one corner, and overlooking the front was a kitchen. Captain Baker and his wife used the flat as quarters. The house had been occupied from new by a Staff Officer in Hitler's elite bodyguard, a man by the name of Genlan and his family. I discovered many years later that in May 1945, he was General Major Reinhardt Genlan, then the Officer Commanding Hitler's personal bodyguard and one of the last people to see Hitler and Eva Braun alive. He turned up in the late 1950s at CIA HQ in Langley, Virginia, USA, running a spy network for the Americans in East Germany.

I was also introduced to two German female typists who were employed through the PCLU - (Pioneer Corp Labour Unit), busy typing from a large pile of statements. Everybody was hard at work, either writing out statements or interviewing witnesses. As I had learnt shorthand typing at school and noticed a spare typewriter on a desk, I told one of the typist that I would assist her. She was very pleased as they all had to be finished by early afternoon. Her name was Gerda Ridenbach, and she spoke impeccable English, and as I was later to discover, she had been a senior female Kreigsmarine Officer. I will enlarge on that story later. That evening after dinner, Captain Baker asked me if I would type out a report of the whole investigation whilst he dictated it, so that it could be at the Provost Marshall office in Bad Oeynhausen the following morning. I was pleased, because I had shown that I was an extra pair of useful hands and although I was only 18 years old, the three stripes on my arm won everybody's approval and acceptance, including the married wives, who can be very influential in a small close knit unit.

My first investigation also worked out in my favour. Royal Engineers and REME, shared a heavy workshop outside Hildeshiem, called 'Hanomag'. The manufacturing workshops where German Tiger Tanks were made during the war was badly damaged, but a number of repair workshops were intact and used to service and repair large vehicles, tanks and even aircraft. A German Speedway Stadium nearby had been re-started by the British Army and teams from all over BAOR had started to have meetings on a Sunday. The bikes that they used were mostly old ones or re-built from spares, and a few riders had designed new frames using spares or old engines, anything that was available. One REME Sergeant had made his own frame and sent off for a new JAP engine, made in North London by J.A.Preswick Ltd. It arrived in a wooden crate and left overnight in a workshop where the Sergeant planned to work on it the following day. When he arrived in the morning the engine and crate were missing. It was reported to Regimental Police who searched the entire site but when they could not find it, they reported the loss to SIB about four days later. I went there on a Sunday morning and took a statement from the Sergeant, who was sure nobody in his particular workshop would have touched it. It was obvious that whoever stole it must have had help and probably used a vehicle to get it out of the base, because of its weight. I checked the base MT records but no clues were forthcoming. I went to the Speedway meeting being held that Sunday afternoon and realised there was a lot of interest in Speedway from the number of local German civilians at the track. A - 'No Fraternization' - ban which was still in force in Germany, meant that they occupied a part of the track that was fenced off. I had noticed however that a large number of German civilians were in the Army enclosure and I enquired why? Apparently the CO allowed German civilians who were employed by PCLU at the 'Hanomag' to mix and converse with soldiers they worked with. The following day I went to see the Adjutant and asked him for a list of names and addresses of all German civilians who were employed at the base. He told me in rather an abrupt manner to get that information from the Civilian Supervisor. I told him that I

wanted him to supply me with the information and on no account was he to ask a civilian supervisor. I realised that his records were probable out of date, so I told him that no action would be taken providing he could give me their names. I knew I could get up-to-date information from PCLU. It was also clear from his attitude that he was annoyed at being given an order by some young wipper-snapper of an SIB Sergeant. However, the following morning the office received a telephone call from him to say he had the list I wanted. I went to his office late that afternoon to collect it. I thanked him for his help and invited him to our mess on the following Sunday where I would be pleased to buy him a drink. To my surprise he turned up with his wife and became a regular visitor. I showed him around our office and explained the type of work we did, because he had no idea such an organisation as ours existed. We later became friends and he proved to be a great help to SIB.

I discussed the case with Sgt Jonny Parr, who had been in SIB for two years. I told him that I proposed to visit some of the addresses of the civilian mechanics in the hope that I might find someone who worked on Speedway Bikes at home. He agreed and said – ‘*Lets go now*’. It was three-thirty in the afternoon and an hours drive to Hildeshiem, so we left. To cut a long story short - we drove past a couple of addresses when I spotted a wooden shed in the back garden of an address on my list. I jumped out of the Jeep and found the engine still in its wooden crate in the shed. It was all the two of us could do to get the wooden crate in the back of the Jeep. We arrested the mechanic when he came home from work. In the shed we also found about 10 gallons of petrol, which was not illegal for a German civilian to possess, but in this case he could not satisfactorily prove ownership so I confiscated it and it was eventually returned to the ‘*Hanomag*’, from where it was probable stolen. The case came before a British Judge sitting in a British Control Commission Court. He pleaded not guilty to stealing the engine, saying that a British Officer had paid him to hide the engine. In cross examination I ask him for the name of the British Officer but as he was unable to give one, he was found guilty and sentenced to four months imprisonment. He also lost his precious job.

About a month after I arrived in Germany, the Russians started interrupting the free flow of Allied vehicles to and from Berlin, and the British check point at Helmstedt, just outside Brunswick, became the scene of a number of dangerous incidents involving the elite Russian Guards unit and soldiers from the Black Watch. Because of this and problems at the Volkswagen works at Wolfsburg, an SIB detachment was formed and set up in the old town of Brunswick, which became known as – Brunswick detachment 70 SIS RMP. RSM Jack Burton, was in charge with Sergeants Morris and Sanders, the interpreter. I will explain in a later chapter how the British Army, together with Major Ivan Hirst REME, and RSM Burton, SIB RMP, saved the Volkswagen Works from total destruction and helped build the company into the largest vehicle manufacturer in Europe.

The Russian situation, particularly in Berlin began to get worse and the American Military Governor, General Clay, threatened to force the Russian back into East Germany if they didn't stop searching Allied vehicle and trains to and from Berlin, illegally. The Russians said that it had become necessary because of the criminal gangs causing mayhem in East Germany, which they alleged were coming from the west. The British Military Governor, Major General Sir Brian Robertson, was a much more level headed man and invited all parties to a meeting in Berlin, pointing out that all the borders were open along the Russian frontier, and searching Allied vehicles and trains, would not stop criminals from getting across their borders. I am sure that he and the Russian leaders would have sorted the matter out on amicable terms had he been allowed to so. Unfortunately, Ernest Bevan, the British Foreign Secretary, wanted to get involved and he was as bullet headed as the Americans. Needless to say, the meeting ended in stalemate and the Russians threatened to throw the Allied powers out of Berlin. However, when they realised this was an impossibility they decided to cut supplies to Berlin altogether and stopped all traffic to and from the city. The only way to keep Berlin alive was to supply the Army and civilian population by air.

Thus, in early June 1948, the Berlin air lift started. The RAF bases at Wunsdorf and Buckeburg, just north of Hannover were set to be the main British supply bases and although RAF SIB had small, three man detachments at each base, Lt Roseberry and Corporal Anderson, who was promoted to Sgt. Anderson, set up the Celle detachment of 70 SIS RMP. They were joined a few days later by Sergeant Altman from the Interpreter Corp. The American Air Force also wanted to use these bases, as the only concrete runway suitable for their large freight aircraft in their Zone was Rhien Main, later to be known as Frankfurt International. The journey to Berlin from Rhien Main was mostly over Russian Occupied territory and twice as far.

At Hannover we were joined by two new faces. Sergeant's Maycock and Howard, who had just completed an SIB course at Woking, and had spent most of their military service in the Middle East as Regimental Policemen. They were both married and moved into luxury quarters at ex-Luftwaffe Officer homes in Celle. The vehicle fleet was increased, and we now had a new Mercedes Saloon, one of over a hundred confiscated from the factory in Stuttgart after the war, which were originally made for the German Army, two Jeeps, four new Volkswagens built by Major Hirst and his REME Engineers at Wolfsburg, and the old faithful, the 15cwt Bedford truck. Ours was an unusual four wheeled drive version and would go literally anywhere. These were all garaged at night nearby in the Pelikan Factory at Buckholz. Although the building had been destroyed, the garages were still intact and we used them to keep our vehicles, and as a Property Store. In fact the houses surrounding the factory were all untouched by bomb damage when in 1942, two Mosquito bombers came and bombed the place, which manufactured German uniforms, leaving all the other buildings untouched. The German caretaker who told me the story was most impressed, as they also left his house at the main entrance to the factory, intact. Because our unit had now reached a certain strength we were allotted a messing officer, who was responsible for collecting food and other supplies from the District Supply Depots and delivering it to our married families and the mess. He was Lance Corporal Dave Scot, from the Royal Armoured Corp and he was billeted at 125 Transit Camp in North Hannover.

When I first arrived in Hannover, the city centre was badly damaged and only two buildings remained intact within a square mile of the main railway station, situated at the heart of the city which had itself been rebuilt by the British Army. They were the Opera House and the Town Hall, known as the Rathaus. This building was used by the British Control Commission as their headquarters, from where they controlled the civilian authorities necessary to run a large city, and with the Police Force disbanded and little in the way of public utilities working properly, it was a very difficult job. The Rathaus was situated on the far side of a large man made lake – called the Maschee, used as part of Hannover's water supply system. By comparison to the city centre, the Buckholz area of North Hannover was virtually untouched by bomb damage and many of the pre-war owners still occupied some quite large properties. They were mostly professional or business people.

Military Police mobile patrols maintained a 24 hour presence on the city streets, with one static post at the railway station during the day. The main German Police Station in Podbeileskistrasse had re-opened, as one by one Policemen were re-trained and denazified, a process that took about 12 months. When they returned for duty, they were all called – Shulzman. There were also three Kripo Officers, criminal investigators, who had been re-trained and they were supervised by a British Police Inspector, who had been seconded on a three year appointment, to the Control Commission Police Service. Occasionally, the Military Police would take a Shulzman on patrol with them.

The crimes we investigated were as varied as any big city today. Murder, rape, breakins, theft and crimes of violence. Most SIB Sergeants had at least 20/25 jobs or more on the go at any one time and everybody's workload was high, seven days a week and many worked 14 to 16 hours a day.

Every weekday morning immediately after breakfast, CSM Smith would hold a meeting in the office, usually about 8am, and every current case would be discussed. Suggestions and ideas would be put forward and every investigator would be required to keep detailed notes in a diary so that everyone knew they could take over from one another. I am sure this system was the reason for our high success rate solving crimes and in some cases for preventing the crime taking place in the first place. Years later when I suggested a similar idea in the Metropolitan Police, it was dismissed as being unworkable. Relaxation was allowed on Sunday evenings when a local German five piece combo would come and play live music in our combined Officers and Sergeants mess. Married staff together with their wives would come and so would invited Officers and senior NCOs and their wives from local units. This helped us all with gaining local knowledge, and getting to know the local Military Commanders. The British Military Governor, Major General Sir Brian Robertson and his wife, were also frequent visitors as they lived nearby in Hannover.

One of the most interesting stories I heard whilst serving in Germany, came from the German civilian typist I mentioned earlier. As I said, her name was Gerda Ridenbach and within a few months we became friends. I often took her with me on investigations, especially rape cases where she knew exactly what to do and what points to include in statements. She would often take the victim to 29 British Military Hospital and collect swabs, and she was excellent in the witness box. It was nothing to find her hard at work in the office late in the evening. Both her mother and father were doctors and before the war they ran a private Medical Practice from a purpose built building at the side of their home situated about 100 yard from our office. In 1947, her father was appointed the Senior Civilian Medical Consultant at 29 British Military Hospital in Hannover. Her mother was sadly killed in Berlin in 1945, when the hospital in which she had been sent to work was bombed.

Gerda had in fact been born in Hammersmith in London, in 1919, when both her parents worked at St Thomas Hospital. Her father had trained as a Doctor there before the First World War and met her mother, who was English, and worked at the hospital as a nurse. Gerda also wanted to be a Doctor and in 1937, she was sent to St Thomas Hospital to complete a three year medical course. Every summer she would return to Germany for the holidays and then return to London to continue her training. In the summer of 1939, she returned home as usual, but after two weeks her father suggested she would be safer in London with the war approaching, so at the end of July she said goodbye and caught the train to Calais. Unfortunately, she was stopped at the German border and sent to Hamburg, where she was recruited into the German Kriegsmarine. After six weeks training she was made a junior officer and sent to join Admiral Canaris staff as an Interpreter. He was head of the German *Abwehr*, the German Military Intelligence Service, and had been so since Hitler became the German Chancellor in 1933. He also spoke English fluently – as well as Spanish and French, which Gerda also spoke. She met his wife, Erika and their two daughters and occasionally accompanied him home for a long week ends at their home in Schleswig Holstein. She told me he hated Hitler from the start of the Third Reich, in particular the Nazis philosophy and was involved in plots to assassinate the German Chancellor, first in 1938 and again in 1939. Both plots failed miserably and Canaris considered himself very lucky to escape being found out and continued doing his job. In 1940, she was promoted and appointed as one of his official Interpreters/PA and accompanied him with two male colleagues wherever he went.

That September, four of them left Hamburg in civilian clothes, travelled by train to Geneva, caught a Swiss Air Flight to Dublin, where she was present when he met Eamon D'Olivera, the Irish Prime Minister. The purpose of the meeting was to arrange a bunkering service for German U-boats in the North Atlantic, so they could use three small west coast Irish ports. In return the Irish got meat from Argentina, fresh fruit from Spain and Italy, and oil and petrol from Romania. Somehow, the Royal Navy found some of the U-boats and sunk them as they were leaving the Irish ports. She

thought that English sympathisers had seen a U-boat in the port, and reported the matter to an English agent. The Irish Prime Minister had warned Canaris to be careful when eating out in Dublin as the English had many agents there. I suspect that signals to and from U-boats were being intercepted at Bletchley Park and information passed on to the Royal Navy. She also said that members of MI6 based in Geneva, used the same route to Dublin, via Swiss Air and then by ferry to Holyhead, when travelling back to London. She even knew that names of most of the British staff in Geneva.

Later in the war, she was with Canaris and a party of German *Abwehr*, when they took over an Irish Hotel south of Cork City at Skibbereen for a three week holiday. She was also with the Admiral when he went to meet the head of MI6 in Geneva, a Mr Claude Danvers. Apparently, Admiral Canaris knew him well and through him had tried to get the British Government to strongly oppose Hitler's plans to invade Austria and the Sudetenland in 1939. Unfortunately for Canaris, the British Prime Minister, Mr Neville Chamberlain was not tough enough in his negotiations with Hitler and he accepted a worthless treaty – declaring 'Peace in our time'. Canaris was the only person who knew that Gerda was born in England and held a British passport. He suggested to Danvers at a meeting in the later stages of the war, when he was still trying to negotiate a peace treaty with the British, that Gerda would act as his personal envoy if he would take her to England and allow her to talk to Mr. Winston Churchill.

One story she told me I refused to believe. She was sent to a British Prisoner of War camp near Berlin where Allied airmen would be questioned about the RAF. They wanted to know about on board radar in aircraft. The pilot she interviewed had crashed his fighter and was wearing a pair of tin legs which were damaged in the crash. His own legs had been amputated above the knees. German mechanics had repaired his tin legs so that he could walk again. I told her that the RAF would never allow a pilot, particularly a fighter pilot to fly with no legs. In any case, it would have been impossible for him to fly the aircraft, he needed legs to operate the foot controls, but she insisted it was true. Some years later I had to swallow my words when I read about Wing Commander Douglas Bader.

Sadly for her, Admiral Canaris was placed under house arrest by the Gestapo in early 1944, after another attempt on the Fuhrer's life at the Wolf's Lair in Poland, and she never saw him again. He was of course executed on Hitler's orders in April 1945, in Flossenburg Concentration camp. Gerda had however, kept in contact with Erika and in 1948 still corresponded with her.

A few days before the war ended, Gerda was told by the German General who had taken charge, as were many others in the *Abwehr*, to burn all her uniforms and papers and return home to her family in Hannover and say nothing about her wartime experiences. I believe she was then the second highest ranked female *Kriegsmarine* Officer in Hamburg. She was also given details of people she should contact if she ever needed help with finances. This was a fund set up in Switzerland by the Nazi hierarchy before the war ended to help the 'Officer Class' survive after the war..

She became her father's receptionist and surgery nurse in Hannover, and was never interviewed by the Allies after the war. One day she was out walking and noticed a British Field Security team from the Intelligence Corp, had moved into Genlan's house in Holbienstrasse. She cheekily went in and spoke to the OC, telling him she was an excellent shorthand typist and spoke English fluently and asked for a job. They did, and the rest is history.

I suggested to her that a lot of the information she had told me would be of interest to certain people in England, and she readily agreed to tell her story. I spoke to Captain Baker and apart from being surprised as I was, he suggested we put a report together and he would submit it to the proper authorities thro' the Provost Marshalls Office. This we did, and a thirty odd page report was

submitted. I personally heard nothing more.

The Berlin Air Lift provided the international criminal with a vast array of goods and equipment to come to Germany for. American gangsters were mostly after armaments, including tanks, half tracks and guns of all descriptions. Their hunting grounds were the hundreds of displaced persons camps scattered all over Germany, especially the larger sites such as those on Luneburg heath. The German Military barracks at Belson, which were quite badly damaged at the end of the war, housed hundreds of displaced persons and eventually were taken over by the British Army, re-built and became known as Holne Barracks. RMP and SIB raided most of the camps on a periodic basis and the items that came to light were quite astonishing. Valuable paintings and rare works of art that had originally been stolen from all over Europe by the Nazis, had then been re-stolen by displaced persons or criminals, and in a few cases, re-stolen again by people whose basic intention was to see them returned to their rightful owners. The problems for SIB investigating these matters was finding the real owners and in our property store we had some truly remarkable objects. Photographs and full descriptions were sent to all sorts of interested parties, including newly set up Governments in occupied countries, auction houses in London, New York and Geneva, and in some cases we were able to trace the original owners.

One case that I dealt with highlights the difficulties we were often faced with. Two sealed ammunition boxes that had been found in possession of D.Ps on Luneburg Heath, became one of my jobs to sort out and I was instructed to give the ammunition back to the Royal Engineers. I took the two very heavy boxes to an RE unit in North Hannover to have them cut open. To my amazement, and the astonishment of the RE Corporal using the welding torch, the boxes each contained 22 bars of gold all carefully wrapped in wood wool. Each bar was stamped with the German Eagle mark of the Reich bank and were emblazoned with numerous sets of numbers. Sgt Anderson SIB, who had originally confiscated the boxes during one of our routine searches, suggested that we went back to the DP Camp and check to see if there any more. These camps always had one person who was unofficially in charge and it was always the best policy to speak to them if one had any problems. Eventually we found such a person, told him that these sealed ammunition boxes contained stolen German Gold and that we wanted the rest. He agreed to call us as soon as he had any news. When we left I was fairly certain that we would not hear from him again, but about a week later the office received a call from him. Sgt Anderson and I returned to the camp and true to his word, he had found another box. When it was later opened, this too contained 22 bars of gold. We gave him two bottles of Camp Coffee and you would have thought we had given him the Crown Jewels. I eventually submitted a report to the Comptroller at the Bank of England, together with a photograph, in accordance with standing orders issued by them at the end of the war regarding Gold, Currency, Printing plates and printing presses that might come into our possession.

About a week later Captain Baker received a request from a Department of the British Control Commission based in Koln, saying they wanted to inspect the Gold in our possession with an American expert. Captain Baker called me into his office and we set a date for this delegation to attend. Only one bar of gold would be available for them to look at and three of us would be present at that meeting, CSM Smith, Captain Baker and myself. On the day four men arrived, two dressed as Majors in the British Control Commission, One American Army Major and an American civilian who was introduced as Agent so and so. They were shown the bar of gold and the American Agent asked if he could see the rest. Captain Baker told him that all 66 bars in our possession were identical to the one on show, they had consecutive numbers thereon and if they wished to take a photograph, that would be fine but the remainder was locked in our property store and that was where they were staying. He then asked where our property store was situated and Captain Baker touched his nose – as much to say that was our business. The American looked annoyed and said, 'This gold is part of a consignment that was stolen from a bank in Frankfurt at

the end of the war and I will arrange for it to be collected in the next few days.” Captain Baker jumped up from his chair, grabbed the single bar from the Americans hand and said to him. ‘This gold belongs to the German Reich Bank. I would not release it to you so don’t bother sending anyone to collect it. Now, we all have work to do so if that is all, we bid you good day.’ The four men then left the office. That evening about six of us went to the property store, we put all the gold in the back of our 15cwt truck and I drove it into the garage under the office. We wrapped each bar in newspaper and stacked it in a locked cupboard in Captain Baker’s lounge. The ammunition boxes in the property store were filled with bricks and they were tied up with ropes and left there. That is how much the CO trusted the Americans. Eventually, the gold was collected by the RAF together with a representative from the Bank of England and flown to London.

The black market case involving the District Supply Depot that brought me to Germany in the first place, was another case that turned up some interesting bits of property. A German Mercedes Benz six wheeled car with a soft top, that had been part of Hitlers personal transport unit, one of six in fact, was found in a warehouse at the DSD. How it got there and who it belonged too was never established. The case started when two SIB Sergeants had visited the DSD regarding the theft of money from a soldiers locker. They noticed a large Motor Cruiser on an RAF Queen Mary, parked at the back of the DSD which was being worked on and which was obviously being kept in one of the warehouses. Enquiries revealed that it was the property of the Commanding Officer, a Lieutenant Colonel. RAF Queen Mary’s were large 38 foot long trailers towed behind a Diamond T Truck and used to recover crashed aircraft or for transporting aircraft by road.

At the same time complaints were received from British families in both Germany and Trieste, that fresh vegetables being supplied to them from the DSD in Hannover, was of a much poorer quality than that supplied a year earlier.

At the end of the war the Dutch Government were given a contract to supply fresh vegetables to both the British Forces and the German civilian population in a very complicated agreement. Fresh goods would be sent by train to the DSD in Hannover, three times a week in two distinct grades. The ‘A’ grade was for the British and the ‘B’ grade for the civilian population. Obviously the two grades were being switched somewhere along the line and someone was making a great deal of money. There were a number of other considerations but to keep the matter simple we will stick to the vegetables. The British Government complained about the deterioration in quality to the Dutch who insisted the quality had not changed. The SIB were asked to investigate. Many German civilians were employed at the DSD through the PCLU system, and they were all supervised by a German civilian. He was watched and his background checked and it was soon discovered that he was not who he said he was. The CO at the DSD was informed and he agreed to deal with the problem. It was only when he was arrested about a month later and his fingerprints checked that he was found to be an ex-Gestapo Sturmbahnführer, who was wanted in the American Zone for war crimes and currency offences.

SIB continued to investigate and found out that labels on goods trains were being changed at the DSD in Hannover, so that supplies to British Forces in Trieste were sent ‘B’ grade and in some cases goods were being kept at the DSD for more than a week before being distributed. Supplies to British units in Germany, including supplies to the Control Commission were also being switched to ‘B’ grade. An SIB team in Koln were asked to check a DSD in their area and they arranged for an SIB Sergeant to travel incognito aboard a train from Holland to Hannover. He discovered that trains were making unauthorised stops at railway sidings in the Ruhr where some good vans were being swapped for others. The difficulty SIB faced was finding the person at the top of this activity for although they could have stepped in and arrested the minions, the British Military Governor and the Provost Marshall, wanted to find the people at the top. The CO and senior staff at the Hannover DSD were strongly suspected, so when a vacancy occurred in the MT

section for a Staff car driver, I was sent in the hope that I would be appointed to drive one of these senior officers and able to find some evidence of their involvement.

Eventually, luck played an enormous part in the success of this investigation, for on the day that I took six vehicles to Luneburg Heath, the Colonel went to his office and removed a lot of files and correspondence. He placed them in the back of his official car and he and a Major, who I believe was the Adjutant, together with his Corporal driver, drove out of the DSD and headed for the Major's married quarters on a Military estate in Celle. Captain Baker, CSM Smith and Sergeant Parr SIB, were already at the estate making enquiries amongst Officers wives whose husbands were not attached to the DSD, when they saw the Colonel's car pull up outside the Major's house and the three men started to unload the contents. The SIB team had seen enough and stepped in. There was all the evidence they needed. The Colonel had apparently been warned who I was and realising he was now under suspicion decided to get rid of much of the evidence by having a bonfire. SIB later discovered that the Colonel was also running other DSD's in Germany as he had been somehow able to control postings to Germany from London's Second Echelon, the department at the War Office responsible for appointing senior officers in The Royal Army Ordnance Corps. He had appointed his own senior staff at other DSD's and two Major's were found to be only Captains and should not have been wearing a Crown on their shoulder.

The Colonel was eventually cashiered under Army regulations and two other officers were similarly dealt with and a Captain in RAOC committed suicide. A number of NCOs were dealt with at Court Marshall's and some received prison sentence, as did a few German civilians. About 18 months after I left the Army, I was a serving Police Officer in the Metropolitan Police when I was subpoenaed to attend the Old Bailey to give evidence as a witness in the trial of three men charged with theft of War Department property. One of the men was the Ex-Colonel. On the morning of the trial I was told that my evidence would no longer be required as all three had pleaded guilty. The Ex-Colonel received a three year prison sentence and sent to an Open Prison.

From an SIB point of view, it was a very successful outcome to a very complicated enquiry, and from my personal point of view, I was credited with a success that I did not really deserve. One sad note however, came when the body of an SIB Sergeant was found at the side of a railway line near the Dutch border. I believe he was attached to SHAEF Headquarters in Paris and working on a similar type of enquiry. News also filtered through that two SIB Sergeants had been found hanging from a tree in an olive grove on Mount Sinai in Palestine. The region was subject to a lot of terrorist activity against British Forces when Jewish Terrorist organisations such as – *Irgun Zuei Leumi* – the *Stern Gang* and *Hagana* – were all fighting for the Jewish State of Israel.

Dead SIB Sergeants was certainly on my mind when Captain Baker showed me some correspondence he had found amongst the papers confiscated that morning in Celle. It was the letter from the War Office informing the DSD of my being posted there. These letters were sent to Commanding Officer's warning them of new postings and contained brief details of the soldiers military service, prior to his records being forwarded later. Mine read – Name, rank and number, last unit was shown as RASC Borden, but previous units – RMP SIB Training School, Woking, CMP Training school, Woking. It might just as well have said in big letters – *We are on to you - You Have been warned.* Captain Baker submitted a report that day pointing out the dangers involved when Investigators were sent to do a job at another Army unit incognito, and hopefully the system was changed.

Staff Sergeant Cooper, our Chief Clerk was married to an Officer in the ATS. She became pregnant in January 1949 and was posted back to the UK. He asked to be posted to London and I was promoted to Chief Clerk. Unfortunately, because I was a National Service conscript I was not given the extra rank. RSM Burton and his team at Brunswick were working at full stretch and he

ask if I would help out with some of his admin. The typing up of reports was his biggest problem as they had not been able to recruit a reliable typist. The trivial matters at the frontier post at Helmstedt when the elite Russian Guards would continue to cause as much harassment as possible to both the British Military and German civilians travelling to and from Berlin, would take up a lot of time and so I wrote most of these reports. In one incident a Second Lieutenant acting as a CTO – Convoy Transport Officer – was badly assaulted by Russian Guards when he carried out standing orders by refusing to allow his convoy to be searched, and had to have hospital treatment for his injuries. The Russians took him to a small German Village hospital about twenty miles inside the Russian Zone for treatment and then refused to have any knowledge of his whereabouts. The RMP Sergeant on duty that day was Sergeant George West, a very smart, regular soldier who always carried a swagger stick. When he heard about this incident he immediately went to Helmstedt, marched the 40 odd yards from the British frontier post to the Russian post with his two Lance Corporal at his side. Five or six Russian Guards saw the RMP's approaching dressed in Red Caps, white blanketed belt, gaiters and pistol holster and quickly disappeared inside their brick built post. Sergeant West banged on their door, which they had locked. When they refused to come to the door and discuss the matter with him, he took out his revolver, fired four shots at the door and blew the lock off. He went inside and disarmed the Russian Guards, locked them in their own cells and took their Officer in charge in his Jeep to the Hospital where the Young British CTO had received treatment. A British Military Ambulance was then called and took the young Officer to 29 British Military Hospital where he stayed for more than a week. I don't think the incident helped smooth over the problems that existed at that time but it did give the Russians a bit of their own treatment and calmed down Officers and men of the Black Watch who were quite ready to start a war. In other cases German civilians were taken off trains and in some cases never seen again. All these incidents had to be investigated and a report submitted even though we knew that no Russian soldier would ever be disciplined for these offences.

RSM Burton had his hands full sorting out problems at the Volkswagen factory at Wolfsburg, which ultimately, he, and the British Army, in particular Major Ivan Hirst and his Royal Engineers, saved from complete destruction. So important is this period to the history of SIB that I have devoted the next chapter to the story.

Unfortunately, all good things come to an end and when my demob date loomed in October 1949, I received a letter from the Provost Marshal's office, asking if I was interested in taking a short service commission and remain in the Army. I would stay in SIB. In private, I was keen on joining the Police Force back home, but provisionally agreed to stay. I had thoroughly enjoyed my time in the Army, in particular with SIB, where I had learnt an unusual skill. I had met some very talented people, I enjoyed the comradeship that exists in a small unit and handled the responsibility as competently as everyone else. A few days later a Police Inspector from Hendon Training School came to the office looking for recruits and discovered that I was shortly to be demobbed. He guaranteed me that with the training I had and the position I held, he would arrange automatic entry into the Metropolitan Police, no exams and after a two year probationary period I would be selected for the CID. Foolishly, I believed him and even Captain Baker agreed that it was a better opportunity than staying in the Army for another five years. Reality however, proved very different..

I joined the Metropolitan Police at the end of October 1949, and after thirteen weeks at Hendon Training School, I was posted to Southwark Police Station. From a Policeman's point of view it was a very interesting place to work. Something different happened everyday and one of the beat patrols covered the site where the Festival of Britain was being built. The staff were either young men with a few months service or older men who had served through the war, but everybody got on well. The problem was living accommodation. I was billeted in Gilmour House, a Police Section house above Kennington Police Station. It was one very large room divided into cubicles about

eight feet by ten feet, with a single bed, a wooden wardrobe, and a small table and chair. The whole room housed about 40 men. I did have a outside room with a window. Some cubicles had no windows. Surprisingly there were no locks on the doors and the lighting was very bad, about eight large lights situated high in the ceiling to light to whole room, that were on day and night.. There was no privacy, no silence, no security and worst of all nowhere to keep my motor cycle. I know we were all Policemen but things did go workabouts. I padlocked a leather suitcase to the bedsprings under the bed in which I kept my valuables, something I never had to worry about in the Army. The washing facilities were far worse than anywhere I had ever seen in Military establishments, and my dirty clothes I took home to my mother on rest days because there were no laundry facilities. Eating arrangements were disgraceful. One had to go two floors down to the canteen to make a cup of tea, where there was one kettle to serve about 180 single men and 20 women who lived in fairly respectable rooms on the top floor. The cooked meals available day and night in the canteen were poorly cooked and the only way one could cook their own meal was in a frying pan. My weekly pay was less than I had in the Army and every week I had to draw money from my Post Office Saving book to exist. After three months I had enough. I was suffering from severe stomach pains and the Police Doctor advised me what to do.

He told me to submit an application to get married and find a flat to rent outside central London. I explained that I had no regular girl-friend, but he just shrugged his shoulders and said, “Thats the least of your problems.”

The first long weekend off, I went looking around the Estate Agents shop windows in North London. The first advert I saw showed a house for sale in East Barnet for £2250.00. I had come out of the Army with about £2600 in my Post Office Savings book I realised I had enough to buy the house outright, so I went to view it. It was semi-detached, kitchen, lounge and dining room downstairs with three bedrooms upstairs, and space at the side for a garage. There was a large garden at the rear which backed onto open park land. I went back to the Estate Agent and told him I would buy it.

He sent me to a Solicitors office situated across the road where I signed a few documents and I promised to pay him a £500 deposit the following week, which I did. About five weeks later I received a letter at Gilmour House from the Solicitor, informing me that I was now the proud owner of a house in East Barnet and would I call and see him as soon as possible to collect the keys. There was mention of money which I thought was rather strange. I was on duty the following morning from 6am to 2pm, so I applied to have the last four hours off which was approved.

At 10am that morning I dashed back to the Section House, changed my clothes, ran all the way to a local garage where I kept my motor cycle and sped off to North London. During that period of five weeks I had opened a bank account and transferred sufficient money to pay for the house by cheque. The Solicitors office was one of those old fashioned places where all the clerks worked standing at sloping desks. One of the clerks handed me a sealed envelope and a set of keys and asked me to sign a couple of documents. He said,“I hope you will be happy with your new purchase and enjoy living there.” He then showed me to the door.

I crossed the road and went into the Estate Agents office to thank him for his help. I asked him quietly if he knew how much I owed the Solicitor and when he would want me to pay the rest of the money. He said, “You don` t owe him anything, he gets a commission for arranging the mortgage.” When I arrived at my new house I opened the envelope and discovered he had arranged a mortgage for the balance owing, which meant I now had sufficient money to buy some furniture. I was ecstatic. Wouldn` t it be nice if those sort of Solicitors were still about today.

PATRICK COLSON Ex Sgt. SIB RMP

