Frank Long

**Summary:** During the 1960’s Frank worked at Rotherhithe Police station as a Sergeant. During this interview Frank recalls the rules of the beat, the community he kept safe and the skills and equipment that enabled him to get the job done.

**Frank, thank you for joining us…**

That’s all right, fire away

**Can I just ask you to spell and say your surname please?**

L-O-N-G

**Brilliant, and can I ask when and where you were born?**

I was born in Brockley, south east four, London

**And the date?**

28th of February 1929

**Brilliant, thank you very much, Frank. Erm, so I understand it you worked as a Sergeant for ten years in Rotherhithe?**

That’s right, yep.

**And I was hoping today to ask you about your work and at that time. So if we could begin could you tell us about your job and your role at that time?**

My role as a Sergeant was either patrolling the streets, looking after all the PCs and looking after the streets themselves or doing station duty in the front office, which looked after all the customers and all the bookwork of the station.

**Ok, and what was your relationship like with the community at that time?**

Very good, they respected the police in those days.

**And, erm, did you live in the community?**

F: er, not, I didn’t live in Rotherhithe, when I was at Rotherhithe, I lived at Dulwich, south east twenty two, and then I moved to Shooters Hill, South East eighteen

**OK, and we’ve heard the community was quite a close-knit community, and everyone worked locally, could you maybe tell us your impressions of the community at that time?**

The community was… little sections of it were tight knit, er, the Dockers were, before the docks closed and then you had an area called “Down Town” which was the far end of Rotherhithe street, almost on the river edge. It was called Down Town and it used to be little town on it’s own so they said. It wasn’t it was just an area, a tight knit community. And most areas were localised I think, and I think that would be the best word.

**Ok and what do you mean by ‘localised’?**

They tended to stay in their own, they didn’t tend to wander too far

**OK, and did you have much to do with the Dockers community and that environment?**

No, because the docks were run by the Port of London Authority Police and you didn’t go in unless you were invited if they had something they couldn’t cope with.

**Oh, and did that ever happen?**

Not to me, no, but mind you, I was only there, I joined there in ’69 and by the early ’70s the docks had shut, so then they were an empty area then.

**And you were talking about Down Town and that close-knit community down there, did you have much dealings down there?**

Well, as a Sergeant I had dealings with every part of my area, my patch, as I call it, erm, I didn’t get too close to any particular area, mainly because I had to keep myself, not above them, but make sure I didn’t favour one or the other.

**Can you tell us about the equipment you would have used for your job and the tools?**

The tools? Erm… what do you mean by the tools of the job?

**Well, I was just thinking about if someone logged a complaint it’s all on computer now and they have radios and I just wandered what you would have used for those…**

We did have personal radios, yes, but that was only communicating between the base station, and Scotland Yard and the PCs – they had individual radios. Not very efficient on occasions because you had to keep them charged up. Apart from that it was all typing and typing out reports and writing.

**So, very different from today when it’s all logged on a computer.**

Oh yes, very different, yes, yes.

**And what impact did that have on your job? Did you, or you PCs, spend a lot of time writing?**

Not as much as they say they did. They say they get a report now and it takes hours to do a report. The PCs that worked under me were more keen to get back out on the ground and get something else, then to stay writing reports half the day. Most of the writing that took the time, was the station officer, the Sergeant who had to type them all out, record them and send them up to the administration office which was upstairs for them to deal with later.

**And what police station were you based at?**

At Rotherhithe

**And that one’s still open at the moment, isn’t it?**

I believe it is still open, but I don’t know how long it opens for.

**Yes, because there is quite a lot of talk that it might actually close**

Yep

**So, we’ll have to wait and see on that one. Do you remember some of the stuff you did as a Sergeant at that time?**

In what way? It’s just general police duties. Accidents, sudden deaths, er, big accidents, little accidents, traffic chaos sometimes. As a Sergeant I didn’t deal with murders but I had a connection with them as their station officer. The people who were charged with murder, which we had several on our ground while I was there, er, bought them in and I had to decide on their evidence whether to charge or not. It wasn’t down to the, what’s that, it’s CPS now, they deal with all the deciding now, but in my day the Sergeant decided or if he couldn’t decide, he’d ask his inspector, could he help me and which they did, they came and said: “Let’s look at the evidence,” and it was down to the Sergeants then to decide whether to charge or whether not to charge. Crown Prosecution Service, the CPS, that’s what it is. They deal with all the charges these days. You send all the paperwork up to them and that’s it.

**And they make the decision, where as in your day, you made the decision.**

In the latter part of my Sergeant’s life, yes.

**That sounds like you had a role of responsibility…**

Yes, oh yes, the station officer was really, you could say he was the guiding light, well, he wasn’t the guiding light but he was the man who all the PCs saw in the minute they come in, they didn’t see the inspector too often, they didn’t see the chief inspector or above too many times, a day, the inspectors came round quite often but our station, when I was there, we had an inspector and eight sergeants, or was it ten? No, eight sergeants, and about 40, or 46 PCs we had then.

**What was your relationship like with your PCs?**

Very good. I got on with them and I still (I’ve been retired for 35 years), I met one in my local church down here in Kent, his daughter got married and we had an hour’s conversation, before and after the wedding and I still correspond with two or three of them, send Christmas cards and have done for, what, 35 years. We keep in touch, not on a month-to-month basis, but yearly basis. But, my relationship, if you didn’t get on with them, then they didn’t want to work. That was my thoughts anyway, I got on with all my, because we changed, we had a relief of about 8 PCs – a relief is one that worked a certain shift – you didn’t stay with the same relief all the time, you changed after, you had them for four weeks and then you call a spare week, when you odds and ends and then you went back to another set of 8 PCS for another 4 weeks. It worked very, very well. Everyone knew you and you knew everybody.

**So did that role, and having to decide on the evidence ever effect your home life at all?**

No, no, I did always speak to my wife about what happened but not in exact details. She’s knew when I had a sudden death, a bad one, as I’d go home and sit quietly for a bit, but my wife knew exactly what I’d been doing during the day but it never affected my home life, ever.

**I was just thinking when you were saying about CPS and them deciding, how have you seen the police force and what you did in your time changed over the years?**

Well, it’s changed beyond all recognition. I wouldn’t know anything what goes on in a police station now. I haven’t been near a front offices in a long time, to me, but to me policemen now are reactive, not proactive. They don’t go out looking, they go out when there is something to do, you don’t see them on the streets, certainly not in Maidstone, not as much as we had to.

**Was there certain hours you had to be out on the streets?**

Well, every PC, when you booked on at say 6 in the morning, were given a certain beat to look after. They knew what they were posted, because it was always on the board beforehand. Say we had 6 beats on Rotherhithe section and they looked after them and that’s where you wouldd expect to find them on their 8-hour shift, unless they got called away to something else, which they did often. Then there was a Panda car, was always on patrol, for the 8 hours as well, with perhaps one or two PCs. If you had a spare PC, you’d put two in it, if not one, and they were on the end of a local radio, not as they are now, and they were asked to go anywhere on the area… or outside it if necessary.

**So quite an organised, well-structured process.**

Oh yes, it was well organised. The PCs knew what they supposed to do the Sergeants knew what they had to do. The Sergeant who was on the section, what we call outside, walking or driving he could go anywhere on the Rotherhithe section, which was quite vast, you’d never get round everything in eight hours, but on a Panda, on the vehicle, you could visit perhaps nearly every street on the ground if you wanted to and of course, you were at the beck and call of the radio: ‘Please Sergeant so and so, please go to so and so… sudden deaths, suicides, accidents, er, suicides, anything, anything that was not normal life for us but normal life in any London area, or any area. You didn’t get murders like they do now or shootings like that. I think I dealt with one shooting in ten years… He shot a bookmaker, and was convicted, eventually.

**So it sounds like it was a very physical job, er, very…**

It’s all, when you’re walking the beat it’s all physical you’re expected to… I know when I was a PC, I was expected to walk at least eight to ten mile a day, two mile an hour, and you were expected to keep going. If you stood too long on the corner, you were idling and gossiping. If you spoke to a PC on the other beat, you could call, shout out at him but not go over to speak to him, on somebody else’s beat. That’s all gone down the… that’s all… they can do whenever they feel they like to go.

**Sorry, so if someone was across the road, that was on another beat and they weren’t allowed to come together?**

Not in the early days, yes, but by the time I was a Sergeant that had virtually gone by the board, but my very early life as a PC, you kept on your beat and you didn’t go off if unless a member of the public said ‘Can you come and do so and so across the road?’ and then you’d have to write a long-ish report to say why you’d gone off your beat and what you were doing.

**WOW!**

I had a beat when I was first a PC in 1949, or the early 1950s and I suffered a lot of nose bleeds in those days, my nose just bled, and I went into a shop to get my handkerchief wet, so I could hold it against my nose to get it cold and I was caught coming out of the shop by my Sergeant, and he said ‘What the heck are you doing going in a shop?’ and I said: ‘I had a nose bleed!’ and he said: ‘That’s no excuse, prove it.’ So I pulled out a bloody handkerchief out of my pocket and I said ‘Well, that’s proof enough,’ and he said ‘Er…’ and he couldn’t do anything about it. I went in for a legitimate medical reason and you could get away with it, but you couldn’t go unless you were called in, you couldn’t go in any private premises unless you were called in. You couldn’t do like they do round in Maidstone and go shopping!

**I was just thinking that!**

Well, they do, they go around the supermarket, push trolleys round, carry baskets, go get their sandwiches – couldn’t do that in my day.

**Could you tell us about how you became a police officer, what qualifications you had to do…**

Yeah, I was in the army from 1947 to 1949, and in early February of 1949, I was looking forward to being demobbed, and coming back. I hadn’t a clue of what I was going to do, though my wanted profession, I had wanted to be a chemical analyst, because I had worked a chemical firm as an analyst before I joined the army, but on the parade notice board of the army in Basingstoke, there was a list of pre-demobilisation courses, for those who wanted to look at doing other jobs before they came out. And right down the bottom, was British Police, venue: London. So I went to see my company commander while I was in the army and I said ‘I get a fortnight off for that, do I get any allowances while I’m away?’ Like rational allowance, as you got so much a day while you were away if you were stationed. It was three shillings a day or something daft. He said ‘ Oh yes, you can do that, so I applied for it, and it was held in the centre of London, I think Bryanstone Square or somewhere. And I lived in Beckenham as a PC in the army, so I thought if I can live at home, and go up from Kent House railway station to Victoria, and get the bus everyday to the place I was staying, I’d do it. So I did it, and while I was there we had police officers come and see us and we had a magistrate come and chat to us and we went and looked at a police court, which was Horseley Road, the big one In London at that time, and we went to a mortuary and had a look at the dead bodies and I’d seen dead bodies during the war so it didn’t worry me at all, and then…. Though my first accident I dealt with did worry me, that was a long time ago… and I thought, well I done this fortnight course in the police and I’d thoroughly enjoyed it, I was living at home, being paid to live at home as well, and having my meals up at the school, and someone said ‘well, do you want to sit the exam, do you want to join the police force?’ and I thought, this wasn’t a bad life, I’d done two years in the army in the open, so I’d stay in the open. So I sat the exam in the four parts. Tuesday morning was the, er, one exam. I think English and if you passed that you came back for the afternoon. Then there was a maths test and I think a general knowledge and one other and you had to pass the first three to go on the fourth afternoon, and if you didn’t pass the first three, you didn’t come back. And I got through the first three and took the fourth and then went back to my army base in Basingstoke and ten days later my mother phoned up and she said ‘I’ve had a letter from the police force’ and I said ‘Oh, yes…’ ‘They wanna know when you can join… you passed.’ ‘I said, well I don’t come out until May, so I got in touch with them and they said, ‘well when you leave the army, tell us when you leave, and we’ll arrange for you to come in and join. So I did, and that was it. Never regretted a minute of it.

**And apart from being paid to live at home and having your meals, what else attracted you to the job?**

I don’t know… just the fact that I’d liked what I’d seen when I’d went round in that fortnights course and it just appealed to me. I hadn’t really unless I’d worked at Boroughs Welcome in Beckenham and it’s no longer there and I felt, well, you know this seems more exciting then standing in a chemical laboratory for eight hours playing with chemicals. Well, I thought, I’ll have a go and can always come out if I don’t like it… but I stayed for thirty years!

**And in those thirty years, did you see changes in your profession and did that affect the way you did your job?**

I don’t suppose the changes affected the way I did the job. There were changes in uniform and procedures, yes. The ranks changed while I was there. You had PC, Sergeant, and Inspector and when I first joined, the person in charge of a station was a sub divisional inspector, he was part of a division but he was out of six subs, he was in charge of that station. Then they made the rank a chief inspector in charge of the station, then later on they made it a super intendant in charge of the station, they upgraded the rank, position to give them a bit more responsibility and they upgraded the rank. I believe now the stations are in charge of chief superintendants, I don’t know, but that’s the one…. When I left, my senior officer, at my station was a chief inspector, and above him was a chief superintendant at the station next door. We were a sub division of Tower Bridge.

**And did any of your training in the army and experience in the army help you when you went and did your job?**

Discipline, yes. I had been disciplined in the army and I expected it in the police force. And got it. You were disciplined in the police force, you did as you were told and had to do, you couldn’t vary it. Now, I don’t think there is any discipline in the police force. And, mine you, there’s not much discipline anywhere these days. I think that word has gone out of the English language.

**And how did that discipline manifest itself? What would you have to be disciplined in?**

Well, you were disciplined in your code of conduct to the public. The wearing of the uniform, you couldn’t wear what you liked in uniform, in the summer you could wear shirt sleeves without your jacket, but in the winter you had to put your jacket on. And then you had to wear your overcoat at a certain time. There were rules and regulations there, and eventually, now, looking round at policemen now, they don’t look like policemen, because half of them don’t wear hats these days, do they?

**No, I don’t think so.**

They get out the vehicles with shirt sleeves with bit and pieces hanging from their belts, they look more like robots then anything else to me, but that’s my opinion! Discipline, if you’ve got discipline, I had it in the army, I had discipline at home, too. I didn’t have a father who lived at home, he had moved out, and mum was not a disciplinarian, but what she said was gospel, if she said ‘you do so and so’ you did it, you didn’t argue with it. And I suppose I have been disciplined all my life. And when I left the police force, I just a shop in Kent and a post office and you had to discipline yourself, the post office said you would open at half past nine, 9 in the morning, and you had to be open, otherwise you were not doing what you were supposed to be doing. And even now I have certain disciplines I look for and do. I’m quite a busy… I wont say young man, because I’m not a young man, I’m an old man, but I have disciplines and I do things at church and in the village I say that’s what I’m going to do at that time of day and I do it. My wife’s the same. We look at things and we do them together, and that’s it. I suppose I’ve lived under a disciplined life, most of my life and either self-discipline or under discipline of others.

**Erm, do you ever miss your job? Do you ever miss working in the police force?**

I missed it when when I said I was going to miss it now. I had a six weeks break after I left the police force in June 78, and I didn’t move into my new shop until July, but when I got down to the shop, I had to discipline myself to open up and make sure the shelves were all stacked properly and filled, so I didn’t have time really to miss the police force. You change direction. I still had contact with the police, I still had contact with the police in Kent, I met a lot of them down there, and although they didn’t affect my discipline, you had to have self discipline, which I still think I’ve got.

**You said you opened at shop, a post office. How did that differ from being in the police force? Apart from the discipline, was there other things you had to learn that you didn’t know before?**

I had to learn how a post office worked, but it was just a job that I thought I would like to do. And, sadly, it didn’t last as long as I wanted it to do, due to personal family reasons, but that’s another story. I stayed down there four years and then moved back to London, for say, family upsets and problems.

**In terms of the area. How would you describe Bermondsey and Rotherhithe at the time in which you were working?**

Rotherhithe at the time? Well, locally… it was a working class area. Most people worked for a living. A lot of them manually, a lot of them had worked in the docks and the area and were obviously upset when it closed. But there were lots of other factories around in the area. It was mainly a solid, working class area.

**Did the PCs come from the area?**

Not many actually lived on the area after the relaxation of the two and a half three mile limit. Years ago, you had to live within three miles of your police station. During my service, that eased out and I lived about seven mile away, but transport was good and a lot of PCs had motorcycles or motorcars in those days. I had my first car in 1959, but when you only had a pushbike, which was a lot of the mode of travel for a policeman, three miles was your maximum as it took you half an hour to ride three miles.

**And when was that phased out roughly that you had to live three miles?**

I can’t really remember when it was phased out, but it was during my service as a PC because I moved from… three miles away when I was at Walworth Road to Dulwich, which was exactly three miles and that was a block of police flats and then I moved, eventually, I purchased a house in Shooters Hill and that was seven/eight mile away and that was permitted. But now there is a somebody who lives in the next village Lenom, who is a police officer in Walworth Road, London!

**Wow… so there’s no limit.**

There’s no limit now, no. And I do believe they get assistance with their finances to travel. I didn’t.

**Apart from it being practical to travel to your workplace if you lived three miles away, was there any other reasons or benefits as to why that rule was in place?**

The real reason, was up until the 1960’s, 50s or 1960s, policemen either walked to work or came on a pushbike. They didn’t have motor vehicles, or very few of them had a motor vehicle. And buses were there, I used a bus to come to work on occasions as London Buses used to start at 4:00, 4.30 in the morning. I used it on many occasions if my pushbike was out of action or I didn’t then have a car.

**Ok, and were there benefits to having PCs possibly not so close to the patch that they were on or was it…**

The only benefit was if there was a big event and something happened, and they wanted a lot of policemen quickly, if you were living close to the scene then you got called first… like big accidents, bit disasters, which there were one or two locally, but I just think it was habit of life, people did move away from the centre of London, they didn’t want to live in the centre and they just moved out and regulations gradually eased. You didn’t take much notice of that, you just applied for something and if it wasn’t permitted you didn’t go it, and if you could move out, you did, and I did.

**Was there ever conflict? If the PCs had got to know their community and they were a regular face, was there ever conflict when an incident had happened?**

No, in big incidents you just got on with the job. I don’t think what I call conflict, might have been arguments but not conflict.

**Apart from the discipline, have you taken anything else of the skills you learnt into your later life?**

Skills you learnt in the police force? I think you learned a lot of skills, which are only applicable to the police force, but some of the things I learnt in the police force, I have used since. I never stand back if I see an accident, I’ve got to get there to help. It’s in my brain that if somebody is in trouble and I can help, I do it. I have done it on many, many occasions. Up in London when I went back to live there after I left Kent. I’ve even done it since I moved down here. In 1995, I was travelling up a hill and a lady just suddenly collapsed in front of me, so for the next hour, I just dealt with a collapsed lady and it’s just second nature. I did it. And when she went to hospital, that was it, I’d given up, finished it. I live in a block of houses, I live in a mobile home site and I know all of them who live here and if anybody is in trouble, or you haven’t seen them in a few days, you go and knock on their door and find out why – are they all right? I guess that is a throw back from the police force; you are technically a caring person who looks after the community. Or helps look after them.

**And would you say that’s a value base you developed from working with the police?**

A value base?

**Do you think they are the values that you hold?**

Well, I suppose yes and no. It’s a difficult question to answer. The values I had then have set me up for all my life, I value life, I value the community and I vaule, like giving help to others. It’s been my nature. I don’t know if that really answers what you wanted?

**Yes it does I just thinking it sounds like a lot of your experience in the police force and your role there…**

Well, they’ve continued, yes, yes. We’ve had people on this Garden of England site collapse, I’ve gone out and dealt with it, called ambulances and called doctors. It just comes as a second nature, I was trained in it for thirty years and you just don’t lose training of that establishment in five minutes, you keep it.

**Yes, yes… was there any particular parts of the job that you favoured more than others?**

Not really because it was so varied you didn’t get the same thing two days or even two months running. Um… I liked, I don’t know… I liked something what we called Town Jobs, where you went up on big parades, up in London, Trooping the Colour, the Coronation. I was up there for the Coronation, I was up there many Trooping the Colours, those stations come from all over the Met Police was called upon for what you would call Aid…. Help, when they needed more policemen. Big funerals, I say I enjoyed them as I enjoyed a day out from the station. It was something different.

**And was there any other event after you left the police force and you thought ‘oh, I’d have liked to have been present at that, or I’d have liked to have been called up to do that.’**

I suppose you’ve got a sense of er, Coronation and Jubilee celebrations, perhaps I would have liked to have been on them, but I don’t know, I watch it all on television. There’s one or two things I think ‘Well, I used to do that… but they are bigger’. I don’t think I have missed the Town Jobs and we used to call them, because you can watch them all better on television. I watched all the Jubilee celebrations, well a lot of them on television and, even so, the discipline up there… I used to be able to stand in the Mall on Trooping the Colour and stand watching the road, if you watch a place now all the PCs are watching the crowd, they don’t see anything. They are watching the crowd for indiscipline in the crowd and upsets, people messing about.

**And sorry, what were you looking for?**

What, when I was up there? I was just watching the procession, because in those days, people behaved themselves. If you turned around and said ‘Look, stop pushing or I’ll clear the road and you’ll go home,’ they stopped. I was on the Coronation of our sovereign lady the queen in 1953 and, I was in the Haymarket, and I was there at 4.30 in the morning to start my duty, and there were thousands there, and people kept on easing forward, they wanted to see a little bit more, so we all said ‘if you push forward, we are going to put a barrier in front of you so you wont see anything.’ And they stopped, they expected discipline in crowds and crowds didn’t get out of hand in those days, you told them to move and they moved. And the greatest example of that, I don’t know whether you saw it or not was the Queen’s Jubilee on television?

**Yes.**

Did you see the band barrier of police officers walking up the Mall?

**Yes**

That’s how it always used to be, if a line of policemen said we will go forward and you can follow us, they followed calmly, quietly, without any fuss, no pushing or shoving, and that for me was the greatest respect for the police I’ve seen since I came out. That line of policemen going up the Mall with a crowd of people walking behind them, quietly and gently, that’s how it always used to be.

**It was incredible to see that.**

It was.

**I was just thinking about unions and whether there was a police union?**

Pardon?

**Unions… was there a police union?**

We had a police federation which looked after your welfare. If you were sadly disciplined for something and put on a discipline board, or some misdemeanour, or not misdemeanour, it could have been bigger, they always represented you like a solicitor would in a police court. It was like a tribunal really and it was called a Police Federation and it’s still there, and it’s still going. It’s not technically a union.

**Were you part of that?**

Well, every member had the opp…. Every member was a part of it because they were in the job. And they had the availability of all the facilities of it. And its still going.

**Did they, erm… have they…. We’ve had a lot in the period we’ve been researching and we’ve heard a lot about the discourse between union workers and factory owners and the PLA and I was just wondering if you, if they, were ever the same discourse between the police federation and the bosses in charge?**

Er… well, that’s what the police federation were there for, to make sure there weren’t too many upsets and they looked into them and they are still looking into them, because I get the police magazine every month and its still there and if we had a complaint, that we thought something was wrong, we’d see our fed rep, our federation representative, and he would go up and see the bosses, the chief inspectors or who was concerned, and put the case to them. And it eventually, 90 per cent of it, was solved, 99 per cent of it. It’s still working now. The federation are not a union as such, a lot of outsiders think they are, they can’t call us out on strike because they were not allowed to strike, they are still not allowed to strike.

**Is there anything else you’d like to tell us that we might have missed or….?**

I think you have covered quite a vast area of what I have done and what I was doing… and I guess you don’t need to go into individual cases because as that might involved names…

**Yes, no that’s fine, absolutely fine…**

I thoroughly enjoyed my thirty years and I was involved in ordinary duty, station duty, walking as a Sergeant, driving as a Sergeant, I only road a Noddy Motorcycle as a PC, because I was doing what they called Out Town enquiries, and I was going all over the sub division and doing enquiries, taking statements at things like that. On the whole, I got on with the job, I dealt with many, many accidents, many many sudden deaths, many serious fatal accidents, I had several of them, and in my service I attended the coroner’s court for sudden and fatal deaths I think about 49 times with accidents. I was always on a pushbike of mainly riding round the streets and I always got given them. I was known at one time as the ‘Dead Body Officer’, but don’t quote that! If there were sudden deaths, I got the job, because I was a cyclist, pushbike and I could get there quickly and deal with it and get it over with, but that was one of my nicknames.

**Well, Frank, thank you so much**

That’s all right