A team of four persons representing AFSC arrived in Southern Rhodesia in January to monitor the situation and see what can be done to relieve suffering in that war-weary country. The team consists of Bill Sutherland, AFSC's Southern Africa representative; Lyle & Flo Tatum, special representatives for the Zimbabwe transition; and Jim Seawell, Lusaka-based co-secretary of AFSC's Technical & Material Assistance Program for Southern Africa.

This is the fifth of the team's occasional reports.

POLL WATCHING IN RHODESIA

For the Rhodesian commonroll election held February 27, 28 and 29 there were 657 places to vote. Any Rhodesian African 18 years of age or older, and some resident non-Rhodesian Africans, could vote at any of the 657 sites. There were several hundred official and unofficial observers from outside Rhodesia eager to see how the voting went. The logistical problems of covering great distances, the sheer limits of human endurance, and the impossibility of knowing in advance what might be a particularly interesting time to be at a particular place means that the observers had a wide variety of experience. Reports from individual observers are apt to read like the story of blind men "seeing" an elephant.

We decided to concentrate on the Salisbury District to attempt to get some feel of what was going on by visiting as many polling stations as possible. The district included 144 stations, 22% of all the stations in the country, presumably a reflection of the concentration of population in the area. There were 55 urban static stations, 5 rural static stations, 24 urban mobile stations and 60 rural mobile stations. Static stations were open from 7 to 7 all three days. Usually they were in buildings, but a few were large tents. The buildings tended to be social halls of some kind, but there was considerable variety including storefronts in shopping centers. Most of the sites had been used in the previous election. The urban mobile stations tended to be open for most of a single day. Rural mobile stations were open for short periods of time, some for only two hours. Mobile stations tended to be small tents. The one feature in common for all stations was that voters entered at one doorway and left at a different doorway.

42 Stations Visited

We visited 42 polling stations. One of the 42 we visited on two different days, as it seemed to have a problem of overly enthusiastic political party activity. We visited none of the rural mobile stations, few of the urban mobile stations and few of the center city static stations. In mentioning specific stations we will identify them by numbers which are our personal identification and unrelated to official identification, which, as far as we know, did not use a numbering system. We prepared for the trips the day before the election started by locating as nearly as we could 84 stations on a large map of the area.
It was not the first place we visited, but number 24 gave us a good look at the voting procedure. With no official status, we had no right to go inside a polling station, and it was probably illegal. One of the things which surprised us was the lack of standardization of procedures at the stations. The distance we and the rest of the curious onlookers were kept from the station was one such variable. In a few places, particularly at storefronts, we could walk right past the door and look straight in. At others we were kept 30 yards or so away from the entrance. If the building was within a fenced area, the fence was usually the limit.

Inside the Station

The first day was the heaviest voting with over one-half of those who voted doing so that day. Late on the afternoon of the second day we drove up at number 24. It was very quiet with no political activity in sight and almost no voters around. As we parked in front a police reservist came up to the car and asked if he could help us. We gave him our set response that we were not from the press, not official observers of any kind, that we had no status there at all, but we were visiting Americans who were going to get a lot of questions at home about the election, so we were just looking at a few polling places. He invited us to come in and see how it worked. He was in charge of the security force at that station, and he introduced us to the civilian in charge of the voting operation. He was also most friendly and cooperative. Both were Europeans, as all whites are called in Rhodesia, but other workers were black. Two workers were first in line with black boxes to determine if voters were trying for a second attempt. We inserted our hands, and under a dim light we saw mostly our fingernails. Then we dipped the back of our fingers onto a soggy sponge and inserted our hands again. We glowed with an eerie phosphorescence which was expected to stay with us for about two weeks. (Claims were made that night that the dye could be removed with solutions such as Coca Cola. Through tests were made by many reporters, and all were satisfied that it was impossible to remove the dye.)

We moved on to get a ballot, which we couldn't take as they were carefully numbered and controlled. Voting was only for parties, not individual candidates. Each ballot had the nine parties listed in alphabetical order with the name and party symbol. An X was placed in the square after the party the voter selected.

With the ballot in hand the voter moved to a booth to mark the selection. The booth was a simple construction much like many of the pay telephones on the streets of Philadelphia. From the stand-up writing shelf about two feet square, three sides were covered with burlap high enough to provide privacy, although not the total enclosure Americans would expect. The booths were light, portable and easily assembled, so that it was possible to supply extra booths where they might be needed. The stations we saw usually had from 3 to 6 booths.

After marking the ballot, the voter folded it and dropped it into a large box and went out the exit. The entire process from entrance to exit took less than two minutes.

Each day of the election started with a new, empty ballot box. All of the parties and the election officials, British and Rhodesian, certified that the box was empty. It was then sealed with tape across the top and padlocked shut. The padlock was wrapped with cord and a wax seal placed on it. At the end of the day the boxes were taken to secure places under armed guard.

We watched a few persons go through the voting process. There was no confusion, and every seemed to understand what was going on. There were four party poll
watchers inside the station. That was the number allowed by law. Since there were nine parties, watchers were rotated where all parties wished to participate. Two of the watchers at number 24 were asleep, one of them stretched out on the floor.

As the security officer escorted us back to our car, he said, "This is a religious country, and that is our strength. At this moment hundreds of people are fasting and praying for peace."

The tragedy of Rhodesia bore heavily upon us.

Security Provisions

Our reception at number 24 was different than any other, but the friendliness of the security force was standard. We were often thanked for our interest. Security was maintained by regular police officers and by police reservists. Police reservists tended to be white. A number of the regular police were black. Some officers were women. We saw no members of the army or air force on duty or posted anywhere near the polls. Neither did we get to see any of the British Bobbies sent over to watch the polling. They were all posted outside of the Salisbury District.

Rhodesia was heavily armed, but there was little evidence of this at the stations we visited. In some places a few of the police reservists were carrying rifles, usually on their backs. The monstrous, grotesque military vehicles about the streets of Salisbury seemed to stay away from the polls. We saw only one parked at a polling station. They were used to pick up and drop off police reservists as they ended shifts. There were 10-15 security officers at each station. We went through police blocks at three different points to get to stations near or beyond the city limits.

At some places voters were "frisked" before entering the stations, sometimes at the door, other times at the gate when there was a fence. At a number of places this was not done. Sometimes parcels were left outside, sometimes searched and kept by the voter. At number 54, women with babies on their backs were required to leave the youngster outside. Rhodesians are accustomed to frequent searches.

All electioneering, political posters, etc. were required by law to be kept 100 meters away from the polls. This was fairly well observed, although some of the stations were much more relaxed than others. We saw a voter with a UANC hatband required to take it and cover it in his bicycle basket. At number 14 a voter wearing a "Vote PF" tee shirt went in without challenge.

Voters were challenged on the basis of trying to vote a second time and on age. The newspaper reported some cases of convictions and short sentences for attempting to vote a second time. The detection was nearly foolproof. At number 48 the head security officer said they'd had a few attempts to vote a second time, but they just sent them away.

Age presented a much bigger problem. There were many youngsters who campaigned with enthusiasm. We saw a number of them turned away from voting. Men were apt to have identification related to job seeking, but women had no such documentation. Birth certificates were not widely used 18 years ago. African personnel at the polls were usually given the responsibility of determining age, and those rejected tended to accept the decision.
Party Supporters Active

At a number of the stations party supporters were holding continuous pep rallies with singing, dancing, chanting, shouting slogans and waving party flags and campaign posters. Sometimes this was taking place in spite of heavy rainfall. Usually these groups represented ZANU (PF) and the UANC. There were much smaller and less frequent PF groups and now and then a small group from another party. These political rallies were assigned spaces by election security officers. The groups tended to be very good natured and cooperative with authorities and their own leaders.

We saw nothing at any station which looked like intimidation of voters. There were three instances of potential problems, but none of them became serious.

At number 27 the station was behind a tall fence lined with a hedge. It was the only place we couldn't even see the building within which the people voted. There was a driveway with an 8 foot wide gate. All onlookers had to remain outside the fence. UANC supporters and ZANU (PF) supporters lined opposite sides of the drive singing and shouting. This was the only station where we saw interaction between the political groups. This situation had been going on for about four hours, according to police reservists on the scene, before we arrived. The tempo was increasing, voters had to pass between these two boisterous groups, and partisans from both sides got to breaking ranks to get closer to the others to shout their slogans. At one point a UANC woman stooped to pick up a stone and was promptly reprimanded by an alert police reservist. The police then told the groups they would have to disperse. With no argument at all the ZANU (PF) group turned around and walked down the street. The UANC group climbed onto a truck and drove away. We visited number 27 the next day to check it out and found the scene was not repeated.

At number 48 the ZANU (PF) group was near the public toilets and denying access to them by the UANC group. The police reservists handled the matter to everyone's satisfaction.

At number 28 ZANU (PF) supporters were drinking beer and swinging beer bottles as they danced and sang. There was no other political group about at this station, but the excess of alcohol and political partisanship was potentially hazardous. Party political leaders calmed this situation.

During last April's election there was massive busing of voters across voting boundaries in attempts to influence particular districts. This was legitimate under the rules of that election. This time people could vote anywhere, but it was illegal to hire transport to take people into different districts than where they lived. We saw a number of bus loads of UANC supporters but no other buses.

There was transportation of groups, particularly by employers, but to the station nearest the place of work. At one place we visited an industry was trucking in 50 voters per hour for the convenience of the 1,000 workers.
Conversations with the Police

We often talked to police reservists about the post-election period. At number 55 one who seemed less frightened by the prospect of a Mugabe victory than most, and he expected that victory, was worried about possible paranoia on Mugabe's part after years of incarceration, exile and battling of the Rhodesian establishment. He was going to stay in the new Zimbabwe, however, no matter what happened. He likes Rhodesia and doesn't see it any more peaceful at home in Belfast.

A young, well-educated, white Rhodesian told us about the carnage that would result if Mugabe won. We were a bit nervous as he juggled an automatic rifle in his arms, our only incident of the kind. After saying that as a reservist he couldn't comment on anything political, he gradually loosened up to tell us about Mugabe. He seemed to believe every anti-Marxist story he'd been told, and there are many about in this country. Samples include that Mugabe preferred to kill children rather than adults, because they couldn't fight back. He predicted that if Mugabe won all whites would leave or be killed within 72 hours. We wonder where he is today, and if the peaceful beginning of the transition is a relief to him or a disappointment.

Florence and Lyle Tatum
5 March 1980