

Introduction

In prison you do all your travelling in your mind. When I was locked up in South Africa, Ireland and the United States I had to condition myself so as to use my mind to travel out of my cell and wander through all the places in the world where I had worked or visited.

In 1992 my life had taken an unusual but possibly predictable turn. One morning I was working as an aircraft engineer in Mozambique, that night I was in solitary confinement in Pretoria prison in South Africa. Here the isolation was broken only by the action of food being pushed through a hatch in the door twice a day. The removal of all stimulation from a very active mind can cause a high level of frustration. To remain healthy, it became essential to find a means of occupying the mind. I found too that to depend on mental activity alone was not helpful and I had to do physical exercises as best I could in the cell. If I walked in a figure eight, I could take ten steps. I counted the steps and worked out the mileage; I recorded the miles and after each one I did a set of forty military-style push-ups. Then for the mental bit: after five miles I lay down on my cot and went travelling in my mind. When I was able to get writing paper I started to record the things I remembered to slow down the brain-storming process going on in my head. Later, in prison in the United States, I was in a cell with a man who had a doctorate in English from Cambridge in England; he looked at what I was doing and suggested that I put it into a book some day.

This book is a product of those sheets of paper that were written from memory in prison. It takes the reader on a journey through various countries and events that took place during the last sixty years of the twentieth century, from my childhood days in Ulster, military service, working on contract in British colonies and emerging nations, and involvement in the conflict in Northern Ireland. I lived in countries along the equator, from the Caribbean in the west to Borneo in the east, and I listened with interest to stories about historical events and figures. I was in a position to observe the local people and their customs and the effects of colonialism and its decline, as the British Empire retreated, often painfully, to its last bastion in the six counties of Northern Ireland. My deep involvement in dismantling its last foothold there was a secret life I carried with me for over twenty years around the world.