INTERVIEW WITH MICHEL P.A.C. BAETEN

MPA (Master of Public Administration)
Rank: Commissioner
Position: District Commander, De Eilanden (The Isles)
The Rotterdam-Rijnmond Regional Police Department
Headquarters: Doelwater 5, 3011 AH Rotterdam
District station: Bruggehoofd 11, 3223 DB Hellevoetsluis
phone: 0031-10-2741100

Interviewed by Curt Taylor Griffiths, Professor, School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, CANADA V5A 1S6.

Published in 4/5 *Police Practice and Research: An International Journal*. 371-81. 2004.

CTG: Can you tell me about your career thus far in policing?

MB: My career began when I was 18 years old. At that time, there were two types of police training: the regular police schools for police officers and a special police academy for senior officers: the National Police Academy. There were about seven police schools, spread out over the country, but only one National Police Academy (NPA). The regular schools had a training program for 1½ years and the training program for senior officers was 4 years. At that time, you could apply for either one – to become a regular street officer you applied at the police school, to become a senior officer you had to go to the NPA. You had to have a certain level of education to be admitted to the NPA. It was more of an academic program and a longer period of training. When you finished the academy, you had to apply for one of the police departments in the country, where you immediately became a senior officer at the rank of Lieutenant (or Inspector).

Now, this has changed. We no longer have an academy that exclusively trains for management positions. It changed in 2002 with the introduction of a new police education program. We do have different levels of education: an operational level, a

Bachelor level and a Masters level. Each level has a 4-year training program. With none of these degrees to you start at a senior level. Recruits come from high school and then to the police academy.

I was still quite young when I applied for policing and I applied for a major police department – in Rotterdam. At that time, there was another way in which the police in the Netherlands were organized. In those days, we had municipal police in the bigger cities – 25 K citizens or more, while in rural areas, we had State police. When you finished the National Police Academy, you could choose between the municipal police and the state police and you had to apply for one of the departments. I applied for three departments: Rotterdam, The Hague and Eindhoven, three of the biggest cities in the Netherlands and I was accepted in Rotterdam. My year group was 50 people nationally. So, in 1984, there were 50 new Lieutenants that joined the Dutch police. Eleven of those officers, including me, joined the municipal police department of Rotterdam.

I remember when we first met the Personnel Officer at Rotterdam, he let us choose the department or sub-division that we wanted to start our career. And, I had a friend at the academy who knew the city very well and we decided to apply for one of the districts in the west side of Rotterdam and that was the more violent part of the city. Our boss at the time said, "watch out, take care, and do what you can to do good and learn about". So, we really enjoyed ourselves at the time. There was no a lot of direct steering or pressure and together we did some things in street prostitution that was very heavy in those days in certain residential areas of that district. We started a new kind of task force on drug dealing in certain houses. And, so we had a lot of fun.

About two years after that, 1986, we were asked to move around. It was quite acceptable in those days, every two or three years you would be picked up and dropped in another part of the service. And, I joined the traffic department and was chief of the highway patrol unit for about three years. It was a very different type of police work and also a very different type of police officer – big hands, big mouth, but very hard working. After that, I had to become a Chief Inspector – our ranking system is different from the system in America and Canada – it was for me the next logical level and I became second in command in an operational support unit. In this unit we had K-9 patrol, mounted police, riot police, the dispatch centre – all types of work with operations support.

Then, in 1993 we had a major national re-organization of the police: the division between state police and municipal police was changed into 25 regional departments and one national department. The municipal department of Rotterdam was mixed together with several other municipal police departments of smaller towns and cities around Rotterdam and several groups of the State Police in the region. It became one of the biggest regional police departments in Holland, that delivers police service in 21 municipalities in the Rotterdam-Rijnmond region. I had to apply for a new position within the department and I became the head of one of the police areas. Nation-wide, we have 25 regions and our region was geographically divided into 12 districts and every district was divided into four or five areas. I became Head of one of those areas. And our goal was community policing. I had about 60 police officers for which I was responsible. I did that for two years and then there became a vacancy within our District Management Team because the Head of the Crime Investigation Unit left. That was a blank spot in my career, so I

applied for that position and I succeeded and so I became head of the Crime Investigation Unit for about 4 years.

Then, the Department Management felt that it would be good for me to follow a Management Development Program and I did that in several places. I joined the staff of the Chief of Police for two years and that was very interesting because for the first time you get really close to corporate decision making and the way that the Chief of Police operates in his external and internal network. It was very educational and two years later I went to a unit for organization and personnel (HRM). At first, I didn't like to go there because it was very distant from what I like in policing. It is very internal. But the Chief of Police put some pressure on me to do this, because in his opinion it is very good for police managers to have an inside view in these parts of the organization. As a police manager, about 80% of your job has to do with organizational aspects, personnel, or procedures, things like that. In retrospect, he was right. I did try to keep myself away from all of the technical procedures. We had technicians, as you do, that deal with all of these procedures. And so, I tried to stay above that. It was a very educational period.

And then, this year, I became a District Commander in one of the 9 Districts that we have in this region nowadays. In our district, we have about 370 officers and civilian staff. And that's great fun.

CTG: In terms of your policing career, what would you say has been the biggest challenge?

MB: Every position that I have had in my career has had challenges of its own: community policing, operational support, crime investigation. Every time you make a change, you step into something new and, for me, I think that the biggest change was

joining the Crime Investigation unit because it is a job in itself. At the same time, I would say that it has been the most fun four years since I joined the department. It is very close to the real police work in the traditional meaning: catching criminals and getting them behind bars. It was very hectic, but a lot of fun.

The biggest challenge is my job at the moment being highest in command in a district with 370 officers with every form of police work (that is: we have a separate regional organized crime unit, but all other kinds of policing we do within the districts).

CTG: In the two decades or so since you joined policing have you noticed that the officers who have joined policing in the past five years have a different view of policing; is it a different type of recruit than you and your friends were when you joined?

MB: I guess so. In recruitment over the years, you see all kinds of changes. We used to have all kinds of difficulties recruiting people. Over the years our department was allowed to grow, which only let to a lot of vacancies, because we did not have the personnel. We did a lot of advertising for about four years. Now we have people standing in line to join the police and we have reached our levels for recruitment. When looking at the type of officer, you could say that he or she has a higher level of education before he joins the police department.

CTG: Does this mean that the new officers have a high level of expectations about what he or she is going to be able to do in policing, what the rewards are going to be, and how much freedom they are going to have in doing their job?

MB: Yes. What we have seen in the past five years are a lot of people who have the same high school education that senior officers have and could go to university; instead, they

choose joining the police as a patrol officer. That is a risk in itself; they can't exercise all of their talents; only a few can travel through the ranks and become higher rank officers with more responsibility. Not all of them. And, this is a concern for the organization: how to coach people in their careers.

But, police work itself has become more demanding than it was 20 years ago. People in the Netherlands are becoming more assertive. They expect more from the government in general and the police. They are more outspoken and they expect a lot of police officers. Another development that you can see is that the government and the police are becoming more and more performance driven. You can see that in the contracts being closed between the Ministry of Home Affairs and our police management and in contracts being closed between police managers and individual police officers. Performance in terms of the number of arrests that the officer makes, the number of tickets that have to be written, quality aspects; all kinds of performance are being identified and written down. It's a big development.

CTG: Would you say that most of the performance criteria are more crime control oriented?

MB: Yes. I think so.

CTG: That would seem to raise some interesting questions about where community policing fits in.

MB: That's a good point. This is a good time to explain how our organization has developed since we have implemented the regional police departments. It is evident how all of the things are connected with each other. Especially the organizational change that we are going through at the moment, in which we are becoming more process-oriented.

And how that relates to community policing and the way that we are developing as a department in Rotterdam.

One of the things that have changed is the responsibility for the police. Before 1993, police management was organized on a national level. The Minster of Home Affairs and the Minister of Justice would control the police budget. At the local level, the mayor was the head of police and responsible for public order and the public prosecutor was responsible crime control. The police department itself was organized in straight columns with one division for uniformed police, one division for crime control, and some administrative divisions. And there was not a lot of connection between those columns. After the reorganization in 1993, we became a regional police department and there were a lot of changes because all of the different departments prior to 1993 had to become one organization. All of the self-supporting, small departments around Rotterdam of about 25-80 officers considered the big department of Rotterdam (3000 officers) as a bit of a threat; Rotterdam would become a dominant element in the new regional department. There were a lot of cultural differences and some of those differences are still noticeable today in the organization. For instance in my District, that used to be two different municipal police departments and three groups of State police. They were mixed together within a short period of time; the officers were still running around in the blue or white shirts and they drove cars that looked like a State police car or a municipal police car. It is perhaps unique to this District, which is the farthest from the centre of Rotterdam and it geographically the largest - about two-fold of the entire region.

One of the reasons for the national reorganization of the police was the organizational scale of the different departments and their disability to cooperate

effectively. On the one hand, it was necessary to upscale the different police departments because many of them were very small and they could not survive on their own. By regionalizing the police structure, cooperation was improved. On the other hand, there was the matter of downscaling: the basic police tasks were organized into smaller areas, more at a neighborhood level. Every district had four or five areas and those areas were very self-supporting, delivering general police service, with team policing. There was integral management responsibility on a district level. And so the columns disappeared and the District commander was responsible for everything, including the operational aspects, personnel, organization, budget – you name it – he was responsible for it. So there was a very strong decentralization of management from the (now regional) Chief of Police to the District Commanders. Don't forget that prior to that situation some of those districts used to be autonomous police departments (or combinations of departments) with their own chief of police. Former chiefs of police now became district commanders, while the Rotterdam chief of police became the Regional chief of police. So a new hierarchical structure developed.

The area of crime investigation was (and is) organized at three different levels. The area-teams themselves were responsible for minor crimes such as small frauds and thefts; on a district level there is a separate unit for serious crimes such as rape and murder, and on the regional level we have one unit for organized crime. This model has existed for the past nine years. About three years ago, we started a new development where we tried to organize ourselves into working processes. We still have the Districts, but the organizational structure within the Districts has changed. We now have four

major working processes: community policing, crime investigation, intake and service, and direct response.

One of the reasons for doing this is that, for decades, we have tried to get community policing off the ground. But we saw that the number of calls for service has increased over the years and all of our attention was given to immediate response to calls for service. So, we did not have any capacity to invest in community policing. We did have some community policing officers, but in small numbers and with a limited responsibility. And so, community policing was very low profile. We invested in the quality of intake and service, through call centers, professional front-desk personnel, civilians who are good at what they do. We professionalized the intake process. We mathematically appointed the number of officers within our region who do the intake service. At the same time we had a very mathematical approach to determine the number of officers who will respond to calls for service by measuring the number of calls, the times the calls come in and by setting quality goals such as maximum response time. It is a very strongly protocol working process. Every district was given a number of officers to do this type of work. The reason for this mathematical approach was to generate as much capacity as possible for community policing! We built new community policing teams – small teams of about 11-25 officers whose only task is community policing in their own neighborhood. So they don't get held up with calls for service and they are not drawn from the street to do deskwork or reception. So now, we can finally invest in community policing and develop this working process. Those are the key features behind our most recent organizational change. It is a complex re-organization process of which we now reach the final stages. In October of this year [2003] our Regional College

(similar to your police commission), which is all of the mayors in our region who are responsible for the police budget and the division of police capacity, has made the final decision about the number of officers I will have in my district, divided over those four working processes.

CTG: Would you be involved in providing to the Regional College documentation from your District to support your request for a specific number of police officers?

MB: To support the re-organization process the Chief of Police hired a company that specializes in measuring work for police organizations. It took them about a year and a half to do this. They measured the number of calls for service, the number of inhabitants, crime statistics – in all about 200 measurement points were used to allocate the police capacity into the processes and the districts. In every district, the local mayors were very anxious to get as much police capacity as they could. Some mayors have the sense that the city of Rotterdam attracts a lot of police capacity (obviously Rotterdam has a lot of problems that the police have to deal with). This led to an interesting discussion with the Mayor of Rotterdam, who also is the Chair of the Regional College.

On October 15 [2003] we finally had a decision and now we know what to deal with and how to reorganize our districts and that is the process I am now involved in. I have to deliver a new plan for the organization of my District before December 1. Yesterday I spent from 8:00 in the morning until 7:00 in the evening with my District Management Team arguing how to divide the positions and officers over the different neighborhoods and processes. But it's fun and it's a nice process, but with the reorganization, next April [2004] every officer will be told what his new position will be and so there will be a lot of commotion.

CTG: Would you say that, from your experience in observing North American police departments, particularly in looking at community policing, the structure that you have outlined that the Dutch police have gone to – with a dedicated community policing section – is it your view that this is a more effective way to go rather than trying to have one patrol officer do everything?

MB: I think that given the situation we had in Holland, officers had no time left between calls for service it has been necessary to introduce this maneuver. And already we can see the good developments coming out of separating teams and areas for community policing jobs. They are much more dedicated to problems in their own areas and in their own neighborhoods instead of racing from one call to the other throughout the entire district. That was the situation we had.

When I compare our developments over the last year to the things I saw in North America, especially the departments I visited that were selected on the basis of their developments in community policing, I think that we still have a lot of area to cover and things to develop. Especially in terms of real problem solving in cooperation with external partners.

We also talked about performance orientation, another development I see in our organization. It is good because you can see the immediate effect. The performance in our district this year in some areas is about 200% of our performance last year in terms of the number of arrests made, tickets written. We perform a lot more just by making explicit the things that we as managers expect from our patrol officers, by quantifying performance targets and setting goals for the individual officer. And in my position, I know exactly what my Chief of Police expects of me.

We used to have police management meetings and about 80% of the agenda was about organization, personnel, and procedures; we hardly ever talked about police work. Now, once every month, we have what is similar to a COMSTAT meeting. It is not as strict as the meetings in some Eastern American police departments, because we also use it to compare things that we have tried and to learn from each other. That's a good development. But every month, there is a chart on the wall with all of my performances in red or in green, and I have to explain why things are in red and what I am going to do about it. And I have similar meetings with my management team and with officers representing the different community policing teams and the crime investigation unit about our goals and targets.

CTG: It sounds as if you are adopting private sector practices.

MB: Yes. This is a big change in our department. And that's a big concern on my part. I really like the process orientation but - and I will be speaking with my Chief about this - we must be aware of other developments. When I look at problem-solving – real problem solving takes time. And when you have the constant pressure of providing new cases to the public prosecutor, you need to take care that you have enough time left to analyze problems, to look out for partners you can work together with on that problem because that way of policing does not immediately contribute to the number of arrests I have to make or the number of tickets I have to write. That's something we have to be aware of. At the end of the day, our goal is not to make as much arrests as possible but to make it safer in our communities.

CTG: You were mentioning that there have been increasing demands from the community and previously, you and I have discussed the differences between North

American policing and the Netherlands not only in terms of community expectations and whether or not the community may have unrealistic expectations, but also the potential role of the community as a partner in solving some of these problems or finding other ways to deal with them rather than relying upon the police.

MB: Yes. That's still a big difference between our way of policing and the society in North America. I think we are developing ourselves. We used to think that the police was the only one dealing with safety in our society. We have started a development at the national level recognizing the responsibility of local governments and other partners, but it is developing very slowly, very slowly and not nearly as fast as I would like to see. And the contributions of citizens themselves is very low profile still. But if there is a safety problem we tend to see it as a police problem instead of giving it back to a neighborhood or to a community and asking them how we can help them because it is their problem. It is still not as developed as I would like to see. And that is one of the things on my agenda – how to commit citizens to deal with their own problems and also commit local governments in this process. Because I think they could have a big responsibility in the total process.

CTG: Because, in the long run, this approach could reduce policing costs. An economic argument could be made to the mayors that there is a need to address the causes of why problems are happening and if the community can be partners in the process, it might reduce the demands that the public makes on the police.

MB: One of the differences that I recognize between Holland and Canada is our relationships with neighborhoods and the way that citizens approve or disapprove of police officers. What I saw in Canada was that the community really liked to work

together with the police, where in Holland the police are seen as being there to deal with problems – the view is "when are you going to do something for me?"

CTG: Why do you think there is this difference in police-community relations? Is it cultural?

MB: Yes. That has to be a large part of the reason. But also police image. Our reputation is different than the reputation of the police in Canada and America. One of the things that I noticed in Canada as well as in Holland, there is always more work to do than we have police officers. So, no difference there. And both countries think about what we shouldn't do. But the difference starts because of the fact that the police in North America are very aware of the things they tend not to do anymore. Because they think of the effect of not doing those things has on the relationship between citizens and police. Whereas, in Holland, we look at that problem in a more business-like way: what kinds of work cost us a lot of time and can be provided by other partners and we just drop it. But there are types of work that, in my opinion, really contribute to the relationship between citizens or groups of citizens or local government on the one hand and police on the other hand. To mention one example, school adoption programs, for instance. Here in Holland, we have chosen that (American) model, which is very good, but now you hear more and more the consideration that teaching is not a police job; teaching is a teacher's job. So what are we doing in the schools. Whereas, in Canada, police departments recognize that parents of children see that a police officer contributes to the safety of their children and they like the police. So, there is a different way in approaching this problem.

CTG: It's a matter of having officers in the schools to work with the counselors to identify at risk kids, a partnership approach.

MB: You have to prioritize. You have to make choices. You can't do everything. But, in my opinion, we have to really look at the effects of not doing things anymore. So, we have to make the right choices and this, in my opinion, deals with our relationship to society. And I think that the police in Canada are more aware of that effect than we are.

CTG: What is the relationship between the police and the visible and cultural minority groups. Has that changed over the years and have their been specific initiatives designed to address concerns?

MB: Our population has changed enormously in Holland over the last 30 years. In the 60s and 70s, we had a lot of people from Turkey and Morocco come to Holland to take low level jobs and in the 70s, 80s, and 90s, you see a lot of people from Surinam and the Dutch Antilles – from former colonies – come to Holland. We are a very open society for refugees. When you look at the population in the bigger cities, 50% or more is not Dutch so we have a very multi-cultural society and this obviously has an effect upon policing that society.

Next to that, I see that there is a lot of individualization, a decline of social control in the bigger cities, and the connection between the police organization with that society is challenged because of these developments. What we do is special diversity programs, for instance, in recruitment. Because as a police department you have to be a representation of your own society and we have a multi-ethnic society and so we should have a multi-ethnic police organization. But we don't have that. In Rotterdam, 50-60% of the population is not Dutch and when I look at youth, we have all Black schools; some neighborhoods are 90% Turkish, or Moroccan, or Surinam. But when I look at the police department, I think about 13 or 14% of our department is multi-ethnic. So, we have a

white department in a multi-cultural society. We do have a lot of female officers – about 30% of our officers are female. We did a lot of recruitment programs for women and we succeeded with women, but we haven't succeeded yet with persons from minority groups.

CTG: One of the issues I wanted to ask you about, related to external challenges to Dutch policing, is the development of the European Union and the open borders. In your experience, are there more challenges now because of the open borders or what kind of capacity is being developed for European Union police collaboration and cooperation. Where does that all stand in terms of the "new Europe."?

MB: I think it is a difficult area. What you see is that we don't have external borders anymore since we are part of a larger Europe and this leads to free border crossing that helps drug trafficking, arms trafficking – for example arms from the former Yugoslavia are very easily transferred into other countries in Europe and with that comes a lot of violent crime from Eastern Europe, organized crime, trafficking of arms, drugs, gambling, Mafia-like crime, prostitution, extortion. One of the things that is a big European concern when you look at Holland is the fact that we have a very liberal view on drug use and prostitution and therefore sometimes we are bit of an outcast in Europe. What you see is that it is very difficult to synchronize legislation on drug use or drug trafficking.

On the other hand, I have seen an increase in cooperation. For instance, by dealing with liaison officers from different countries here and Dutch liaison officers in those other countries. And in cross-border crime investigation, especially with respect to drugs, with Belgium, with France, with Germany, with England. We have the possibility,

for instance, to continue a pursuit when it crosses a border, to do police observation in other countries with our observation teams. So that helps a lot especially for the regional departments near the country border. You see a lot of cross-border cooperation.

CTG: So, Belgian police could come and do an operation in Holland?

MB: Yes, within certain limits, that is possible. There is a lot of drug trafficking between the north of France, through Belgium, into Holland and backwards. And we have one police team consisting of French, Belgian, and Dutch officers who address this problem. Ten years ago, this would be unheard of.

We also cooperate with several foreign police departments. We have a regular cooperation with Hungarian police, we have an arrangement with the Baltimore police department, with Shanghai, just to exchange observations and experiences. We have a structural cross-Channel conference for our sea harbor police with the sea harbor police of London, Hamburg, Le Havre, Antwerp. Regularly, police managers from harbor police departments see each other and exchange information.

One of the other developments in our organization is that we have attempted to make better use of intelligence and information, growing more into an information-led police. One of the more well-organized police departments on that aspect is the regional police in Kent, UK. We have developed a steady relationship with Kent and, at certain times, police officers from Rotterdam go to Kent and learn about the way they do police business there. And we have people from Kent coming over and explaining things to us. And so, our international orientation has improved over the last years I would say.

CTG: How have things changed since 9/11 in terms of the way that the police look at their role in the Netherlands?

MB: You see a high emphasis on disaster management, crisis control and security and safety issues. Particularly in the first months after 9/11 these issues were very high on the political agenda. Both government agencies as the police were very much concerned with it. Special government departments for nuclear, biological and chemical terrorism were built. On the regional and local level, you saw improvement in interagency cooperation between police, fire departments, medical services, and the military. And so, there have been a lot of developments in this area.

Rotterdam has the largest port in the world, and a lot of very high-risk chemical industries. And so there are a lot of potential terrorism targets in our region. One of the things that I do besides being a District Commander is that I am a Commander in what we call the GBO, which is a command structure for special police operations that overrides the regular responsibility of the District Commander. So when we have a very big event or football match, or riots, or a disaster in our port, we call on this command structure. I have one of the positions in this structure. It's a regular command staff with a General Commander, a Chief of Operations, a Chief of Logistics and a Chief of Intelligence. Due to 9/11 our command staffs have been especially focused on potential terrorism and disasters.

CTG: Finally, how has your educational experience at the Netherlands School of Public Administration and the study tour that you took of North American police services as part of that program affect how you view policing and the way that you do your job in the position that you are in?

MB: The study trip has given me much more inside information about the way in which North American police departments do business. The struggle that they have had within

each and every organization to develop community policing. At the time they are ahead of us and I have seen a lot of things that we can learn about – things we should do and things we shouldn't do. This helps me a lot in my job. I can share this information with colleagues. I can talk about it in my own district. Only recently we had a three-day conference for which we invited all officers of the district. In three groups every officer could attend a Quality Day to talk about the quality of work in our District and because I was the new District Commander, they let me do the afternoon program. This gave them the opportunity to see me up close and vice versa. And I talked with them about community policing and aspects of reputation and image. Things that are very important in Canadian policing: problem solving, cooperation, partnerships. And this is directly related to my study trip. So, the study trip was very, very helpful.

And, the study in general teaches you to look at organizations and complex problems in another way, to see organizations and how they relate to other organizations, to other partners and their interests. You learn how they interact in networks and how to be able to influence that. It gives you inside information on how administration is organized in Holland – national, regional, and local. It helps me for instance in how to position myself in my group of mayors. I have nine mayors in my district to deal with, which is the biggest number of any district. And they each have their own interests and agendas. This study has helped me in how to deal with those processes.

CTG: Thank your for sharing your experiences, observations, and insights into policing.

MB: You're welcome.