

## Questions for ex-Rhodesian combatants

### Background info:

1. Where were you born. If not in Rhodesia, why did you decide to emigrate? And why Rhodesia? What were your family links with Southern Rhodesia? What is your nationality ?

*Born in South Wales; father worked on contracts and for Overseas Development throughout the commonwealth. I finished schooling in South Africa, where I was exempted from national service. I had no intention of serving in the South African forces as I was opposed to apartheid, but I believed in the threat of communist world domination and wrote to the British army and the British South Africa Police. The British army sent me a brochure about Sandhurst and the Rhodesians sent me a brochure and an application form and shortly thereafter an air ticket. If the British army had been as efficient I would probably have joined a Welsh regiment.*

*Rhodesia because there was a war on and I wanted some adventure. I think I also wanted to stay in Africa, having lived most of my life there.*

2. What were your family links with the UK (emigration from the UK; length of time in Rhodesia; schooling/university/profession).

*Both of my parents were Welsh. I lived in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) as a very young child. I spent my childhood in Uganda, Malaysia and the UK as well as most of my teens in South Africa. I met several young Rhodesians through my sister at Durban University and liked their approach to life.*

3. Where did you consider to be 'home'?

*I have no sense of any particular place I would call 'home'. Probably because I have travelled all of my life.*

4. What were your formative experiences? (family/school/environment/peer group)

*Dragged all around the embers of empire. Father conservative liberal, mother probably a moderate middle-class socialist. Learned to fight during a brief career at a secondary modern in South Wales. Had friends from all sorts of race groups. Went to liberal private school in South Africa and*

*came to loath apartheid. Once got detained by the South African Security branch.*

5. What did you think of white immigration/immigrants (post war? Post 1965?)

How did you view South Africa? And Afrikaner residents in Rhodesia?

*I had a sense of moral disintegration in the UK. My father despised the Wilson government and some of this rubbed off onto me. I come from a middle-class/professional background and was shocked by the conduct of some working class immigrants I met in Rhodesia and South Africa but was comfortable with middle class immigrants. Don't you dare call me a snob.*

*I've always loved South Africa and generally got on well with Afrikaners. I learned to skirt around issues of race and always hoped that South Africa would survive beyond apartheid. I got on well with most Rhodesian Afrikaners although I found many of them ridiculously racist. While still in Uniform Branch I got into a serious argument with an Afrikaner farmer who referred to one of my African Constables as a 'police boy'. One of the most admirable people I have ever met was a retired South African army Lt. Col who had left South Africa in the fifties out of disgust at apartheid and who farmed near the last place I was stationed.*

6. When did you join BSA Police or Reserve? Why did you join? What did your family think?

*1974 as a regular. Because I wanted to fight the perceived 'Red Peril' and what I saw (and still see) as terrorism and I wanted some adventure and experience. My family were bemused. They had expected me to go to university to study to become a journalist.*

### **As combatants:**

7. What/whom did you think you were fighting for?

What values/'standards'? (Western? European? British?)

*I thought that Britain had behaved disgracefully towards Rhodesia and sought to redress some of these wrongs. I was extremely pessimistic about the ability of Africans to govern – and events in Black Africa sort of vindicated this view. In short I thought I was fighting for western, perhaps*

*old fashioned British standards and got gulled by the Churchillian rhetoric. Having said that, I still believe Britain is responsible for the mess in Zimbabwe today.*

8. What/whom did you think you were fighting against?

What formed your outlook?

Media/friends/music/religion?

Was there political indoctrination/regular discussions from your commanding officers?

Political discussions with your mates?

*I thought I was fighting to hold back the tide of anarchy that came with black government and an insidious terrorist organisation. (No – seriously) I placed it firmly within the context of the ‘Cold War’ being fought by surrogates in Africa. At college I was given a Rhodesian propaganda booklet by a Rhodesian friend, with very graphic pictures of terrorist murders which got me quite fired up; nothing worse than you see coming out of conflict zones today.*

*Originally I was quite dispassionate (ever read Yeats’ ‘Irish Airman’? ‘Ulysses’ was my other thematic poem) but some time in 1976 I realised that I hated my enemy.*

*Most of my friends could not believe it when I joined the BSAP. We were all liberals by South African standards and most had no desire to do military service. My joining was a complete departure from my life style hitherto.*

*I used to argue about politics with most of my superiors and peers when in the Rhodesian forces and my liberalism was a source of amusement. However, it didn’t not stop me being selected for Special Branch. I am on record as having said, in about 1977 that if I had been black I would have been a ‘terr’.*

9. How much understanding did you have of the war?

What were your sources of information?

How important do you think the international environment (Cold War) was in shaping your attitudes to the war/liberation struggle?

What did you think of your commanding officers?

What did you think of the 'protected villages' scheme?

*I believed, and still believe that I had a better understanding of both the general and particular than most of my peers and superiors. I had read Mao, Lenin, Thompson and Kissinger and anything else I could get my hands on.*

*I viewed everything within the context of the 'Cold War' and considered Mugabe and Nkomo to be surrogates of the communist powers. I also had a strong sense of the African context. Remember that this was the time of Idi Amin, Julius Nyerere's disastrous Ujaama experiment and general chaos and corruption in Zambia, Congo etc. My sources of information largely dried up in Rhodesia, although I kept as abreast as I could. I did catch myself being sucked in by our own propaganda.*

*I respected some of my superior officers and held others in complete contempt. I was fairly impressed by Territorial Army officers who were usually intellectually superior to their regular counterparts.*

*I had mixed feelings about the protected villages. I felt hugely sorry for the native population and often got very depressed, particularly on R&R when I had time to think about it. In sum though, I recognised them as a tool in counterinsurgency campaigning. I also recognised that they made the locals terribly vulnerable, particularly when Internal Affairs began to fail to police and protect them properly.*

10. How far do you think that the war helped to create – and sustain a sense of Rhodesian identity?

What other factors do you think were important?

How much had you travelled outside Rhodesia?

*I only arrived in Rhodesia after the war had 'hotted up', but I sensed that it had started to galvanise a siege mentality. Sanctions were more important in forming a Rhodesian identity I feel. I used to find Rhodesians very insular and found the cartoon map of Rhodesia that appeared in a magazine, totally exaggerating Rhodesia's size, very amusing.*

*I had lived all over the world – most members of the BSAP were recruited from abroad until some time in the 1970s and so it was probably the least insular of the services.*

*The war also caused white emigration – ‘taking the gap’, we called it. People left for a variety of reasons; the immediate threat, extended call-ups and often just lack of faith in the future.*

11. How much importance did you (and your family) attach to African nationalism?

How far did you differentiate between black Rhodesians and the ‘terrorists’?

What was your relationship/contact with Rhodesian black troops?

How far did you feel it to be a tribal war? Racial war? Civil War?

Ideological war?

At the time why did you think the ‘terrorists’ were fighting? How far did you differentiate between ZIPRA/ZANLA & UANC?

How far do you think this affected HOW the war was fought?

*My parents were very saddened by the news and images from countries they had lived and worked in and I had inherited some of this. I had formed the opinion that African nationalism was a recipe for disaster and that Africans still needed a couple of generations to prepare them for government. I blamed the Americans in particular, for forcing the Europeans to decolonise too quickly.*

*I saw the native population as pawns in the conflict. We didn’t know the term ‘human terrain’ but I realised that this was the core of the conflict. I was on record (as above) as saying that if I had been black I would have been a nationalist. I became very frustrated at tribes people for their inertia but I realised that they had no choice and were completely vulnerable. I had no compassion whatsoever for terrorist collaborators although I did manage to ‘turn’ a few. Again, I used to get very depressed when I had the time to think about it.*

*My relationship with African troops was very intimate. I commanded a recce section that was predominately black and had one of my white section leaders removed because of his racist attitudes towards the men. I also became the focus of aggression/derision by a superior officer while attached to auxiliary/special forces – I believe because of his blind hatred of the*

*auxiliaries and his perception that I was too liberal in my dealings with them. Fortunately he was replaced a few weeks after my attachment by a more easy-going officer who let me get on with things. It was the only time my (relative) liberalism ever gave rise to any real nastiness.*

*I saw the war as tribal, racial and ideological – but I did not see it as a civil war. I saw it in the context of insurgency/counterinsurgency and as part of a continuum that included Malaya and Kenya, which was part of the reason I was very alienated from Britain at the time and for several years afterwards.*

*I believed, and I still believe, that Mugabe in particular, considered the war to be politics by other means. I believed Mugabe simply wanted to usurp Smith as ruler of the country and predicted pretty accurately the style of his future government. I was shocked at ZANLA's ruthlessness and their systematic use of terror compounded my belief. I never operated against ZIPRA and could only form an opinion based on intelligence briefings and sitreps. I believed Nkomo to be a more genuine (sort of Garibaldian) nationalist. My dealings with the UANC were fairly cordial, if patronising on my part, and the Pfumo re Vanhu auxiliary group I was attached to were loyal to Muzorewa. I recognised the Muzorewa government of 'Zimbabwe-Rhodesia' as a puppet government but I was quite comfortable with this. I had become quite cynical some time during 1977.*

*I believe I understood why individual black people went to Mozambique to join ZANLA; frustration at being second class citizens with very few chances of advancement, maltreatment at the hands of security forces, desperation and seeing a Mugabe victory as the only means of bringing the war to an end, poverty...*

*I saw the conduct of the war itself as a process of spiralling violence with control of the will of the people as its central factor. I had skip-read Clausewitz and don't believe I fully understood the 'Remarkable Trinity' but had an inkling that this was what was at play. I remember expressing the opinion in a bar in Salisbury that 'their (the black tribes people) lives are f.....' My friend replied 'you've let the war get to you...'*

*I believe that ZANLA understood the concept of balance of terror far better than we did, and used it far more effectively. From the security forces the locals faced possible beatings and burning of their huts, from ZANLA they*

*faced certain torture, maiming and murder. My views on this have not changed. The locals were simply haplessly caught up in this cycle of savagery and were its prime victims.*

## **Leaving:**

12. When did you leave the BSAPolice ?

*10 June 1980. I resigned 3 days after the election results, when I realised that there were no plans for a coup. I had at one stage considered withdrawing my (3 months) notice, but events while working as second in command of a police station made me decide that I had to leave.*

Did you leave Rhodesia/Zimbabwe?

*Mid-July 1980 – after I had spent my pension money.*

Where did you go to? Was this temporary or permanent?

*South Africa – first to my parents' home and then moved around the country trying my hand at various jobs. Everything was completely temporary and I was in a complete state of flux. I spent a large part of 1981 on a 'working holiday' in the UK and Europe, before eventually getting a job in Johannesburg in late 1981.*

When did you settle in the country you now live in ?

*Settle? I came back to live in the UK in 2001 but I had served briefly in the RAF 1990-1993. I still suffer from chronically itchy feet.*

How did you find conditions and the situation of the country you settled in?

*When I moved to Johannesburg in 1981 I made contact with a large group of old comrades in the same situation as myself. We had all found reasonably good jobs, drank furiously and nurtured each other. In retrospect, since none of recognised the need for therapy and had no support structure, we gave each other a kind of informal therapy. Life for a young white man in Johannesburg in the 1980s was very good whatever your*

*emotional baggage. I'm afraid my opposition to apartheid had practically disappeared and I simply accepted it as the status quo.*

How different did you feel from the other residents? Why?

*I and my fellow ex-Rhodesians considered ourselves abstractly superior, harder; and gave up trying to explain ourselves to Johannesburgers in particular. Being a young white in Johannesburg was a bit like being a young Londoner, except you didn't have to do your own washing and ironing. So while we integrated, we considered our new friends slightly pathetic. English-speaking South Africans had an ambiguous relationship with the Afrikaner government and we found them frivolous and self-seeking. We soon became like them.*

What did you think of the 'end of empire'?

*Ever read Yeats' 'Byzantium'? I was extremely angry and blamed the western powers, the UN and Britain in particular. I still believe that Rhodesia's accelerated demise was a tragedy brought about by realpolitik and still believe that the conduct of the monitoring force, at the behest of the British government was a scandal.*

With hindsight what is your view of the struggle in the 1970s?

*Unmitigated tragedy and part of a tragic period in history in which we are still living. I still don't know whether it was for better or worse that I was involved. It was a consequence of irresponsible abandonment of artificially created states that were not ready for self-government and that the seeds of the tragedy were sewn at the Treaty of Berlin. Having said that, I still don't think colonialism was an unmitigatedly bad thing. I watched my father build roads, dams and clinics and felt I had tried to carry on as he had. Yes, paternalistic, but I continue to believe that gradual transition in the 60s and 70s would have left Africa much happier.*

13. After leaving Rhodesia did you join any other Police or Military service?

*I spoke to the South African army but decided against it. During 1981 I walked into an army recruiting office in England, but found I was still too*



*angry to be able to wear a British uniform. I joined the Police Reserve in Johannesburg in the 1980s as a reserve detective, which was quite good fun. In 1988 when I had finished an Honours degree in Johannesburg I decided that I would like to become a police officer again but did not want to join the SAP as a regular. I travelled to the UK, was accepted by the Met but joined the RAF as a Provost Officer. After I left the RAF I returned to South Africa in 1993 and joined the SAP reserve again and remained a reservist until I left in 2000.*