

Questions for ex-Rhodesian combatants

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Background info:

1. Where were you born.

Scotland

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 ?

I always wanted to go to 'the colonies' and probably as a Policeman. I suppose because of the books I read as a boy and all of the influences one was exposed to at that time, when the British Empire was still a force to be reckoned with. I had a cousin by marriage who was a senior Kenya Police officer. I had an interview with him but in the end chose Rhodesia. I had no family links with Rhodesia. I am British.

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

My family links were all with the UK (although I had relatives in South Africa). I left school early and was working in London when I applied to Rhodesia House. I spent 21 years in Rhodesia.

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

Once established in Rhodesia, and especially after marriage and starting a family, I considered Rhodesia to be 'home'.

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

My family was middle class and I attended a Grammar school. My peer group was drawn from cousins, school and other friends, the Boy Scouts.

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

I think white immigration to Rhodesia provided the country with the solid base of professional and artisan people it needed in order to fulfil its potential, particularly post war. I don't think the calibre of immigrant was the same quality after UDI.

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

I was prejudiced against the apartheid system before arriving in Rhodesia (and therefore decided against emigrating there). I regarded South Africa as being necessary to Rhodesia's survival and therefore was prepared to overlook my misgivings about its political system. In the course of my duties I worked/liased with many South African officials and always had good relations with them. That did not blind me to the iniquities of their system and hence I chose not to follow so many other Rhodesians by moving there when I left Rhodesia. In my limited dealings with Afrikaners in Rhodesia, I always found them to be straightforward, trustworthy and honest. They were mostly railway workers, artisans or farmers (with a few in the Police). There was a tendency for other Rhodesian Europeans to look down on Afrikaners because of their perceived lower standard of education and culture. I think the Afrikaners were aware of this and, coupled with the old animosity dating from the Boer War and before, it sometimes made for awkward situations.

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

I joined the BSA Police in 1956. I joined for the reasons given already: an ambition to go to the colonies, probably as a policeman. My family (although, or perhaps because of, containing lawyers) did not have a high regard for the Police in general (although they knew nothing about the Rhodesian Police). I think they regarded my decision to emigrate to Rhodesia as quite radical, although they did not attempt to discourage me.

As combatants:

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

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

I considered I was fighting to preserve civilised standards (“equal rights for all civilised men”). I personally was not fighting to preserve a particular government or type of government but was strongly motivated against terrorism. I believed in the gradual transfer of power to the majority.

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

I was fighting against African Nationalists who were committed to extremism to obtain their ends and who were serving the interests of Soviet and Chinese communist expansionism.

What formed your outlook? Media/friends/music/religion?

What formed my outlook was my background as a Western European raised in a liberal democracy, my experience as an intelligence officer and my knowledge of geo-politics. The media played its part but one was conscious of the use of propaganda and rhetoric on both sides

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

I was not aware of this if there was. I very much doubt it, as we were a non-political organisation.

Political discussions with your mates?

I don't recall any serious discussions/debates with colleagues. Of course, we would talk about topical events but I think we were all pretty much on the same wavelength and consequently there was little to discuss.

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 consider I had a full understanding of the war because of the privileged position I held at the centre of events as an intelligence officer. My sources of information were the daily flow of intelligence and an awareness of current events in the world at large. The international environment was very important in shaping my attitudes. The war/liberation struggle was greatly influenced by external pressures. The so-called liberators were trained, financed, armed and manipulated by the communist bloc, while the Rhodesian Government and people were under constant pressure from external institutions such as the UN, communist, third world and 'non aligned' countries and left wing/liberal groups.

I respected my commanding officers for the most part but there were a few whose outlook was clouded by an inability to adapt to the unprecedented circumstances. The Protected Villages scheme suffered from being fine in theory but unworkable in practice.

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 think the war helped greatly to create and sustain a sense of Rhodesian identity, coupled with the feeling that we were isolated and underdogs but could hold our own against whatever was thrown at us ("Rhodesians never die"). Latterly it must have been obvious that it would be impossible to maintain that identity in the same form. It was inevitable that morale would decline with the worsening and eventually terminal situation and the increasing level of emigration. Having said that, it is evident that the sense of Rhodesian identity is very much alive among the ex-Rhodesians where-ever they have settled throughout the world.

Up to the time of leaving Rhodesia, I had travelled in Western Europe and Southern Africa.

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?

I attached considerable importance to African Nationalism, given that its activities were my main preoccupation as an intelligence officer. My family gave it no more importance than the general run of the population (who were generally apolitical apart from staunch support for the Government in its handling of the political situation).

I differentiated totally between black Rhodesians and ‘terrorists’ and was always struck by the generally good black/white relations, despite the worsening security situation.

I had some contact with black troops on operations but this would be limited to observing them while in contact with their officers. I had high admiration for their professionalism and loyalty. I had much closer contact with my own black colleagues and the Police Support Unit (but again through their commanders). I had nothing but the greatest respect for these men and their unstinting work ethic and loyalty under the most trying circumstances for them.

On one level it was an ideological war, but this was not a factor that impacted on daily events. It was not a tribal or a racial war and in the beginning not a civil war but was becoming so by the end.

The terrorists who began the ‘struggle’ were genuinely motivated by the desire for majority rule and believed that they were denied the political means to achieve this (i.e., the vote); and therefore they decided this left them no alternative other than armed struggle. I think their political beliefs did not originally extend much beyond this but they were thrown into the arms of socialism and adopted the tenets of Marxism/Leninism and Chinese communism as the countries living under these systems were ostensibly (cynically) on the side of ‘democracy’ and majority rule.

Of course I differentiated between ZIPRA/ZANLA and the UANC because it was my job to know what they stood for. I believe this affected how the war was fought on both sides. On the Government side, we benefited for many years from the rivalry between ZAPU and ZANU (“divide and rule”). Secondly, ZIPRA’s lack of determination (when compared with ZANLA), although better trained and perhaps equipped than ZANLA, made it possible to contain the threat they posed. This meant that for some time it was possible to counter the threat from ZANLA without having to fight on two fronts. On the terrorist side, ZIPRA, as Russian surrogates, were more rigid and conventional, whereas ZANLA adopted the fanaticism and ruthlessness of their Chinese Communist masters. Like the Communist Chinese

before them, ZANLA in the end had the weight of numbers to ensure their dominance both in the field against the Rhodesian security forces and later when dealing with ZIPRA.

Leaving:

12. When did you leave the BSAPolice ?
Did you leave Rhodesia/Zimbabwe?

I left the BSAP and Rhodesia in February 1977. .

Where did you go to ? Was this temporary or permanent?
When did you settle in the country you now live in ?

I went to the UK (Scotland). This was not intended to be temporary but I left the UK after nine years to work in the Middle East. After 12 years I retired to Majorca, Spain in 1998.

How did you find conditions and the situation of the country you settled in? How different did you feel from the other residents? Why?
What did you think of the 'end of empire' ?
With hindsight what is your view of the struggle in the 1970s ?

I found it very difficult to settle down in Scotland, even though this was my original home. I found people and their attitudes much different to what I had known in Rhodesia. 1977 was a time of economic down-turn in the UK and it was very difficult to integrate. Even though Rhodesia was much in the news then, people not un-naturally were only interested in their own situations. If they did have any interest in Rhodesia, very often they were persuaded by the media line that white Rhodesians were racial supremacists and undeserving of any sympathy.

Being an unreconstructed imperialist, I believe that 'end of Empire' was sad but inevitable.

With hindsight (although I had my misgivings from UDI onwards), I believe the struggle came at too high a price, especially as it ended in defeat for the forces of law and order. Ian Smith was proud of the fact that "UDI bought 15 years of stable government", but I would say the cost was too great and it led directly to the present dire situation in Zimbabwe. It may have been a forlorn hope but I believe that astute political manoeuvring could have prolonged the inevitable for long enough for the nationalists to be mollified and gradually introduced to

the democratic system, all the while keeping the British Government and world opinion on side, so that any 'terrorist threat' would have been handled with their approval and backing.

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

I worked for 12 years in Bahrain Public Security, retiring with the rank of Lieut.-Colonel.