

Questions for ex-Rhodesian combatants – David John Sloman

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 ?

I was born in Plymouth, UK. After leaving school I joined the Devon Constabulary as a cadet with the intention of making the police my career. A colonial police force sounded to me as having more of a challenge with wider opportunities than a UK force and both Rhodesia and the BSAP sounded the better option out all other colonial forces that I made enquiry of. I had no family links with Rhodesia or any country outside the UK, in fact, I was the first member of my family to leave the UK. I hold dual British/South African nationality.

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

Answered mainly above. I served in the police in Rhodesia and later Zimbabwe from 1957 to 1983.

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

Rhodesia! However, Zimbabwe as it stands at the present time is no substitute. My family connections with the UK are restricted to cousins and my own extended family group were born in Rhodesia and now live in SA or Australia. I must therefore consider SA as my "home".

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

Brought up in a typical UK family household with my upbringing centring on local and church matters; I was an only child. I attended a public school and took part in the combined cadet force which doubtless schooled me as regards a disciplined and regimented life.

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 no feelings, one way or another, as regards white immigrants pre- or post-war. During my time in Rhodesia I did not see SA in a good light: their politics seemed to be hostile to everyone, not just the black population – generally a repressive regime. The Afrikaner residents of Rhodesia that I came into contact with caused me no offence.

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

Joined the BSAP as a constable in 1957 and served through the transition to Zimbabwe in the ZRP until 1983, retiring as an assistant commissioner. I joined for the prospect of a more challenging career than that of a UK police force. My family knew little of Africa and only raised objections of a personal nature.

As combatants:

5. What/whom did you think you were fighting for?
What values/'standards'? (Western? European? British?)

As police officers we were defending the rule of law. My personal political view was that the British government had let Rhodesia down in not granting dominion status, they having been swayed by an air of liberalism then sweeping Africa, and that only Rhodesia had values and standards worth supporting.

6. 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?

The majority of my police service was spent in Special Branch so I had a good idea what we were fighting – African nationalism and black power. Anyone living in Africa could see for themselves what was happening to standards and value elsewhere on the continent. There was no political indoctrination from commanding officers. Doubtless as colleagues we discussed what was happening.

7. 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?

Obviously because of my position I had a good understanding of the war and in the main my sources of information were based on the job itself and what I encountered on a daily basis. Generally I considered the international environment hostile and thus relied on my personal understandings and beliefs. The only objection I had with my senior officers was that many were of the "old school", brought up on horse

patrols and quiet policing, and were thus somewhat out of touch. In principle I considered the protected village scheme to be a step in the right direction, though I had no direct contact with its administrators.

8. 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?

The war created that “togetherness” that was the Rhodesian identity and was visible in both blacks and whites. The Rhodesian diaspora is witness to that today. I have travelled extensively outside Rhodesia/Africa, both whilst a serving police officer and later in civilian life.

9. 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 understood African nationalism but I also realised that it was mainly a power struggle – democracy, the land question etc were irrelevant. Black Rhodesians were intimidated by terrorists/nationalists and generally had little interest in politics, witness the views expressed years after the formation of Zimbabwe that “things were better under Smith”. My relationships with serving black policemen, and soldiers, was always good. Initially it was an ideological war that by force of circumstance became a civil war.

Leaving:

10. When did you leave the BSAPolice ?

Did you leave Rhodesia/Zimbabwe?

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

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

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 ?

After Zimbabwe independence in 1980 I remained in service until 1983. My decision to stay was a combination of my belief that despite what we had gone through we could make a go of Zimbabwe and my personal circumstances. Immediately I retired from the police I moved to South Africa: I was a widower with two teenage children; I had been to Australia and was not then enamoured with it; and was then on the verge of re-marrying and mutually we decided neither Australia nor the UK was suitable for our extended family.

We settled in well in SA, having established civilian employment there before I left Zimbabwe. My views on a repressive SA government remained but my employment did not bring me into contact with any Afrikaners of influence. I did not attempt to learn Afrikaans, or an indigenous language, but remained in English-speaking companies. I had no problem with other residents of SA that I came into contact with – other than it was clearly evident that the black population were on the whole hostile, an attitude that I had not encountered before in Rhodesia. I was disappointed to see the end of the Empire because I felt, as I still do today, that the white man has generally little to be ashamed of. I look back now on the struggle of the '70s and consider that we did our best. It was a waste as regards the loss of life but as we see Zimbabwe today I firmly believe we have been vindicated. Watch this space as regards South Africa!

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

No.

D.J. SLOMAN,
Assistant Commissioner BSAP/ZRP (retd.)
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