

Derek Humberstone

Derek was born in the UK and emigrated to Southern Rhodesia as a child with his family in 1947. He had left school in 1945, aged 16 and joined the Navy afterwards. Married a white Zambian woman. Left Zimbabwe and the Force for South Africa in 1981. Joined the South African Air Force and lived there for one year. Returned to Zimbabwe to work in security. Left Zimbabwe for the UK in 2003.

This is Doctor Sue Onslow talking to Mr Derek Humberstone at the Victory Club in London on Tuesday, 5th May 2009. Derek, thank you very much indeed for agreeing to talk to me. I wonder if you could begin by saying please, how did you come to be in Rhodesia in the 1960's and 1970's?

I emigrated to Southern Rhodesia with my family in 1947. I had an aunt in Rhodesia who was a school teacher. She went out there originally to school teach and then she married a South African and they set up their home in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia. After the war my father wasn't in too good a health and my aunt said "look, why don't you come out to this lovely country of Southern Rhodesia?" So we said "well done", we did. So my father, brother and myself, we left in 1947 for Bulawayo and my mother and sisters, they arrived later and we set up our home in Bulawayo with our relatives. So that was how we arrived.

What was your father's background before 1947? Had he served in the war?

Yes, well he was in the Red Cross, in the British Red Cross and he did a lot of work with wounded soldiers. He wasn't a combatant but he was involved with a lot of colonial troops and Polish troops who used to come to our house. So that was what he was doing during the war. He was employed with Shell-Max BP, that's his main job. That's when his war records moved to British Red Cross.

Where had your family lived during the war?

I was born in London but we were evacuated to Leicestershire.

Where in Leicestershire?

Two places. We moved to Evington first of all. We were billeted out with very nice people and then when my father and mother came up from London, they got their own house in the centre of Leicester in a place called Highfield Street. We arrived at the time when Leicester had their bombing. They only had one spate of bombing during the war so we left our bombing in London and we went up to Leicester and we hit there in the first week. To us it was nothing. All the Leicester-ites, they were saying "God, it's bad isn't it?" and we were laughing, anyway, so we went from one blitz to the other.

Nobody said “it’s your fault, you’ve brought it with you”?

No! So that’s how we arrived in Leicester. Then after the war we went back to London.

How old were you when you emigrated to Rhodesia?

(00:02:59) I was seventeen

Where had you done your schooling before then? In Leicester?

In Leicester

And then after the end of the war you went back down to London for two years?

No, I left school in 1945 and then I took up a position with the Royal Research Ship Discovery which was in London. It was a Sea Scout training ship so like all boys, young boys of that age, I wanted to go into the Navy and my father, being with Shell said “right, you do your apprenticeship and then we’ll find a position for you on the tankers”.

So you were sixteen at this point or eighteen?

Sixteen, so I was going to become...go in for a career in the Navy and I started off by being on the Research ship in London.

And how long did you stay on that for?

The end of ’45 to ’47

And you were based in London the entire time there? On the cadet programme?

Yes

And then you headed to a landlocked country?

Yes and loved it from the moment I arrived. My father, brother and myself, we were the first to go out there. When we arrived in Bulawayo which took us two weeks by ship and three days by train, I loved it from the moment because we went straight out into the bush to a place a hundred miles north of Bulawayo.

Which was where?

Called Matapa Mine, it was not too far off where Lobengula was buried. It was right in what we called a Shatin and I loved it from the moment I arrived.

What did you do when you arrived there?

Well, my uncle had a contracting business but I broke away and I started farming. I became what was called a farm assistant and I went to a place called Fort Victoria where my manager was an Afrikaner and I was billeted with him to become a farmer. Then I broke away from there and I went to another farm in Marandellas where I did tobacco.

(00:05:22) But then you were running your own show by this point?

No, no I was only a young boy. In those days if you wanted to become a farmer, you had to start at the bottom and they called you a farm assistant. So to get that experience like when I was down in Fort Vic, we had dairy and we were growing crops. So I had to take my turn at milking the cows, take them out into the fields with a horse with no saddle. They said if you're going to learn to ride a horse, you've got to do it without a saddle. So I went into the bush with the horse, no saddle looking after cattle and when we came back in the afternoon...

I've done that, but I had a saddle!

Then when I came back in the afternoon, I had to do my turn at milking the cows and clean up afterwards and then went doing other chores. Then when I went on the tobacco side it was just the same. The assistant on a tobacco farm has a rather tough life because you had to go out into the lands early in the morning to start reaping. Then you went back after you'd filled up your wagons, you went back to your barns where it had to be tied then loaded into the barns for curing. Then after the barns had been loaded, they were sealed and then the temperature was controlled by water. Being assistant, I had to...it was my job to get up odd hours to go and check that the boilers were properly stoked up and the temperature was right, that was part of the curing process.

So you did that throughout the 1950's? You were working your way up through the farming ladder?

No, no, that was up until 1949. Now while I was doing this farm work, we used to have chaps coming round on motorcycles, very well turned out, smart uniforms and they were treated like royalty by the locals. And these were troopers from the British South Africa Police and I thought "hey, this seems a good life, these guys are treated like royalty". At that time, they also had conscription in Rhodesia and I got my papers to be called up to serve my time in the Army and I thought, 'well, I'd rather go into this rather smart uniform rather than go into the Army.' So one day when we went into Salisbury, that was the nearest place for the cattle and the tobacco sales, I went up to the police depot and in my ignorance I said "can I see a recruiting sergeant?" and the Inspector I spoke to said "we do not have recruiting sergeants in the British South Africa Police", so I got taken down a peg. So anyway (he said) "what do you want to do this for?" I said "well, I want to join the police if I can". He said "what do you do?" I said "well I'm a tobacco farmer" he said "you're nuts, people are wanting to leave the police to go and be tobacco farmers.

Now you want to come and join the police?" Anyway, to cut a long story short, after usual vetting, I got accepted into the police in November 1949.

What did your parents think of you signing up for the police?

Thought it was wonderful

(00:08:46) Actually preferable to you doing your national service in the Federal Army?

Well they said "you're old enough to make your own decisions and the police had such a good reputation out there they said "fine, go ahead". They accepted that I was going to become a policeman.

Just to go back to your family, where was your brother at this point?

They were still at school

Oh right, so he's your younger brother?

Yes

And your sisters?

Yes, they're all younger than me and they went to school in Bulawayo.

I'm very struck that your farming experience when you first arrived in Rhodesia was quite influenced by the Afrikaner community. You talk of your uncle who was a South African, you talked about going and working with an Afrikaner farmer?

Yes well my first manager was an Afrikaner and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Now, how long had they been there? People talk about the Afrikaner community in Rhodesia as being quite insular, and a relatively provincial farming community. But views of 'the Afrikaner' are also measured against the apartheid regime in South Africa that people had left South Africa to go to Rhodesia. I'm wondering if the community that you met was reflective of that at all?

Yes well to meet the Afrikaans...

Break in interview

Derek Humberstone Part Two

Derek, you were talking about the Afrikaner community that you knew in Rhodesia in the 1950's?

Yes, well my manager was an Afrikaner and I was treated like a member of the family. I had no problems whatsoever, they're very religious but also very hard working. There were a lot of Afrikaners, farmers in the Fort Victoria area. How they came I don't know, I should imagine that they came up with the Pioneers but the farming community was very strongly supported by the Afrikaners in Rhodesia. But they were, in my opinion, good Rhodesians, they were good folk.

(00:10:58) You joined then the BSAP, because of the uniform, in the early 1950's. What was your early experience of serving in the BSAP? You obviously did your training which lasted for approximately four or five months?

Five months

Including equitation, but then you could ride beautifully since you'd...?

Oh yes but riding with the police, I had to keep my knees in, stiff upper lip...

And you had a saddle

And I had a saddle. That was the difference! Yes, thoroughly enjoyed it.

Where were you posted to first?

Bulawayo, first of all. I was placed into what we called the Town branch and I wanted to go into the District Branch. So after serving for about five or six months in Bulawayo, I managed to get a transfer into the district branch and my first station was Plumtree in Matabeleland.

So were you a patrol officer there?

No, no it was constables, the rank of patrol officer only came later, years later. So my first district station was Plumtree

And how long were you there for?

I can't remember because the most you could stay at any station was two years because they kept on moving us around. From Plumtree I went on to another district station called Mangwe which was a two man station.

Was that drastically different then from Plumtree?

No, no it was about an hour's drive from Plumtree, The work was mainly investigations and actually you were "jack of all trades" because not only were you doing police work, they didn't have a very established civil service so the police were required to carry out other jobs like immigration. After hours we ran the immigration post. Then there was cattle sales, you went out and checked the brands on the cattle, checking the stalls.

So you were really doing responsibilities of the ministry of home affairs, of internal affairs?

That's right, although we had internal affairs but they were called the Native Department in those days.

Did your brother follow you into the BSAP?

(00:13:29) No, no, he did an apprenticeship on the Rhodesia Railways and then when the war started, he was being called up then he joined the regular Army and he joined the Rhodesian African Rifles.

Towards the end of the 1950's when African Nationalism started to really raise its head in Nyasaland, what did you think about the accelerated transfer to African majority rule?

Well I went up to Nyasaland with a police contingent

During the Emergency?

Yes, yes I was stationed there. We went to Blantyre and then went all around and whilst we were there, there was no problems at all.

How long were you up in Blantyre?

I think it was about three months

And how large was the contingent that came up from Southern Rhodesia?

We went up with a company of RAR and ourselves, I would think were a company strength. We had the armoured car section, the RAR and the police, we were about a company strength.

What did you think of Doctor Banda, Malawi and Nationalism at this point?

Well I didn't personally meet Banda but listening to people who interviewed him, they thought that he was a liar and a person not to be trusted.

Did you place much weight on African Nationalism, or did you see it in fact as a construct and agitation by a small minority?

Well, we could see that Nationalism was slowly creeping south because before we went to Malawi or Nyasaland, we had a recruiting chap from Kenya come down to try and coax some of us to go to Kenya at the time of Mau Mau. I was offered a position there but I said "well fine but I'm on a permanent post here. If I get transferred to the Kenya police will I become on fixed establishment lists?" "No, no only on contract"

So you're saying that the white colonial government in Kenya, the governors' office was going down to Rhodesia to recruit policemen to manage Mau Mau?

Well I don't know whether they came down from Kenya. They asked anyone who was interested to go up and come up for an interview and I was one of them.

(00:16:18) **How many went along, do you remember?**

I don't know

Do you know if a sizeable number actually went up to Kenya?

I don't think so. I know one of my colleagues went up and he said it's a good thing I didn't go up, because it wasn't all that it was made out to be.

Was the BSAP, as far as you knew, actually paying attention to what was going on in Mau Mau?

Oh yes, we sent officers up there at the time of Mau Mau to find out what was going on. They came back and they briefed us and said "look, this is what's happened up in Kenya. It's going to spread down here so let's start getting ready for it". So we had lectures and we started briefing our rural community, the farmers, said "look, what's happened in Mau Mau could come down here".

How much was this a coordinated programme directed from BSAP headquarters in Salisbury?

I don't know. Well it must have been sanctioned by them because it was the high chaps that came round and briefed us, you know like homestead identification signs. So if your farm was attacked, if you lay out certain materials underneath your homestead identification, aircraft flying around, they can see that you needed help.

Do you remember when approximately this was? I know Mau Mau lasted 1952-1958

No, I can remember quite clearly in 1957 having a briefing from one of our chaps, a chap by the name of Jimmy Mitchell, Inspector Mitchell. He came round and gave us a briefing and showed us how to set up road blocks and how to deal with them if they were attacked by Mau Mau. So we were starting to get prepared for it in the 1950's.

So when urban violence started to accelerate in Southern Rhodesia at the beginning of the 1960's, you then were using policing techniques, counter insurgency approaches from Mau Mau?

Well we not only had Mau Mau, we used to send guys down to Botswana when there was problems when Seretse Khama got married to Ruth

Williams. They had problems down in Botswana and a contingent went down there. I didn't go down there so our chaps were going down and they were getting experience or they were getting knowledge of what was happening all around us. I think our guys did the right thing by sending them there and getting experience and getting our guys prepared.

Where were you in the early 1960's then? Were you still in a rural Matabele...?

(00:19:24) No, in the 1960's I transferred from Bulawayo up to Mashonaland.

So you were in Salisbury?

Yes

In '62/'63 as Federation was breaking up

That's right, yes

Do you remember what you thought of that at the time?

Well, I thought it was a silly mistake because the benefits of federation were benefitting all the three territories especially the locals. It created a lot of employment, there was freedom of movement between the three territories, Malawi or Nyasaland which was the weakest country, they were benefitting from the mines in Northern Rhodesia and the agriculture from Southern Rhodesia. So it was a good thing and I think it was wrong. I think the Nationalists, they won the day and I don't think they got the help from the British government.

Talking about Britain and the British government, had your family maintained close links with Britain throughout the 1950's?

No, when we went out to Southern Rhodesia, people had been here a long time. They were referring to England as "home" but we referred to "home" as Rhodesia because that's where we were living.

I can see why your brother and your sister would do that, but how about your parents?

Yes, my father never went back to England

He never went back to England?

No, never came back to it at all. He was quite happy, we had our own home there in Bulawayo.

How about your mother and her family?

Yes, well when my father died out there, then my mother did come back during the seventies. It was rather late in life when my mother came back.

Do you think she felt Rhodesia was home?

Yes

Or did she feel that England was still in some ways home?

(00:21:29) No, we severed all our ties with England

So you didn't stay in touch with family back home or cousins, aunts

No, well we communicated with them but Rhodesia was our home because we felt that we'd been kicked in the teeth by the Brits so we said "well to hell with it". When I was 21 I was so patriotic towards Rhodesia I became a Rhodesian citizen and I took out a Rhodesian passport when I was 21.

That is 1956/'57, when you are 21?

I was born in 1930 so...When I was 21, I can remember I was at Nyamadhlovu out in the country and I was so proud when I got my little certificate to say I was a Rhodesian citizen. I took my passport and I was very proud to show it.

When you say you regarded Rhodesia as home, at that point in the '50's, was your family encouraging other members of your family to emigrate to Rhodesia at the time?

No, no we didn't have much...I had a couple of cousins over here. In fact I did have a cousin who was also working over here. No, we didn't encourage them but we said "well if you want to come, come, because it's a lovely country".

Before UDI then, what did you think of England and the Queen?

What did I think of?

England and the Queen

Well we had a lot of support for the Queen but not for the British politicians who we distrusted. It didn't matter if they were Labour or Conservative, as far as I was concerned you didn't trust any of them because they would let you down but the Queen, we still had a lot of respect for the Queen. Like when the National Anthem was played, you'd stand up. If you got on a ship and the people would respect the Queen, not like in England when the cinemas closed, everyone went to rush out before the National Anthem was played because they didn't want to stand up.

But I'm curious, how much can you say then that Rhodesia in the 1950's and before UDI was actually 'England in the bush' in Africa. English values, English ways of schooling, English outlook: in other words your value system had been shaped by England?

Well yes, as far as loyalty was concerned to the Queen but not to the government because we found that you couldn't trust them. It doesn't matter who it is whether it is Margaret Thatcher or anyone, we didn't trust any of them because they were going to sell us down the river.

Where were you at UDI?

(00:24:33) I was in Salisbury and when UDI was declared, I was put in charge of the prison because we didn't know what was going to happen. So I was sent up to look after Salisbury prison and it was quite an experience because walking round with the prison officers, the male white prisoners came up and they said "we have told Mr Smith that if he needs any assistance from us, we are prepared to stand by him" and I thought "great".

Did you let them out because of that?

No but it was nice walking round most of the prisoners and I was a policeman walking round the prison, there were probably some people who I had put there and there's no animosity. In fact lots of them, especially amongst the white prisoners said "well if there's any trouble we're going to stand by you guys".

And how about the black prison population? Did you have any discussions with the black prisoners there about what was happening?

No

So there weren't any rumbles of trouble between black and white?

No, nothing at all

How long were you responsible for the prison?

Oh not for very long because things didn't happen. There was a lot of rumours going round that the Brits were going to send paratroopers up and everyone and we thought 'well if they come, they're going to get a pasting.'

Did you expect Britain to use force?

Well, there was rumours that they were going to come but we thought well if they come, they come. If they did come they will have a fight.

What rank were you at this point?

I was an Inspector

So you'd married?

Oh yes

Your family were settled in Salisbury?

Oh yes

But did you talk about UDI with your colleagues about whether this was a positive thing, or if it was in fact a dangerous gamble or...?

(00:26:49) No, no we felt that if the Brits can give independence to Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia, why could they not give it to Southern Rhodesia which had been a self governing colony since 1923 and during the wars, they sent a lot of troops to fight for England. We felt, well, why are you denying us the opportunity of giving us...continuing as we are instead of holding us back? So we felt bitter towards the Brits for not recognising us as an independent state as they did in Malawi or Northern Rhodesia.

Just moving on to the bush war as it developed, one of your colleagues has described it as "sliding into war". That it was a very gradual process whereby the white Rhodesian community became increasingly aware of guerrilla activity, of terrorist activity but that it was a slow process. Would you say that squares with your recollection?

Well it was an on-going process. They were using the communist tactics copying Mao Tse Tung, their policy was: if you control the rural areas, the town will fall. So we put a lot of effort into trying to secure the rural areas by going out on patrol and reassuring the locals that we would give them as much protection and look after them as far as possible. And this was done by units like PATU, Internal Affairs, Guard Force and lots of other units.

So when do you think you realised that there was a war going on?

Well we realised that it was going to get worse when Mozambique collapsed.

Ok so we're talking '74/'75?

Yes, I'm not quite sure of the dates. Because Mozambique, we did get a lot of assistance from them, the Portuguese. They had conscription and they were sending men out from Portugal to do their National Service in Mozambique so that helped to stabilise Mozambique. But it's only after they had their coup that Mozambique then started to go under so then we realised that we were going to be in for a rough time.

Between 1965 and 1974, where were you posted? Were you still in Salisbury?

No, I went down to Umtali

How much contact did you have in Umtali with your Portuguese counterparts?

I didn't have any...yes I did...I did have contact with them when I went on operations. But the main contacts were carried out by Special Branch officers, they were our link.

So Special Branch were the liaison with the Portuguese counter insurgency forces?

(00:30:26) Yes

What about you, as a regular policeman at this point?

We had, on the military side, we had contacts with the Portuguese military but we didn't become involved in any of their operations, not from my side. I know there were joint connections but that was on the Army side, but not on ours.

And there was also joint connection on the Air Force side with Operation Alcora with the South Africans as well.

Yes, we were police, the Army and the Air Force, they did a lot of externals but we were police so we were in the country. We were looking after the border areas, we were taking the pressure off the Army and the Air Force so they could go and do their externals.

How much do you think in the early stages of the war, the police was really the senior service but also the front line of the growing insurgency?

That's right because we had very strong police reservists who were very strong in the rural area and most of them were farmers so they would have been called up to carry out patrols in their particular area and so relieving the military to go on externals.

How often would people serve in the reserve police? How long would their stints be? Coming away from their farming occupation and doing their reserve duty?

I think that depended on the type, a minimum of seven days because we didn't want to disrupt their lifestyle and also they were farmers

The backbone of the economy

Yes, so seven days but then we'd say "look, if you want to volunteer for a longer period, it's entirely up to you".

Based at Umtali, as you were, how large was the number of police for which you were responsible?

Well, down in Mutare I started getting promotion and the job that I was doing there was training the police reserve in counter insurgencies. So I was responsible for the whole of Manicaland province police reserve but I can't give you an idea of the numbers. There must have been between 500 and 1000 but that's throughout the whole province.

Were you responsible for formulating this counter insurgency training or was this something that had been formulated in Salisbury and you were implementing it? I'm just wondering, (00:33:18), as a senior police officer by this point, how much was your input?

Well, I had experience in the formation of PATU and I also served as an officer with the Support Unit. Have you heard of the Support Unit?

Yes I have

So PATU and Support Unit and also my experience in Malawi so when we formulated any operations, it was done on a joint basis together with Special Branch. We wouldn't do anything without Special Branch being involved because they had the information. If they said to us "look, there is a problem in that particular area, can you guys go down there and do it?". So it wasn't just myself, I had other officers who were advising us, telling us which direction to move.

But you weren't involved in Ground Coverage?

Oh yes, at one time we had Ground Coverage but all the information that we got from the Ground Coverage and all other agencies were all fed back into Special Branch. We didn't keep the information to ourselves

No, it was passed on where it was processed

We passed it on, yes

I'm just picking up on the last remnants of the Portuguese experience in Africa. What did you think of the Portuguese officers that you encountered? The Portuguese police, the Portuguese farmers that you met?

I'll give you one example; I was in the Portuguese mess on the border and the officer from Portugal, I think he was a University guy and he had his white troopers and when he invited us for lunch and my crew and I, we felt embarrassed because we were having this lunch and all these white Portuguese troopers were sitting down in a circle behind you and I said to him, the officer, "can I please buy your troops, can I buy them a dinner?" He said "no, no they're ok" and I wouldn't have done that to our chaps. I would never have had a meal and left our guys out, I just wouldn't have done it. There was a distinct division between the officers and the lower ranks. I think they treated their lower ranks like peasants. Well they were peasants from

Portugal and the way they adapted themselves I would say they were peasants.

So what you're arguing then was, in your experience, Rhodesian society, and the Rhodesian BSAP was much more egalitarian?

Oh yes

As the war developed, what did you think you were fighting for?

(00:36:28) Independence and stability but we realised that it was going to be a wasted effort. We realised that in the long run, if we could... if the politicians could work together with the Nationalists without interference then there would be a chance but we knew that there would never be cohesion between the two main tribes, the Matabele which was Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe and his gang. Historically the Matabele were always on the upper hand, they came up from Zululand, they settled in Bulawayo and they used to go out on regular hunting trips into Mashonaland country so there was this tribal conflict that the Matabele did not like the Shonas. In fact they've got a name for them called "maswina" and that means "our dogs".

And what did the Shona call the Ndebele?

I don't know but if we wanted to stir up anything..."you're a maswina, are you?"

Oh, light the touch paper and stand back!

Yes, but we didn't do that. We knew that the Matabele did not like the Mashona and we knew this.

Ok knowing that, did that influence the BSAP recruitment pattern? Did it have certain preferred areas of recruiting its African police in?

I couldn't answer that because I never was involved with the recruiting but I think there were certain areas where they were taking recruits from because they were good material. There's one area I think it's some way in Fort Vic, probably Chibi, they used to recruit chaps from there.

Was there a particular effort though to keep Shona speaking and Ndebele speaking African kinsman apart? Or was it a genuine inter-tribal force, the BSAP?

Well we tried to mix up but we tried to send the Matabele into the Mashonaland area and the Mashona would not be... I don't think the Mashona would be all that trusted down in Matabeleland as events in the 1980's prove our point. Because when they sent in the Fifth Brigade and they carried out terrible massacres in Matabeleland, terrible.

Oh the Gukuruhundi. Yes I've heard figures of those killed range anywhere between 10,000 to 30,000. In fact I was talking to a Doctor, a medical trainee who was seeing in the hospitals, coming into Salisbury, those who'd been terribly wounded and maimed. He said "no, it was very widely know what was going on in that particular area".

Yes

(00:39:58) Just going back to my question about what were you fighting for? You said stability and independence

Yes

But were you also fighting for European standards? Were you fighting for a certain way of life?

Yes, we wanted to...we were hoping to get a civilised way of life

What did you mean by that?

Well, before the whites went to Rhodesia, Rhodesia was virtually barren. There was no agriculture; there was nothing there, no infrastructure. If you looked at photographs of Rhodesia at the time of the Pioneer Column, the country was barren, it was bare. But when the European pioneers came up and they started to develop, the country started to flourish and so we felt that Rhodesia was the breadbasket of Africa and we had a very good agriculture. We used to supply high class quality tobacco and maize and food and cattle, it had a very good agriculture because we realised that if the farms were removed, the country would revert to their subsistence levels because in their own culture, they only grow sufficient crops food for their particular family. They don't want to grow it for everybody else because that's the way their culture is. So we realised that if these Nationalists came in and they upset the farming community, there would be major problems especially on the farming side and that's what happened today I'm afraid.

What did you think you were fighting against?

Communism because we had briefings from our Special Branch chaps and we saw the tactics that these terrorists were using. First of all they were called CT's, communist trained terrorists. Because of the political wording, we were not allowed to refer to them as CT's so we called them...I forget what else we called them but we could see that the way they were going, the Nationalists, the way they were operating, it was part of the communist doctrine. We read books, have you heard of the Mao Tse Tung's Red Book?

Yes I have

Well we could see that was going to happen

Did you differentiate between China and Russia, the Soviet Union I should say, at this particular point?

The Chinese had a... their infiltrations were increasing and they'd overtaken the Russian ones. The Russians seemed to divert their attention more towards the Belgian Congo and Angola whereas the Chinese, they were concentrating on Rhodesia.

So you felt you were fighting communism?

(00:43:38) Oh yes

So you felt that the African Nationalist fighters, the CT's as you refer to them, were being directed and managed by an external force?

Yes

Break in interview

Part Three

Derek, I'm interested in how you viewed your opponents in the bush war. To what extent did you see this then as a guerrilla army, aided, abetted and directed by external hostile forces? Did you give any credence to African Nationalism? Did you see that perhaps white minority resistance might be radicalising African Nationalists?

I felt that the Nationalists were being influenced and encouraged by the Chinese and the Russian communists.

What about the level of violence, because it was a particularly brutal war?

It was and it was directed in the main towards their fellow blacks and some of the atrocities that they committed. I don't know if you know in fact I would say that even worse than what happened in Kenya. You've heard about these women who had their lips taken off and all those things? The Nuns that were murdered, Elim Mission in Mutare where they raided the mission and any of the survivors, they were brutally killed. The shooting down of two Viscounts by Joshua Nkomo and then his thugs went up and they murdered the survivors. Shooting of the ferries from Kariba going up and then the Elim Mission, Fatima Mission in Bulawayo, that was Roman Catholic, that was also attacked by them. We called them "shoot and scoot" because they wouldn't take on the police or the Army or the Air Force because they knew that they would get retaliation. So they went for soft targets and the soft targets were farmers, miners and schools. A lot of the school children were abducted and they were taken away.

I'm curious to see how that then influenced the level of violence, the level of brutality which was greater than actually was reported in the

press. Whether that made you feel; they are violent, they are communists, communism is violent, communism is brutal. I'm just curious what connections were made in your minds at the time? Some historians have said "it was a language; it was trying to "up the anti". It was trying to terrorise the local population so that they feared the guerrillas more than they feared the white led security forces".

(00:47:09) Oh yes, I agree with that. We went in softly and gave them food and medical and look after them. Terrorists would go in and they would rape the women, steal their food and burn their huts down and assault them.

From your point as a senior police officer though, didn't you see a brutalisation of the white security forces? Young men brought in for a short amount of time and the experience of that violent bush war and then when they went back into civilian life, the rupture of six weeks in, six weeks out. Did that cause a progressive brutalisation as well?

Towards who?

Towards the African...towards people who were suspected of being guerrillas. Towards communities that were suspected of supporting them.

No, I cannot recall where there was any upsurge or violence towards the Africans by members of the security forces. We still maintained very high standards and we dealt rather severely with anyone who did commit those acts.

How would it have been dealt with? Through military discipline?

Well if it had occurred, that person, if he was in the military, he would have been taken before the courts. We did not tolerate any form of violence and if it did take place...

So you're suggesting though that that would be an isolated occurrence? That that was unusual?

Yes, off hand, I cannot think of any incidences where there was any form of retaliation and there was plenty of opportunity for it, especially amongst the farmers. But I do not recollect...and I served in a lot of those areas, no.

How much information did you have about the wider environment of what was going on? People draw a picture of Rhodesia at this time as an isolated landlocked country in the middle of a bush war and that it was relatively insulated from the outside world. Did you pay attention to what was going on in the international environment?

Oh yes

What were your sources?

Well we thought that we were not getting the support from the Brits and if anything we were getting more support from people like the Australians.

Break in interview

(00:50:16) My question was about your awareness of the wider world outside Rhodesia?

I think we had more support from the Australians and from the Americans. We had a lot of Americans who served in their special forces who had come out to join us. We had a lot of Australians and New Zealanders because we would also travel, we had our leave, there were no restrictions on what...the only restrictions that were imposed was by Britain.

And did you travel?

Yes

Where did you go?

I went to South Africa, I came to England, went over to Europe, Spain, France

But you said you'd taken out Rhodesian citizenship when you were 21. Was that a problem, travelling on your Rhodesian passport?

No, in fact I was rather proud of it. I used to say "here's my Rhodesian passport" and a lot of people said "well done" and that was the attitude. No, I had no problems with my Rhodesian passport

How often did you travel? Was that an unusual occurrence to go abroad?

No, in the police we used to accumulate our leave. We had six days a year, that was leave but normally you can accumulate so every three years, four years, we used to accumulate three or four months leave and then we would go down to the coast and that's about it.

So your wife, was she Rhodesian or was she from Britain originally?

My wife was from Zambia. I have great delight in telling people, I married a Zambian but white.

Her family was from Northern Rhodesia?

Well she was born there, her family were born in South Africa, worked up into Rhodesia and he was on the railways and my wife was born in Livingstone, Northern Rhodesia.

When do you think that you felt that the war was going against the Rhodesian security forces? You talked about the politicians not getting

together with the African Nationalists; you suggested that there was a time when you came to think “the writing’s on the wall”?

I think after South Africa pulled out. I think the South Africans were pressurised into putting pressure on Smith. Then we realised, well I realised (00:53:12) that our days were going to be numbered because Mozambique had gone. That was controlled by, can't think of the names at the moment but that were covered by the local terrorists

FRELIMO

FRELIMO and the only other outlet was via Durban and once the South Africans put the pressure on us, our days were numbered.

What was your experience of the South African contribution to the Rhodesian bush war? You mentioned before we started that you had knowledge of South African policemen, the SAP coming up?

And we were grateful for any assistance that we got from them. They sent up companies of police to help because they feared that they were going to get the same. They wanted to get their chaps with the knowledge and experience, so they came up. We had a lot of support from their Air Force.

So what was your personal experience though of SAP members?

Well I had a company of them. We took them through training and we told them what to expect in the bush. They were deployed in the bush but they came under contact straight away. Although we appreciated them they were, in some cases, rather a liability.

In what way?

Well they were much older than our chaps. There was no youngsters amongst them and I thought it was wrong to send up mature Bobbies, policemen up into the bush war.

So these were urban Afrikaner policemen that they had sent up?

Yes

How did they integrate with the BSAP? How were they regarded?

Well we didn't integrate a lot because them came up, they were met by their officer, the BSAP officer, they were taken straight on to training and from the training which was, I don't know how long it was now, then they were taken straight up to the operational area. So they didn't have any contact with the normal people, they were taken straight into operational.

And how long would they serve in the operational area for?

I think it was six weeks, six weeks deployment

That must have been a brutal introduction?

(00:55:50) It was for a lot of them. They sent their own Padre up but I found it frustrating because Sundays, you don't stop for war but the SAP, that is their day to go to church and rest so I couldn't deploy them on a Sunday because there was a fear that I would upset the Padre. It was very good to have that but when you're fighting a war, if you've got to deploy on a Sunday, you've got to deploy on a Sunday.

So there's a certain degree of superiority then I can detect here from the BSAP towards the SAP?

We were grateful for them coming up, we were grateful for their contribution but I think that they could have been more selective in sending the younger men up.

You also made reference to their uniform?

Yes, they had a peculiar type of uniform which stood out amongst the others. Theirs was a...rather like the arctic camouflage, there were lots of pale colours in it, ours was dark but it's quite distinctive.

So it stuck out in the bush?

Oh yes

So they would have been targeted by...?

They were targeted, yes and it would be quite horrifying. Some of the incidents you'd see involving the SAP were quite horrifying. They were caught in all sorts of peculiarities.

Was there a particularly steep learning curve then? Did they learn from their mistakes?

Well I don't know because we only had them for six weeks

So there's a language barrier?

No, there wasn't a language barrier because I know we could get through in basic Afrikaans, they were bi-lingual and their officers who came up with us, they all spoke English so there wasn't a language barrier.

But then, shall we say, there's a sartorial barrier, their uniforms were very different from yours, there's a cultural barrier?

Oh yes

If their experiences were much more urban than fighting a bush war?

Yes

(00:58:21) I can see why they would have been of political advantage but limited benefit.

Yes but we were grateful for any help that we can get. Now I believe we had a contingent from the Foreign Legion

You did

I never saw them but I know that they came up and we were grateful because we were stretched. We were six weeks out, six weeks in and it affected your family life and a lot of families, they suffered.

Well it's interesting, I've talked to members of the Rhodesian Air Force and Bill Galloway commented that "no, no it didn't disrupt family life" I said "but wait a minute Bill, you went back to base. Your family was there in a supported community. People who were in the police, people who were in the Army, it was a far greater rupture in terms of family life" And then feeling alienated when you come back from the bush war into your family life can cause huge stresses, huge traumas. You can understand why they might want to get back to the bush to their mates.'

Well without mentioning names, I used to have some of my chaps would come to me and say "look, please send me up, there's another deployment, please send me" I said "ok fine" because we were only too pleased to get guys. Then his wife would come and see me "hey, you're a real shit aren't you? Why are you sending my husband up again?"

And he'd asked for it

Yes there was that side

You mentioned the Guard Force?

Yes

Can you fill in some more details about that?

Well, the Guard Force mainly evolved with the protected villages. They did a good job, they had to make sure that when the gates were closed and the compound was secured that there would be no infiltration by the terrors.

Did you have any experience of the Guard Force? I realise that this was 'Infernal Affairs' being responsible for them.

Yes I did come across them funnily enough. We felt quite happy with them, they were much elderly men, a lot of them had been in the Army or been in

other units. We felt, well, rather them look after the villages than us. We can get up, because we were much younger, we can get up and look for terrorists and they can look after the villages.

(01:00:47) What about the auxiliaries that were recruited in 1979, beginning of 1980's. In other words, to boost the governments' security personnel, this were Sithole's auxiliaries and Muzorewa's also?

What, the Pfumo ReVanhu?

Spear of the Nation

Yes, Spear of the Nation, that's right. I saw them but I've never had anything to do with them, I wouldn't like to comment. I know they did exist but what they were doing, I don't know. I thought it was just someone else's' private Army.

It was. So was that the feeling among you and your colleagues?

Well yes we said "well who are they? What are they? Someone's obviously trying to build an empire". I wasn't particularly impressed with them but I've never had anything to do with them.

So you hadn't got first hand experience of...?

No, I knew they were there but I don't know what they were doing. We had more things to worry about than...

Are you suggesting then that that actually caused some unease amongst senior members of the BSAP? Because I know that they were recruited from poor urban communities, some of them were trained in Uganda and some have argued that they were pretty much an ill disciplined rabble. Now I don't know if that's fair, but I'm just wondering whether that strikes chords with your recollections?

No, I had very little to do with them. I did see them, I wasn't particularly impressed. I don't think they had...I don't quite know what they were doing but I did think that someone's trying to build an empire.

One other question I have about the style of fighting is; you obviously were aware of the importance of shrines and Spirit Mediums for African communities and I'm just wondering did you ever try to build upon that to counteract the appeal of African liberation? I know that Bertie Cubitt of the BSAP said "oh no Sue, we never messed with anything like that, that would have been totally disastrous. We didn't try to persuade a medium to tell African fighters "you must do this" or "you mustn't do that"". Other members of the BSAP have said "actually, come to think of it, that would have been a good idea".

We knew that the terrorists were using Spirit Mediums, they knew that and we knew who they were. We would make contact with them and we would try to win them over but not influence them because they...

(01:03:41) Sorry, you tried to win them over but you wouldn't try and influence them? What's the difference?

You wouldn't try to say "you know where these gooks are and we want you to tell us what you know about them", never tried to influence them that way. We left this more or less to the Special Branch people, we knew who they were, we knew the influence that they had but at my level we just left it like that.

To your knowledge, Special Branch in fact were paying obviously very close attention because they acted as a degree of magnet for liberation units and so that gave the ability of enhanced intelligence gathering.

If we got information that there was an infiltration in an area and we knew there was a Spirit Medium in that area, we would probably put an Observation Post (OP) on the Spirit Mediums place to observe if there was any unusual activity going to and from which would suggest that he or she was in cahoots with the terrs. And if there was then we would feed it back to Special Branch.

How far do you think the war helped to create a sense of Rhodesian identity? That actually fighting, not just UDI and the laager mentality that came with that, but actually the war itself?

Well, it built up a strong Rhodesian identity as you see here because we've kept it on. To this day, I think that we were proud of what we did but also we are very sorry that we didn't get the support from the Brits. On November the 11th, the Rhodesians don't parade down Whitehall.

I know, you have a service in the shadow of Westminster Abbey instead

Yes

I've been there

So we feel that we've been extremely let down

But the war itself, the common experience of fighting, making a particular community pull together because of opposition. I'm just wondering whether actually having to fight creates a particular bond?

Oh it does

How much do you think the Second World War was also an important reference point in the Rhodesian bush war?

Well the Rhodesians, they contributed a lot to the last war. The Long Range Desert Group which operated in the desert and where Colonel Stirling sent in the SAS, the Long Range Desert Group was in the main manned by Rhodesians the same as the Royal West African Frontier Force, a lot of Rhodesians were there and the Rhodesian C Squadron SAS went to Malaya (01:06:57) during their campaign. Have you met Major General Ron Reid-Daly?

Yes I have

He's a character,. He'll be able to give you a lot of other information because he did a lot of externals

Oh yes, a man of great initiative and personal resource

Yes, well in fact the Ghurkhas and the Brits, they introduced a very good training film from the Malaya campaign called "keeping the peace, part one" and we used that as our mainstay for training our guys when our bush war started. Because what happened in Malaya happened down here. You had your protected villages, you had your patrol formations, you had the terrs so the guys that went out to Malaya, they came back and said "right, this could happen here chaps so let's get the film and start preparing for it".

The patterns of learning counter insurgency from Malaya, from Mau Mau so it's shaping not just techniques, it's also shaping mindsets?

Yes

Well, talking to members of the British Army now they say "well the Rhodesian war, it was yes, a total war but it was also an all encompassing counter insurgency campaign" because it had psychological warfare. It had propaganda; it had pseudo operations; it carried the war outside; it was fought within; it covered every aspect indeed of fighting a guerrilla campaign." Would you agree with that?

Oh yes

So 1979/1980, what did you think of, first the Muzorewa government and then the Lancaster House settlement?

Well I thought that if the Nats. had got behind and supported Muzorewa things could have been different but he was a very weak person. He was not strong. I don't think he would have stood up to Nkomo. He was a churchman.

Had you ever had discussions with African members of the BSAP on what they thought was going on? How they viewed it?

No because we weren't allowed to get involved in politics and not allowed to attend political meetings. If we did go we had to go in a private capacity.

So did you ever go into an African police mess? Obviously you had... the BSAP would have had a division between the officer's mess and other ranks?

Yes

(01:10:03) **Did you go into the other mess?**

Oh yes quite often I would go down into their mess and go into their quarters, that was part of our duty. We had a duty officer, we had to go and meet all ranks. I used to feel quite comfortable with these guys because when we went on patrol, when we went on operations you had your blacks with you and they were one of us. We had no segregation, we shared the same food, the same with our sleeping accommodation, same dangers, they were far (junior?) to us but they were equal.

So just to recap, by 1979/1980 you hadn't had any discussions with black African policemen on how they felt the politics was playing out. Well, it seems to me from what you're saying that your determination to fight on had been influenced by the fact that they'd taken part in it. That this was an interracial, or shall we say, multi racial force fighting the guerrillas? Is that fair?

Yes

Did you see then, the war in the '70's in any way as a racial war?

I would say racial plus ideological

So you did see it as a racial war?

Oh no, not a racial war, no. The blacks, I think they suffered more than what the whites did

Without a doubt, yes

They were intimidated far worse than what the whites were. They had a lot of suffering, they had a lot to lose

Was it a civil war then?

I wouldn't say it was a civil war. I would say that it was a war to try to prevent communism taking over because if they took over, the Nationalists would revert back to their tribal instincts.

But communism is the antithesis of nationalism. Communism is about communal values, it's not about tribal values.

Ok I stand corrected on that, we knew that the Mashonas and the Matabeles would never come together and there will always be this division and I believe

that is the case now. But with the Nationalists, I think they have now become unpopular because they have become greedy and they have milked the country and the houses and you've probably heard about this? So they have become number one capitalists.

(01:13:26) **Derek, when did you decide to leave Rhodesia/Zimbabwe?**

2003

So you stayed after independence?

Yes

But you talked about going down to South Africa?

I did go down to South Africa

When did you make that move?

I went there in 1980/'81, I went down there

After independence?

Oh yes, I stayed on a year after independence

In the police?

In the police but standards were deteriorating so rapidly and we were losing so many efficient people

Where were you? In Salisbury?

Yes

In Harare rather?

Yes, I was OC at Harare Central and people were leaving, we were trying to maintain standards but we were given black officers who they'd elevated, sitting next to us, to try to train them.

So were these former members of the liberation armies that were...?

I do not know that, but we could see the way it was going and I didn't like the way the standards were dropping and that's when I decided to leave. I had the telephone exchange operated by five white ladies and virtually overnight they all resigned and they were replaced by blacks. That's the worse thing you can do is to give a black a telephone because it's like a mobile phone, it's always on and they will abuse that the same as a car; give a black a car, he'll abuse it and that's what was happening.

So where did you go?

I went to South Africa

(01:15:22) And did your wife...?

Oh yes

Was that a joint decision?

Oh yes, again, they were looking for people like ourselves to go down and do all their defence stuff and I went down there and I joined them

Was that in response to an active recruiting campaign by the South African security forces?

Yes but it was never publicised, it was kept very much overt.

Quite a bit's come out about that, about the deliberate recruitment policies conducted by the SADF but also the South African Police.

Well Pete Hughes, he went into the SAP and I think that they realised what was going to happen and they wanted people like ourselves to be ready for it, to go down there and help them out

So bringing your counter insurgency techniques, bringing also your knowledge of the country. Now was this part of the counter insurgency strategy to destabilise Zimbabwe?

Yes

How did you feel about that?

I also realised that South Africa were going to have a rough time, more than what we had because you had so many different tribes in South Africa with different ideologies and you had the Afrikaner who opposed any form of settlement.

Which unit did you join?

I joined the Air Force, I joined their Intelligence side and I was quite impressed with what I saw. I could also see that it was going to be short term.

How long did you stay in that particular...?

I stayed twelve months.

Break in interview

So you were describing your twelve months in the South African Air Force in a military intelligence role.

(01:17:54) Dealing with Europeans or whites down there was different to dealing with Rhodesian whites. I felt that the Rhodesians, when they were called up, when they went on to training, they put everything into it. I didn't find that with the chaps that I was dealing with down there. I wanted to go up to South West to Angola where there was a lot of fighting. That's what I wanted to do, get up there. I wasn't content just to stay in the headquarters.

How much do you think that desire to get into a fight was a direct product of basically your side having lost in Rhodesia?

Could have been. I wanted to vent my frustration

That's what I'm wondering

Could have been but I thought well I had far more opportunity, a lot to contribute by going up to, rather than just staying in...

Contribute in what way? The support of a white minority regime that had the structures of apartheid? Which actually didn't fit in with Rhodesian racial attitudes. There are some paradoxes there

I don't know, I know about apartheid but it didn't affect me in any way whatsoever. The guys that I dealt with when I was down there, I dealt with the blacks, there was no problem at all. Does that answer your question?

Yes it does. So you stayed for twelve months and then what?

Then I went back to Rhodesia

In what capacity?

I went back. I was offered a position as a security manager in one of the big textile companies

Where was that based?

In Salisbury

In Salisbury?

Yes

So were you aware of Gukuruhundi?

Who?

Were you aware of the violence in Matabeleland?

Oh yes, yes because my mother was still down there and she used to 'phone us and say "look you know there's lots of firing, you can hear the guns and (01:20:26) bombs going off. She was living outside of Bulawayo and she said "Derek, there's a lot going on down there".

Was anything in the national press in Zimbabwe at this time about the disturbances?

Well no, I think it was being suppressed

It was, I know it was. I'm just wondering if you had picked up on anything knowing as you did from your mother about the level of violence down there?

No, we had, with wishful thinking that things were going to come right because all of our services, all the war, if we stay and support, will things come right? But it's a fool's paradise

But you stayed until 2003?

2003, yes and things were deteriorating rapidly. As I say, when the Jews leave a country you know it's time to leave. In our case, when the Doctors started to leave. That's when my Doctor, he said "Derek, get out now" he went down to Botswana to take up an appointment in Botswana. But they're rather frustrating, nice country but their culture is just totally different from what we were used to.

So how did you find coming back to England?

Well I didn't want to come back to England! Initially I tried Australia but Australia, at that particular time, they had the points system and with our age and that, I didn't qualify. Then we looked at South Africa and could have gone to South Africa but then I said "well, how long would we survive in South Africa relying on our pensions?" Then we thought, well, with the money that we'd saved, the pensions, we had lost three years because the medical in South Africa is very high, medical aid is very high so we thought, well, we've got to take the last route, come back to England. So we came back to England.

So the country that you'd rejected and felt it had rejected you actually welcomed you back?

Yes but I came back, although in Rhodesian terms I was a millionaire, I came back here and with the property and the money that we had there and the lifestyle, now I'm on benefits

Well but that's provided by the state

Provided by the state, but we're not complaining. We've got accommodation and we can walk around at night without being mugged. We can go places where there's no restrictions

(01:23:16) Why did you choose to go back to, Essex isn't it?

Because my children, they married and they came over and they're in Essex so we came back here.

So how did you find it? Having left England in 1947?

England is not the England that I knew as a youngster. I went back to Leicester and I didn't think I was in England. It's all mosques and so many...it was an eye opener. That's why a lot of the English countryside go to the villages where it's England as I knew it. But the towns, London, it's not the same that I had back in the old days.

But you feel that rural England then...?

Rural England is super but the towns...you know I was a very keen boy scout and I had my own scout troops in Rhodesia and I was a boy scout here and when I came back I thought well, I'd like to get back into scouting. I went to my grandson's scout troop and I thought well, I'd love to get back because I know there's a shortage of people for scouting and when I was speaking to the scouters and I started asking questions, like British Bulldog, that game, they said "oh no we don't do that now" I said "why not?" they said "they're going to get hurt" I said "oh well when you go out camping..."

My kids played British bulldog!

Yes, well when you go out camping and you start digging, what about the knives? They said "oh no we don't carry knives" I said "well how do you do it?" and they said "oh health and safety" and I was put off. I thought they're a nation of wimps now, they don't want to do anything.

And the scouting group after all was to encourage a nation of empire builders

Yes, so I was very put off. I thought well, the kids today are completely spoilt, they've got far too much money and they've got no respect for their elders but apart from that we are very happy to be here but if circumstances changed and things were to come right in Africa, we'd say "well I would go back to Africa".

So where's "home"?

Home is here. Well no, home is in Africa, it was in Africa. That was my home and we had a lovely home. I had a yacht, I used to go boating.

On Lake Kariba?

Yes, I used to go fishing, I haven't unpacked my fishing tackle here because you go fishing here, then you spend all day there, you get wet and you've got to chuck it back so there's no way...

(01:26:03) I can see why 'catch and release' doesn't appeal to you!

It doesn't appeal, no. I'm not going to stay all that day and...When the summer comes and it's a hot day, I put my sleeping bag outside and I sleep in the garden and I sleep under the stars

Yes, well you don't need a mosquito net

No, if things were to come right but I can't see them coming right. We've still got friends there and we still communicate and they say "look, it is not the same, Kariba is not the same"

No it isn't, so the past is another country

Yes

It really is. Derek, thank you very much indeed for talking to me

Pleasure, my brother-in-law was also in the police

Derek, you were just mentioning as we finished about your brother-in-law. Would you mind just adding that detail?

Well he was a town policeman, I was a district and he married my sister and he went through and he retired as a Chief Superintendent and then he went into the information department and what he saw there, he realised that things are going to get bad so he packed up and came back to England.

No, I know, having seen the Rhodesian files the amount of attention the information department paid to African Nationalism, its fragmentation and spread, its influence at all sorts of levels.

Would you like to...can I put him on to you?

Please, that would be excellent

And I've also got another chap who served in the Guard Force and then we met up again in South Africa. He took up a commission in the Army and we used to go out together and he finished up as a Lieutenant Colonel in the South African Army.

Where is he now?

He's here, he's just come back

Derek, that would be excellent, thank you very much indeed End of interview