

Questions for ex-Rhodesian combatants – Ed Smyth

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 South Africa, 1959 my parents moved to Rhodesia 1960-65 but returned to RSA – Gwelo Bata Factory incidents I believe. My father 2 sisters and brother and all my cousins lived there most still do

2. What were your family links with the UK (emigration from the UK; length of time in Rhodesia; schooling/university/profession). 3rd Generation African

3. Where did you consider to be ‘home’? No where anymore

4. What were your formative experiences? (family/school/environment/peer group) When I was 15 yrs old attending Hilton College in RSA (a fine English style boys boarding school that cost my father a fortune) we went on a family holiday to Rhodesia. I was a very mature 15 and my cousins and their in-laws where 18-23 playing the clubs and bars. This was 1974. What a time I had

5. What did you think of white immigration/immigrants (post war? Post 1965?) Never really thought about it

How did you view South Africa? I was pleased to be out and not involved in National Service And Afrikaner residents in Rhodesia? In general they were good farming types, hard working hospitable

6. When did you join the Rhodesian security forces (RLI; RAR; RAF; BSA Police or Reserve?) RLI 10 Jan 1977 – a boy soldier as I was only 17 yrs old Why did you join? I want to join Greys Scouts and ride so did RLI basics and transferred, being a cavalryman only lasted 2 bush trips and I moved back to join 1 Commando and start a great career What did your family think? My father disowned me but my cousins where very supportive. He got over it 2 yrs later

As combatants:

5. What/whom did you think you were fighting for? The country Rhodesia and the life it had to offer all occupants. It was a great country and worth defending

What values/’standards’? (Western? European? British?) Definitely Western world, I was never the ex-pat thinking type

6. What/whom did you think you were fighting against? In my mind it there ever was a communist generated, driven and motivated war in Africa – Rhodesia was it

What formed your outlook? School, upbringing, capitalism and its values Media/friends/music/religion? Media possibly, friends a little, music I guess, religion I am a practical Christian but not Calvinistic or missionary so no it never influenced me

Was there political indoctrination/regular discussions from your commanding officers Not that I recall – it wasn't necessary we all new what we were doing and what was expected of us

Political discussions with your mates? Not sure we chatted politics much, what for we talked combat and party

7. How much understanding did you have of the war? A fair bit

What were your sources of information? Newspaper now and then, family when in town

How important do you think the international environment (Cold War) was in shaping your attitudes to the war/liberation struggle? Quite important, I certainly understood Russian and Chinese influence and saw first hand Chinese “advisors” well combatants really

What did you think of your commanding officers? Outstanding leaders in particular my first OC Fred Watts

What did you think of the ‘protected villages’ scheme? It had to be tried, but I am not sure how successful it really was

8. How far do you think that the war helped to create – and sustain a sense of Rhodesian identity? Huge – we human beings are strange, in many ways there are no better times than war, chat to old timers in the UK about WWII

What other factors do you think were important? That sanctions created a self sufficient country – I lived in Zambia 1992-2005 and there is no comparison when you look at the lack of development of industry

How much had you travelled outside Rhodesia? Before 1980 only RSA

9. How much importance did you (and your family) attach to African nationalism? A lot, my closest Aunt and Uncle in Salisbury where prominent Presbyterians and she was heavily involved in woman's movements etc.

How far did you differentiate between black Rhodesians and the ‘terrorists’? totally, there were good and bad

What was your relationship/contact with Rhodesian black troops? Very good, I was detached to train the “specials” at one point and my last deployment was leading a 12 man external op which included RAR guys

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

Ideological war? I did not see it as tribal at all till the 1980 incident. If there was a country that could have risen above racialism there it was. Racial and Civil were the vehicles used for Ideological wars in that period of our history

At the time why did you think the 'terrorists' were fighting? To take over the country for their own benefit which ultimately came to pass. How far did you differentiate between ZIPRA/ZANLA & UANC? They certainly had different MO. ZIPRA were better combatants, I would go so far as to say it was not just training, ZANLA probably had better training, so guess it is tribal. How far do you think this affected HOW the war was fought? It is what developed fire force and Scouts

Leaving:

10. When did you leave the security forces? 10 Jan 1980
Did you leave Rhodesia/Zimbabwe? End Jan 1980
Where did you go to? RSA Was this temporary or permanent? 15 yrs
When did you settle in the country you now live in? 2005
How did you find conditions and the situation of the country you settled in? Very different How different did you feel from the other residents?
Quite Why? They are spoilt
What did you think of the 'end of empire'? I am not sure I ever viewed it as an empire
With hindsight what is your view of the struggle in the 1970s? We buried too many people especially young men, but they were the best friends I have ever had and someone had to do it. Sad we never got more support from the West. History has shown it was a war for all the right reasons. Taken on average and over the course of History every man woman and child had a better quality of life under the previous Government

11. After leaving Rhodesia did you join any other Police or Military service? Yes I served in RSA – SADF Army detached 1 Recce and Department Special Tasks Chief Staff Intelligence 1981-83 and then Police Special Branch covert 1984