

Joe (and Mona) Skehel

Joe was born and grew up in the UK. After finishing school, went out to Rhodesia and was posted to Internal Affairs, in 1955. Married Mona in 1959. Left Rhodesia for the UK in 1977.

This is Dr Sue Onslow talking to Mr and Mrs Joe Skehel in Sudbrooke, Lincolnshire on Monday, 3rd August 2009. Mr and Mrs Skehel, 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?

Well, basically I was born and educated in Blackburn and I went to a Marist college there. I did form six and I was at a bit of a loose end with Manchester University. I went back up to the school one day; there was another fellow, a bloke called Joe Rimmer who came from Accrington and I asked him what he was going to do and he said he was going out to Rhodesia. I said "tell me more about the place". He told me a lot about it from what he had learned and he said "cigarettes are two and three for fifty" so I said "that sounds a good place to be".

That was the clincher? The price of fags?

So I wrote to Rhodesia House and they said "come down". I was interviewed by a guy called Hope who also came from Lancashire and this was the end of June or July and he said "fine, we'll take you on". I said "now look, what about me being able to go out on the same boat as my school pal, Joe Rimmer?" He said "hang on" and he 'phoned up and he said "right, it's done". So on the 28th July, I sailed for Rhodesia.

28th July in what year?

1955. We arrived in Salisbury after two and a half weeks and started work there on the Monday morning. I was posted to the then ministry of justice and internal affairs and my pal was posted to mines, lands and surveys, both in the county offices. That was, as I say, August 1955. I then registered for national service in the Rhodesian Army and I was called up in January 1956 and spent four and a half months in Bulawayo at the territorial force training centre which was an intensive four and a half months infantry training, as compared to the national service that there was in this country where the guys did six weeks military training, and then they were posted to some trade of something. So when you'd finished there at four and a half months, you were a fully qualified infantryman, ready for a battle if it was needed. It was a great time I had there, a great time. I played football for the army whilst I was down in Bulawayo and met some very good friends.

So after your four and a half months, then you went back to the ministry of justice?

Back to the ministry of justice and applied to go to the ministry of what then was native affairs. I went to Sinoia in my first posting on 10th September 1956.

(00:02:55) **So what were your responsibilities?**

When I went to Sinoia?

Yes

Basically collecting tax, both in the office when the applicants came to pay their tax and also going out onto the European farms where they had huge labour forces, making sure that these guys paid tax as well and the European farmers co-operated with us in getting this money in. That was quite interesting. I used to go out with a driver called Tobias and a dear old man Machupisa who was an interpreter; he was ex-RAR from during the war and he was a super guy, Machupisa. Anyhow, I got stuck in straight away into my qualifying exams and in November 1957 I passed my first part of the law exam together with the tribal customs administration examination. Then the following November I passed part two of the law exam, so I finished my law examination and I also passed the first part of my Shona language examination. I'd also met Mona by then and we married in 1959, January '59 in Sinoia; and at the end of '59, Patricia having been born, our eldest daughter, we were transferred to Wankie which was my first official appointment post as a district officer and assistant magistrate in Wankie. Now Wankie was the colliery town of Rhodesia and the government had new offices there which were splendid because the colliery had insisted the government built them in the style they wanted to the standard they wanted. We were housed in what had been the old office block, up on the top of Government Hill, as it was called and this had to be seen to be believed. Our dining room and sitting room was the old courtroom with a faced brick wall two thirds of the way down to separate the dining room from the sitting room and these damn great windows. Now when we married in Sinoia, we bought curtains that went from the pelmet down to the floor but there, they wouldn't fit and we had no money to fix this. So we had the curtain hooks on a curtain ring with a paper clip on top to make them cover.

(Mona – And they just brushed the floor)

And I went there, head office knowing that we were going on leave in 1960. I was assured by Dennis Connerly who became secretary of internal affairs, who was a great pal of mine, that we would not be sent back to Wankie after leave. Well, we were sent back to Wankie after leave and I was furious about this. He said he'd do his best to get me on my way as soon as possible. Lo and behold, in January 1960, we were transferred to a place called Zaka which was some sixty miles south and east of Fort Victoria where there was no electricity. There was no shops apart from the trading stores. We spent four years there and again, the gods smiled on me insofar as career was concerned in that a fellow who had been a senior ANC in Sinoia was posted there after we'd been there about a year, as native commissioner; there was a big dam being built at that stage and there was a resettlement going on down

in the southern part of the district. He took it upon himself to go down to the southern part of the district with his caravan, his wife and his son and we spoke once a day on the radio. Other than that, I ran the station and in (00:07:06) running the station, I was left the responsibility of moving the tribesmen out of their areas as a result of the construction of the Mangirenji Dam which was part of the planned development of the low veldt for the growing of sugar, citrus and this sort of stuff.

How much objection or opposition was there to that?

None, it was amazing, it was amazing. I gathered all the kraal heads together for a meeting and there was just myself and corporal Niri who was a super guy. We sat down on the trees and I said "right, this is what's happening but the government have bought these farms, just over the hills, I want you guys to go and look at the land, make sure you're happy. I then want you to list all your belongings and we will move it for you and when we're ready, the move will go". And there was no muttering, no murmuring, no anything. A month later I went back and they all had their value lists of what they had from the chickens to chicken wire, to bags of maize and everything, and it all went well. As I finished with the kraal head, who, you know, was the head of the kraal who said what he had, there was one little guy left and he was sat on the floor and he was ancient and I said to Niri, I said "what's he doing here?" so he went to the guy and this fellow said "My name wasn't called out" and he thought he was going to be left behind and drowned in this dam. So we sorted him out and that was great, off he went. Johnston had this nervous breakdown and I acted as DC there for what? Eleven months, wasn't it?

(Mona – Yes)

Until we came on leave to this country. After leave, I was posted to Rusape which is about a hundred and five miles east of Salisbury, as the district officer. The DC there was a guy called John Bawden who was a most marvellous man who had a terrific war record in the desert; he got an MC for, I don't know, for this Rhodesian artillery battery taking out German positions. But Bawden had a problem; he was an alcoholic I think. He was in the pub every night and within less than a year, he was posted off the station. So again, I was landed as acting district commissioner and I had over eighteen months there, acting as DC, running the station. It was a big station and it was a very political station. There was all sorts of nationalistic feelings in part of the district but again, I had no great trouble. Everything went pretty well. I'll tell you a funny story; we had...no, sorry, this is when we went back, I'll leave that until later. So then we left Rusape...

Sorry, you said it was a very political station, and that you were aware of nationalist agitation at that point?

Well yes and there was a history of it, the Makoni rebellion way back in 1896/1897. There was nothing hostile but there was always this political innuendo chucked into meetings. Makoni himself was an old rascal but again, I had a wonderful relationship with this guy. He had been the sergeant

messenger at head office in Salisbury in his time, having been taken away as a youngster shortly after the country was colonised and put into (00:10:57) government service. He was quite a character, Makoni, quite a character. So much so that when the new Makoni was appointed after he'd died, they put the body in an ox skip, in ox hide, put it in a cave and when the new fellow, Abel Muzanenhamo was appointed, this had become very political with all sorts of families vying for a chieftainship. But there is a standard way of who gets the chieftainship. In amongst the Ndebele, it's father to son but it was collateral succession amongst the Shona, so if Makoni's father was chief, it doesn't necessarily mean he's going to be chief. It then goes down the line, the family line and they appointed Abel Muzanenhamo who was of the line. It was the right thing, the spirit mediums agree with this, the whole issue, and there were two political families there, Gwasira and I can't remember the other guy. Leonard Gwasira was a nasty bit of work. Gwasira went and consulted lawyers in Salisbury. Well, there was one lawyer in Salisbury who took on anything that could be anti-government or embarrass the government and his name was AJA Peck. By the time I'd installed Muzanenhamo, I was then posted to head office as district commissioner in charge of staff administration.

(Mona – No, we went from there to Fort Vic)

Sorry, to Fort Victoria. That's right. We went to Fort Victoria after leave and we were in Fort Victoria for six weeks in a horrible house.

(Mona – It had a mouldy bathroom)

It was a bathroom, a shaped bath which wasn't fitted into the wall and when the children were bathing, and when even an adult was bathing, water would get over the side and underneath the bath where you couldn't get. The thing was as mouldy as hell. People were always sick when they stayed in that house until they realised what was going on. Anyhow, I was only there for six weeks and then Noel Robertson came down - he was deputy secretary - and I was called into the PC's office. Robbie looked at me and said "hello Joe" and I said "hello Sir" he said "you've still got the dust of Rusape on your boots/shoes." And that was one thing I always had, really shiny shoes. I looked down at my feet and he said "no, I don't mean that". He said "we're promoting you" so I said, "I beg your pardon?". He said "you're going to Kariba to act as district commissioner". I was promoted as district commission of Kariba. When we went to Kariba, this was a real great station to have. It was hot as Hades, a really hot climatic...and we had a horrible house. It had been built as part of the construction of the township that had housed people who worked for Central African Power Corporation. All the Central African Power Corporation people had air conditioning in their houses but the government refused to put it in the other houses.

(Mona – There was a fireplace)

A fireplace! We had the only fireplace in Kariba and it was painted duck egg blue inside.

(Mona – Never had a fire)

(00:14:37) Never had a fire lit and it was a tiny, tiny house and it was hot but we made the best of it. We were only there for about eighteen months.

So this is in the run up to UDI at this point?

(Mona – No, this was post UDI)

Post UDI, this was '68. Outside the house, the war had started now, with terrorists coming across from Zambia and there's an army base in Kariba, where people did national service. Just outside the house, there was a heli-pad where the helicopter used to come in and land because they couldn't land up at the army base and my youngest son, Michael

(Mona – He was only two or three)

He used to go out there with his toy gun. All you could see was troopies come out to the helicopter; he used to shoot them all up. This was one of the star attractions of Kariba for him, wasn't it?

(Mona – Well, in one sense, it stopped him climbing under the bed every time it came in. He was terrified)

They took him in the helicopter and played around with it

(Mona – After that, he shot for Britain)

Joe, can I just take you back? You said that you were district commissioner in Kariba. When you arrived in Rhodesia for the first time it was 1955. So between '55 and say '65, in that ten year period, how much did Rhodesian society change? White society, was it very egalitarian? Was it much more free and easier than the UK that you'd left behind? Or in fact, was it still quite divided?

Well, there had been this political thing when Garfield Todd was Prime Minister and then the Rhodesian Front came to power. But there was no change in the way we operated, no change at all.

What about just socially? Were there great social divisions between those who lived in the urban areas, the 'urbanites', and those who lived out in the Rhodesian rural areas?

Not really. There was a lot of good hearted banter about the townies and this sort of stuff, but I don't think there was any great social division

No, ok,. So you found it a much more egalitarian place then than the UK?

Yes

How did you find the UK when you came back on leave?

(00:16:49) OK I suppose. We saw my parents, we saw relatives of Mona's didn't we?

Had it changed much?

Not really

So you didn't feel that, at this point, that you were increasingly different from the UK? Where was "home"? Was the UK still "home"?

No not really

So Rhodesia was "home" by this point?

Rhodesia was home, yes. And if things hadn't have gone wrong, Rhodesia would have always been home

How quickly did Rhodesia come to be 'home'? Mona, were you born in Rhodesia?

(Mona – I was born there, as was my mother)

I think that cemented it but also, the way of life suited me, the people I worked with suited me. At the time it was a...you know, really enjoyable and there was a great freedom of movement. There was a lot of sport on, there were little clubs at every station. Tennis courts and it was a relaxed way of life away from the working side of it, far more relaxed I think. You developed far more friendships than you do in this country because you had to get on with people and if you didn't get on with people? We had several places the oddballs there didn't get on with people and they didn't last, they didn't last.

(Mona – In Zaka, for example, we were eighteen year old kids)

So what was your feeling about African Nationalism in the Sixties, leading up to UDI?

Ambivalent I suppose. One always regarded them as trouble-makers. There was very little constructive stuff came out at that stage. It wasn't really an anti-white feeling; it was an anti-social feeling because they alienated to a certain extent the elders of the tribes as well.

Well, they were challenging after all the traditions...

This is right. They were challenging their positions. At Zaka, we had trouble. We had dip tanks filled in and this was a favourite of theirs because we were on weekly dipping for most of the year, for their own good, and they paid two bob a year per head for those dips. And the first things they did was fill the dips in with rocks. So that was fine. As far as we were concerned, your

(00:19:19) cattle could die, you filled the things in, you empty them, because we're not going to do it.

How about opposition to de-stocking?

De-stocking was not there at that stage. De-stocking had gone long beforehand; there was no attempt at de-stocking at all at that stage. De-stocking took place before I even went to Rhodesia. The land was over grazed and God knows what it's like now, God knows what it's like now. Parts of the Rusape district were becoming desert like when I was there.

Deforestation?

Deforestation, over grazing and cultivation in non arable land without protection. When they had the Land Husbandry acts in Rhodesia which come into force before I got there, there was a strict rule on contours. Contours were pegged out for these people and they had to dig them and maintain them, but all that started going by the board. All that started going by the board. It was very sad. In Makoni district, when I got there, there were parts of it that were already becoming desert because they were farming on the hills where they shouldn't have been and to have stopped them, you would have needed, I don't know what sort of force. People on the ground, they were given advice; we had peggers employed by the African development fund who pegged the land for them, the whole issue. Land development officers, the lot. Ok, it wasn't universal; there were people who were very good, and good farmers. A lot of them made a good living in the tribal area, but the ordinary common or garden guy at the bottom of the social set up, he was the fellow who chose to ignore things, often because of ignorance.

Was there any discussion in native affairs or internal affairs about changing the Land Apportionment act? Because, after all, there was growing pressure on land, in the tribal trustlands.

There was no attempt to alter the Land Apportionment act at that stage of it. It was a political thing. It was a no-no.

Really? Do you remember any private discussion about whether this should be modified?

No, none. There were cases where, as I've mentioned, like with the Mangirenji dam where people are re-settled, but the attitude was that you've got to protect this land because land, once it's ruined, you'll never get it back.

Was there any discussion also about population, shall we say, management and control in the tribal trustlands that you were involved in?

Yes, and it was one which the African politicians picked up on very quickly, birth control. We had these birth control clinics which operated, not only by (00:22:22) government but by the health department, the whole issue on a low

key basis, not on a formal basis but this was regarded as a white man depopulating by the politicians and this was left.

So from your view point, it seemed to be politicised rather than acting actually as a public health issue which was the approach that you took?

Yes, correct

From the point of view of recruitment for internal affairs, it was obviously officered by Rhodesians?

The majority of them were Rhodesians. Some of them up to third generation by then.

You were unusual then?

Yes

Or was it because you had come in 1955 and so by the 1960's you had already been in the country a while, and you'd married a Rhodesian?

No, not really, there were quite a lot of people...

(Mona – I remember this friend just up over the river, Frank, he was another one from England and his wife was English as well)

Barry Lennox

Yes, but predominately...

They were predominately Rhodesians, yes. Predominately Rhodesians. Some of them, such as this fellow Brian Johnston, who was the DC in Zaka when I got there, he had uncles who'd been district commissioners and provincial commissioners way back.

(Mona – Two of his brothers were and his father-in-law was)

Yes, a lot of it. The majority were Rhodesian. Without going through it, I would say, when I was a district commissioner, probably 70% from the ministry were Rhodesian born and bred, yes. Some of them were third generation by that stage which was good in many ways because they'd grown up with the African on the farms. They spoke the language and they knew the guy's customs and it was a good set up.

So, in that you would have had to have liaised very closely with traditional power structures?

Oh yes, chiefs and headman

(00:24:38) **Yes exactly. At that point, they were salaried employees of the government weren't they? Dating back to the...**

They had this stipend. It wasn't much money. I can't honestly remember. I think they got something like twenty quid a month but that was based on the population. Some of them got more than others if they had a huge tribe.

(Mona – They had a badge of office and a cloak)

Yes?

I've often read that the attitudes and influence of the chiefs have been, shall we say, down played because they were described as government employees and as that they had received a salary from the government, that meant that their position...

A little stipend, yes

What was your view of the Indaba of 1964?

1964? Indaba at Gwelo?

Yes

I was one of six district officers who were on duty at that...

Yes?

They acquiesced. They acquiesced so it was put. There was no opposition to it, no opposition at all. They could see what the future held and even when UDI came out, there was no opposition, other than these nationalist politicians who, by then, were a spent force within the country and most of their activity went on outside the country.

So you felt that the security legislation that had been brought in had dealt with the "troublemakers", to use your phrase from earlier?

I think, yes, it did. Yes, it did and it wasn't just that. I think it was there as a protection for all people. For example, in the Rusape district, it had been known to be politically unstable, going back to the rebellion when the Makoni there was hanged. But again, even at the worse scene at the worst war, when we come on the Chipinga district, I could go anywhere in that Chipinga district. I used to take my small son, Michael, with me before he started school and we never were told...

Break in interview

So what did you think of UDI?

(00:27:55) I think it was the only answer, the way things were going with the Wilson government in this country. If they had been in a position where they had imposed their constitution on Rhodesia, it would have led to even greater trouble.

It's interesting, having looked at the British files, because the way that the Hume government and then the Wilson government was taking the Rhodesia issue from 1961. The Rhodesian constitutional was passed then...

Yes

Up to 1965, the encouragement from London was, please modify the Land Apportionment act and expand the electoral roll; there are indications that there was a willingness still to see a white dominated government acquire independence in Rhodesia.

Yes

So what would have been the problem to that?

I think the Land Apportionment act was in the way. There's no doubt about it and I think the ever increasing African population was another problem.

So you were worried about the ratio?

I wasn't, but I think that was possibly a worry. One thing I would say is that throughout my whole time there, our work was completely apolitical. It carried out the wishes of government, ok, and if it was white or black or whatever it was.

(Mona – The government was completely apolitical)

Yes, government service

The ethos of the civil service was determinedly apolitical but the issue then becomes political, with UDI which is, let's face it, a rebellion against the Crown. Even though there was declared loyalty to the Queen, that then makes the civil service, in fact, involved with a political act

Yes

So there's the paradox that kicks in

Yes

Did you have any foreknowledge of UDI?

No

None at all?

(00:29:58) No, we knew something had to happen after the Tiger talks and the Fearless talks

No, no, this is UDI in November '65. Tiger and Fearless were '66 and '68

That's right, they were post, weren't they?

Yes

(Mona – We knew something was probably going to happen but we didn't realise why)

So you hadn't been briefed by your ministry?

No

And you weren't aware that, for instance, that the police...?

We were aware of the friction that was going on

And after all, a state of emergency had been declared

Yes

So you were aware of that?

Yes

You knew something was up?

Oh yes

Were you concerned at all at the time that Britain might send in the troops, and try and...?

Not really

Bring in the Union Jack and get everybody to rally round the flag?

Not really. Logistically they couldn't have done it

Rumours of there being a battalion of Royal Marines eighteen miles outside of Salisbury?

Rubbish

Exactly, but there were such rumours flying about?

(00:30:53) Yes, rubbish

(Mona – Well they hadn't reached us, we were ninety miles from Salisbury, it was too far)

So you were insulated by that scare mongering?

Yes

After UDI then in November '65, at what point did you start to feel that there was more – well – African Nationalist agitation?

Right after Zaka. Zaka was on the brink of it in parts, but it was nothing to give any concern. You could still talk to people, you had no problems. I think it was after Zaka, in the Zaka district where we realised something was going on.

Break in interview

You were saying that in Zaka, there was a question of being aware of African Nationalist agitation.

Yes

In what form? Again, sabotaging cattle dips?

Yes

Leaflets, statements, rallies?

No, they had one rally. They had one gathering outside the DC's office and - this is when I was acting DC - I went out and talked to them. I said "look, I'll quite happily talk to people who you appoint to speak on your behalf, but I'm not speaking to a whole angry, a potentially angry mob". They had their people come in; one of them eventually became an MP, just like there is now. They were reasonable about it; they were told that nothing's going to change. The government will still be the government, there will still be the administration, there will still be the schools built, still be the missions, the whole issue and they acquiesced to it, the tribe's people. In the towns, there were riots obviously but we didn't face any hostility, didn't face any hostility at all.

So you saw then, by the way you're talking, African Nationalist agitation as being principally urban and principally driven by youth, a younger element?

Yes, to a certain extent but I do also feel, and I think many other white Rhodesians did feel the same way, that there was a lot of propaganda. Or maybe not propaganda but there was a lot of support coming out of the

(00:33:38) university with the likes of Terence Ranger, whom you may have heard of and others who were stirring the pot a bit.

So you felt then that this is left wing intellectual agitation?

Correct

That's the way you're describing it

Yes, I think there was an element of left wing intellectual...

Well, Ranger could be equally described as idealistic and in tune, in fact, with African majority rule elsewhere in Africa?

Well fair enough, yes

So that then says that Rhodesia was very much swimming against the tide of intellectual opinion and political opinion elsewhere on the continent?

Yes, yes that is true, that is true

Did that thought ever cross your mind?

Yes but at the same time, we considered, and I still consider, that what we were doing, a progressive advancement of these people was the right answer, rather than chuck them into the pot of universal adult suffrage which had not worked in our neighbouring countries.

So you were comparing Rhodesia then, to what was going on...

Zambia

You were actually actively comparing it with what happened to Zambia post '63?

Yes

And in Tanzania post '63 as well? So you used Northern Rhodesia then as a mirror image?

No, not necessarily just Northern Rhodesia: Kenya, Tanganyika, I mean, right down the continent. They had all started to, perhaps not fall apart but to step behind in their developments and what they had done was replaced a benevolent paternalistic white regime with a black regime who were, in many instances, there to cream off what they could for themselves. This is exactly what happened in Rhodesia, and you look at it now.

(00:35:23) **So as the war started to accelerate, the bush war which Fred Punter has described as “sliding into war”, being a sort of process of incremental steps ...**

Yes

What did you think you were fighting for?

Well, we were fighting against these terrorists to try and keep the country stable.

“Terrorists”? It could be said though they were African Nationalists?

Well, they were terrorists. They were trained by communists, they were trained in China, they were supported by China and they were supported by Russia, and armed by them.

So you felt you were struggling against communism?

To a certain extent, yes

Did you feel that they were being guided and directed by Beijing, and by Moscow?

To a certain extent, yes

(Mona – They were certainly financed by them)

Yes

So how much? I mean, obviously this would be part of your discussions: where did you get your sources of information about the sources of their financing? About the propaganda that you say, the message that they were trying to...?

Well, again, I think that we had sympathetic people elsewhere who were prepared to talk to us. In this country, in other countries.

But I’m asking about you in native affairs. You’re talking about we as a government and as a civil service. I’m trying to deconstruct what you mean by “we”. “You” as a couple, what were your sources of information?

I think I’m speaking as an individual, as opposed to a government servant at this stage.

Did you get regular briefings on terrorist’s attacks?

Yes

(00:36:54) **Terrorist activity?**

Yes, yes

In what form? Were these verbal briefings, were they written briefings?

District commissioner's conferences and Special Branch reports and we also ran our own ground coverage system and again, we filtered this stuff through to police and up the line. So we had a fair idea of what was going on.

So ground coverage was run by internal affairs?

No, no the police also ran a ground coverage set-up

Yes, they did

We also had a ground coverage set-up

Right, ok, so for your sources of information, you have Special Branch, and you have district commissioner meetings. How frequently were those?

Meetings with Special Branch?

Meetings with Special Branch and your district commissioner meetings

District commissioners would meet once every two or three months at provincial level. Meetings with the police, well, liaison with the police was on-going.

Well, you were both under the same ministry after all

No. We were internal affairs. The police was part of the ministry of justice.

Right, so how close liaison was there between ministry of justice and ministry of internal affairs?

At which level?

Top level

Top level? I should think there was a heck of a lot because I never was in that level of the...you know, the head office level at that stage.

(00:38:24) **As you came further down the hierarchies, as it were? Did you have your own internal police force then?**

We had district assistants. They were called district messengers when they were started up and then they were called district assistants I think in Kariba I had three. In Zaka, there were about six. These were ground coverage guys

who operated out in the tribal areas talking to people and looking for information.

Did they pay for information?

No. Towards the end, we had funds to pay for information and I did pay for some stuff in the Chipinga district but it was modest, it was modest. We're talking about a few dollars.

So did BSAP, or the army, also run its ground coverage?

Well, this is the funny thing. The army had this ground coverage system that they spoke about and between you and I, it was absolutely useless in my experience. Absolutely useless.

Why?

Because they didn't have the guys who could communicate and...

Are we talking the RAR who had a relatively inefficient ground coverage?

No, there were whites who were doing it. There were whites who were doing it. The RAR in my time were not involved .

So then you've got competing structures in a way, overlapping ones?

No, all our stuff, ground coverage stuff went direct to the police and they would comment on it; they would add to it or they would come back with questions on it. This was the police and Special Branch.

How often were your meetings with Special Branch?

Depends where we were stationed and it depends what the situation was. For example, in the Zaka district, I don't think I ever saw a Special Branch guy. In Makoni, Rusape, when I went there as DO, yes a liaison with the CID guys there. In Kariba, yes, by the time I got to Chipinga of course on the border, the JOC was formed and I was a member of the JOC all the time I was there. The whole of the security services liaised and we met nightly, every evening.

That then describes a pretty elaborate intelligence gathering network?

(00:41:19) Yes

But then what do you do with it? Who analysed it?

That will go up the line. We would comment on anything at district level which we had some particular concern about but it would go from us to the Special Branch and Special Branch would take it on from there and it would go up the chain. But once we had sent our reports in, it would go in, in duplicate and

we'd get comments on our comments from Special Branch as and where appropriate.

Now if, for instance, there had been a terrorist incident, is this where Internal Affairs would call in the police to deal with it through the criminal justice system or did you have your own pattern of, shall we say, retribution because...?

No, if there had been an incident, the police would take it.

So in no way was it dealt with through a system of traditional justice?

No, that would have put the traditional tribal set-up at risk if that had happened.

Was there any discussion about whether it should be dealt with within the traditional justice system?

No, no we were part of a national intelligence gathering and sifting stuff and it went up to the experts. We never pretended to be experts in this.

When I asked you the question "what were you fighting for?" you immediately replied what you were fighting against. So what...

We were fighting to maintain the status quo and the gradual advancement of the African, the betterment of the African in the tribal system as opposed to letting things go.

Was there any discussion in Internal Affairs that perhaps by the very resistance and determined, as you say, management of that transition, which, lets face it, under the 1969 constitution was only going to be slow and only ever going to reach a state of political equality, it could actually have been building up African opposition?

Yes, this I accept, this I accept

Did you discuss it at the time?

Not officially

(00:43:37) **But unofficially?**

Unofficially, yes

Where would such discussions...? With your mates, with Mona, at the club?

Very rarely at the club. We were never great club goers as such. When we met with brother DC's, then we talked about it.

And your conclusion was?

We've got to get out of this, got to go and sort it out, which we were trying to do

How?

You see, African advancement was going ahead in a steady pace then. By the time I went to Rusape as DC, we had Africans as district officers, there was a steady advancement.

Sorry, when you went to Rusape for the first time?

No, the second time

When did you go back to Rusape for the second time?

'71, after Kariba

So you had Africans as district officers at that point and so was there an accelerated promotion programme?

They had to pass the qualifying examinations and – I wouldn't say it was accelerated but they were coming. It was growing, are you with me?

Yes

It was growing

Were they particularly targeted by African dissidents?

Not to my knowledge, not to my knowledge

I'm just wondering because as the terrorist activity increased, they targeted kraal heads, sub-chiefs

Yes

(00:45:13) In trying to combat, after all, the political language of violence that the African Nationalists used, how much did Internal Affairs also adopt a hearts and minds...?

Very much so

In what way?

Co-operation with the public, talking to the public, development projects

What sort of development projects?

In Chipinga district, irrigation schemes and more irrigation schemes, improved roads, improved services.

Improved housing?

No, housing was their own responsibility in the tribal areas. If they were wealthy, they would build a brick house, otherwise it would be pole and dagga.

(Mona – What about your protected villages?)

Oh yes, we had...yes we came to those when the war was going...increasing, we did move people into protected villages.

Whose idea was that?

It was the government's idea following on from the Malaya campaign. General Templar's efforts in Malaya

So you'd very much used the template from Malaya?

Yes, to a certain extent, yes

What do you mean by "to a certain extent"?

We didn't have the money to put into construction work, you know. What we put in were water supplies and roads but we didn't have money to do the buildings.

So that meant that people, if they were going to be displaced and concentrated, were then moving to areas where there was no shelter?

They built their own huts

Right, but this is still forcible transition?

Yes, but there was little resistance. There was no force used. I didn't have the force to use.

(00:47:00) Why were you so starved of funds?

I think the whole country was starved of funds. You know, our exports were not being maintained at the level they had been; there were sanctions so there was a definite shortage of investment in the country.

So could it then be fair to say that the protected villages idea, while a good one in theory, was hampered as there was a financial shortfall implementing it in practice, which meant the PV scheme was compromised?

No I don't think so. One thing that they welcomed and the women in particular, was the fact that they had water accessible to them in these protected villages. Proper water bore holes were put down and they welcomed this instead of having to walk to a river and find the river dry or something in the dry season. There were bore holes put down, there were roads put down, there were schools built in the protected villages.

How about health clinics?

Yes, there was health care, preventative and curative clinics

How closely were you at that point monitoring whether in fact there was public acceptance or public support of the PV's system? Because after all, if you had gathered together people who were dissenters, you had concentrated political dissent.

Speaking to people and the speaking to people was not done in English or at meetings. It was done talking to people, it was done by ground coverage members and as I say, in the Chipinga district, I could wander around without any firearms and stuff

(Mona – And he used to take the sons with him as well)

Yes, I used to take the boys out

Were you at all concerned that the concentration in PV settlements was going to provide a base for, in your terminology, terrorists to act? They were going to use it as a base from which then to go out into the area?

Terrorists? No, it was the other way round. We were keeping the terrorists away from, trying to keep terrorists away from the people.

So you had fortified stockades, you had curfews...

No they weren't fortified

(00:49:29) I'm serious because not enough is known about this, you may be laughing and saying...

The only fortified place in a protected village was the keep itself which had earth bags pushed up and that's where the European and the African staff were. But for the rest of the people? Ok, there was a fence round some, others were not fenced because there just wasn't the money there to fence it.

Ok, but did you have a cleared area around it so that you could try to physically protect the village? Were there guards that were posted?

No

(Mona – It was a no-go area)

So people in the protected villages, were they then allowed to go out and tend the surrounding land?

Yes, they went out and they cultivated their land but they went back in the evening.

What about Guard Force?

By and large, Guard Force was a waste of time

Whose idea was Guard Force?

God, I forget the guy's name now. He had been an army commander. I forget his name now but we had some funny fellows in Guard Force

In what way?

The guy who commanded Guard Force.. The only place I had Guard Force was Chipinga, my last outside station. We had this guy, he was a huge bloke and he used to come down to the office once a day and knock on the door and come in and salute and stamp his boots and goodness knows what and ask "had I anything for him?" And that was about it. He was an ex-British Army bloke NCO and he had a staff of about twenty and some of those were posted out as regulars to the protected villages.

Were they trained? Were they armed?

They were armed with 303's; they later got SLR's and they'd been trained at Chikarubi in Salisbury. I forget the Brigadier's name who commanded Guard Force.

So you had a pretty low opinion of Guard Force?

Yes

(00:51:54) Because...? Why did you regard them with such disdain?

(Mona – If you'd met them, you'd have known!)

Well, since I haven't met them, I'm asking for your opinion!

I regarded them as an intrusion. In some districts, districts like Mount Darwin which went into protected villages first, where they came in the north (that was the ZAPU lot that came in there), where they had district assistants in the camps. Ok, they were also dragged off the street and put on a course but there was far more control then. Guard force were a bit of a joke, as I say, it was a fragmentation of the army and the civilian effort.

Ok, so how were they recruited? Were they principally Africans?

They had Africans, they had Europeans. There were some good people there in the end, but they actually started putting national service guys into Guard Force before I left. But by and large, in the districts where I'm not sure, I think there was a couple of districts where the DC's remained in control with their own supernumerary district assistants in these. It definitely started off that way and I think they worked equally, well a lot better.

You're suggesting then that Internal Affairs didn't have a very high opinion of Guard Force, or was that just you who didn't have a very...

No, no I think it was most of the guys. Not everybody had guard force. In Manicaland district, for example, Ian Moffitt who was DC at Inyanga. Umtali didn't have any because they had no PV's

So it was only those areas that had PV's had Guard Force?

Yes

So how many PV's were there in your district?

You've got me there: three in Chikore, four in Mutema, that's seven and in Nduwoyo, there should have been twelve but I think we only had six established by the time I left.

In your view, did they serve the purpose of protecting the rural population from terrorist activity?

From intimidation and criminology, yes they did

(Mona – Also cooperation, so I suppose that's intimidation. They'd come in and they'd taken all the children 14 and 15 and over for one of the schools)

This was the first one. This was Chikore; this was the first lot that I had go over the border into Mozambique.

(00:54:59) The forced abductions, yes

And bear in mind, if you look at the map of Rhodesia and the eastern districts, the border of Mozambique was a five strand barbed wire fence, fixed by the international veterinary commission to stop the spread of rinderpest in the early 1900's and that had been put in by imperial governments, France, Portugal and Belgium and England. But it's the tribes and this was my biggest problem in the Chipinga district that half the guys, the chief Makoni's crowd of...of chief Musikwavanhu's crowd were in Mozambique and these guys, the rain spirit Chapo. The spirit was there and Musikwavanhu was upset about his spirit being in a foreign country then, in a war so we built a brick house in Musikwavanhu's village so that he could be with his chief and we tried to keep the custom, keep the African, not just the hierarchy but the tribes people aware that we were aware of trying to assist.

Did that help, in your view?

Yes, to a certain extent it did. It did but again it got to the stage of weight of numbers. I think when the “war” started...

When did you think it started? That’s interesting because people say to me different times.

(Mona – When we were in Kariba)

When we were in Kariba, we had crossings then. Our daughter, she sorted out one crossing, one terrorist incursion and they’d built this new house we talked about, several storied house, Patricia had this window...

(Mona – And she was talking to me in the bedroom and looking out the window)

And looked down

(Mona – And she said “somebody’s just crossed from Zambia)

We looked down the Zambezi River

(Mona – She said “somebody’s just crossed from that side to our side” and I said “yes but there’s rapids down there, if anybody’s in a boat they’re not going straight”. That night, they tried to blow up our airfield and when I found out, then I phoned the police and said “do you know where these blokes crossed?” and he said “no we can’t find it”. I said “well, I think Patricia knows”)

So David Patterson came up the house, a Special Branch guy

(Mona – He came up and just after lunch - the children went to school up until half past twelve - after we’d had lunch and the three of us had to go up to the (00:57:50) bedroom. Patricia stationed herself where she was and pointed out what she’d seen; and she was right, there were the tracks)

So for you, the war started then in ‘66/’67?

In Kariba

(Mona – He wasn’t even there)

I was in High Court assessing...

(Mona – He was sent home really quickly)

But then, after that, when the war started to accelerate, what was your view?

At that stage?

Yes

That we could contain it, but by the time Chipinga came, there was no long term future.

Did you ever think of leaving?

(Mona – Well we did, didn't we?)

When did you leave?

(Mona – Well, July 1977. We were actually in Salisbury but the children were still borders in Marandellas which was then only fifty miles away. We picked them up for half term and...)

Patricia was in form six then, wasn't she?

(Mona – Patricia was form six and Andrew was half way through his first of the two years to do 'O' level and he was sounding off)

In what way?

(Mona – Well, several of the men teachers were away on call-ups)

Police reserve call-up or army call-up

(Mona – I was actually teaching full time in Rusape)

In Rusape, in Salisbury

(Mona – In Salisbury...had been called up, the headmaster was a friend and he called on me to come and fill in the gap. This is where I had to teach (00:59:38) history before it's been written. There were four or five of them away and replacements in temporarily, but several of the teachers were police reserve and they'd a call at four or five in the morning to go somewhere or other and set up a road block. So there would be another three or four teachers missing during term, during the day and Andrew was sounding off "by the time I do get around to doing my 'O' level, there's not going to be any young teachers left")

Well, Patricia used to take part of it and supervise...

(Mona – Well, the head had her very well organised, the sixth form, if there was a teacher missing, whatever subjects they were doing in sixth form for 'A' level, one of them would be delegated to go and teach form one and form two. Form three and four always had on-going work and somebody just used to go in with them to supervise and above that, they all had projects that they were

expected to get on with themselves if the teachers weren't there. This is how the school was existing)

And this is in Marandellas?

Yes

(Mona – This was Marandellas High)

**How much was that being replicated do you think across Rhodesia?
With the disruption of war service?**

(Mona – Well, in places like Salisbury it was easier to get...)

Relief teaching, supply teaching

(Mona – Relief teachers on a phone call, but in Marandellas, it just didn't work. Ok, he really had it working very well)

A good head

But Andrew was sounding off and saying that his teachers were never there

(Mona – We knew that we were going to have to go and there were already by then, no jobs for teenagers when they left school)

So this is when? 1977?

'77

So this is after Ian Smith's September television broadcast that majority rule within two years?

Yes

(01:01:39) (Mona – July '77, I can't remember, I don't remember Ian actually talking the thing. I've read about it but I don't remember the actual broadcast)

So in the summer of '77 you decided...

(Mona – Well, Andrew started school at the end of September)

How did your family feel about you leaving?

(Mona – My father wouldn't speak to me. Mum could understand)

Did you tell them you were going?

Oh yes

(Mona – Oh yes)

Well, some people didn't. Some people just left

(Mona – No, we told them)

I was given a farewell by the ministry before I left

(Mona – Yes, he's got a great big salver, tray, enormous thing)

Did anyone accuse you privately of "taking the chicken run?"

No

(Mona – Well, there were people who wouldn't speak to you, like John Saunders)

Yes, John Saunders who'd been my district officer in Rusape as DC there

(Mona – But they were over here three years ago, staying with other Rhodesians in Lincoln and we met up with them. They'd turned and said before they went, "You did the right thing at the right time.")

That was quite something though, for you to have to leave: the physical process of packing and coming to this country. Had you maintained links with any...?

(Mona – Andrew and I stayed with Joe's brother)

My youngest brother

(Mona – He'd fixed up schooling for Andrew)

So where was he? In Lancashire?

(01:03:07) No, St Albans

(Mona – No, in St Albans)

In St Albans?

The knight of the realm, Sir John Skehel: he was Director of the National Institute of Medical Research.

Right, useful

(Mona – He wasn't then)

No, he retired as Director of the National Institute of Medical Research

And so you'd stayed in reasonably close touch with him?

(Mona - Oh yes)

Oh yes and I'd been over in '77 when my father died. John said then "you'll be coming over, won't you, and there's a room for you?".

He gave you an escape route?

Yes

(Mona – I don't think we could have done it without...)

No, we couldn't have done it on our own

(Mona – Because Patricia was ending her school career and it was pointless bringing her away before she'd done the exams. We really were waiting for Andrew because he was no scholar; he's perfectly able but give him a cricket bat or a rugby ball, he was better. The youngest son, we could mess him around because he was prepared to take second place anyway so we knew we could move him ok. We wanted Patricia to finish and Andrew having started his 'O' levels, we were prepared to see 'O' levels out)

Mona, I must ask, as a mother myself, how much was there also in your mind "I don't want my son fighting in this war"?

(Mona – Yes)

Despite the fact that they both became army officers in this country

There's only so much you can do as a mother! You try to keep them safe as long as you can, but then they go and do something else.

Michael was a great buddy. He was the only one who was with us all the time in Chipinga and whenever I went out I took a firearm with me. We had an FN (01:04:49) rifle, an Uzi sub-machine and I'd come home and the first thing this little boy would do is take it off me, sit down on the floor, strip it completely and put it in bits and put it together.

(Mona – He wasn't allowed to fire them; he was too small, well too young and too small)

In Chipinga now, we started, the police and myself, started a scheme for the children coming home from boarding school for holidays when the war had started and then my number two, Dirk Du Plois who was a super shot himself, Dirk took all the teenage boys

(Mona – Well, the sixteens and over)

Sixteen and over, yes

(Mona – There were guns on all the farms)

And on the rifle range, taught them how to shoot. Master Andrew was nothing like sixteen and he said “can I go?” I said, “no you can’t, it’s sixteen” he came in on us laughing and he said “Mr Du Plois says I can go” and who finishes up the best shot? Andrew.

(Mona – And it was a sock to Michael because he wasn’t allowed to go and shoot; he was allowed to clean the guns)

How did the children feel about leaving Rhodesia?

(Mona – It was a joint decision, it really was)

We all sat down and talked about it. As I say, both boys finished up going to Sandhurst and going into the military over here.

But physically packing, did you have to leave a lot of the stuff behind?

(Mona – Well, Andrew and I left in a bit of a hurry)

Yes, to get him into school here

(Mona – So that he could start the school year because he started in September, but wrote his ‘O’ levels in June and...)

I stayed with... Mike and Patricia stayed at boarding school and I brought them over the December after Mona had come in September and then I went back and worked my notice and came over in February.

But Joe, were you allowed to bring money out of the country?

(Mona – No)

(01:06:55) No

(Mona – The bank manager gave him fifteen quid and he said “this is ridiculous. You can’t land in a new country, in a strange country with nothing in your pocket.”)

And a crowd of six or seven of my colleagues from head office came to see me off and the one guy gave me a fiver to get the train, the tube

Had you been able to line up a job back here?

(Mona – Not then)

No, no I came back in the February and I had two anxious months writing off to the jobs advertised in the Telegraph and the number of no’s and no’s and no’s came back.

(Mona – But you had several interviews and always was the second)

And the one guy who I went for an interview with, he said to me “your bloody trouble is you’re suitable for a lot of jobs but people are frightened of what you’ve done in the past”

Really?

So what you’ve done at your age, people would never have been able to get that far in this country. My first job was at the Three Counties Agricultural Society in Malvern where I applied for the job which was a number two there and got the job as number two; the boss man who was younger than me, now dead poor fellow, went down, when they offered me the job, himself and this management consultant and at the second interview he said “I want the thing quite clear to you. I can see you’ve still got ambition, you must appreciate now, before we go any further that you’ll never achieve that ambition here because I started here after school and I’m staying here”. So I said “fine, I accept that”

(Mona – It was a job at that stage)

And eighteen months later, the Lincolnshire job came up, to run the Lincolnshire Agricultural Society and I applied for it and I got it. And that’s where I’ve been for twenty years.

How did you find coming back?

I think by the time we made the decision and carried it out, all sadness had been put aside for practicalities.

It sounds as if you made yourselves numb?

Not really. No, I don’t think so

(01:09:37) Well, you obviously dealt with it differently

Yes, we packed everything up, I remember getting that dining room suite through there.

(Mona – We didn’t come with a car)

I bought that. One of the guys who had been in charge of public works when I was district commissioner in Kariba who I got on very well with. He became the head of furniture purchasing for government and PWD in Salisbury. So I said to Jimmy, when he found out I was going, “Come on, I can’t take any money with me. I want some furniture”. So he said “what do you want?” I said “I want a new dining room suite, I want a new bedroom suite, can you organise it for me?” He said “Sure”. So these were made and delivered to the house in Salisbury. I was on my own at this stage and when these guys were packing up the house, having been given permission to take all my

possessions out, this crew for Glen's Removals came from the Rusape district where I'd been district commissioner. They knew me and we chatted away in Shona with them; and this guy said to me, "Mr Skehel, I shouldn't be letting this through. It's new isn't it?" So I said "yes" He said "ok" and he showed me the form he put in. Next to it he put "marked and scratched".

So at the time, people weren't allowed to export new furniture because it was a way of hiding money?

It's a way of getting capital out

Yes, how did people get money out though?

I don't know because we got nothing out, we got nothing out

Alright, you didn't know officially

This one colleague of mine, Jim Hurd who is now dead sadly, he gave me a fiver when he came to see me off, amongst some other colleagues at Salisbury airport and he said "that will get you to St Albans".

How did you find Britain? You've described about coming back, looking for a job for two very anxious months and then how you ended up in the Lincolnshire Agricultural Society. But as a country, as a society? After all, you'd left it in 1955, 22 years earlier.

We'd been back quite a few times

Yes, ok, so you'd maintained your contact?

Yes and they were basically fair

(01:12:19) **Had you maintained a sense of Britain as an emotional home in some strange way?**

No, no

But you'd maintained your sense of...

If this war had not happened, we'd never have come back

But it was still the mother country in a funny way?

No, I think we looked at it as the only place that our children could complete their education and get on in life.

You didn't think of moving to South Africa, or to Australia?

No, no

Why not?

Well, I had family here, I had my two brothers and we knew it

And you spoke the language

Yes and Mona was qualified for the old Rhodesia and Nyasaland education thing where they accepted qualifications in this country

I just wondered if you had read any of the “when-we” literature which had been, after all, put out to encourage Rhodesians to stay in Rhodesia?

No

I thought there was quite a drive, wasn't there? To try and keep white Rhodesians in the country?

No when I left there wasn't

Really?

No

People leaving at a thousand a month at that particular time?

Yes. I don't know, I just took it as another progression, another challenge. There was no way that the children would have benefitted in adult hood in Rhodesia the way things go with black governments.

Looking back, how important do you think was the Cold War to what went on in Rhodesia? That battle between communism and...

(01:14:08) Well, that was the prime mover. That was the prime mover of change in Africa

Did you see in any way Rhodesia as being at the front line in the Cold War?

Oh yes, Nkomo's crowd were supported by Russia and Mugabe's crowd by China. There were Chinks in Mozambique. Oh yes, it was all part of the Cold War, as you say, and the only reason that South Africa survived for as long as it did was because of its wealth and then you had a far bigger white population.

How much do you think the war was also crucial to building and maintaining a sense of Rhodesian identity? It had helped pull Rhodesians together, both black and white?

I think it did, I think it did. As I say, and I'm not exaggerating this, right at the height of the war, I wandered round that tribal trustland in my Land Rover, I only had one member of staff abused and that was my number two, Dirk Du Plois who was abused at having gone to a kraal to call on the guy and got involved in a drunken beer drink. The people were drinking beer and they abused him, not physically but he knew if he didn't get out, he would be... And I went back and called this lot together and they offered to pay compensation to him. I said "I don't want compensation, I just want good behaviour".

But at the end, you describe going out with your rifle, after all, your young son had been stripping it down when you got home?

Yes, in the end, I either took an Uzi or an FN rifle when I was out, particularly if I was going to the border, because going down the border was pretty nasty, pretty nasty.

How much do you think the rate of people leaving also helped to spell the end of the Rhodesian state?

Oh definitely, it definitely did. Economically it had a great effect

Well, you described the disruption of the call-up on teaching. I'm just replicating that across the economy

Oh it did. It went right across the economy

(Mona – They used to do six weeks in, six weeks out, bank managers, everybody)

Mona, you must have seen an awful lot of damage that that did to Rhodesian families? I mean, the disruption to family life and the trauma of fighting, coming back and then going again.

(Mona – Yes)

(01:16:33) One of our main occupations in Chipinga towards the end was going to funerals.

(Mona – We went to sixteen funerals in one month)

Guys who had been killed by terrorists or blokes who'd been killed on army call-up

(Mona – Five of them were one family)

It's also the way they were killed

(Mona – Yes, one of which was a friend of our daughters)

Really? It was a farm shooting?

(Mona – No, it was a landmine. They were all in the back of a pickup. The one survivor was the daughter of the girl I was at school with and she lost both of her legs)

In the country districts, one was more aware of the situation than we used to call those buggers in Salisbury.

(Mona – Well we always said “they didn’t know there was a war on in Salisbury”)

Was that your sense, when you did go into town?

(Mona – Yes)

That they were in fact...

(Mona – They were just blasé about the whole thing. We were living with it around. Well, I was woken up and he couldn’t hear it, by a gunfight one night)

Mona, were you armed?

(Mona – At times, yes, when I took the children back to school)

Oh yes, tell her the story about that white guy

(Mona – Well, Andrew used to ride shotgun with an Uzi and we used to ride to Umtali and then run the gauntlet of terrorists. Anyway, we disarmed the gun, magazine in your handbag, gun over the shoulder up into Meikles for coffee in the tea rooms. You weren’t the only one; there’d be a dozen women there with these weapons, sat around but then I still had to go Umtali to Marandellas. Andrew then was demoted to the back seat and Patricia was allowed in the front seat and the Uzi with the magazine still in my handbag was lying (01:18:45) across the back seat. You come out of Umtali at Christmas Pass, have you been there?

No

(Mona – There’s a garage at the top and about 100 yards beyond the garage was a smartly dressed, turned out to be Englishman in a suit with a gallon can in his hand. Well, we had petrol rationing and we knew exactly what had happened. So I stopped and said to him “would you like a lift?” he said “I would love a lift”. So he opened the back door and did a double take at this Uzi which Andrew kindly picked up and I said “it’s alright, the magazine’s in my handbag”. So he got in and said “is it really necessary?” I said ...)

Where was this person from?

(Mona – He was from England. He’d landed that morning)

He’d landed that morning

(Mona – Hired this car and told that there was plenty of petrol to get to Umtali in the back and it had run out about ten miles from Umtali)

I wonder how long he lasted in the country?

(Mona – Well, I did assure him that we had come from terrorist held territory and it was now disarmed because we didn't expect to meet them in between there and Marandellas, but I'm not sure if it was the same time when I came through...We used to drive in convoy to take the kids back to school with police or army, sort of front and back and they cancelled the convoy system the day before school was going back)

Did they give a reason?

(Mona – No and he was involved in the cancelling of it as well. So we left, one car tucked themselves in behind us and just sat there and when we got into Marandellas, Andrew turned and said "well mum, if there were any terrors there then they never saw us". I have never driven so fast)

Mona, you used the words "terrorist held territory", was an area of the...?

Some of the tribal areas became very much terrorist controlled

(Mona – And the actual road to Umtali was at times mined so if you used this road, you drove down the middle and hoped like hell. But they could have been sat on the sides and this is what Andrew was saying. We came back once; we'd been up at Inyanga for a few days, the car, our Ford, had been to Henry for service and we picked it up and had taken it back. He was driving in the front with Patricia and Mike and I had Andrew with the gun with (01:21:37) me. Patricia had the gun in the other car and we came across a helicopter in the road)

Round the bend and there was a chopper

(Mona – Well, they spoke to Joe and told him what was going on)

So this was a stick that had just come down?

(Mona – Yes, they spoke to Joe and told him what was going on but they wouldn't speak to me. It wasn't a policeman that I knew because they wouldn't actually speak to me. I said "well you told him" he said "well yes, he said he was the DC". I said "yes, well I'm the DC's wife". "Oh well, never mind, just follow". They had to wind the helicopter round to let the car, the props...)

Because the helicopter blows

(Mona – Not for our Ford but they did for the BMW. They actually had to wind it round to let Joe go through and we'd gone another mile or so and you know how you... well, you don't get them here really but they had been a cutting

down about that high, something only about as wide as this carpet but they had cut the road in the middle and a policeman who I happened to recognise, an African policeman stepped onto this with his gun pointing down the road like this. Well, Andrew nearly shot him because he didn't actually know who he was. I couldn't give you his name but I knew he was a Chipinga African policeman)

By the uniform?

(Mona – No, because he was in just camo which anybody can wear including the terrs)

When you were up in Kariba, that was about 1968/'69?

'68, my first DC

There was a South African police unit, a SAP COIN unit operating up there. Were they in your district?

(Mona – Yes)

Useless

The reason I say that is that I've been contacted by somebody who was in that unit. What was their intention? Were they supposed to deter people coming across Kariba?

They were in support of the Rhodesian security forces and they operated at the dam wall itself. They were supposed to patrol around the place but they were absolutely useless.

(01:23:54) (Mona – They became known as a liability)

Why were they useless?

South African police is a pretty low level of society. He's normally...might have passed standard six

(Mona – That was their necessary education)

That was their entry, standard six

(Mona – Which would have been thirteen)

And we used to call them 'slopies' and 'thick bloody slopies' and goodness knows what

(Mona - Have you spoken to John Wills West?)

No I haven't. I'll ask you afterwards about that one. So you didn't have a high opinion of their education. Were they principally Afrikaner and urban and out of their environment?

They were principally Afrikaner and I would say it's a mixture of urban and rural people.

(Mona – But of course they couldn't communicate with the local Africans for a start)

How well trained were they?

Well, they're just all South African...

Sorry, what did you say Joe?

If you see them in South Africa, they're useless anyway

I'm just starting to feel really sorry for these guys who, after all, were sent out there on a logistical support mission

Well, we had some of them who used to sit in their camp and cry

I'll bet they did. After all, they are totally out of their world, out of their environment, physically isolated, physically endangered, poorly trained

Yes, I suppose we're being cruel

Well yes, I'm sorry. I think you are

(Mona – But they were generally known as a liability)

(01:25:43) They were worse than Russians

What was the casualty rate?

Very few

Really? How big was the unit, the COIN unit that was with you?

I don't know

Twenty/thirty strong?

There were quite a few hundred weren't there?

Oh really?

There were about sixty in Kariba at one stage

Ok, but they were liaising with the BSAP?

And the army

And the army, ok, but were they autonomous?

They were autonomous, but they were there to act on Rhodesia's behalf

But as a political gesture too, to the South Africans?

Yes

Because the incursions came over, it was also ZAPU-ANC related, wasn't it, at Wankie?

Yes, they were not regarded with any fervour or welcome

How far did the war help to create a sense of Rhodesian identity?

Very much so, yes

How far did you see the war, from your viewpoint, as also a civil war?

(Mona - Yes)

I didn't see it as a civil war

(Mona – Yes, I did)

(01:26:49) I'm going to ask you both: why didn't you see it as a civil war? Why did you?

Well, I was there to protect our own blacks as well because these people were horrible. The terrorists were absolutely ruthless with them.

Why do you think they were so violent? It was the means of violence, the torture, maiming? I mean, were those traditional uses of violence? I'm just thinking it because if you're referring back to a previous war, and you're reviving cult folk memories of war

(Mona – It's intimidation)

It was, there's two ways of getting heart and minds, isn't there?

There certainly are

One was fear, one was help

So did you ever discuss whether your hearts and minds was losing out to their style of hearts and minds?

We never discussed it because we knew we were losing out. We knew we were losing out, in the Chipinga district, in the whole of Manicaland. We knew we were losing out; we knew we were in a situation where we could not win the peace. We might be able to win the war eventually with numbers, if South Africa had continued, but winning the peace, that was a different thing

(Mona – That was Peter Walls)

Yes, Peter Walls, the GOC was a great personal friend of ours. Peter said that

(Mona – We went to a social do or something in the Chipinga Club. It was actually a dancing room and I said to him “do you think we’re going to win this war?” and Peter said “oh we could win the war but we’ll never win the peace”)

That was a very astute remark

He was a good man, Peter, a very good man

But as far as also hearts and minds were concerned, was there any discussion that you knew of in the ministry of justice to try and recruit and turn people in the prisons?

I don’t know

I’m just thinking because you made reference to the Malaya campaign of using PV’s. In Kenya, also, the idea of the stockade and gathering together. The whole Mau Mau effort in the emergency had a real ideology to it of re-education, to try and cauterise, in the white (01:29:15) authority’s view, the infection of Mau Mau owning anything that could undermine the colonial state.

I think it didn’t happen with us for the simple reason that when the war started, it was all effort was put on fighting the war. So, in other words...

**So this is using then a military means to solve a political problem?
Picking up on what Peter Walls said**

Yes, that’s it basically

Well, how do you account for that?

There’s no other way, soldier

But you’ve suggested though that there was, this hearts and minds thing though?

Yes

Put enough money towards that...

But we couldn't stop the guys coming into the country and armed. They were the aggressors. We were not the aggressors; we were defending what we thought was right

So you didn't see 'hot pursuit' as aggression?

No

Viewpoints. Mona, why did you see it as a civil war?

(Mona – Well it was African fighting African part of the time and alright, most of them, the forces were probably, the officers were white Europeans but there were volunteers fighting Africans)

Was your area, in Manicaland, Chipinga, a traditional RAR recruitment area?

No

I know that there were traditional areas and you made reference to a former RAR soldier who'd first worked with you when you went out. I know that there were traditions of father to son...

He went back to Burma

Did he now?

In the Second World War

(01:30:58) **Looking back, do you think the struggle was worth it?**

At the time, I would have said "yes". In retrospect...

At the time, what did you think you were trying to build?

A cohesive Rhodesia where it would be populated by all

(Mona – With a future for everyone)

A multi-racial Rhodesia?

Yes

(Mona – We never had the animosity that you got down in South Africa, never, ever. We used to go on holiday there and as you passed Beitbridge, the atmosphere was different. Even during the terrorist acts)

To tell you how things...those relationships are still there. Several years ago now, there was an advert in the Telegraph on a Saturday. A week in Meikles

Hotel, return flights, £450.00. So I said to Mona, come on, let's do it again, so we did. Our plane was late taking off from...

(Mona – Twelve hours late)

From this country and it meant we got into Salisbury, into Harare late at night. Meikles Hotel kept all facilities open for this crowd of us

(Mona – They were the only ones who'd apologised too, not the airline or the tour people)

And they said that if we go upstairs, there were snacks and drinks on the house and then please wander to your rooms, have a good night's sleep.

(Mona – In the meantime, your luggage will be taken up to your rooms)

To your rooms, so we had a couple of drinks, sandwiches and set off for our rooms and...

(Mona – We passed the foyer, we were going through the foyer where the luggage had been put so we just checked)

And this African, an old fellow, said "your golf clubs are here, Mr Skehel"

(Mona – No, he came up and he said "Mr Skehel, your luggage has been taken to your room")

That's right, bags have been taken to your room

(01:33:06) (Mona- So we trotted along to the lift and half way up in the lift I said to Joe "how did he know who you were?")

The following morning, the waitresses were queuing up, weren't they, to talk to us in Shona

(Mona – They all wanted to come and talk Shona)

Now, how did they know who you were and that you spoke Shona?

This old boy must have worked at the office at some stage

(Mona – He must have been in Head Office at some stage. He'd lost a job there and he'd become a porter at the hotel)

It was quite...

(Mona – And we never saw him again)

And we couldn't carry a thing in that hotel. When we went through the door, our bags were taken out of our hands. When I went off to play golf, my golf

clubs were taken to our friend's car, who came to pick me up and the atmosphere was absolutely first class.

(Mona – Except that they registered us wrong. We were put down as JPS Kettle!)

Yes, I apologise again for mispronouncing your surname. I'm afraid it must happen quite a bit

(Mona – Oh it does)

It does

(Mona – And it took one friend, who's now in Yorkshire...because I 'phoned them and left a message with the girl. Her daughter is Gail and she said "oh Gail 'phoned"; and Gail was there and she said "no I didn't". She turned to her mum and she said "you don't think it was the Skehel's do you?" So she 'phoned back to the hotel and asked to be put through because I'd left the number, and found that that was Mr Kettle's room)

Do you feel yourselves to be Rhodesian, Zimbabwean or British now?

Not Zimbabwean

(Mona – Definitely not)

How about Rhodesian?

Rhodesian, yes

(Mona – I think we are Rhodesian)

We're growing out of...

Are you?

Not really, no

But the country you remember doesn't exist any more

It's gone, it's gone

(Mona – It had gone really. There were tremendous potholes on this trip)

Yes, when we went back for seven days

(Mona – Someone with a sense of humour had been round and planted trees in them all

Yes, we went to see our house that we'd built for retirement and the oak tree which had gone in as a sapling from the oak in the DC's residence at Rusape was now a beautiful tree

(Mona – It was an incredible tree. That was the sapling of...)

Joe and Mona, thank you very much indeed for talking to me.

End of recording