

## **Rhodesian Combatants : Oral History Questionnaire.**

### **No. 5111 John Roy David BACON – Known to all as Jack**

1) Born in London UK.

I decided to emigrate to Rhodesia from a sense of adventure, and also the fact that I was an admirer of Cecil Rhodes who I had read about when a boy.

I had no family links with Rhodesia, but had met Airmen who had served out there when I was doing my National Service in the RAF. They had been with the Air Training Group set up in World War 2.

They had all recommended Rhodesia as a good place to live and work. The Climate in particular being wonderful.

I am British.

2) My Parents were both Londoners.

I emigrated in 1953 and spent 27 years in Rhodesia in the BSAP and 4 years in the ZRP. I left Zimbabwe in 2009 to return to UK.

I attended Colfe's Grammar School in London. I was initially employed as a Shipping/Customs Clerk in Shipping Company in the City of London.

3) Rhodesia

4) I initially attended a London County Council Infants School and then St. Joseph's Academy in Blackheath. When World War 2 broke out, the School was evacuated to the South Coast. (of all places!) After the Battle of Britain where I witnessed many incidents, and the subsequent night Blitz on London in 1941, all of which made a lasting impression on me. My Parents decided that it was too dangerous for me to remain in Blackheath, and I was evacuated to Tunbridge Wells in Kent, where I was admitted to Colfe's Grammar School. This was a Fee paying School, previously evacuated from London in 1939.

Being an Evacuee was a strange experience at first, but I got used to being away from home. I was 9 years old at that time. Unfortunately, my Parents separated not long after this and my Mother was left to bring me up. Father was directed to do War work at Woolwich Arsenal and I only saw him a few times after that.

I had a Sister who was nine years older than me who was employed in the Post Office Engineering Branch as a Tracer in the Drawing Office at Gresham House near St. Pauls Cathedral. Her Office building was the only one left standing in the whole of that area due to severe bombing.

My School friends all came from around where I lived in London. We were billeted on Skinners School. They went to School in the morning and we went in the afternoon! Saturday morning School was in another School. It was about the time of "D Day" when the Flying Bombs (V1) started and they came over Tunbridge Wells in droves, mostly on their way to London, but some were shot down nearby. The Authorities decided it was too dangerous, and all Schoolchildren in the Town were evacuated, some for the first time. We went at very short notice to Frome in Somerset where we spent the rest of the War.

5) I had no real knowledge of immigrants or emigrants Post War, other than what I read in the newspapers. I knew about the Jamaicans who were coming into the UK. Later I learnt about UK Citizens leaving for Commonwealth countries and Colonies to find a better life for themselves. Most I think were fed up with food rationing, and the austerity of life after a terrible War. Food Rationing was still in force in 1953 when I left!

I considered Southern Africa a good country to possible emigrate to.

The Afrikaaner Residents in Rhodesia, I always regarded as Rhodesians.

6) I attested in the British South Africa Police in August 1953, and proceeded to Cape Town on the "Pretoria Castle". Thence by train to Salisbury (Harare now). It offered adventure and a completely new way of life for a young man. I was 21 years of age and at no cost to myself.

My family were all for the idea, and later came out to settle too.

7) As Combatants, we considered we were fighting Communist expansion and aggression. We fought for the Southern Rhodesia Government who employed us, and also naturally to protect our families and homes from this menace. Also to uphold the traditional British way of life and its standards.

8) We were fighting the Communist inspired African Nationalists who had received lengthy training in Russia and China to overthrow the Rhodesian Government by force of arms.

The main enemies were ZAPU and ZANU with ZIPRA being a Military Wing of ZAPU. All had the same goal, the complete removal of all Europeans from Power and the Country, so we fought the lot!

My outlook was mainly influenced by the Police Force, the Media and friends.

There was never to my knowledge, Political indoctrination as such, or Political discussions by our Officers. Only Operational Orders and Directives. Police Standing Orders strictly forbade Politics when on Duty. You could of course use your Vote in an Election.

Naturally we discussed Political events with our friends as to how the War was going, the Casualties and life on the Home Front.

9) My understanding of the Liberation War was limited to what I read or heard about on the Radio or in the Police. I realized that the Nationalists were a sinister threat and menace to the well being of Southern Rhodesia /Rhodesia and all its inhabitants, both Black and White.

The Cold War/Liberation Struggle to overthrow the Government of S.Rhodesia by force of Arms was important in shaping my attitude to these people, and encouraged me to resist the Terrorist incursions into the Country I regarded as Home to me and my family.

I respected my Commanding Officers. I was after all serving in a disciplined Police Force and knew that all Officers had come up through the Ranks to their present position.

The Protected Village Scheme was a successful and necessary method of protecting law abiding and vulnerable Africans of whom there were many in the Rural Areas.

10) I consider the Bush War helped to create, and sustain a sense of National unity amongst Rhodesians. It created a true Rhodesian spirit and identity as everyone was involved, both Black and White. Most of the European population were involved to a large degree in some form or other.

The one factor we all knew was that we were literally fighting for our very existence, and that of our families and homes.

I am a reasonably well travelled person having visited the USA, Canada, South Africa, France, Spain, Portugal and Mozambique.

African Nationalism was from about 1970 a source of worry and concern to my family and I .Also to the Government, Police Force and the Security Forces of Rhodesia.

In the main, I regarded the average peace loving African as a fellow Countryman, but the "Terrorists" as Communist inspired ,and who were going to create mayhem in the Country.

My relationships/contacts between Black Rhodesian Troops /Police members were of necessity a disciplined formal one at that time. Rank had to be observed .However, respect and comradeship for each other was usually evident.

I considered it to be mainly an ideological War, but also partly Racial, Civil and Tribal too.

The "Terrorists" were mainly Marxists who had left Rhodesia to obtain Military Training in Russia, China, Zambia and Tanzania, with a view of overthrowing the Rhodesia Government by force of arms.

ZIPRA was widely regarded as the most militant of our adversaries. They were mostly composed of Matabele, a Warlike offshoot of the Zulu Nation founded by Shaka in Natal, who later emigrated to Central Africa. ZIPRA were well organized and well equipped with Communist weaponry. They proved to be good fighters who gave the Rhodesian Security Forces a hard time.

ZANLA was not regarded as being so warlike, although anyone carrying an AK47 Assault rifle is dangerous. ZANLA although by far the most numerous, lacked the aggressive fighting spirit of the Matabele ZAPU/ZIPRA forces.

The UANC only came into the picture very late in the War and were not Combatants as such. The Rhodesian Government considered they were the best Organization from which to form a new Government of National Unity. However, the Ballot Box proved them wrong in the end; the AK47 is a great persuader!

The two main Terrorist Groups hated each other, and there were known instances when they actually fought one another. These even continued after 1980 and Independence.

12) I left the BSAP in 1980.

I did not however, leave Rhodesia/Zimbabwe as it was then called.

I remained in Zimbabwe and continued in the newly constituted Zimbabwe Republic Police Force.

I regarded this as a permanent move at the time. However, after four years I decided to leave the Force. A lot of my European friends had already left at the time of Independence, but there were still several hundred in the Force, although numbers were dwindling.

My Wife and I left Zimbabwe and returned to UK in January 2009, after 56 years in Africa, and now reside in Yorkshire.

I found conditions very different from when I left UK in 1953. Everyone appeared to be well off, owned a car, a TV and seemed generally satisfied with their lot.

The UK appeared very prosperous compared with Zimbabwe, where total collapse seemed imminent on top of being bankrupt. No water, no electricity for days on end, Municipal and Health Services tottering under these abnormal conditions. The Zimbabwe Dollar was worthless, a loaf of bread cost Millions, if you could get one! The poor Africans were on the verge of starvation due to the Farm acquisitions. The European farmers who normally provided the bulk of the food supplies had gone, and the "New" Farmers had little idea of highly intensive, highly mechanized farming Operations. 4000 European Farmers had produced enough food for the whole country with a lot left over for export.

I felt, almost as if I had never been away and quickly got back into the swing of things in UK.

I only feel a bit different from the other residents here in Yorkshire, as I am a Londoner at heart.

The local Yorkshire Dialect gets some getting used to, but I am getting there, and I get along well with the Locals.

The end of the Empire was a natural progression of peoples obtaining their independence from Britain .However, Southern Rhodesia was a Self Governing Colony and naturally expected to be recognised like the other countries, but this was not to be, despite supporting Britain in two World Wars and the Boer War.

The Struggle in the late 1970's, was on reflection, particularly in the final year, before Independence, cause for concern. Despite winning militarily, and holding our own economically, Rhodesia was being put under intense pressure to come to an Agreement with all the belligerent Parties. This pressure was exerted by South Africa, who in turn were being pressurised by Henry Kissinger of the U.S. Government. This resulted in the "Plug" being pulled and supplies of vital supplies and arms and ammunition which we had been receiving from South Africa being suspended, or halted altogether. The writing was on the wall, and the Lancaster House Agreement was the end result and now part of History!