

Bill Duffey

Born 1939(?). Grew up in the UK and joined the British Army. Joined the Rhodesian / Federal Army and travelled to Rhodesia in 1961. Then went to Nyasaland with King's African Rifles. Eventually joined the British Army again (in 1965?) until 1977. After a divorce, enlisted in the Rhodesian Army. Left Zimbabwe for the UK in 1999.

This is Dr Sue Onslow talking to Mr Bill Duffey in Wallasey, near Liverpool on Tuesday 29 September 2009. Bill, 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?

I served in the British Army with the Irish Guards. I came out of the army and I got a job in Liverpool and it was in a department store. Then unfortunately across the road was the army recruiting office there was a chap called George Shannon who was also in the Irish Guards as a recruiting sergeant. He used to come in and, didn't give me a hard time but it was a bit of barracking "you must join up again" and that sort of thing. I still kept up buying "Soldier" magazine which was, it still is the magazine for the British Army, and there was an advertisement in there which appeared all the time "Wanted – soldiers for the infantry and the army of Rhodesia and Nyasaland". So I got in touch.

When was this?

This was '61, 1961 so I went down to Rhodesia House. I enlisted there and that's how it all began.

So was your family from Liverpool originally?

My mother's Welsh, which is only down the road from here, and my father's from an Irish background. But my father was born here, not far from the town hall, in fact and so I was born and brought up here.

How long had you served in the Irish Guards for?

Only three years.

So that was your national service, was it?

No, National Service was eighteen months but I went in as a regular, I signed on for three years. I had no intention of soldiering after that and then I spent a lifetime doing it but that was the...I went in because I knew I would have had to have done national service and I probably got the taste for it.

So had you served in Africa during your time in the Irish Guards?

No, no. In that period, we'd been over to Cyprus during the emergency and that was about as far as we went, as a battalion.

So you saw the advertisement in Soldier magazine, went down to Rhodesia House and signed up.

That's it

(00:02:43) **So what was the interview process?**

Well, you had to take along confirmation of who you were, British Army and discharge books with you which has in it a character reference. Because of my background, I was happily led into the infantry. Of course I didn't know the background; it was explained to me, I imagine, and from there, I went to the newly formed Rhodesian Light Infantry.

Ah, the all white regiment.

The all white regiment and the Federation was expanding. They expanded into an SAS squadron and an armoured car regiment which was called Selous Scouts later, of course. The name was carried on by another regiment, when I went back there in the Seventies.

So your initial recruitment then, into the army for the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, they paid for your trip out to Rhodesia?

Yes, we flew out on a Canadair Aircraft and we went via, all over the place really. So we landed in Libya and went into Tripoli; and then we went off to Khartoum, we landed there. Then down to Entebbe in Uganda and landed there, stayed there overnight and then into Rhodesia, and I remember all these things...(shows the interviewer documents) That was just a menu so there's the date on it. I can follow it from that. That was on that particular trip out there.

So this is a menu from the Lake Hotel in Entebbe. Dinner, 10 shillings...

So that was, as I say, digging through my box of souvenirs, I just came across that. That was actually on that trip going out.

It's wonderful because the lettering on the left is in Swahili.

There you are, well, Uganda you see.

Yes, but did you go with any other friends, colleagues from the Irish Guards?

No, I met quite a number out there eventually. But no, no I just went off on my own with a group of other people who I, to be honest, I can't even remember who they are now because they all drifted off. It all got fragmented when we went out there. I remember we arrived in Salisbury, the capital and went to KG6 barracks; and I remember going to the mess there. The most amazing thing was a pint of beer was little more than one and a penny and a packet of cigarettes, Springbok, was two and six for 50.

(00:06:00) How did that compare with the UK at the time?

Oh, I can't remember what the prices were, but you wouldn't have got anything for...you know, you wouldn't have got 50 for two and six, but it was a heck of a price. So all of this, this was heaven straight away and then the sun was shining the next day. I'd arrived in the right place, you know that was it.

Sun shining, beer cheap, cigarettes freely available

Absolutely, yes and after a few days, I can't remember, I think we did a passing in test. They took us up to a place called Gun Hill which is now built, where Mugabe's lot has these big houses for all of his deposed Heads of State pals. It is a different country to live there now. We did a map reading test to see if we had got some knowledge or whatever standard we were at. And then we went off to Bulawayo and joined the battalion which had just been named the Rhodesian Light Infantry. There was lots of people like me, ex British Army and there was lots of Rhodesians of course, lots of South Africans, quite a big mixture of people.

Had you known anything about Southern Rhodesia before you went?

Only schoolboy geography, that was all.

Right, so how did you find the people that you'd enlisted with, those South Africans and those Rhodesians down in Bulawayo?

It was different. The South Africans, of course. I have a much better idea about them now, I took everybody, you know, they were all sort of, all white men, one would think that...I didn't realise the vast difference there is, you know, in the South African ones, not the same as the Rhodesian and certainly not the same as the Englishman, and with their attitude towards us, which wasn't apparent. I had to find this out, about the Boer War only happened yesterday, and this type of thing.

When did that realisation start to dawn on you?

I think it may have been sometime after, where...I've brought no photographs with me but I've got photographs of the mortar platoon which I ended up as a mortar platoon sergeant in the battalion. As you can see on the snap there, different racial or skin tones on people and these were the ones with names like Van der Daar; all of that built up a bit of knowledge in you, that they were different people. And of course I went down on leave to South Africa and found that there was a difference. But it took a while. It wasn't one of those moments where I said "ha, I've worked it out"; it took a while, sort of, I suppose social intercourse with them to discover that they were really, terribly mixed.

Bill, I'm thinking that in 1961, Federation was starting to crack, after all, with the negotiations for Northern Rhodesia, with the background of the

(00:09:22) emergency in Nyasaland in 1959 to 1960. How aware were you of the politics of what was going on?

In fact, I wasn't. I'd no idea of the set up whatsoever. That wasn't apparent but of course as time went on, it became absolutely apparent and going to Bulawayo where we were, it was, Winston Field was the candidate for what became the Rhodesian Front. It was really like those Hollywood films where... lovely warm evenings and he was in the town hall and there were hundreds of people outside. You couldn't get in the place, not while he was orating in there. This was of little interest to me as we'd go from bar to bar sort of thing. But I was becoming aware that things were... there was a big political turmoil and then, as you spoke to people, you found out a bit more. I just can't remember the ins and outs of it, but by the time we'd got to '63 where we knew it was going to happen. You were already in the picture by then.

Bill, did it concern you that, after all, you were all now part of an army for a country that's trying to negotiate independence from Britain and that's proving very fractious indeed?

Well, at that time, I don't think it was on the cards where... the three territories I do know from reading since that Rhodesia I think wanted more time. Southern Rhodesia were quite happy to go into the federation because of the... they had the administrative set up and Northern Rhodesia had the minerals and if they had to have the add-on of Nyasaland, which had a vast population but nothing else really, they were quite happy to do this. Of course, when the crunch came and they were going to split the Federation up and do away with all, with pressure from, I don't know, I suppose the OAU and all these different people...? No, that came later didn't it? But when the decision was made to split it up, the fact that the two northern territories were given their independence and Southern Rhodesia wasn't, although they'd been self governing since 1923 and they didn't owe anybody anything, I don't think. Everybody was totally upset about this.

Did you talk about these political issues with your colleagues?

Well, in '63 we did because then, we knew something was going to happen. I can't remember when they said that the Federation is going but prior to that, I mean, we've got to look after our own futures and lots of my friends stayed on there. Mike Mould, for instance, whereas I chose not to and again, that was handed out to... every soldier got one of those and...

“Dissolution of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Rhodesia and Nyasaland Army”

And in that, you were given a choice of going to stay in Southern Rhodesia, going off to Northern Rhodesia because at that time, Northern Rhodesia had the Northern Rhodesia Regiment and the second Kings African Rifles were there; and Nyasaland had one Kings African (00:13:27) Rifles and this was... so the options were there and everybody had an option to go, or stay.

So what did you decide to do?

I opted to go back to the British Army via Nyasaland with 1 Kings African Rifles and that's where I actually went.

So when did you go up to Nyasaland?

The first day of '64. I've got the old passports here. I'm not going to bore you with them but you know, with the stamps in them.

So what did you think of African Nationalism at this time?

I don't think at that time I was aware of it too much. During this period, we'd done...we'd run round, here's another thing from this period, we'd run round banning parties and things like this you see, so we went round chasing these people and searching their huts in villages.

This is a banning notice of the National Democratic Party, and it's written in Shona and Sindebele language

I was aware that there was a nationalist, what's the word? aspiration to get in there but at that period, I think it was only small. It was kept well in check with the police, the BSAP and the armed forces but it wasn't really...the big picture, I don't think I'd even grasped at that time, the split up of the three territories. I knew we were getting rid of the empire as I'd seen in Cyprus and so I was aware of that, but I didn't see any (?) from the Africans out there. Now having said that, again, I've got in the back of my mind that we did go to Gwelo as a battalion; and we were actually, we were there when there'd been riots in the townships there. And we went there and kept the peace there and we never had to, as far as I remember, fire or anything like that.

I haven't asked you, Bill, what did you join as? At what rank?

I was only a private soldier when I went out there. I was out there because I could do the stuff. I was a sergeant in no time.

Yes, so when were you promoted to sergeant?

I don't know, sort of in the first year or so.

Right, so about 1962, you were promoted to sergeant?

Yes

And so by the time you went up to Nyasaland, you said, at the beginning of 1964

(00:16:48) First day, yes

And what was... at what rank?

Yes, I went up as a sergeant. When I went up there I took over the mortar platoon, but that's a longer story. You'd have to get a separate history on Nyasaland.

Ok, I'm just going to ask you this because Kenya is often described as "the officer's mess and Rhodesia, after the war, is the sergeant's mess." Have you heard that description?

I haven't, no, no. From the settler's point of view you mean?

Yes

I can imagine that because in Kenya, it was running farms, plantation thing. It was the same in Southern Rhodesia, but Rhodesia had lots of artisans and white men who have come out, builders and bricklayers and people and all these fellows started their own businesses off. They run the place so it was very much like that. The railways was a great big thing full of, mind you, a lot of South Africans were up on the railways; they were whites as well as the natives. It was a big grouping of people.

Was it quite class divided when you got there, that you found?

Well, there were very rich people I never got to see, but then, we're talking about this period, I mean, the place, as I said, the beer was cheap, cigarettes were cheap. There were nightclubs open which nobody had ever been in a nightclub over here really at my sort of level. These places were there and it was wonderful, dance halls and all the rest of it, so you didn't have to look beyond that.

Were these all white dance halls or were these multi-racial dance halls?

No, these were white. I mean, it did go on but as I say on a very small level, there was no actual, never advertised "come along to our multi-racial dance". That just didn't happen.

Well, I do know that Sir Edgar Whitehead tried to accelerate de-segregation and that produced a backlash between 1961 and 1962. How firm were the racial boundaries, that you saw, when you first went out there?

I can make a comparison with working later in Pretoria. I mean, you wouldn't think there were any in Rhodesia; there was no apartheid as such, there was...except you went to your own drinking place and the African would go to his own and I suppose the money issue came into it. You never actually saw any racial (?) and in fact with the Rhodesian Light Infantry then, I never (00:20:03) really had much to do with Africans, to be honest. We had a fellow who was the batman, who cleaned the barracks and so forth, like this, but not a lot to do with them. The taxi drivers were black.

You really were working in an all white environment then?

It really was that way and of course a complete contrast getting up to Nyasaland, you know. It was a much similar situation up there. That's how I remember it, I never really got to know the African in that period.

In that first period, where did you regard as “home”?

I think, I actually think Rhodesia as home. You carry your home with you as a soldier you serve...I saw this and I saw no reason for it moving on, but as we got towards the end of Federation, I looked at my future in the Rhodesian Light Infantry and I thought, no, one of the things there was that...I don't think I'd come in with a lot of knowledge from the British Army and I never learnt anything new while I was out there. I did a couple of courses at their school, but there was nothing new. They'd been shut off for so long from outside influence.

How about relations between the RLI and the BSAP? After all, the BSAP liked to consider themselves the right of the line, the senior service.

Well, they were on all parades. I don't think it was a problem with them because they were a paramilitary force; so there was no problem at all and in fact during Federation...

What, not even at rugby matches or...?

Ah, I mean the Rhodesians were the greatest example of sunshine and good schooling. I admired the actual Rhodesians themselves: they were all fit, well not all, but the majority were fit fellows and they'd all played rugby at school so the competition between schools went on right until the bitter end of the collapse. Oh yes, this was a big thing, and inter-regimental this sort of thing and like the Irish Guards, your promotion was assured if you were a boxer.

This is a very male British public school set of values here?

(00:23:59) Well, I think all of their schools had these things and I know from talking to colleagues of mine, you know, Rhodesian Army fellows, and they all had all the characteristics of a British public school. They had fags and all these things and the initiation...

Bill, where had you been to school? I mean, what was your schooling experience?

Nothing like that. Just the normal secondary modern here and that was it and then all my schooling after that came from the army really.

So how difficult or different did you feel to these people?

Oh not at all. By the time, when I was commissioned, no, it was fine. By then I'd been schooled in the army so there was no problem. I'd been to Staff College and everything so there was no worries on that level. No, you know, I don't think you ever thought of it; it was just the way things were. We

probably weren't aware of it at that time or at this early time in Federation, I wasn't...

So after you went up to Nyasaland, how long did you stay there?

I stayed for two tours. One tour was, it was the Kings African Rifles. I did all the independence. I should have brought some photos but I never thought that we'd get round to that. So I didn't bring those, I did all of that and I was the last escort to any battalion of the Kings African Rifles because that was the last battalion; and then became the Malawi Rifles and I stayed on. Now I was really wondering what on earth am I going to get up to and I was persuaded to go back into the British Army again by the quartermaster (?) so I did and I went back to the British Army and soldiered on until '77. By then, I was getting a bit jaded. I've had a very chequered career and I could apply for voluntary redundancy, which I did and I came out with a pension and I got on a boat and I'd just been divorced and of course it was an ideal time. I got on a boat and I set sail down to Cape Town with the intention of enlisting in the Rhodesia Army, which I eventually did.

I'd like to take you back...

If you want to go back to, somebody may have mentioned to you, in Federation, we did go up to the Congo and these are just some of the leaflets that were dropped by the UN aeroplane over the area we were in. We were at a place called Ikapushi, on the Katanga border with Northern Rhodesia.

obviously in the local language in French and in English: " the UNO will exterminate you all. UNO is no longer the UNO for peace but UNO for wars. UNO will steal your freedom, your wealth and the sale of your parents"? I wonder what...?

(00:27:22) I'm not too sure how that works out

No and then we have here, "for the Katanga people, white and black, to defend you is very dear to us. Christian civilisation, liberty, democracy and justice. To arms, it's better to die standing up than to live on your knees" - this is in French – and this is from the state general of the Katangese Forces.

Yes, that was Moise Tshombe's lot.

So how far were your views then shaped to what was happening in Africa by your experience in Congo?

Well, they forced the man and you certainly, you wanted to fight for...

Break in interview

(Where?) was certainly horrific, people being caught and skinned alive and this type of thing and at this customs post, a white convoy came through and

for some unknown reason, I've no idea why, but they were made to abandon all the vehicles, their pick-up trucks and they were then put on military three tonners and driven off to, I don't know, Kitwe or Ndola or somewhere like that and also to leave their weapons behind. This is the first time I'd ever seen an FN rifle; they had FN's, so they piled all of those up there.

Well, they're Belgian, would do, yes

Yes, obviously but I'd never seen one. We didn't have those, we had British Army self loading rifles.

So this is a contingent from the RLI that went up to the Congo?

The battalion went up and we deployed for conventional warfare. We dug trenches and had a front line and a rear line and that sort of drop back positions as if we were going to fight in North West Europe.

This was actually in Congo?

No, no, this was right on, where the border was at Akapushi. There was a strip of no-man's land in between both border posts of 100 metres or so and we're actually on that and at the other places. I think one was Kolwezi, I can't remember, I know I was at Ikapushi. Again, I've got all the photos from this.

When you were up in Nyasaland, Malawi, what news did you have of UDI? I mean, did you stay in touch with former mates down in Southern Rhodesia? Were they telling you what was going on? I'm just wondering what your views were of the political crisis, as it was developing?

(00:30:16) No, we thought it was the only way they could go and when I was with 1KAR, the CO, a bloke called Paul Lewis who has died recently, he gathered us all, the British WO's in the sergeant's mess and we had a talk over what had just occurred in East Africa with the previous Kings African Rifles battalions who mutinied if you remember that. We had a thing where the rifles were self loading rifles so the main working parts, you could detach them from the rifles. So of an evening, they were stored in different places and we also had...

So you were obviously worried about mutiny?

Yes, we also had machine guns split up around the married quarters in different places just in case anything like this thing happened. There was no worries whatsoever, it was an entirely different situation to East Africa, although it was the Kings African Rifles, it was divorced from the East African side of things.

But you say that Paul Lewis got you all together?

Oh yes, sorry and he said, on the Rhodesian set up he said “what would your views be if you were asked to fight against Rhodesia?” I think there was only one person who was quite happy to do that. He was in the REME, the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, and the rest of us said “no” and I think this also, I don’t know if it took place on an official basis back here but I believe it did; and that was the opinion of the army here, they wouldn’t have gone in there to fight against the Rhodesian regime.

So you left Malawi in the late sixties?

No, no

You returned to the British Army, you said

Yes, oh yes, it was '69 I think

Oh right, so did you follow the politics of Rhodesia? Did you stay in touch with people in the interim before you went back there in 1977?

No, no I didn’t, no. I’d meet odd people over here who...we’d both soldiered out there or something like that, but that was all. There was no other way. I had no other contact, no.

So in 1977 when you said that you were made to retire from the British Army?

No, I retired

Oh you retired

(00:33:29) I took voluntary redundancy. They had a scheme which went on, I’d applied for it two years previously, didn’t get it. I got it this time and as I say, I had a pension out of it so I was quite happy to go.

And you volunteered for the Rhodesian Army?

Well I sailed out to Cape Town

But had they been actively recruiting here?

No, well I’m saying “no”, not as far as I know. They never spoke to me about this.

But you decided to “burn your boats”, as it were

That’s it and I was surprised when I got to Rhodesia.

Well, you went to Cape Town and...?

I had about a month in Cape Town and then I got on the train, I've got all of these things in this bag, but I went up to Rhodesia as I say. I found there, in the recruiting office, people that I recognised and I couldn't put a name to them at the time; but I found there was some opposition to fellows who'd left at the end of Federation, coming back and it was all "oh you deserted us" type of thing. Some of them never, ever got back into the army, I could name them even but I did, you know, I got back in.

Excuse me for asking, Bill, how old were you at this point?

Oh well I'm seventy now, so you'll have to deduct down from there.

So those people who had reapplied...

I'm afraid, again, I'm a terrible man for keeping these things, that was the trip up on the railway from...

You do like keeping menus

Well they're the handiest thing next to a diary, but unfortunately it's not dated.

"Rhodesian Railways Catering Services Menu; Breakfast citrus segments, rolled oats, cornflakes, savoury mince on toast, broiled bacon, eggs to order" and then, that's interesting, at the bottom, right at the bottom it says "Zimbabwe".

Well hang on, have I got the right one here?

Well, I don't know

Oh no, that was the name of the train

(00:36:06) **Oh right, the train was called "Zimbabwe"**

That was the train, even that far back, yes, that was the name of the actual, the engine, I suppose. One other thing before we wander away, that's just the part on orders. Again, I've saved that and you'll see when you flick the page, from that period in Federation, this is, we're now, we've gone back from the Congo to the brand new barracks at Cranborne so we were in that and you'll see I feature quite a lot there.

You do. Oh dear Sergeant Duffy, what were you doing?

We don't want to go into that. But you see that, that's John Thompson who was the adjutant at the time; he came from the Northern Rhodesia Regiment and he was the last white general in the army. Sadly, he died just after he'd left but his daughter was at that reunion where I came across you, I don't know if you spoke to her?

No I didn't. No April '62 wasn't a good time for you, was it?

It was just one of those things, and that was the days of starched gear and boots and putties and shorts so you had to change about four times a day on duty, just to keep smart.

Is that what these “infractions” were?

Well, no, I’m not saying that but the ones I’ve done, with me being on duty, I had to keep I was there because I had to mount all the guards and do all these things you know, so a bit of a mess, but I thought I’d just show you.

When you went back in 1977, which regiment, which unit did you join?

I said that I came from the Rhodesian Light Infantry and I wanted to go back to that. Obviously I thought this...by now, I was well up on everything, I had done so many courses. I’d been, only a Colour Sergeant in the British Army and that again was a bit of a chequered career. I’d been a bit further than that but anyway, I arrived out there and the CO at the time was a fellow called Rich who is now deceased and he said “no” I mentioned my past service and this was through the grapevine. “No, you deserted and left the country in ‘63”

“You renegade. We don’t want your type back”?

That type of thing. So I thought, God this looks serious so I ended up, I was sent down to the depot of the Rhodesia Regiment and I, frankly I couldn’t stand it. I thought it was a dreadful place and it was really not my cup of tea at all.

What was the matter with it, from your point of view?

From my point of view, it was very military. It was training national servicemen but it was the whole, the regular element of it, just wasn’t my thing.

(00:39:22) In what way?

It was a military set up, I thought. I thought my standards were a lot higher than theirs in that way, so anyway, what I did, I said I wanted to go on a course and they sent me off to Gwelo School of Infantry. I went there on this drill and weapons course and I got there and I did well enough for them to say “gosh, we’re looking for instructors, would you like to come here?” and I said “you bet your life”. So I ended up there in Gwelo in the School of Infantry.

Right, just taking you back to the Rhodesia Regiment, so you felt that that was a rather brutal, shall we say, training

No, no I wouldn’t say brutal, no, no, it...just training national servicemen and the people who were there in the WO’s and Sergeant’s mess weren’t my, I didn’t match with them.

In what way were you different?

I can't remember now but they were just, it wasn't my thing. Plus I suppose the barracks was isolated outside of Bulawayo, quite a way out about twenty one miles or twenty one k's. So I wasn't happy there, put it that way.

But in the School of Infantry, you were appointed as an instructor?

Yes and through that, as I say, I'd done all these courses in the British Army, the mortar course, snipers...so I could run them, which I did and I just progressed there and eventually I (?)

Bill, had you gone back to Rhodesia for any political reasons? You've outlined the professional and the emotional reasons which led you to leave the UK, but I'm just wondering about the politics of it.

I really thought, I thought that the whole thing was... when I'd been there, well this again was a shock coming back, the place had changed immensely.

In what way?

Well the clubs I'd been to were sort of degenerating, they had sort of vanished and the whole place had changed. The easy going lifestyle had gone now and everybody was in uniform of some sort, even people they called "retreads" they'd been brought in, in the army, a lot of those. And this depot of the Rhodesia Regiment, lots of these old boys who'd been brought in, but it was great in the way they...the atmosphere, you know, people were glad to be of some use so you'd get somebody who'd been well retired was called back; and he'd either be issuing petrol coupons or something like that. There's a sheet of them (shows interviewer), and these type of things, but it was a great change. I'm thinking about this and I can't think of much more now except that these problems we had with having to get petrol and...

(00:42:57) So this is a white community at war, the war's come home to the home front. If everybody's involved, even in some small way...

Yes, very much so.

How much do you think the war was creating a sense of Rhodesian identity at this point?

I think very much so, I think it would have...I mean it was always political thoughts on the other way with the Edgar Whitehead type, you know, thinking. But I think the majority, say in '77 when I got out there were still up for going on, fighting because things hadn't really got too bad just yet although sanctions were biting in certain ways. But of course, as things went on, everybody got disillusioned with call ups, forever being called up and then...

Well, it was also the casualty rate. In a small community, it was a high percentage of casualties, even if the absolute figures, it was the black African community who were suffering by far the most.

Sure, yes well there was that, I think. It was more the aspect of not being able to get on with their lives. Their lives now had revolved round between call ups; they were forever being called up, and they'd go away for weeks on end.

So it's the disruption.

I think that, and they couldn't get on with their businesses. By then, if something went wrong with your car and they couldn't get a part, they had lots of ingenuity, they'd make something to overcome whatever that gasket was that they couldn't get. It was very good like that but everybody was getting fed up with it, I think, in that respect. I personally wasn't, it didn't sort of...it flowed over me but that was how, I'm sure that's how the white regime saw this in the end. Couldn't really go on when the people weren't behind you. But also the Rhodesian Army, the regular army was only about 9,000 strong and it was only 1500 of those were white, and all the rest were black.

Were you training black Rhodesian soldiers?

I did, only I got attached to Guard Force which is one of these, so many of these little units they had dotted about. I've got no time for Guard Force at all.

Why not?

We were supposed to train these fellows to shoot on the rifle range and some of the guys who were there were sergeants and former regular RLI. This is another strange thing they had there, were people who weren't (00:46:13) serving in the regiment any more. They'd been called up, were still wearing their old regiment's uniform and I knew a couple of these fellows and they were mistreating a couple of these blacks, instead of coaching them how to fire. They were on our side in that period, so it was these things which annoyed me and of course, it didn't go down too well...

How much of that was going on, to your knowledge?

Well I only saw that there ... but as I say, this was a very rag tag organisation and the people were no longer fit to go into the regular army as such. But I mean, this is only a couple of blokes I saw, but it was one of these things where they...there was too many little private armies there, there really were and I think...

In your view, where else were the private little armies?

Well I think we had INTAF. I think it was INTAF, internal affairs which ran the protected villages.

What on paper?

Maybe, but it was very much, I always felt that it was, to achieve the aim, they weren't going for the regiment. They wanted to exercise their power, "oh no, this is our rifle range, this is our bit of land, you can't use ours" kind of like this.

Had you visited protected villages, any of them?

I had, yes

What did you think of them, the ones that you visited and where were they?

Do you know... they'd be in the north of Salisbury but I can't remember the areas now. But I did go to them and I really felt sorry for one or two of the white guys who'd been stuck out there. I suppose they were doing their best to, I don't know, what they'd been told to do but I think it was old General Templer's idea in Malaya that they were trying to work on, but it was never that successful I don't think.

So the protected villages you saw, how well defended were they? How well organised?

Well, what they did, from my memory of it, they had a battlement built up, you know, a quite high battlement and of an evening, everybody in the village would go into that and it may have achieved the aim, in stopping the terrors being able to intimidate them on the outside; and again, in the morning, they'd go out and go about their normal business, in the fields and so forth like this. I (00:49:29) suppose the idea was there, but I never got the impression and I had little to do with them, that it was actually much use.

Bill, at this point, did you regard yourself as Rhodesian or as British?

Very much Rhodesian, in fact, just to prove it

There's your Rhodesian passport, so when did you take that out?

I can't remember. I was down in Gwelo and I don't know, is there a date in it? You've got me, I don't know, it must have a date in there somewhere. Oh right, '79, March '79.

Were you one of a number of foreigners who'd gone out to join the Rhodesian Army at this point, in 1977?

I think at that point, when I went out there, it was in dribs and drabs you know. There was no recruiting going on, well, no, there wouldn't be. Rhodesia House was not very...no, I did it purely as I said, I left the British Army, I knew the place out here so I got on the boat and did it.

You didn't contact anybody first, before you left England?

No, no

So you contacted them down in Cape Town or you just rocked up in Salisbury?

I turned up in Salisbury, went into a boarding house in, I can't remember the name, I can remember the boarding house and walked along to the recruiting office.

Had you followed the Rhodesian War on the British televisions and in the British newspapers?

I knew more or less where it was up to, sure, yes. And it was something I thought worth fighting for, you know, the way everything else was going and of course I honestly didn't think it would collapse. I thought to myself, it would be in future we know how that went, but I really couldn't...and again I don't think even now, I was really aware of just what South Africa was. It took a fair bit of time afterwards, to work there myself, to figure out how they were.

Bill, what did you think you were fighting for?

I suppose it was to preserve what was better than what had gone on in the places that had got their independence in sub-Saharan Africa. That's really from the top to the bottom of Africa. Nothing was very good. At the time we'd had the Congo, dreadful things, Nyasaland, it was now Malawi but that was passive under Banda and again, they weren't shaping anywhere; they'd got no money for anything. I just thought it would be, it's the way to (00:52:48) go. It's probably a bit naïve thinking it/ It couldn't go on forever but I thought at least you could go on, in my lifetime. And at the same time, Africans were coming to the fore: they were being educated and had good hospital facilities.

But Bill, Ian Smith had gone on television on the 25th of September 1976 and said black majority rule in two years and you arrived there in 1977?

Oh well I missed that then, so there you are. I don't remember that. He said that?

Yes

Oh well there you are, I'd missed that.

It's interesting though, how far did you see more clearly what you were fighting against, than actually what you were fighting for?

I thought, yes, I just wonder, well of course it's turned out to be, it was really east against west and I think the Americans had a hand in undermining Rhodesia. I really believe that.

In what way, east against west?

Well, it was the communists who were training Mugabe's lot and Nkomo's, Russian with Nkomo and the Chinese with Mugabe. That was there and of course, the winners of this now are the Chinese undoubtedly. They've got their hands on everything else, The west seemed .. they didn't want to be involved in the thing.

So you felt you were fighting the forces of communism?

Yes, it's one of the things that, ok, it's the standards that we had, you know, I mean in the west but of course, the powers that be didn't see it in that way, did they? in the west.

Did you have political discussions with your friends? When you were down there?

This is one of your questions and I couldn't really, I couldn't think.... We did. we discussed what was in the Rhodesia Herald or whatever press we got and I always listened to the world news on the BBC and this sort of thing. So I had an idea of what was going on but politically I think it was, at that time, it was a matter of what are we going to replace it with?

Do you think the war shut down the space for discussion? "You mustn't criticise what's going on because our boys are out there in the bush and fighting."

(00:55:45) No, there were people who were anti the war, for whatever reason they had. I'm not sure they'd have achieved this (?) you know but there were people like that.

What did you think of people who were leaving?

Well no, I've never thought, I probably hadn't realised the amounts that were going. As it got towards the end, it became evident there was a flood, and as it became even more clearer towards the very...before the elections, I mean, desertions from the army and things like this were...only for the reason of saying "well there's nothing here for me, I'm going now" and that type of thing.

Do you remember discussions with friends like that: " this isn't working, we're losing this"?

Well, yes. I'm afraid I was the eternal optimist. I thought, well, the way it's got to go and they tried this out with Muzorewa and...

What did you think of that?

That was his little (?) and, well, I think that was doomed to failure. Yes, I'm afraid it was. I think having read the, and I can't remember what was in old Ian Smith's book, *The Betrayal* it was called

The Great Betrayal

Yes, and various other things. I think Lord Richards and people like that, they made up their minds and they weren't going to...there was no leeway, they wanted it to go one way and to give the place away because that was the last thorn in the British government's side with the OAU. We had no other

problems in Africa then and I'm sure that was it, and that became evident so I was a bit anti-that in a way.

Bill, did you ever or do you recall ever questioning whether it was white resistance to accelerated black political and economic rights that was making African nationalists increasingly radical and look to the communist bloc for support?

No, I don't think I ever thought that way. I thought that they were a bit radical and that's...I'm sure probably it was the other way round, I'm sure that the communist bloc had got in there first and they'd already taken them off and a bit of indoctrination and so forth. I'm sure that was the way. And then they came back and spread the word, but I don't believe there's any black ever believed in communism as the communists did. I don't believe that, I think it was just a word to them, although, when they all came back, these...

Was it a word to you? I mean, did you understand about communism, its political philosophy, the system's economic organisation?

(00:59:12) Very much, I mean we had more about it out the...they took over the armed forces in the Spanish Civil War, the anti-Franco forces. It was interesting to see there how they infiltrated gradually and took over power when it did. It all seemed to be only for, to benefit the small group at the very top.

Bill, from your standpoint, between '77 and '79, the war got pretty vicious?

Yes

Would you describe it as a war against communism or was it a civil war, was it a hate war?

It was a preservation war wasn't it?

A war of survival?

Yes I think it was...

Well, how about the fighting in between ZIPRA and ZANLA then?

As we said in the car, that was tribal, that was for who's going to have the biggest share at the end type thing and of course, unfortunately the Shona, Mugabe's lot are the largest tribe by a long shot.

What did you think of Lancaster House?

I think it was a stitch-up. British politicians outclassed the Rhodesians but were then taken in by Mugabe and the wish to get out of Africa. I saw that the decisions were already done and I do get the impression going along that

Harold Wilson and people would have given way somewhere along the line or maybe, I don't know, but I can't remember too much detail but I did think that maybe...but they were against, but I do think it was just...it was like sending out there for the independence, the British bobbies with the helmets; and all the poor old whites out there said "oh we're saved, we've got the British bobbies here. It's all normal" and all the rest of it. It wasn't the bobbies' fault but they're very good here, sorting these things out.

Did you decide to stay, or did you seriously question whether you should leave at independence?

I looked at it all and I thought what on earth am I going to do now? I was absolutely stumped. I thought and as it came up, I made contact with the British Army. The Irish Guards came out as part of the monitoring force and I thought, I don't know, I couldn't go back to that anymore. I thought, well, I'm going to stay and we'll just see where it goes and we got called up, me (01:02:34) and a fellow called Eric Simpson, an ex Scots Guard and we went to army headquarters and they wanted us to train the new army. So I thought, well that will be interesting to see all these terrorists come in and I got involved with that for a short time.

In what way?

Training them. They took over a school called Guinea Fowl outside Gwelo and that's where they started training these people. They all had these war names, Chimurenga names like -Stalin . You said to them "right, who wants to go into town to buy some necessities?" and they'd all look round at the one man who was the one with the answer. There was no sort of individual thought among them.

That's pretty organised hierarchies though?

Well there you are. This is them and it worked on the lines of speaking to them as I went out of my way to find out anything you could. A lot had been sent to Odessa to be trained there and they all had these little...

So these are ZIPRA fighters?

Yes, this lot were; they were mixed in then and it gets worse. But this lot had been and they all had qualifications, they'd say "oh I'm – whatever it was" and when you looked into it and you tried to get off them just what they did know, it would be very low level sort of Lance Corporal level type thing. They'd say they'd been trained in all the...

Such as what?

Radio operators and things like this you know, whereas they had higher sounding titles and the course that they'd been on. This is the impression I got from listening to them.

Did you have any troops who'd been trained by Cubans, I'm just wondering?

Not that any of them ever said, but very few would say. They still regarded you with a bit of suspicion and at Gwelo itself, they started...an authority came out from army headquarters saying "we've got to start commissioning these people" and we ran courses where for every ZIPRA man who was commissioned, you'd have to have two ZANLA men commissioned, this type of thing went on. It was absolutely ...well it was an experience not to be missed.

(01:06:13) So how long did you do that for?

I can't remember and then I got asked if I wanted to go up to Army Headquarters and I went into the G.Ops there. By now, it was like Hitler's bunker where everybody was waiting to go somewhere: people were waiting to go off to Australia or wherever. They were just waiting for visas.

When you say "they", I mean, who are you talking about?

I'm talking about the whites. The colonel "G" was a fellow called John Pritchard. I went under him and then within months, he'd gone off to Australia. I think it was a matter now of accelerated promotion in the way the slots were being filled as they went. I moved up as the GSO 1 operations there, General Staff Officer for ops and I finished off as that I chaired the National Joint Operations Committee which went from being virtually all white to nearly all black in the end, bar John Thomson who I said was the last white general there. He retired and all the Air Force had dropped off. Nhongo who is Mujuru now would chair them and so it was all terribly interesting and I was the minute taker for this so that was even more interesting.

Yes, because would this have been the time of Gukuruhundi? The Gukuruhundi campaign in Matabeleland.

Yes and I deployed down there with the Colonel G. We had the para battalion with Lionel Dyke who was the CO. He had been round and looked at the Fifth Brigade and areas where they'd been operating in. They really had, they'd hammered the hell out of them and you could see the effects on the local population were .. normally an African greeting is an open hand which is, I suppose a bit like a salute of ours, nothing in my hand, so they greet you. Now, just driving down these dirt roads, both hands would go up you know; they really had, they'd clobbered them, terribly so.

Did you have any idea of the scale of the killing in Matabeleland?

Not really. I didn't realise it was that big but you could see burnt villages and things like this. We had a couple of terrorists, escorts on the vehicle and you'd say "so what happened here?" "ah we met these people" and they'd laugh like heck. So you knew what had gone on there. I made a few notes at

the time and in fact I passed it on to B-MAT who asked me. I think the place we were at was Tjolutjo, it's where the para battalion was.

Bill, when did you leave Zimbabwe?

'99

(01:10:23) What was your process of leaving? Why did you leave then?

Because I gone on through various jobs, all sorts of things, thinking well, we'll get by like this. Wonderful country and so forth. It can't get worse and unfortunately it did. It just went on and on and money, nothing in the shops, the power went off and the water would go off and it was just becoming intolerable then. All the clubs you belonged to were closing down or they'd been taken over by the locals and the whole atmosphere changed. Everything that had been there, or a lot of what you'd had there had gone so it was very difficult. Even your motor car, to get repaired was a colossal problem.

So how long did it take you to make that decision to leave?

I came back here and I did a recce. I can't remember when, probably '98 and I had about three months over here and I thought, I was trying to work out what the process would be and how...because I knew that no money was going to come out of there and I tried to move round what I could.

So where did you come back? To Liverpool or did you go to London?

No, I came here because at the time, I had a parent still alive here so that was handy. That was somewhere to actually go to. I'd only got back here actually and the Irish Guards, it was their centenary in 2000 and they were going out, a group of them to South Africa, round the Boer War battle sites, which was the first place they had been deployed. So I went out with them. We had a good time and I left them at the airport and I flew up to Zimbabwe; and I tried to sort out my pensions and things. And of course, it was just a laugh, "oh yes, yes, yes, ah, I see where we've gone wrong, yes sir". Of course I've never seen a penny but there we are. So I did this for a couple of days and stayed with a pal of mine, and even then I had to spend a lot of money in foreign currency, getting petrol or diesel in fact for his Land Rover, just to go around. There was no transport from the airport either; so it just lucky somebody on the plane with me who I knew gave me a lift into Harare.

So did you have to sell your house then?

I sold that prior to this. Yes, I'd got rid of that and this was part of the plan, going along to get rid of it. So I sold it and most of my belongings. This was a place with a clay tennis court and a swimming pool so all of that went.

In Harare?

In Harare, yes Avonlea

(01:13:47) How did you find England coming back here? I mean, I know you'd gone away and come back again in the sixties. So then you'd gone away for a much longer length of time and come back again.

Well I've always enjoyed England. I've always enjoyed the pub life and things like this, but I did find a change. I've found a greater change now where, we all know the problems here, the sort of low level anti social behaviour but so much of it. I know even more through my constituency now, that was fairly evident then and everything seemed dirty in the streets and litter, this kind of thing. So I may be wrong but that's how it appeared to me and it had changed a lot. The Military Club you were having your dinner at, I'm a member of the Victory Services so when I stayed down there, at least twice a year, you'd see the change in London with the Edgware Road which it's on: it's like being in some other country. It used to be all Irish at one time. Yes, there have been changes, not for the better I don't think.

I was going to say, have there been any changes for the better?

I don't know, I don't know. I think all this social tinkering is not actually working and instead of people living their lives, getting more dependent on somebody else to tell them what to do. But if nothing else, I suppose the African was very resilient. He had to be; they're on their own, but again, I admired the Rhodesians. It was only what you had in your back pocket was what you had. When you lost your job or the crop on the farm went, that was it, you had to look to your own resources. I thought they did extremely well.

So you say you go down to the Victory Services Club twice a year for regimental organisations?

Yes

Are you still part of the Irish Guards?

Yes, yes, on St Patrick's day or the nearest Sunday to St Patrick's day, we march up to Horseguards with the regimental band and the regiment and do our thing there. This year, with the regiment being in Windsor, I went down to the battalions, St Patrick's Day Parade and marched round them and get your shamrock off; it was now off Princess Anne, the Princess Royal who issues it there. So I made that reconnection.

But do you feel different from British citizens? You say that, you know, you've talked about the physical environment, anti-social behaviour from street kids, younger element but...

I think there's a big change here in the way, where I think that people who've been in the services over here, (?) you can tell automatically. You just slip into conversation although there may be generations between you and you wouldn't know what weaponry they're using, the modern soldier but you can

still slip into that. Now when I was here of course, there were a lot more former soldiers about. Now the army had shrunk and there aren't so many (01:17:29) about. It's different so the majority are or always have been civilians so that bit has been lost I think as far as society... it has taken something or something hasn't been put into the country through that experience.

Do you feel yourself to be Rhodesian or Zimbabwean or British or what?

Well I don't go round saying I was a Rhodesian because I wasn't. But I don't mind saying that I was there and I had a Rhodesian passport and I was committed to it but the unfortunate thing is ...It's one of those things, if I went back today, there's absolutely nothing left there to go back to. There's no old regimental associations, there's no barracks you can go to, absolutely nothing. There's no way of life that was there, it's gone and I get the impression that's the same with the Rhodesians I've met. That's all over now. I haven't met anybody who said "I can't wait to get back there and sort the place out". It's unsettling but that's over now I think.

Would you go back?

There'd have to be a reason for going back, as we said in the car: if my pensions were going to be paid or whatever. But we know that's never going to happen. It will never, it's just never ever going to happen,

How important is it to you that the Troopie statue is now at Hatfield?

Well that, of course. I'd seen that in Cranborne and I think the more...say for, not having served in the regiment in that period, I think that's a big thing for the regiment as such. So I think it is a great thing and have you seen it and the setting it's in?

I have

So it's in a great place as well, isn't it?

It is, it's very tranquil

It really is. It's great, isn't it, and of course the colours that I served under with the RLI are in the chapel, in the actual house. I don't know if you've seen those?

No, I haven't been into Hatfield house.

Well they've got the crown on them because it was under the crown, so that's a great place. That's the barracks they were in (shows interviewer document)

"One Commando Barracks, registration number, Major Duffey car pass"

(01:20:38) That was what Cranborne barracks became and that was the Rhodesian Army flag. You can see it's reflected there in the tie I'm wearing.

So it's yellow and maroon and wide blue stripe

Right, so that was the...

Looking back Bill, a number of your former Rhodesian colleagues have said they ask themselves; was the struggle worth it? What would you say?

Yes I think so. It's a matter of "Never say die". Anything could have changed along the way, couldn't it? Or else you'd have had to walk away from the place and I think it would have still gone the same way.

But was the struggle, was the war worth it?

I do believe so, yes. I think yes, it was the last of the Wild West, wasn't it? It was, people say it was. This is what we believe in and as I say, you've got to think, they'd been self governing since 1923, they still couldn't believe that this country was ditched on like that. They served in the last war and there was so many of them enlisted that the Royal Rhodesia Regiment, as it was then. They had more places than (?) into battle and they split everybody up into penny packets throughout the whole army, especially all those veterans who were in North Africa and to see where that went. And then of course, they filled up the country with ex-servicemen and people who wanted to emigrate at the end of the war from here, and these people made decent lives for themselves and so forth. Then as the politics changed and unfortunately, these are modern politicians and it's all very much of the day aren't they, you know and they sold them all out really.

Bill, you're a politician now, you need to be careful...

Well I know, that won't be voiced in this chamber so it doesn't matter.

Bill, thank you very much indeed for talking to me.

Sue, a pleasure

End of interview