

Alison Ruffell

Brought up in London. Trained as a nurse in London. Was admitted to the Sunshine Scheme and travelled out to Rhodesia in 1974. Soon afterwards, left nursing to join the Rhodesian Army, undertaking a mixture of administrative work, training and nursing. Remained in the Army until beyond independence. Shortly afterwards, transferred to the British Army.

This is Annie Berry interviewing Alison Miller, now Alison Ruffell, on Monday the 3rd of August 2009 in London. Thank you very much for coming along today. Perhaps you could begin by explaining how you came to be in Rhodesia initially?

I did nurse training in London and wanted to have a year out of the country to get some experience before I went back to my hospital, to work there again. There was the Sunshine Scheme in those days where they paid for nurses to go out to Rhodesia for a year. They would pay their fare both ways and give them a job for a year, so I signed up to the Sunshine Scheme and went out as a nurse.

Was this scheme always for Rhodesia?

Yes, I don't know if there were other countries but I knew a Rhodesian family and they were over in the UK and we were just sort of generally chatting about what I was going to do and they mentioned the possibility and showed me where to go. I had to go through the back streets because there were sanctions and stuff then so I went to Trafalgar Square and then signed it. So I got accepted and did a year out as a nurse there and that was how it started really.

And where were you going from; London?

St Thomas's in London, yes. I was brought up in London and literally the plan was just to go for a year and as I say the ticket, the return ticket was in a year, and I'd come back and then go back nursing again in England.

What did your family and friends think of that decision?

From the nursing point of view, great, I mean, we're fair travellers. My mum had been in South Africa in her youth so she understood the urge to go and she'd always said South Africa was lovely. I knew the family, I liked the family I was going to and I just thought it would be a good break before I really got stuck into my career in the UK.

And what was the process of being accepted?

Yes, I just went to some little dingy back office in Trafalgar Square and put my forms in and I think I got accepted there and then. I mean obviously working in a big London hospital they were quite keen to have people who had got

some good experience. I can't even remember...I must have got a letter to confirm, but I think I applied in about April and was out in June so it was a very quick process. And because I had a family who would sponsor me and got nursing accommodation out there, it was a very easy thing to do.

(00:02:31) And how had you heard about it? This was through friends?

I think I must have heard about it through that family. I didn't hear it through nursing, it wasn't advertised anywhere.

Yes, I was going to ask if it was advertised.

I think I just knew the family and they just mentioned "oh there is a scheme." It's a long time ago, it was 1974.

So it would have been word of mouth?

Yes, I didn't know about the war then, I wasn't into reading the papers and knowing what was going on out there, it was just literally to go to Africa where my mum had been – although she was in South Africa – and have a year out. I was thinking it would be nice in the sunshine and with lots of animals; and then go back to the UK. Never had any intention of staying, never.

And you say this was 1974?

This was '74 that I went out; I went in something like June/July '74.

And you just briefly touched on not knowing much about the situation out there?

I didn't know anything; I don't remember ever knowing anything about it. I wasn't somebody who read the papers or really listened to the news, I do now but I didn't then and I don't think I was really aware of it then. I think I vaguely knew it was going on but didn't understand anything about it. I wasn't into any of that sort of thing in those days.

Did you try to find out more when you decided to go?

No, not really because it was fairly quick and I was going to do nursing which I knew. I thought I wanted to work in Rhodesia; apartheid wasn't like South Africa. South Africa was much stricter and in Rhodesia I thought I'd be able to work in a black hospital. Not because I wanted to nurse...that sounds about black and white, not because I wanted to nurse blacks but because the work was much better and more interesting. But I found that I was actually going to work in a white hospital which wasn't really what I wanted because it wasn't busy enough. I just wanted to be busy and have a lot of experience in nursing so from the nursing side, I didn't really gain what I had wanted to. But I still enjoyed it, fantastic time out there but it wasn't what I expected really.

Can you tell me a bit about how you got there, how you travelled? By boat or by flying?

Oh no, I just flew straight there, they paid your flight out and it was all organised by them. I just got the tickets and went out and was picked up by (00:04:41) the family that I knew and then literally went to work the very next day so it was very quick; too quick.

Did you have any training or preparation?

No, but I was a qualified nurse. I was going to work in an orthopaedic and surgical ward in a big hospital – the sort of thing I'd done before – so there wasn't really any particular need to...

And what about cultural training or preparation?

No, although I didn't realise, because you were in a white environment, a very British environment, it's very, very British out there. It's a very interesting thing and I've said it from the very beginning, it was very bizarre. I remember it to this day, when I got off the plane and stood on the tarmac, I knew I was home and yet I'd never been there before, it's a very bizarre feeling, I'll never forget it. It's not me looking back thinking it, it's me at the time and I remember to this day the walk off the plane and stepping on the tarmac and thinking "this is where I belong," very strange. I just can't explain why, it's definitely not in hindsight, it's exactly what I felt at the time.

And so what was your perception of the country when you arrived?

Well from the airport, you go through the black township, it isn't like a Soweto-type township but you go past all the huts and mud huts and stuff. Of course I'd never seen a mud hut before. In those days, TV wasn't the big thing, so I didn't see documentaries on it or anything beforehand. So you went through the poorer area and I got picked up by three of them and went to their house and of course they lived in a typical white Rhodesian house which was a big house, bigger than I've ever had in the UK. So I was interested in the African huts going past, but more excitement-type of interest; and then going into the sort of white affluent area. And then from there I was in a brand new hospital with a swimming pool and all that stuff so it was all, I was sort of protected from everything if you like, after that, without really knowing I was, if that makes sense?

And you briefly made reference to it but were you aware of the petty apartheid as it were, within society?

Certainly not at the beginning, I mean, literally, I went straight into work the next day so I was very busy concentrating. I don't really know when I did...as I said, right from the beginning, you didn't have the buses where it had whites sitting in some seats and blacks in others. You didn't have blacks only, whites only seats like you had in South Africa, so I didn't know it in the same way. I didn't really come across Africans really properly until I shared a house with

somebody and we had our own cook boy and garden boy and then you realised. That's when I first probably realised the difference.

(00:07:26) So it was having your own accommodation that...?

Having your own accommodation, because you employed a cook boy and a garden boy and that's probably the first time...I'd never employed anybody, never had anyone working for me before. And then seeing what they lived in and what we had, it was quite interesting. And the fact they were so grateful for what they had.

And you said that you felt immediately at home. Where would you say that your home was at the time?

Oh from the moment I landed I felt that was where I should be. Not even the beginnings of a doubt. And of course I'd been away from home because I'd been nursing and I lived in London, my home was London, but I lived in nursing accommodation, so my mum was at home. But really I was a traveller, just moving around from nursing accommodation to nursing accommodation and then when I went I just felt...I think my mum said she felt the same in Africa and I think it probably helped that the sun was shining. But there was a smell of Africa that you can't understand unless you've been there; there's a certain smell and it's the dust, I don't know what it is, there's a smell about Africa that once you've been there, you will never...and when you go back there, because I've been back to places since then, I've got the same smell again. I thought, "yes, this is why...I should be here." I never, ever settled 100% here and everybody will say that who's been there; you're never the same again once you've been to Africa, there's something about it. You must go, you must go.

So would you say that in your childhood, were you sort of brought up with awareness of the wider world and a sense that you should travel?

No, I think probably...there were four children and I was the last to leave home because I was the youngest and it was a great release to be out in London, not into the world. Not that I didn't like home but I loved being away from home. I'm very very good on my own company or with other people, you know, I don't get scared at meeting people or going to new places. But I was never a traveller because one of your questions that I saw earlier, was "had you travelled much before?" Well in the seventies, I'm not sure that people did. But I hadn't, no, I'd been on holiday to Greece or somewhere and that was that. I've travelled a hell of a lot since but no, I hadn't travelled before. So it was a huge...I mean just going to the airport and going through passport control, I had one moment of thinking "poor mum" and then it was completely forgotten. It's the flying, and I love it to this day.

So you just fell into it?

Yes, I was never, I don't think I was ever homesick, no. In fact I was more homesick here for a beach than I ever was the other way.

(00:10:10) And did you keep in touch with friends and family in the UK?

Not friends really, I think in nursing you tend to move around and you're not really with friends so much. Family, yes, just the normal, not as much as my mother would like, and being a mother myself now, I understand. But you get so caught up in what you're doing you don't really think about home so much. But I used to go home about every two or three years and one of my sisters came out about three times on holiday so I sort of kept in contact. We're a good family, we're a close family but I didn't...I was just having a great time.

And you said that this was initially one year long?

A year-long nursing contract, yes.

And you found it a little bit unsatisfactory?

Well it wasn't busy enough you see because in the London teaching hospital you were usually very busy on the wards and I was a ward sister at that stage. I had a lot to do [in London] and the whites were very healthy in Rhodesia and there were only a quarter of a million of them so not that many got sick. The ward was quiet, it was very old-fashioned nursing and I was on a very dynamic ward at Thomas's with new projects starting. To go back to nursing sort of twenty years before, I didn't really gain anything from the nursing point of view. I still enjoyed Rhodesia, I wasn't unhappy at all, but I wouldn't have stayed longer than a year for nursing.

Were you aware of the background of your nursing colleagues and where they had come from?

From what I remember, most were Rhodesian trained. I don't remember to be quite honest. Again, after about two months I moved to another hospital, which was a smaller hospital, and I actually shared a house with two of them. One girl, she wasn't Rhodesian born but I can't remember where she came from, she must have been British but I can't remember now; it was a long time ago, remember.

Did you know of many other British nurses going out when you had?

There was nobody else in the Sunshine Scheme that I knew of but then I didn't meet that many nurses. I was on two wards altogether in a year...I can't even remember socialising with the nurses but I must have done so, certainly in the nurses' home, but my memory for that sort of thing is not very good. Because I had so much from the army, I think I probably forgot about the years nursing. I remember bits, I remember the accommodation, I remember some of the things, but not a lot.

So how did your nursing finish and what did you decided to do subsequently?

(00:12:37) Well the first time I probably knew there was a war on was when, I remember, we had a soldier admitted into the hospital with a really badly shot leg and I sort of thought, "oh he's been shot here." And to be honest, the terrorist war had only really started properly in '72/'73, very much for the farmers. I'm not even sure if the majority of people in Salisbury really knew much about it, I mean people like me. And then when I went to Umtali which is called Mutare now, I worked in the hospital there, again, we didn't have any regular soldiers but we started to have in the BSAP reservists, you know, people called up over six weeks, the TA. They probably didn't call it the Reserve, the BSAP...what did they call them? They were called up every six weeks and they did six weeks in the army, twelve weeks back in their jobs all the time. BSAP Reservists?

I think so.

Because there was also the Territorial Army as well, they had National Service and all that stuff going on and I think the first I really got to know about is that they opened a new brigade called 3 Brigade in Umtali, so it was a big base for the army. And then, probably because of course army blokes always take nurses out you see, there was very much a social life and I think I got to hear about the fact there was something going on, by going out with blokes, being 24 [years old] at the time.

How much did it concern you that this was going on around you?

Well it's exciting for a youngster, it was just excitement, I didn't really understand it. I actually got in the Army...you ask me why I left nursing, what happened was, when they came into Umtali while I was still nursing, I think I knew that nursing wasn't for me and I don't know how I met up with him but I met the chap in charge, in Umtali at the time. They just had a territorial armed battalion that had been there for some time and I met the chap who was the major in charge of the battalion at the time, I don't know how I met him, he just made a comment saying "oh they're looking at females to join in," there weren't any females in the Army at that stage, "they're looking for females to join the army." I was dissatisfied with nursing but loving Umtali; you know, men, Army, I'm sorry but it's me in my early twenties and I thought, God, what a fantastic...and because they then appointed you, it was very easy to get in at that stage. You had to be interviewed and I was interviewed by him, but being a nurse...and you got your rank. The women didn't wear ranks on your arm at that stage, you got paid depending on the qualifications you had and I had 'A' levels so I got colour sergeant. We didn't at that stage wear our rank, I don't think; I can't remember us actually wearing them, and we got paid depending on our school qualifications, that's how they worked it out for the females. And I joined in the first group; in fact it was the second group, because this regiment was the one that got to me. I joined them from the beginning and they then had all the people going out for six weeks in, eight weeks at home. So that's when it started going bad and then people started getting killed, people I knew; and then I realised there was (00:15:54) something bad going on. Then of course I worked on operations on the radio and stuff, so all the time it was going on.

So by that time you were actually in the Army?

I joined the Army in October '75 and in December there was a really bad incident in that December. I was going out with a coffee farmer who was a BSAP reservist during the six weeks and twelve weeks, and two things happened fairly close. The first thing was, there was a big helicopter crash, which killed the second in charge of the Army. That big crash, I don't know if you've heard about it but the second in charge who would have been the Army commander, the brigade 2IC and some really important people got killed. Because I was a nurse, although I wasn't nursing in the Army, they wanted somebody to go, so I was actually taken out to the helicopter crash scene and they'd all died except one. And that was an accident, we weren't shot down, it was an accident, I know it was an accident. That happened, and then my boyfriend got killed. Don't be sad for me, it's not...but he got shot. So you then suddenly thought, I mean, the helicopter was an accident but then you thought "well, they were doing something at the time" and then this chap, my boyfriend being killed. So I thought, "actually, this is really serious." And then of course in the regiment, the 4RR who I was with, people were getting killed because I got all the situation reports back on the radio. To hear all the people being killed or injured, that's when it really...

So there were a series of events that really made it sink in?

A series of events. And really, I think the main posts, working in 4RR, I realised in fact there were actually so many people who did a normal day's work, they were sending them out six weeks out in the army, twelve weeks back at their normal jobs. To keep that going, to me, I thought there must be something really...and even before, very quickly, almost from the beginning, I knew there was something much, much more serious than I'd been led to believe.

Can I hear a bit more about your training and so on?

In the Army?

Yes.

Well the Rhodesians were like typical Brits in the old days and they were very polite, opening doors and things for you. Even though we were sort of squaddies, if you like, they were still trying to treat us like ladies, which was hilarious. Not like here, because I went on to the British Army afterwards, so not like the British Army. They treated you like women and yet you were soldiers to be shouted at, and they couldn't shout at us. We had a sergeant major from one of the big battalions and he was a really, you know, typical sort of RSM-type bloke, but he just couldn't keep us together because we were giggling, (00:18:25) you know, we'd giggle and it was very difficult because it was new for everybody. None of us had done it before, none of them who trained us had done it before and we only had two weeks training because remember, we weren't going out to fight.

The whole point of us being in the army...it didn't work like that in the end, it worked for the army and us much better than they expected. What they had thought of was that we would go and do the admin jobs, to release men to go out and fight. That was the theory behind it, which is what you were doing in the beginning. But it went much broader later, as you will see. We were really only doing admin, so although we did firing on the range – I think it was rifles, although I carried a pistol most of the time – it was only two weeks training. About a year down the line, I actually took over the training courses so I actually trained the people myself. It was just the two weeks – I don't even remember what it was now, God, I lectured on it – it was just about the army structure and all that sort of stuff and we had to do drill, that was hilarious, drilling, and weapon training and just the background of the army and the army structure, for just two weeks.

Gosh that's very short.

But then remember we were only going to do an admin job you see, and then in our place of work we actually learnt our role. But in fact we tended to be much better because you were having army guys who wanted to be out fighting, stuck doing admin. Because we were there to do admin, we could actually do a job we wanted to do, whereas they could get out and do what they wanted to do. So we actually probably did the job much better because we didn't have other things we wanted to do instead, if that makes sense? But they still kept treating us like...I remember the CO kept opening the doors for me and stuff, which he's not supposed to do; I'm supposed to open it for him and stuff. And they'd wink at you and things, which is really not very appropriate. They just couldn't get used to it. Remember, the white females in the Army were obviously brought up – and I wasn't – very well, with lots of money and good housing, so in their own rights, they had quite a good status. And suddenly you've got a major and a private and they're really equal social status outside, which is not the same in the British Army, to a point, if you look at social standing. So it's quite an interesting...

Yes, we've asked a bit about the social environment in Rhodesia and people have said there were very traditional attitudes between men and women.

Yes, I mean we were wearing long dresses to go to the cinema when I went out there in '74, long dresses to go to the cinema! And that sort of stuff, it did change. It was England sort of thirty years behind, but lovely, like the white colony you hear about in Kenya and stuff; you had the clubs with men only – you've got them here – the golf club and all that, lots of sport there, very good social life.

And so there was a slightly strange setting in the Army?

(00:21:11) Yes it was a strange setting because it's unlike any other army. They suddenly got the women in and didn't quite know how to handle them. It was only when the women started to take over themselves, by looking after the women, that it actually worked better. They just treated us like women

and yet...but then it wasn't that important at the time to be, dare I say, that disciplined, in that we were supposed to be stuck in safe offices in towns and not getting involved in anything else. So from that point, it was fine.

Where did your training take place?

In Salisbury.

So you had been in Umtali but your training was in Salisbury?

I was in Umtali, came to Salisbury for training and then went back to.... Unlike when we got commissioned, you always got taken on by area and went back to the area who took you on, so you went back to the one who sort of interviewed you, or at least to that town usually. You didn't have central recruiting centres. It may have changed two or three years later but I wouldn't know if it did change.

And that was slightly different again from men?

Well normally you'd go to an Army...well obviously in the Territorial Army, they lived there and there was a catchment area so they lived in the area so they automatically went to that particular one they belonged to. They did their National Service training and then they went to the area for...especially the reservists because of course they had to be at work most of the time. So that's why it was a really good close knit community because everybody knew each other because they all lived in the farms, worked together. They all knew each other socially, as well as through work.

There were very few women who initially went in weren't they? Less than fifty or, so wasn't it?

They took probably about twenty at a time. I was actually the third lot, August, September, October, the first lot; and I actually came in on the third lot and it was twenty at a time if I remember. And when I ran the courses, yes, it was about that many, very small numbers. But it was a small army; I mean, remember there were only a quarter of a million whites in Rhodesia. It's a big, big country – I think it's eight times the size of England or the UK or something – but people were in clusters around the place and so it was all they needed really. Initially they had one every month and then they had one every two or three months and then it got spread out a bit longer than that.

And were you aware of the other women's motivations for joining?

(00:23:37) Well we all got on, I think it's a mad thing, again, Joyce will know a lot of this side of it because she actually did all the admin for the nurses joining the army, so you need to talk to her more about that. I think youngsters like me...quite a lot of older people went in, some people in their forties went in so I was probably one of the younger ones. The eighteen year olds didn't go in initially, they came in later; it tended to be that most of the people on my course I think were twenties, thirties and forties and they were

sort of asked “do you want to join the army?” by people that they knew, you know, rather than them going and saying “I want to join the army.” People would come to them and say “do you want to join it?” it was sort of that way around initially. It changed later because the adverts started coming out and it changed.

Yes, because I’d heard that a lot of women were very keen to be involved and to be used within the efforts.

Yes, but the men weren’t keen; men were not keen. Sorry, not the men, the wives weren’t keen, that was the real problem with that. But that’s the same with any army I suppose because it’s a new thing; they’re worried about their men being in the field with the females, understandably.

So it could have ruffled a few feathers?

I think it probably did ruffle a few feathers, yes.

And do you think men were generally ok with it?

The trouble is with men, it’s probably like the British Army – because I was in the British Army as well – the men were so unused to women in the Army and in uniform that they kept trying to protect us all the time. That’s why a lot of people would say women shouldn’t be in the front because would they be protecting the women they’re with, rather than actually looking after themselves? Could a man get killed because he was trying to protect a woman who doesn’t necessarily need protecting, who he wouldn’t have had to protect if it had been a man? But they were probably more chatty than you normally have. Say you had a lieutenant to a private, they were probably more chatty than they would be if it were a man. But it was a very, very family environment anyway because there wasn’t really the rank. The rank was there but the respect was there for all ranks, so a private and a captain would probably be socialising in their normal lives outside. So it was very different there than the British Army. The British Army you see, people come in not knowing anybody. The Rhodesian Army, a lot of people, even me, you’d get to know people and it is all these communities getting together for the same cause. So it was a very, very different feel, it’s totally different.

And did you know much about other elements of the security services at the time?

(00:26:00) I didn’t then but I got to learn when I did the admin at 4RR, but then I got moved. I was really, really lucky to be one of the first females, not on the front line, but much nearer the front line. Our regiment went out to an aerodrome, it was called Grand Reef, it was a traditional airfield and there’s something called Fire Force, which – if you haven’t heard of Fire Force – was where you had the helicopters and the men based in one area and when an incident happens they fly off. Well that was where the Fire Force was based and I was actually on the Fire Force base very early on for a female. So I then picked up the fact you’d got the Air Force and the chopper pilots were Air

Force. In the British Army, this type of chopper pilot is Army Air Corps; in Rhodesia they were Air Force. The chopper pilots were there, so they were involved and I began to have some idea about the intelligence; you know, you started to get to hear what was going on, because I did the sit reps and began to understand that side. Then when I worked at army headquarters later on I saw a much, much bigger thing, Com Ops, the lot; but that was a couple of years down the line. So the fighting and that side, I got involved in very quickly, being aware of what's going on. The actual political, well not political, I only really began to touch the surface when I went to army headquarters and worked there.

So what was your first role when you went to Umtali?

In 4RR I had a little ops room, if you like; this was my little domain and I used to do the radio schedules three or four times a day. I'd do radio schedules to all the guys out in the field and I would get reports back from them. A lot of it was just admin chat saying, oh you know, "you need to get this and that." Or other things were when Jonny died, in fact, his brother was out as a captain on the war so I actually had to call him back. Anything to do with the regiment and from their point of view, they loved having a female voice, they said it was so nice to hear a female voice on the radio. Once I actually flew over in a plane and actually talked to them over the radio and they said "where are you?" and I said "I'm actually above you now" and waved and landed and went to see them. I used to go out and visit them and I was actually, I was really very lucky. The first terrorist incidents I was involved in was when I went out to visit them in other places and then I had a map of the area we were covering and the contacts, and I used to put where the contacts were and do briefings like that. So it was really briefing about what was going on and having contact with the regiment and anything else I was given to do. I was lucky with that as well, so it was a much more interesting thing than just leave requests and stuff.

Was that quite unusual?

Yes, the OC of the battalion at that stage then went on to be in charge of the SAS out there so actually he was very into...because I'm fairly intelligent, please don't get me wrong, but I'm fairly intelligent and pick things up very quickly and I think he felt I was wasted. This sounds a bit... (00:29:11) but he felt I was wasted in there and very, very quickly he said "right" and he almost let me make up my own thing. It really went on from there and then they said "go up to Grand Reef, you're much more use there." All I actually did in Grand Reef, I can't actually remember what I did there. I was there for about five or six months, I actually lived out there. It was only about half an hour by road, probably not even that from Umtali, but you had to really live on base. So I was the only female living on base, I had my own little room, they protected me and I had my own little sort of room that was actually like a little house. I can't remember it now but I felt very safe there, I didn't feel under any.... But there I actually went out because it was a great advantage for me because I was a nurse, but wasn't in a nursing corps and there were times with the incidents where they didn't have any medical people. So I was

actually flown out from the base once to a contact scene because some guys had been in contact and had been shot and then as we took off in the helicopter, a landmine went off. So I actually went right out to where things were going on so I could actually see the bodies and I actually saw it and you smelt it and I had that sort of experience and probably a few of them did, but probably very, very few. So I was very, very lucky, just being in the right place at the right time. All my life I've been very lucky like that.

So were you used as a nurse in your work?

No, only because at the time, if there wasn't anybody, they just said "oh you're a nurse, can you go?" I went to the helicopter crash because I was a nurse as much as anything; and I went to this contact because I was a nurse and there was nobody on base. I didn't actually use...it was the Sergeant Major who had got shot in his bum and he wouldn't let me look at his bum, wouldn't take his trousers down for me, who said "this is most unusual," so that was hilarious. But then as we took off from there, the landmine went off and then we brought some casualties back and I brought some terrorist casualties back as well from another contact so I had terrorists in the helicopter.

I did a lot more than...I actually used to, we had a few helicopters and if the helicopters were going anywhere, when I was in Grand Reef, if they were not being used in Fire Force and going anywhere, I used to say to them "can I have a lift? Can I have a ride to see where you're going?" and they used to land and often land where the troops were, it was really interesting. I had a really good time and that was supposed to be social and actually I went and stayed for two nights in the bush with...again, they looked after me, they were really good to me. We were swimming in the lake at the time, there was a big lake there and the radio went off saying there's a contact and the team went to the contact and people were shot and they called me from the base. I think I was taken by truck not helicopter then, and there was a terrorist there who had...when you got a rifle magazine and it holds the bullets, you've got a coiled spring, and the spring of the coil had gone straight into his stomach and because those terrorists had injured some of our guys the day before, our guys were trying to beat him up and I said to them – you had to be very aware and sensible – "if you want to do what you feel you need to do, then I will walk away, but if you want me to help him from a nursing point of view, you leave me to (00:32:31) do my job." And they actually left me to do my job.

It was very interesting, and this is a very unusual one with that guy. There were two of them; the second guy was shot in the knee and actually lost his leg above the knee later on. And completely out the blue, about three months later, the guy had lost his leg and I was protecting him from the soldiers. I know it's very important for them to get information out of people and I can't stop them doing their work, that wouldn't be right for me to do because theoretically I shouldn't have been there, but they let me carry on. And it worked very well because about three months later we did some initiative, I don't know what it was called, where we used to have terrorists that we'd captured, to go and talk to the troops in the field and tell them the sorts of things that they were doing wrong, like "you must watch your magazines

because the sunshine, we can see you coming because of the light shining off your magazine.” And they actually seemed to fairly willingly answer questions. It’s very interesting, sitting in the middle of nowhere in a tent with all these soldiers, with a terrorist answering questions, it was just an amazing situation. You’d never have it here, would you? And anyway, I was going to one of these and I was in the back of the truck and there was a couple of terrorists there in the back of the truck and the terrorist turned to me and said to me “thank you so much for what you did that day” and that was the guy that had the knee.... Amazing, I mean, dare I say, I would never have recognised him again, but it was him. But in fact he was then hung.

So he got back...?

No, he lost his leg then was used to answer... and then he got hung because he was a terrorist. It was like that, I’m afraid that was...you know, he killed people; whether it’s right or wrong is not the point. But it was amazing, because of me stopping our guys beating the hell out of them, we then were able to use him and it was pure luck, how could I have known. And then to see him in that truck three months later, it was very interesting.

It may have made him that much more willing, I suppose, to help you?

Yes, I mean, I didn’t do it for that, I wouldn’t even think of the future, I didn’t even know he’d be hung, I didn’t know any of it really, I wasn’t aware of what would happen to him. But his injury wasn’t enough to kill him; his injury was enough for them to cause him a lot more damage. It’s because they’re mates, if you’re really close to a mate and they get injured...we knew it was those terrors because of the footprints across the dust that morning, we knew it was them and you can understand, if your mate gets shot and you find the person that’s done it.... So I had to be very careful and be aware of both sides.

Did you see that kind of retaliation a lot?

No because there were very few times I was actually...I mean, that was in the middle of the bush, right in the middle of the bush, but I would never have expected to have been there, it was just pure chance. Again, right place, right time. Just pure, pure chance. I don’t really talk about this much because in the (00:35:27) UK it’s not something...I occasionally might have a little go and say “oh by the way...” because I’ve got quite a bit of experience, I tell them, but I don’t think I’ve talked about that one for years.

It’s incredible to hear. Did you feel at the time that you were fighting for anything in particular?

Probably fighting against something, I think. I felt very...because I got to know the guys well, I think I felt very protective for them so it was almost to protect them and to keep them safe, but it was also very much the feeling of communism coming in and the more the time went on, one might say we were proved right. Whether it was right or wrong, it’s like the cook boy and garden boy. I said we had those and when it got to the end of the whole thing, they

said “please don’t leave us, please don’t go” and they did not want the whites to go because they were treated.... I mean, as much as you might say, “well you’re paying them very little and they’re living in a mud hut at the end of your garden,” whether it be right or wrong, they were so much better off and they actually pleaded and said “please don’t go, please stay and keep us safe.” But I think in Umtali, because it was very much a family regiment, everybody knew everybody. I think that side of it was just keeping the men safe and protected. Once I got to Army headquarters, and it was much more the whole Army, I could see much more about the whole effect coming. And what the blacks did to each other was absolutely awful. I mean, you hear it now, you think of it now, even now and they were horrible, awful torturing. What they did to each other was just...

Did you have much awareness of the different factions as it were, within the opposition?

Yes, the ZIPRA thing, yes I saw that, you said one of them, the third one, ZIPRA, ZANLA and the other one...

UANC?

UANC, whatever it was, yes, the ANC were a bit insipid I think. They never really...and Muzorewa took over for a bit joint sharing with Smith, but they were never really in power. Of ZIPRA and ZANLA, I think ZIPRA were probably – that’s the southern Matabele type – they were the sort of warriors and they were probably the ones that were the most dangerous from what they do to each other, I think the guys will know more about this than I do. And it was ZIPRA versus ZANLA but you knew that there would never be a power sharing, it would never work; you know that one would, like any, not any black, probably others as well, they would never have shared power when they came in. It was almost, it’s interesting, I don’t know if anybody thought about getting one of them to work with the whites, to fight the other one, I don’t know if that would have worked.

I think ZANLA was Chinese and ZIPRA Russian, is that the right way round? Again, somebody else will know; I think ZIPRA were Russian although I could have got them the wrong way (00:38:26) round. But anyway, it was very much, it was people outside the country fighting for things that...you know, they weren’t interested in.... They were obviously probably interested in the gold and all the stuff but it wasn’t so much about the whites not having power, it was about blacks having power obviously, but it wasn’t about the country and the land and what they could do with it, as you can well see now. I mean, they import maize now, I mean, for heaven’s sake, an African country importing maize. It was just about power from their point and for Rhodesians, it was then fighting for their lives and their country. The white Rhodesians thought “this is our country, we actually made the country what it was” and other people say “yes, but you stepped over blacks to do it.” But then the country wouldn’t have been like it is. So the whites did all the work and got the farms and they looked after, obviously not all of them, but a lot of the white farmers looked after their workers very well. They had schools,

accommodation, hospitals the lot, so they were very well looked after. Even so, you might say “their salary was low,” but they were looked after.

Were you aware of issues around, for example, land?

It wasn't really an issue, I don't think, I'm not convinced the land issue...again, the blokes will know more but I don't think the land issue came until after we had gone. I mean all this white...yes obviously they want it there for the whites but they only started taking land...I'm sure that was in their minds, but the Rhodesians were fighting, black and white, were fighting to keep their land. And no, it wasn't just about their own farms; it was about the country as a whole and keeping the country. I don't think even then they could see how bad it was going to get after they had gone.

And what importance did you place on that international cold war environment?

I was never really in politics. I mean obviously the people higher up used to go abroad and have meetings and stuff, I was never involved in any of that, I was just there. I'd got past the stage of, “oh it's fun I'm in the army, there's lots of blokes around,” much as that was fun. Initially the first few months I worked, “this is a lovely job for me, I'm really enjoying it,” and what fun for a girl of my age. But as you got into it, you really believed in it and really wanted to do the best.

You mentioned that you feel that communism had a part to play but did you see that in terms of the cold war?

No I didn't to be honest, we were just totally, I wasn't aware of anything else going on in the world. I was totally aware of what was going on in Rhodesia and the influence to the outside; I mean I knew it was Russian and Chinese, but that was it, that was as far as it went. But it was really when I used to go home, I went home a couple of times in the time and I would listen to the news of what was going on there and it was totally different. I thought “oh my God, I must get back now, this is disaster,” and you'd go back and it was just the same. So you'd hear this really, oh God, “this has (00:41:21) gone, this has happened, that's happened” and you'd go back and it was no different. One day, I nearly got the flight back over saying “God, they need me back there” but in fact it was no different at all.

So how frequently did you come back?

I think I came back...oh, what you need to put down is my mum's reaction to me joining the Army. I didn't tell her for six months after I joined; I pretended I was still nursing

Oh goodness.

Well, you know, she thought nursing was a career and the Army, she didn't. When she found out, she was absolutely livid and she was going to send my

brother to bring me home. But then when I went back she sort of, as I was obviously enjoying it so much, obviously there's only so much you can tell her, but knowing so much, and I was getting promoted, because I went on the officer's course, by then of course she was quite happy. And then she was, you know, then telling the world I was an officer in the army. But I went back home once after I was commissioned, I went back home for something a few months later, I came back and at the time I came back, I was involved in some passing out parade or something, and I was on British TV, on the news. They just decided to suddenly show that there was a second commissioning parade of females in the Army and I was on the first commissioning so I was ADC to Janet Smith for the parade and mum saw me on the TV. I hadn't written to say I've got back safely but she saw me on TV and so she was, of course, now, proud mother from then on. And of course I went to the British Army afterwards and she was then very happy about it all.

Did they know about the war?

What in the UK?

Was it her fear about the war or it was just simply the Army that she was worried about?

Oh no, she wasn't worried about the war and me being killed, no, no, she was more worried about the fact that I'd given up this wonderful nursing career at Thomas's in London to be a blooming squaddie in the Army, that was what she was thinking. So I didn't tell her for a long time. So each time I got to move forward to do things, I'd tell her, "oh mum, I'm now training the girls for the Army; now I'm doing this" so...

So it was fine when she realised that it was going somewhere?

I don't think she was worried about me being killed, no, she was much more worried about...

(00:43:17) Because you mentioned this perception that people had here of what was going on...

I don't know how much people know, even coming back, well obviously talking now, people don't know...no, I don't think they ever did, even the British Army, when I got to the British Army, they didn't have a great perception of it, not really. But mum...my family did of course to a point because they'd listened to the news more because I was there.

How much and what sort of media would you use or have access to in Rhodesia?

What, in the outside world or just within Rhodesia?

Within Rhodesia.

Well radio, television, news, the lot. One of the people on the news I went out with for a bit so at the end of the news on Rhodesia, he used to give me a wink at the end of every news item, so I used to watch the news. But the thing is, we were so busy and tied up with things, you didn't.... And you were very aware of what was going on; I was more worried about what the Army was doing, perhaps not so much about the Air Force and Police, some of the time. Although actually that's not quite true, I think I wasn't so aware of the other security services and what they were doing, but the Army, Air Force and Police, yes. But you were so involved in it, there wasn't much in the news except about what was going on.

Were you aware of the censorship and so on?

Oh God yes because one of my jobs was to authorise the allocation of weapons under sanctions, so yes, of course I knew which things we were short of. To a point, again, not in depth, I didn't know about all the wheelings and dealings that went on in other countries, but I knew where some of the equipment came from...which, I won't say anything because I'm not quite sure if I can; but somebody else can say that.

So how did you...you've said that later on you did become more involved in the intelligence and the operations, but earlier on, how would you have gained a picture of what was going on?

I think the picture I gained was more from talking to the people involved. I mean the Fire Force used to change every...I can't remember how many months, so there'd be a different group coming in so they would have been somewhere else in the country. But it was really just from intelligence sit reps, reports and stuff that came in every single hour of the day about what was going on around the country, that's how I picked it up. I wasn't really...I say I wasn't interested, I was so involved with the area I was in, I wasn't in a position to have any say in what went on at that stage. I never did, so it was very much my small area at that stage.

(00:45:50) So the politics of it just didn't...?

Well no, because we were far too involved in what we were doing; well I was certainly. No, politics...remember I wasn't a Rhodesian, it wasn't my country. But yet I felt it was, very much so, I felt Rhodesian, still do. Well I don't feel Zimbabwean, I feel Rhodesian.

What about the African belief system and languages, did you have to...?

I was never in an area...no, the people in Matabeleland could speak Ndebele, no, I never did. I never really...if I'd been in a black regiment, yes I would have learned, but no, I never did. And the house boy and cook boy spoke English so I never...I was never any good at languages at all, so never did, no. English was very much the language.

And how about the cultural environment and belief system?

I think again, because most of the time I never worked with black soldiers because most of the Fire Forces that were in Grand Reef were the RLI and the RAR must have been there, but I didn't really get involved with black soldiers until much later on. So I never really got involved with any of them, which sounds very naïve now, but I didn't, because if I was in a black regiment I would have picked it up a lot but I wasn't in the...

Yes I think with a lot of people it just simply depended on...

On where you were.

Yes and what they were.

Yes and whoever's spoken to Pat Lawless, he was actually in an all-African regiment, a black regiment, so he would have much more.... And they're very, very loyal. We brought some of them over a couple of years ago, and they just have such respect, the whites respect the blacks in the Army so much, and rightly so. Very, very brave people, very brave.

Were you aware of their use in other operations or anything?

Well I was in the Selous Scouts at the end so yes, that opened my eyes a lot. I was there just before independence and after independence and yes, that opened my eyes tremendously. Things went on that I didn't know about until then, even though I'd been at Army Headquarters.

Do you mean operationally or things like use of...?

Both. I mean it was the way the African soldiers were used in operations, yes; I understood it much more. I was much more aware really from that in the last six (00:48:08) months. It was interesting, I'd picked it up a bit, I sort of got vibes of it before but never really quite understood, I hadn't seen it before.

Are you able to expand upon that?

No I don't think so, there'll be other people who were involved much more than me but just to say that they...no, I don't think so. It's just that there are a lot of other people around who will know more than I do and if they speak, that's up to them, but I, again, I still always felt even then that I only knew part of the story and you need to speak to somebody who was in it and amongst it. I knew what was going on because I knew the operation that was going on but there's always much more to it than that, so no.

After then, you were with the 4RR?

I went 4RR then I went to Grand Reef and then I was asked to go up to Army Headquarters to train the females in the Army. So I did that for about...I didn't train them to do drill and stuff, I organised their two weeks and did their exams, all that sort of stuff.

And this was in Salisbury?

That was in Salisbury, yes, and I did that until I got commissioned. I got commissioned in '77 so that would have been maybe for a year, '76/'77. And again, I got the feeling of what it was like to be out of it in that, you remember I said the guys that had to do admin, and then when we relieved them they'd go and fight? I was almost doing the same now, doing admin thinking "actually I want to be..." not to fight, but I wanted to be out, back at Grand Reef. Although I was beginning to get quite interested in the thing as a whole by that stage, so I wanted to see how the whole worked, rather than just a small section of it. I enjoyed it and I obviously met all the girls going through and the Air Force girls did their training with us as well, I think we all did it together at that stage, I'm fairly sure. There weren't anywhere near as many in the Air Force but I've got a feeling the Air Force girls went to the same place as us, yes, I think so.

And how did your commissioning come about?

They realised there were so many females and somebody had got to organise them, it was much better if they...and they invited people. And because I was actually working at what's called 'Military Studies,' that was where we did the training for the thing, and it was me that started running the officer's course and people were invited to apply. I then went on an officer selection board and not wanting to be big headed, but I got the highest mark ever – and you can tell the men this – at that stage. I got the highest mark ever recorded, male or female, for the OIR test, Officer Intelligence Rating test. You can tell that to the men!

Amazing!

(00:50:38) Yes, because when I went to Army Headquarters, I said to the guy at the time, "how did I do?" and he said "I thought you used the answer sheet." What it was is intelligence tests, you can never fail. I thought I'd done badly because I hadn't finished it but you're not supposed to finish it. It's like...I'm a member of MENSA you see and you had sort of patterns and you had to say what comes next in the pattern. I just whizzed through it, about a hundred of them, and he said, at the time, I got the highest mark ever recorded, male or female. I was quite chuffed with that.

That's fantastic, that certainly showed them that women could...

Well I actually haven't told them that, but I think I might tell them the next time I see them. I'd forgotten, but I think I might tell them. But the chap who did the test said "I can't believe it," I will tell them all. Anyway, we had an officer's selection board which is two days of tests and various discussion groups, interviews etc. I think I always felt that I was going to be taken on because I was working for the people; not because I happened to be working for those doing the test, but because they said "you need to go for this" and there was absolutely no reason why I shouldn't go. So then I went on the first commissioning course and I think twelve of us got commissioned. I didn't

come top of the course interestingly enough; I was a bit disappointed with that. But never mind, I came third, so my number was 003. The one that came top was 001. Whatever the long number was, it finished up 001, 002, 003, so I was slightly miffed about that, they came in order of how well you did on the course, which seemed a bit unfair to me.

That's a bit embarrassing, isn't it?

Well no because I don't know how many people knew. The army didn't know, I wasn't going to tell them. But then what happened was a really difficult...towards the end of commissioning, they were starting to decide who was going to go where and where we were all going to be posted and we didn't really have much, I'm not even sure we had a say. I think the married ones did; there were two that were married and I think they could stay in the area they were in. Some went back to where they'd been as juniors but I was at Military Studies and I wouldn't have wanted to go back there as an officer; there wasn't a role for me anyway. Anyway, it got to the last day and they said to me "oh you're going to have this job...", a G-Job, which is operation, intelligence, staff duties at the G-Branch, an old branch rather than the admin branch, it was really nice, really charming "...and go there on Monday." So I went there and my boss, the Major, I was a Lieutenant and my boss, the Major, was very anti-female. I'd been with him in Grand Reef and Fire Force and he was a really good Fire Force Major, very very good, very astute, a very intelligent white guy. He was at Army Headquarters, the Major, and I was going to be second to him, taking over from a male Captain or it may have been a male Lieutenant who was desperate to get back and fight. I walked in the first day and he said "I don't want you working here, I don't want a female." So there was me, having done my course and wasn't wanted, he wouldn't take me.

They wanted me to do a training job but (00:53:40) the G-Training job was being held by a female who failed her officer selection board, so she was a Sergeant, so she was still doing... They wanted me to go there and I was a bit pissed off, thinking...so I went and then they all got talking...all morning and then he was virtually told he had to have me because the other chap was to be sent off. Anyway, I went to see him again and of course it was obviously very difficult initially and I'll never forget, he said to me "I don't want you here, I don't think it's right you should be here" and then he looked at me and said "but I've got a feeling you'll prove me wrong." And we worked very...he's a very difficult bloke to work with, very very bright guy and we got on really well and I worked with him for two years and it was fun. Then, when I went to the Scouts at the end, he invited me to go there. In the end, he actually married General Walls' daughter, Pat Armstrong, they live in South Africa. (Deletion) And from then on, staff duties were the organisation of the Army, its allocation of equipment. Not actually like a quartermaster where you're handing out, it's actually trying to work out, with the stuff that you've got, where it should go and the appropriate places for people to be able to do their jobs, that was the idea. I did that for two years and it was fantastic. I was very lucky, again, there weren't that many...there was another girl but that was training and she wasn't commissioned. I was the only female that actually got to be picked.

It must have involved a very broad understanding of what was going on?

In our offices you had the ops room and that's the ops room for the whole army. The ops room was here, duty officer was here, my office was here and Pat's office was there, so we were literally...you walked through the ops room, so you knew exactly what was going on all the time. I actually did duty officer stints at times so you could actually see everything on the... all the Army commanders, generals. Also, one of my jobs was to take the minutes of the big meetings where all the COs from around the country would come. I'd take the minutes for that and therefore heard everything that was going on there as well. I didn't take the minutes because I was female; I took the minutes because that was the job for the Captain. I never believed in doing things because I was a female, I was very feminist in those days. I was right beside the secret rooms where they kept all the documents so if you kept your ears open, it was really good, that was where I really learnt what was going on.

You said that you did officer duty; that was when people were on...?

Duty officer, just the weekends and stuff, you were duty officer and you had a Captain; although I might have been Captain by then. You had a junior officer and then a more senior Major and a more junior officer and you would have worked together. They'd obviously be responsible, the one who worked through the generals, but then I was, not their lackey, I mean I did a lot of work. I think (00:56:28) once I actually did it on my own, but you just picked up stuff, it was really good.

So during that time, you were based in the...?

I was based in that office, right by the ops room, yes, and was dealing with all the officers around army headquarters. It was a great big sort of square-ish building, with bits off the end, and I used to go round, I used to know everybody then in the Army Headquarters. And then I lived in the officer's mess as well, so that was nice. They had a female section of the officer's mess for me. They had separated a section for me.

That was something that had been set up, quite new...?

When we had the officer's training course, we actually went into the officer's mess which the men didn't like because we weren't commissioned. But we had a sign in the officer's mess that said I think we had to eat...I can't remember if we ate separately or ate at a different table. We didn't mix, you know, but once we got commissioned we were very much part of the mix then. There weren't many of us at Army Headquarters mess, there must have been five or six probably, I can't remember, there weren't that many officers around. There may have been a bit more actually in army headquarters, but I lived in the mess there. Not many of us did live in the mess there, four or five of us that lived in it perhaps.

You wouldn't have been going out into the field as it were then?

I did a lot more of that later on but yes, sometimes I'd go out to places. I did go round the country a couple of times because I had to do some stuff where I actually had to go to every brigade around the whole country. Oh, I didn't tell you, when I was at 4RR I moved to another base for a bit and on that base, one of the army commanders came in and was doing a trip round the country. I just said "is there a space in the helicopter?" and he said "yes" and I went round the whole country, going to all the operational areas – it was fantastic – for about five days; that was very lucky.

And you were glad to...

That was before I was commissioned, well, there was a space and I used it. If ever a helicopter was going anywhere, I just...if you don't ask, I mean, all the other girls said "how come you...?" because I always used to ask. Nobody else did and I said "well I've just asked, they can only say no," as I still do even now. If you ask something, if they say "no," fine. If they say "yes," my God, aren't you lucky.

Were you allowed off the duty that you were on?

Yes, I think they...well I actually picked up a lot from it, it was well worth it for me. Sorry, that was a separate thing, I was very lucky.

(00:58:40) It benefitted the operations in the long run I suppose?

Yes, I mean you used to land in...and I actually had a boyfriend at the time who was in the SAS and he never used to tell me where he was, he wasn't allowed to tell me. And one of the places we landed, he came out from the bush and I looked at him and he looked at me and the Army commander looked at me and said "oh, there's something going on here." He was cross, my boyfriend, because he thought I knew he was there, but I hadn't got a clue he was there. He thought I'd come in deliberately so it was...we had about five minutes' chat and that was it and I didn't see him for another three months.

That must have been a bit awkward with all the other officers around?

Well no, because he just came up to meet the general you see and I got off the plane as well and his face...(deletion).

That could have been a bit awkward being observed by everyone around you, having to...?

Well no, the general just suddenly saw, because I blushed and this bloke...

And what did you do after this period in the headquarters?

I did two years there. Now what happened after that? I did that all the way through until the Scout's job...yes, I did that all the way through. I actually did more and more and more of the work and Pat moved on and the boss I got

was actually the one whose job I'd taken when I came. He came back to me as the boss and I did not like that, because you have to be very fair to allocate to the units, for the job to be done, and he just allocated to his own regiment. I didn't get on with him at all and I just couldn't...I will never work in a job I don't enjoy. So I just said "I want to be moved" and he'd only been there a month, I just couldn't stand him; I haven't seen him since actually. By then Pat had gone out to run the Scouts and said "come up to the Scouts," so I was internal intelligence officer, so I was responsible for the internal intelligence and somebody else was responsible for the external. It was really just gathering intelligence together more than anything. And that was when they had the elections going on and all these different assembly points, so the Scouts were involved in all the assembly points and stuff. Then the moment that I remember to this day, the moment that independence was announced, when they heard...because nobody was expecting him, Mugabe, to win, it was totally unexpected. I was sitting in the office – well it was totally unexpected by the soldiers – when it came in. I was just sitting in the office with Pat Armstrong and it came through and they were so shocked. Then the Scouts stopped, they closed throughout the country the next day, the whole lot left. I then had to move out. I was only in the job six months but I went back to do an admin job at 2 Brigade. They were trying to find what to do with (01:01:18) me I think because everything had suddenly.... I went to 2 Brigade and was a bit bored, I just didn't enjoy it and then I went back to do my old job at Army headquarters, still as a Captain, but Acting Major pay...what did I get? I can't remember.

This was after independence?

Yes after independence. I stayed for a year after independence. I decided there were two people in the army...I mean I respected a lot of people but there were two people who I thought if those go, that's time for me to go. Pat Armstrong went and then somebody else went and I thought now it's time for me to go. I tried to get a job with Pat Armstrong, I mean, there's nothing between me and Pat, nothing at all, but I just wanted to follow him because I was impressed, he was a very bright guy and I thought if I followed him, I would really.... But he recommended "no don't." I wanted to go to civvie street in South Africa and he recommended me not to and at that stage, my job in army headquarters was working with the British that came in after independence; not the ones that did the monitoring force, but the ones that came in after independence. I did the training and I was involved a lot with them. I spent as much time with them probably as I did with my own, setting up new battalions and structuring the new battalions, travelling and getting them set up and stuff. I then managed to get a direct transfer to the British Army. Three of us did, Pat Lawless, myself and one other guy all got direct commissions into the British Army, and Pat and I stayed for a long time, and the other bloke. We all met up together in Germany once, it was great. We were all spread out, all over the globe in the British Army so we were the only three that I know of that got a direct commission and then I came to this Army.

And your latter posts, with the Scouts and subsequently, were they based in an office or you were out? You said they were intelligence, but was it based...?

No, based in an office definitely. No, I wouldn't have gone out with the Scouts, no, it was very much...I don't think I went out with them at all. I went out to training courses, that's all. No, it was an office, and then it was an office off the ops room again. So of course, the ops room, you had that again of knowing so much. The last job, in Army Headquarters, I actually did quite a lot of travelling to new regiments and stuff and went around the country to different brigades for various reasons so I did quite a lot of travelling then and it was really good.

Did you see many of the monitoring forces and so on?

The monitoring force, actually, I was duty officer at Army headquarters on Christmas Eve when they landed so I actually picked some up from the airport.

What were your opinions about them?

(01:03:47) Obviously the first ones that came in were the Guards, I don't know if they were Welsh Guards or who they were but they were very, very prim and proper, and difficult sense of humour and stuff. It's only when you got to know them, they were absolutely lovely guys. But initially I thought, "oh my God..." because of course I didn't know their agenda; to them, was I the enemy or not, you know? So you had to be.... But it was fun; it was a different type of people, again, back to being normal again. It was actually quite fun but they had very much their own agenda and they were not supposed to be involved with us at all, I mean, messes had to be separate.

They had to be very impartial.

Very impartial I suppose, theoretically. But a lot of them were on our side because of course, a lot of our lot had done their training at Sandhurst before UDI and of course, we're very much...in the way that we...so they were very, very impressed with our terrorist war. I went to a 3 Para presentation, one of the Lieutenants is now a Major in 3 Para here, he was doing a presentation only about three years ago to 3 Para in Colchester. Because I've helped him with the documents and actually gone, I was invited to it and they were very much in awe of the Fire Force concept in Rhodesia, even 20, 25 years later, very much in awe. So there were people coming out, very much in awe of what we'd done and yet, having to keep away. So I don't know where they stayed; they didn't stay in the mess, but I remember bringing them. I think it was Christmas Eve when they landed and so I got involved in quite a bit. I got more involved with them, the training team when they came out, BMAT, after independence. I stayed a year and did a lot of stuff with them.

Did you have any thoughts on how they dealt with it?

Well in the Scouts, there were things you picked up that you probably might not have picked up. Some of the intelligence stuff was quite interesting, which I won't go into but you learnt a lot about what they were doing which you wouldn't have known otherwise, or I wouldn't have known otherwise. But I think it was very...you ought to get hold of some people here who did it, that's the best thing, some of the monitoring force, because you'd get their perception and ours. I don't think, again, I really still wasn't into politics and I didn't understand the deviousness of people, so I didn't really...I just saw them as Brits, because I was British, saw them as Brits coming over. How funny, I mean I was serious, don't think I was...but I think it must have been very difficult for them I suspect because there were lots of different things that would have happened if Mugabe hadn't got in, lots of plans afoot, and that would have made it very difficult for everybody. So I don't really know, you never quite know what they were told. I think I was only more aware towards the end, as they were leaving. Once I was involved with them with the assembly points, I then began to think, hold on, actually this is a very difficult position for them.

(01:06:38) Did you come into contact with any of the auxiliary troops that Sithole and Muzorewa had?

Oh yes I did, what were they called?

Is it Pfumo re Vanhu?

Oh yes, something like that, yes. I think I saw them in Matabeleland, I didn't really see them much before. Though if I remember, they weren't very well trained, I can't remember them being well trained. I saw them when I did a trip, when I was in Bulawayo once. But no, I mean I knew the whole point of it...they weren't...I'm not quite sure of the point of them. Muzorewa was very weak, he was a puppet. I've obviously met all of them; I sat next to Mugabe at conferences and stuff and horrible Tongagara, is he dead now, do you know? He's an absolute pig, absolute pig, and actually Mugabe was very impressive, a very impressive person. But to be honest, this is difficult, but he was very impressive as a person at the time and I thought if somebody's going to make this work, not that I wanted him to, he would. But he's changed a lot.

In terms of tactics and so on, there's a question that we wanted to ask about, memories or similarities with Kenya and Malaya? Were you aware of any?

No I don't know...of course, some people were in Malaya.

Exactly, and the folk memory of it as it were; did people talk about it?

I never, you're talking to the wrong person. Not really, no, I never...do you mean about the Mau Mau uprisings and stuff?

Yes.

No, no I didn't even know.

Or just meeting people, was it spoken about?

No, I wouldn't have been interested; it sounds bad doesn't it?

No, a lot of people don't...

I sound a very shallow woman, but I wasn't shallow. No, not from my point of view but somebody...I mean, are you speaking to David Heppenstall or not?

Sue has met with him, yes.

Oh she's spoken to him, because if you ask him that question, he would have had a much better answer, he's a more mature member of the thing. I was fairly...you know, one of the younger ones. Pat (01:08:46) Lawless must be about four years younger than me. Our concern now is that the older ones are going now, there's no-one left, so there's no...you know, but yes, it's the older ones you need to speak to about that.

And did you see the use of protected villages at all?

Yes, I mean, again, I visited some, actually I think I must have travelled around quite a bit because I visited some. But again, at that stage, I was never really into the politics of it, never really...

So did you form any opinion of how they were working?

No, not enough, again, it's more the Int-Af who got involved in that.

Yes.

Yes, of course I knew they were there but again, to me, I was so busy in the work I was doing and I didn't have a responsibility for the decision making. I was aware of what was going on but I was just far too much involved in what I was doing.

And we've mentioned this a little bit, the opposition of African Nationalism? What were your perspectives of that?

You're talking to the wrong person, I'm so sorry. I was just doing a job of work that I absolutely loved, trying to keep a country together that I loved, and that was my point of focus.

Did you have a sense of what the war was doing for Rhodesia and for Rhodesian identity?

Oh yes, oh yes, I don't know how you talk about it. I think it was very obvious that we couldn't have kept going and I was just really sad, all these young men, I mean people were dying, for what? And you think of all

the...everybody knew everybody else so anybody who died, you always knew somebody who knew them and you just knew that they could not possibly keep it up. And you knew that Rhodesia wouldn't be...I mean there was no discussion about changing the name but to anybody you talk to, they'd talk about Rhodesia and not Zimbabwe I suspect. You just despaired about where it was going to go. I didn't ever feel it would be this...I didn't realise it would be this bad, as bad as it was up to now; supposedly things are changing. But yes, I think you despaired about it and there wouldn't have been...because the ZANLA especially didn't ever call them Rhodesians, it was always Zimbabwean to them, or it may have been the ZIPRA actually, I don't know, but Rhodesia was a white thing to them. So that's about as much as I can answer on that.

(01:11:07) Did you sense the values that people were trying to achieve?

They were trying to stop communism, they had a country rich in...and it wasn't about people making money, there were very, very few people who felt that they were there to get the money out of the country. But you had such rich resources, incredible gold, platinum, the soil, exports, tobacco, the lot, such huge natural resources. And farmers just put their souls into everything. It's the loss of that which you'll never regain and will never regain again. Even at the time, you could see it going and I would say most people could.

You said you were keeping an eye on what other people were doing around you come independence; had you decided that you would want to leave?

Yes I decided to wait because once those people went I felt it wouldn't be safe to stay. I already had an ex-terrorist working with me as an officer in Army headquarters doing the job with me and I had to go out on a visit – I think this is where I really began to realise – leaving him behind because he was such a twit. I went out on a visit to set up a new battalion, actually with a British Army guy, so I was working with BMAT at the time. And on the way back we were fired on by terrorists, and what we didn't know was that the people going the other way were killed. We were fired on and it was just incredible, they'd just got paid and they were incredibly drunk and they were caged into an area. It doesn't surprise me, it was a small area and we got fired on and when I got back and told him, he said to me "well if I'd been in the car we wouldn't have been fired on." It was a load of rot because they were so drunk they couldn't have seen whether they were blacks, whites or anything. Then I went to somebody else and he got really cross with me because I'd gone and he hadn't and I said "I'm going." I couldn't work with him, he was just almost a puppet there, he didn't know what he was doing and I didn't really feel inclined. I didn't dislike him, I tried to get him to work with me but he just wasn't interested and he wanted to go and see his cronies.

And then, oh, we had a terrible...I got into such trouble, well sort of. This I suppose expands it, but we had a photograph at army headquarters and the photograph was all the officers at army headquarters. We had one every year and this was the first time we had some ex-terrorists coming in as officers, so

I was responsible for arranging everything and got them all arranged with all these terrorists there, which was fine; I'm quite happy to call them terrorists. And then one of my commanders said "no, actually, they're not supposed to be in the photograph." So having gone through everyone, I then had to go round and tell them they all couldn't be in it, which was very embarrassing for me. Then when we got to the photograph thing, the general said "where are all the..." and I said "but I was told not to bring them." And he said "you know that's not right, you're to go and fetch them" and I said to him, in front of the whole thing, "I am not going back to tell them they're now to come," having had all the hassle I had, and I walked away. I'm not in that photograph; not because I didn't agree either way, it was because.... And then I got called in, rightly so, I should have been (01:14:04) chucked out, because I actually argued to the general in front of everybody. So that made me think, "well hold on, the whole things altered...."

Yes, a lot of confusion.

They were confused because nobody knew what they were doing. They were given ranks that they didn't deserve and they didn't know what they were doing and we were trying to teach...not that they weren't intelligent but they just hadn't had enough training. You can't get put into a job where you don't know what you're doing and I was trying to show him and he wasn't really interested in being taught, because I was a woman as well, that doesn't help. Being a white woman in the Rhodesian Army, by that stage, the Zimbabwean Army, was actually very difficult. I was one of...I think Joyce left after me but I decided to try and see. And then with the Brits I managed to get a transfer so I went straight back to the British Army, so I had a job to go straight into. So again, right place, right time.

What was it like leaving?

Oh, I just left myself behind; it was absolutely horrible I just can't describe it. I mean, I never, it took me five years to even begin to settle in the UK, it was just.... I went to the British Army and I was just as busy in the British Army but the army wasn't at war and I was working really hard. Then of course the Falklands came; I wasn't involved in the Falklands, but the Falklands came while I was in the British Army but I just...I think I looked around people thinking "you have absolutely no idea what's going on." They were moaning about things and I thought, "you just don't know, you just moan about little things." Even now, I mean it's changed now but I feel the same now. Because I work now as a nurse in intensive care, I see things now and yet you have people when you get back home, my own home, moaning about little things. Literally this morning, a girl was in the queue and I was getting a paper and she had a friend and her friend went in front of me and she said "oh I'm sorry, we didn't mean to jump the queue." I said "it doesn't matter, another couple of minutes to me makes no difference. Compared to life, this is nothing," and she was smiling. So when I got back, I mean, the weather doesn't help does it? But I just so, so missed it, more than...it was horrible, it took a long, long time.

Where were you based in the UK when you came back? Did that make a difference?

I went from being a female with virtually no other females around to being in the female training regiment in the British Army, so that didn't help. I was there for about...with lots of lesbian approaches being made to me, that I just couldn't...I was there for about six weeks and then I was posted to an all-male regiment, being the only female so I felt at home again. Oh it was awful, that was a terrible...they didn't really know what to do with me I don't think, they only realised after I'd got back, about a year later, I'd never gone to.... In those days, for the female (01:16:46) officers, now they go to Sandhurst, but I think I'm the only female in the British Army never to have been trained.

Break in interview

So you went into this job in the UK?

A direct transfer, yes.

Looking back on the war that you had left behind, what sort of war do you think it was? A racial war, a civil war, or an ideological war? What's your perspective on it?

As much as they would like to say it's ideological, I think they just wanted power. Looking back, I can understand, they'll say the whites took over the country and look how they're treating us. And of course Mugabe had been incarcerated for a long time, an intelligent bloke as well, so that must have been terrible. But I mean he wasn't for the good of the people in Rhodesia, was he? Look at what he's done. As most communists are like, you know, it's for what...I don't know if he ever was ideological. And I understand the reasons behind it, I mean, I can understand the other side, if I was the other side I'd probably feel the same. But I think what they did to people was just absolutely unacceptable in their choice of freedom. They want freedom but that's not freedom. The people that came in, the blacks who had been in the Army, were probably in the worst...they were left behind, a lot of them had to stay behind...and how they reacted when they got power. Whatever they might have thought before, it can't be right. I mean, that country's ruined. And that's the sadness of it; it was just completely ruined.

Looking back at your time there, do you feel that it was worth it, your being there and the fighting of the war?

For me personally, it was absolutely fantastic, the experience. I mean the job I'm going for next week, interestingly enough, this is the first time I've gone for a job where I'm going to use that experience in the Army. I'm going for a job of site matron at the hospital. It's only a short term job but I've been shortlisted and I'm going to say "I've got the ability to think on my feet in difficult situations." Well who else going to a job like this has got my background? And from my point of view it's been absolutely...I would never, ever...I mean, a girl in my twenties, it was just fantastic. I saw things that I

won't ever forget and I had a lot of sadness's that I would never have had if I hadn't done it. But I'm not sad now; it's just the experiences you go through. I mean, I'm sad what's happened to Rhodesia, people dying, I see it now, my life now in ITU.

Well, just whether you feel it was worth it?

(01:19:20) Oh yes, I don't see how you couldn't say it was worth it. I think the trouble is that you...well would a mother of a son who died say it was worth it? I suppose you've got this here now. They were very much...unlike here, it's difficult to know if soldiers here are fighting for their country or whether they're fighting because they love the Army and their career. In Rhodesia, they were fighting for their country; they were definitely, definitely, definitely fighting for their country and everybody pulled together like you will never see anywhere else, ever. You will see it, I mean, with the Paras, three years ago, that regiment was wonderful, the camaraderie amongst them. So as a regiment, yes, they'll be fighting for themselves but whether they would actually be fighting for what they believe in, as opposed to doing the job that they love, it's different. And remember there were black Rhodesians fighting on our side for what they believed in and I think it made people....

I think the worst outcome, not for me personally, it was for others. We had people in their prime, people of Pat Armstrong's era, my boss; people that left at Major, Lieutenant, Colonel level, at the height of their careers, moving forward who suddenly.... And so many drank themselves to death and didn't settle down. It was a drinking culture anyway but a lot of them, you hear them reminiscing now and it's...I went to the RLI reunion and they had a Hurricane the plane the Paras used to jump out of and heaven knows how good it.... This is on the outskirts of London; they got a Hurricane last year to fly over and go round and round, was it Guildford or somewhere like that, about four or five times with all these paratroopers looking up and the atmosphere then was absolutely phenomenal. Everybody was just in awe of it because they were all back there again and it just showed what a close group it was. But there are a lot of very unhappy people to come out of this, people who've never settled down themselves to various jobs, whatever you do, gone off and fighting wars...you see now they've gone off to fight wars under labour.

How do you think that you coped with the trauma, as it were, of coming from a war situation?

Oh I didn't have the trauma they had. I saw things but nothing like the soldiers and all the farmers and the way they were treated. I wouldn't say I was traumatised at all, no.

Do you think that was because you were largely out of the operational areas?

Yes, I mean I saw dead bodies, I saw people shot, I saw people injured...

But you weren't sort of 'in there?'

But then remember I was nurse before so I didn't see the torture-type things that would have been...I obviously read about them all and you think about them to this day. Wilbur Smith does a lot on Rhodesia, if you read his books, some of those books are exactly what I mean. We had those jets (01:22:13) that were fired on, the two jets where people were killed and it's true about some of them being alive; a lot of his stuff is true actually.

These Viscounts you mean?

The Viscounts, yes. (Deletion)

So it was a reality that you were living with, but not so much involved in?

Yes I mean the trouble is, you never...in that you knew more people that died there than I've ever known before or since. You wouldn't have that, I mean, even in the Army, the people that die are just names, apart from the people within the regiment, even other regiments wouldn't know them but in Rhodesia, so many people knew so...I mean even now, somebody's just died now, John Fairey, he's in his seventies and he's still flying old planes and he crashed his plane the other day and died. And even now, so many years on, people are incredibly sad because of the experience that Rhodesians shared together. I cannot believe any country has ever shared anything like it, not even to touch it, ever, it's amazing, I just wouldn't have missed it for the world.

How do you think other British people reacted to you having been away?

What I was surprised was how few people really knew what was going on out there. Now of course they know; well they know about the farming and stuff. But it's just difficult to...you'd go on a bus and go along in London or something and you're reminded of back there, you're thinking "they're all chatty about their social lives" and things, and you think, "what's going on out there?" And I don't expect they have a clue or they care really. Would I care? Do I care what's going on...? When I say I don't care what's going on, I don't mean I don't care, of course I do, being in the Army especially, but it doesn't mean anything to you. And when you come home – and I can, to a point, understand the soldiers, I mean I was never in that bad a situation, but – when you are involved in something like that and then you come back, it's such a.... I'm sure there are a lot of divorces and things in the Army because there are people moaning, maybe about the fact that their washing machine's broken and you can never...that must be the most difficult thing, people just don't understand.

Yes, lots of quite petty...

Yes, but now I've gone the other way because now I'm back and I'm in ITU now, it's pettiness but it's from, "God, this person's dying in ITU, and yet you're worried about this." In the past, it was, "these people are in Rhodesia and they're going under all this strain and yet you're worrying about..." So

it's (01:24:49) changed, but it's the same feeling. It's very interesting for me, I'm very lucky, I've had two very good careers, I've been very lucky.

I was finally going to ask about you going out on the 'sunshine scheme,' which would largely have made use of contacts across the Empire. What did you think of the end of empire, come the sixties.

I don't really know, I don't understand what you're getting at, sorry.

Did you have an opinion of the end of the Empire, Britain giving up the...

Even now, I've never been into that, no, sorry. I sound very shallow don't I?

No, not at all, I guess it's just asking people what they thought about it ending.

In the end, I had done a job that I loved in a country that I was just as passionate about as the people; the country, the blacks and whites, everything, I just thought "what a fantastic country." Then I moved on to a point, but I felt more unsettled with the fact that I wanted to be in Africa and wasn't. But when I now come back and, because we have reunions every year, it's very interesting to get the feelings back. I mean Ian Smith came to a reunion about three years ago, no, more than that, five years ago. And what amazed me was these fairly senior guys at the time, Majors, Lieutenant Colonels who were there, who had been in the army then, they were in awe of him. He was almost like a deity to them and I had never seen that before, it was really interesting. I sat and watched these people and they were treating him like a footballer would treat, you know, like that footballer chap who's just died, just like that, it was amazing.

Well I've reached the end of the questions. Thank you...

End of interview