

## **Ian MacPherson**

*Born in Calcutta in 1945. Went to school in the UK. His family left India for the UK in 1962. Ian trained in Bristol and hoped to go to South Africa but ended up travelling to Rhodesia in 1969. Volunteered for the Police Reserve in 1971/2. Left Rhodesia for the UK(?) in 1977.*

**This is Dr Sue Onslow talking to Mr Ian MacPherson in Sunningdale on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> June 2009. Ian, thank you very much indeed for agreeing to talk to me about this Rhodesia project. I wonder if you could begin by saying, please, where were you born?**

I was born in Calcutta on 12 November 1945.

**And how did your parents come to be in India?**

My mother's grandparents were in India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and my father went out to India in 1932. They were married in '45.

**When did they leave India?**

1962

**So they stayed there after Partition?**

Yes

**Your childhood and upbringing then were in India?**

A lot of it. I was educated over here but, like a lot of those kids in those days, I used to fly backwards and forwards for my holidays.

**When did you come back to England for your schooling?**

Well, I was actually at school in England. I started off at prep school when I was six up in Scotland.

**Boarding?**

Yes, and then I went out for my holidays or I stayed with my grandmother in Dundee or my Aunties down in Dunfermline. Then when I went on to senior school, I was at Sedburgh. I used to either fly out to India or I'd stay with an aunt of mine in Windermere.

**Did your parents ever feel that a little stranger came home?**

I don't think so because in those days, that was how it was done.

### **And were there great troops of you coming back?**

Yes. I remember the first time I went out, I flew out on my own. I was seven and I went out in a Comet. 1953 I think it was.

### **How long did it take?**

(00:01:52) Oh, in those days, with the Comet, because it was the first jet, it was the same time that it takes the jets now. But of course, they also had the old propelled aeroplanes which probably took 36 hours or so. But with the Comet, when I first went out, it was pretty quick.

### **It must have been quite exciting?**

Oh it was. It was hugely exciting actually. What I remember was that... because they are very small aeroplanes, I think they had about forty seats or something, I was insisting on helping the stewardess to actually serve the food. I think I just got in the way.

### **Age six! So your parents left there in 1962**

Right.

### **Did they then go to Rhodesia?**

No, they never lived in Rhodesia. I lost my mother two years ago but they went and lived up in Cheshire. Now I went out. I did my training in Bristol, at the packaging company Dickson Robinson. I was hoping to go to Cape Town, but I actually went up to Rhodesia. This was in 1969, and I was totally taken by Africa. It was a big adventure for me, coming from India and it was just something; it was in my genes in many ways.

### **Had friends of your parents gone from India to Rhodesia?**

No, all we knew about Rhodesia was UDI. I happened to meet a Rhodesian girl and we were thinking of getting married but that fell through. Otherwise I would have gone to Cape Town because we had companies down there, as well as in Rhodesia. So it shows how incredibly civilised and well organised the place was.

### **Were you still working for Dickson Robinson when you went out to Cape Town?**

Yes. Yes, I went out there but I had to resign because I was going to get impossibly up to Rhodesia because of UDI and all that sort of stuff. And when I got there, I just thought it was wonderful.

### **So you decided to stay?**

I decided to stay.

**Where did you settle? When you arrived there, were you staying with friends?**

(00:04:03) No, I actually had a little flat there and my fiancée, I'd like to call her at the time, lived in Bulawayo so I lived there. Luckily we had a factory in Bulawayo so I slipped into the work quite easily.

**What about sanctions?**

What about sanctions? 'Sanctions' was a word! Oh one must think though, one must remember that from UDI right up to 1972, the country prospered. It was this something that...this pioneer spirit about the Rhodesian. They got round things like this and luckily, Mozambique and South Africa were sort of allies. But yes, there were sanctions but we did things for ourselves and the economy grew and the Africans came along with it, so did schooling, the whole thing, and it was incredible.

**So you arrived there in 1969 and then your relationship fell through. And you decided...**

Very quickly, I mean literally. It was on the station, I think.

**This wasn't Brief Encounter?**

Yes, there was a few brief encounters on the ship when I came out. However, that's...

**But you decided to stay, so you got yourself a job in Salisbury?**

Well no, my company was there. It was Robinsons then because we had a place in New Zealand, South Africa etc. So I had a letter of introduction from the boss in this country, Mr Robinson, and he said "yes, sure, come on, we've got something for you to do". So I got involved in sales and marketing then. I was there for six months and I went up to Salisbury and I was involved in sales and marketing up there.

**You had mentioned before we started recording this interview that you volunteered for the reserve?**

Yes, the police reserve and that was in 1971 or '72.

**Why did you do that?**

Well, I used to go back. I went backwards and forwards to England and I got snippets of information. I met people who said "Rhodesia – oh my God, this, that and the next thing" and threw their hands up and I thought, right, I've got to find out a bit more about this." And then when I went back one time, I said, "how can I actually help?" because I do believe in what we're doing. The obvious thing for me was the police reserve, the British South Africa Police Reserve, because unlike these two guys [refers to Spike McKenna and Alan Kluckow] they were Rhodesian and they had to do national service. This is going back, I think that was the case. I volunteered to do police reserve. Yes, it was doing that and also it was a bit of an

adventure too.

**(00:06:57) Were you unusual in volunteering to do police reserve?**

No, I think a lot of people did. There were New Zealanders, there were English people. Remember, I was only 24. It wasn't as if I was an old man or an old woman. So it was the thing and there was a lot of fun.

**So your training was in Salisbury?**

In Salisbury, yes. Obviously initially it was, I don't like to use the word "intense" because obviously who do you compare it with? These guys? [Spike and Alan] Scouts or the regular Army? Nothing like that because remember, the regular Army were the people who kept things quiet for years until things hotted up and then everything just mounted up. But yes, we were trained. Oh my God, yes. We had to be.

**Where were you sent first of all?**

Well, my first assignment, as it were, was up at Altena Farm in December or early January 1972 and that was a family called the de Borchgrave's. Now I believe that that was the first real incident which actually started "the war" as the intensity of it, although there'd been lots of incursions in years previously. My job up there, with the other four or five guys, was basically to guard the farm, the people who worked on it and the family. That involved obviously night duty, sentry duty - which was awful - and it also involved doing patrols round the grounds, looking out for any signs whatever.

**And taking the little girls riding?**

And on one occasion, taking the little girls riding, which was really quite amusing.

**Well, you could have had problems controlling your horse, rather than using your rifle.**

Well yes, yes! It was a bit like that but that didn't last long because the girls...if I remember correctly, then the riding was stopped but the terrorists - and they were terrorists, they weren't freedom fighters, they were terrorists, there's no argument on that. That evening or whether it was two days before, whatever it was, I can't remember exactly, they went and hit a farm called Whistlefield. Then they came up to Altena and as I say, I was left for - I think - about a fortnight and then after that, we'd go back to work, get back with our lives doing what we do. Then we'd be called out again, probably two to three months, and then we'd go to another farm or go to another farm. But then as things accelerated, as you said, just somehow accelerated, the war got more intense out on the borders and terrorists were hitting the Africans, like as he does now quite frankly. Mugabe? Exactly the same: he hasn't changed his tune whatsoever and he knew what he wanted fifty years ago and he's using the same tactics now as he did during the elections when Soames and all those people were out there. So we had to get involved, to look after  
(00:10:29) the people on the farms. Then the other time I remember very clearly

because we went up to a place called Mukumbura. I'm just trying to cast my mind back. I think they were building protected villages up there because all I remember was that we flew up on a Dakota and there were big landing strips. We were under canvas there and there were a lot of people. I think there was also the camp we were in. Apart from looking after the builders when they went out during the day, I remember there were other sections of the forces there because we were right on the border.

### **What did you think of the protected villages scheme?**

It made a lot of sense to me, a huge amount of sense. Again, one's got to try and understand the African. These guys were there; they had their tribal systems, their Chief system and then you had these guys coming in and literally saying "if you don't do this, we will take you out", and they did. Then they had us. We'd go in and say "look, let us know" and whether it was in Malaya or wherever it is, it was terror. This is where we saw some pretty horrific sights, what happened to the villagers and the Chiefs or shall we say, the headman of the villages. But I think the theory was good; the fact that we wanted to defend them and the only way to defend them was to bring them in so that they could be guarded because these terrorists were trained in Russia, China and they just filtered across. Again, one's got to understand the vastness of this. It's not like going from here to Reading or Virginia Water. This is the vastness of Africa, the Zambezi, the Limpopo down in the south. I mean, it was just massive and it was virtually impossible to have patrols all the time. Anyone with a bit of sense could cross the river.

### **Did you debate the idea of the hearts and minds campaign with your colleagues?**

Yes, we were talking all the time about it.

### **Well, how much did you feel that "infernal" affairs, the ministry of internal affairs, was putting a lot of effort into winning hearts and minds or did you see it merely as strategic villages in a sort of Vietnam concept?**

I think, again, it's like all these things, they did both. I think you have to. I mean, they were not stupid because half the people that ran the Army were either in Malaya. You know, people like General Walls. They understood this. They understood how these terrorists worked and you have to win hearts and minds. I mean, if our people had (done this?) – I was talking about it now - but if any of these politicians had a bit of sense, they'd have put that first and had a plan like that rather than going in and bombing them because you've got to win the people over. But it was trying to do that and I'm sure the terrorists tried to win hearts and minds as well but they were slightly more robust.

### **Focusing on intimidation as opposed to...**

(00:13:47) Yes, that's what I'm saying. I was being kind, I'm being kind. But yes, I think there was a lot of hearts and minds, but the soldier's job was to guard them. When you start talking about hearts and minds, immediately people say "oh yes,

brainwashing” usual sort of stuff. You know, of course there was a bit of brainwashing, it depends what you mean. It’s like anything in life: you can read what you want to read into it.

### **What did you think you were fighting against?**

I thought I was fighting against, quite frankly, some very evil, greedy people and they were wanting to destroy what would have been (a wonderful country). By 1978, if you look at the development of schools, if you look at the concept of, how shall I say, responsible voters, there would have been enough people going through schools and the Africans would have been a much more powerful African vote and it would have come together much more and this is what Ian Smith wanted. He was an African, he understood their mind.

### **But the 1969 constitution would only accept racial parity of representation?**

Yes, but what I’m saying is, there would be racial parity because to begin with... Again, you know, we’re looking at, crikey, how long did it take to get the vote in this country? 1928, five hundred bloody years. America, 1964. Yet they’ve got this man, Andrew Young, rushing over there laying the law down and all these British politicians. If they’d looked at their history and said “you can’t just suddenly let everyone have majority rule.” That in itself is an awful term quite frankly: “majority rule” -what does it mean? You look at what was happening in North Africa. There’d been how many coups? And also you look at the Chinese and the Russians. The Chinese had (?) with 1950 something or other and some conference in Java (*Bandung*) that they were going to get involved in Africa. So did the Russians. It was old Wilson I think, if I remember correctly, who used some wonderful phrase like “competitive penetration” by the Chinese and the Russians. So we knew about communism and we knew very well that we...

### **Had you read Marx? Had you studied it?**

Yes, I’ve always been interested in history. I’m an avid reader of history, imperial history, whatever it is. I love it and I had read this, yes. I’ve got the little Red Book actually, believe it or not, when I went to Hong Kong when I was in Rhodesia. I flew across to see some friends and relations of mine in Hong Kong. It was something that was totally against our civilisation. Let’s face it, I was a part of that civilisation in India and people like Smith and all these guys, commerce, civilisation and Christianity. That was the thing and they were...that was the very simple thing. That was the principle and all this devious sort of going round in circles, was foreign to a lot of Rhodesians. Well, not foreign but the fact of the matter that you look at a farmer in Rhodesia, you look at someone like Ian Smith and again, you’ve got to look at Rhodesia in those days, back in the 30’s and 20’s. Nothing like now or (00:17:36) even later on, there was no room for deceit as a farmer. The sun went up, it came down. The cattle had to go out, the food had to go out.

### **It rained, it didn’t**

It rained – it didn’t rain. You couldn’t lie to that and one thing you could not do was

lie to the African because they were incredibly perceptive. And so that is the mentality that the farmers had. Some of them were more robust towards the African, but if you look at the African's character and the way that hundreds of thousands of years, their systems have worked. They have one chief, a paramount chief, they have the headmen of the villages and they rely on it to come from the top. Mugabe's doing that now. He is the man at the top; he's making sure that his people and patronage are getting done. He's putting his own aristocracy in because he knows in 50/100 years, it will all have settled, one way or the other and things will have moved on. Incoming generations will say "look, what we did was wrong". We did it here. I think if you don't look at it philosophically like that in timelines, it can drive you mad.

**But that's what I'm very struck by, because you're talking about different national timelines. But you're also talking about actual chronological crossing points: so Rhodesia, in a large way taken from the outside, was going against the grain. It was going against a tide of world opinion, a tide and patterns of voting; and of course de-colonisation, African Nationalism and nation-state construction.**

**How much do you think the laager mentality that was created by UDI, and sanctions, created a sense of Rhodesian identity?**

That'll die out

**How about at the time? Did you feel...?**

Oh at the time, oh yes. Actually it was like Britain in the war.

**Did you feel that the Second World War was a very important reference point when you were there?**

Not really. I knew that...I don't think I sort of mulled over it. The fact of the matter was there were people who led us that were involved in the Second World War and obviously their mentality was brought from that as was in the nineteenth century. It was step by step. This is why I'm saying: when it dies out, it'll just be a memory.

**But I'm asking for Rhodesia in the sixties and the seventies how important was that memory of the Second World War? Because it's a memory of battle, a memory of a just war, memories of styles of leadership? You've also got rationing, you've got a sense of pulling together.**

(00:20:34) Yes. I can't answer that because I never really thought of it in the context of the Second World War. Obviously we were aware of it but I think it was just a case of saying "look, what we're doing is - we're trying to be sensible". That's the bottom line: common sense.

**Did you feel that there was an abrupt disconnect between your time in the field and then going back to your profession? You talked about going on patrol, going back again. That must have accelerated the switch in and switch out sense?**

How do you mean, accelerated the switch in...?

**Well, given the intensity of the war particularly between '77 and '79, if there was a....**

I wasn't there. I left in '77 so I can't talk between '77 and '79. I was up from '69 to '77 but it was getting pretty intense. But if I understand your question, are you saying, basically, did I just switch off from the fighting when coming in?

**Yes**

Well, first of all you had to because you had to adjust, first of all to your family life, to your work, your social life. But you couldn't just switch off. I mean, you saw your mates and you had a few drinks etc. and remember, that was me. These guys were different, they were slightly more intense, they did longer. Then of course, you've got your professional soldiers. When I say professional, we got paid, but I mean the Rhodesian Army whether it's the Rhodesian African Rifles, the RLI, the SAS, the Selous Scouts, they were professionals, so they would have been immersed in it all the time.

**How much camaraderie, active collaboration and support was there between regular BSAP and you say, the reserve? Were you a slightly lower form of life?**

Oh yes, these guys! You had the British South Africa Police full time professionals. We basically went in and we did work. I can't remember, apart from training, if I ever really came across full time BSAP, unless it's on road blocks and all that sort of stuff. It's not as if we had these guys watching us all the time, the professionals.

**No, I just wondered if you got together in the mess with them or anything like that?**

No, I never got together in any mess, we didn't have that. As soon as we got home, we just bugged off actually and got on with life. The only time we'd have a drink was if, after a hard day's work out, whatever, and we were allowed to have a beer. There was no sort of "ah look, here's a reservist". "Oh so, you're a regular" No, very rarely. I can't ever remember actually sitting down or having a drink with the regulars.

**(00:23:37) It's interesting there's such a divide. After all, you were all...**

But you see, the word "divide" I think is quite divisive actually. It wasn't a divide because it was divided. It was just we had different jobs; we didn't run into each other. Obviously when we went to the parade ground to pick our kit up to go off, the regulars were there and they'd help us etc. but we weren't sort of in and out of each other's pockets.

**Was there a social distinction there too?**



I've never thought of it like that. We were all doing the same thing.

**Did you feel that Rhodesian white society was very egalitarian or were there subtle distinctions by profession, by origin, by length of time in the country?**

I think yes, there were. I think so yes. There was bound to be. I mean you've just got to look around here. You don't have to go to Rhodesia to see what's going on in this country and I know, from my point of view, I was a Pommie but it didn't make a lot of difference. We all got on like a house on fire. I was lucky, I could play sport and all that sort of stuff, so we got on like a house on fire. I used to play rugby with Spike and we went to Salisbury Sports Club and there was Old Hararians so there was a great life going on besides...We had to; otherwise the country just wouldn't have functioned. But again, it's amazing how humans adapt. I find it incredible to look back and I think of all the whinging and what's going on in this country and saying "It's someone else's fault". We used to take responsibility and say look, we've got something to do, let's get on with it.

**Why did you leave in 1977?**

I just wondered actually... I thought, you know, really, are we winning?

**So that was after Smith's television statement of September '76?**

What did he say?

**Majority rule in two years**

No, it wasn't so much that because that was before the Muzorewa side came in. It was just instinct really. I thought ... I'm still very much in contact with Zimbabwean wildlife etc. I'm sponsor of something. But I just thought, no, I think if I want to get on, I'd better leave. Luckily I had family here.

**You didn't have a family there at that point?**

No, so I could do that, unlike Spike who had youngsters and a wife. He had a hell of a lot to think about and most of the other people that I knew, Rhodesians, and a lot of them felt the same. They said "Well, black majority (00:26:26) rule, it'll be fine to begin with. They'll woo us, they'll woo the West and suddenly, it'll change, when things don't..." And sure enough, within two years, there was the Matabeleland business and then you could just see the graph going down and down and down. I remember, we were up in the eastern districts on a farm and I've got photographs because we'd been mortared or something - and by the way, I never once fired my weapon in anger and actually this is important to note that we were hit once or twice - We were talking about this and I remember one of the guys said "Give it thirty years. I think that's when you'll really see bad things happen". But we had no idea then, anyway, that Mugabe would have got in. But that's history now, how he got in and how he pulled the wool over people's eyes. I don't think he pulled the wool over Soames' eyes; I just think Soames had a mandate and he had to do the best he could.

**When you decided to leave, you hadn't considered at any point taking out a Rhodesian passport?**

No, I never really thought about it. I just got on. I know there was a number of Rhodesians... Yes, I remember there was a time where I know there was a threat. They said "Look, you know, you need to get..." I think you were allowed two passports. It was a long time ago, but I remember, I just didn't get round to it or whatever. I had other things to do, for Christ's sake! We had a life to live and fun and everything else. We were living a very full life and there was a camaraderie, there had to be. But no, I never considered taking out a Rhodesian passport.

**Was it complicated for you to leave?**

How do you mean?

**Well, I'm just thinking of, not only the disincentives for Spike having a family there, but also from the point of view of taking out capital...?**

No, I just left. I said goodbye to people. I said "look, I'll see you but I'm going now. I just don't think things are going to work out".

**Did people try and dissuade you, and encourage you to stay?**

Yes, one or two people said "well why don't you stay?" and I said "well, no, I just think there isn't really the future here and I'm at the age where I've really got to knuckle down". I said "Well, now's as good a time to go. If I want to come back, I'll come back". It was all very... I remember a couple of friends saw me off. I said "I'll see you" and this was it. He said "I'll see you, ok, bye" and went and that was it.

**So you'd been there since 1969 to 1977?**

Yes

**Had you started to think of yourself as Rhodesian?**

(00:29:12) No

**Or did you still feel yourself to be – well – where? British Indian?**

Yes, it's funny you know. It was almost like a romance. The intensity had been there and the fun, and then there came a time where – do you or don't you? And then I left but I've been back so many times since independence. It was rather like saying "we're still great friends" and it's worked like that. So yes, I have to say, I never felt Rhodesian, no, but I always felt very welcome. I never felt an outsider; in fact, as I keep saying, we laughed, I was a Pommie but I scrummed down with them and we'd be the young guys. But I was never a Rhodesian because I wasn't born there, I didn't go to school there. I didn't have that gene contact, you know what I mean? That close contact of having been brought up in that country.

**Yes, I think the 'brought-up' bit is interesting because talking to people who went out there, they might have been recruited into the BSAP as young men and who felt themselves very swiftly to be Rhodesian whereas you didn't. It's interesting how different people adapt to different situations.**

It may be I think probably more. I don't know, but I never felt I was a Rhodie. I liked to understand what was going on and also with my background, it was fairly sort of international, if you like to call it. I'd seen things, I'd spoken to people, I'd been brought up in different ways. My wife's father was chief of police in Malaysia, the secret police there. He's dead now; he was the guy who looked after Lee Kwan Yu in Singapore because she was born in Singapore. When he died, the first thing that happened, Lee Kwan Yu sent people round to her mother and said "look, are you alright? etc." because he helped Lee Kwan Yu and his lot a hell of a lot. He stopped in many ways, a lot of awful things happening to them because he said "these are clever people. They know it". He was an incredibly enlightened man and there were a lot of people that that rubbed off on actually. It's like everything: there was good and bad; there's black and white.

**While you were there, you've described how you felt that you were fighting against terrorists that were being encouraged and supported by communists. Did you feel that it was a civil war in any way?**

No, it was the people that were fighting were coming in from the outside. A civil war? You think of the English civil war, the American civil war: it wasn't like that. It was a dirty little war of terrorists and we were trying to stop them, that was it. Then of course, needless to say, when any hot pursuits happened, the world went up in arms. It was just appalling, I thought and I have to say, I feel ashamed sometimes of being British when I heard the lies that were being told.

**It was also a media war**

(00:32:56) Of course it was a media war because a lot of the media didn't like Rhodesia because it was against the pattern of things, as you've said. That was it and crikey, we were the first country since America to give two fingers to Britain although it was very reluctantly and Smithy...Old Smith, I know people who hold Smithy...but you couldn't have got a more decent straightforward sort of guy.

**How far at the time did you feel that Ian Smith was a moderate within the Rhodesian Front and that there were definitely people to the right?**

Oh yes, I always felt that you had this guy with his principles at the top and like everything, you look at the government now.

**I'd rather not, thank you!**

Yes, well you can imagine even there, people swirling around with different attitudes and moving away from the principles that were set initially. One day it'll be African majority rule but it's got to be based on land tenure. Voting rights have got to be based on education etc. so you get an intelligent vote, not a system whereby you get

some people...and you can't expect the tribesmen to suddenly be able to understand the democratic system when they've been, for thousands of years, brought up in the way they are. And so, I think he stood his ground and it was happening like this all around him. I don't think he moved; I think he was pushed and it was Kissinger who said to him finally "listen mate, I'm terribly sorry but you've got to do it. That's just the world". He tried to accelerate and bring in the Muzorewa government which nobody wanted - certainly not Mugabe and his lot because Mugabe just wanted power.

**You were outside Rhodesia at that point, but obviously still very much in touch with your Rhodesian friends?**

Oh very much so, very much so

**And what was the feeling about that home grown settlement?**

The people I knew were fairly well informed, intelligent people. They said "look, it's got to happen and this is the way to save it now" although it would have probably been a few more years before there would have been, as it were, more black MP's than white MP's. Yes, in the constitution there were certain privileges because let's face it, the economy was still run by the whites, so it was only fair. The Africans, most people, the council of chiefs and all these people said "yes, this is it, we don't want to see what happened in Malawi, Zambia, Tanzania, Congo, Ghana, all these places, happen here. We must stop it and the only way is, yes, we've just got to do this and hopefully good sense will happen and it will be thoughtful government for the people". We've seen what's happened and I think a lot of people that I knew said "well, it's not what we necessarily want but we've got to give it a chance". They want to give it a chance but the rest of the world said "no, no, we want you to - now - now- now" and that's when it was a case of, well, you know. And then when South Africa pulled the plug because let's face it, I think Vorster (00:36:28) was trying to appease Africa. So he said "right, we will use Rhodesia as a tool". Let's face it, the South Africans, who didn't just let Mandela and people out, it was because communism fell. The West said "look, we don't need you any more" that they had to accelerate things.

**I think that was a different dynamic, but that's another story**

Well that's one way of reading it

**That is one way. There are others.**

I mean yes, obviously there was the nationalism and all that sort of stuff but the final straw was when the Berlin Wall fell and the communism as far as America and the West was concerned, was pretty well finished. Let's face it, Southern Africa was fighting against communism and they thought - well, let it go now.

**I have a different reading of what happened, but that's ok. Did you consider going to South Africa from Rhodesia?**

No

### **How did you regard South Africa? Did you meet South African policemen?**

No, I always thought South Africa was a harder, brusquer, less tolerant place. Yes, that's what I thought. Rhodesia was much softer in a sense; their attitude was much more liberal. South Africa: again, if you look at the history of South Africa, the Afrikaner, it was built into their psyche, their approach towards the Africans and it was to certain Rhodesians, especially Afrikaners that were coming in. But no, I wouldn't have gone to South Africa. I wasn't really attracted by it at all.

### **So did you come back to this country?**

Yes

### **How did you find that? Coming from Rhodesia to socialist Britain?**

Yes, but you know, I'd come back. I knew people here. It wasn't as if...and you can get on a plane and it took twelve hours. When I left, I remember I said "oh well, I'll see you when I see you". There wasn't sort of any great tears and all the rest of it. Obviously there was a certain pang but I said "ok, fine, we'll be in touch" and then of course, a lot of Rhodesian friends came across and I looked after them. We played a round and then they went back and all the rest of it. So it's not like in the olden days when my parents went out to India, it took – I don't know how many months to get to Calcutta or something like that. It was 'phone him or get on an aeroplane; it wasn't as dramatic and again you see, as I say, it wasn't in my blood.

### **(00:39:01) So you came back to Sunningdale? Or where did you go?**

No, I didn't have a job and there was a recession on. It was a blooming hot summer and it was just lucky I had my brother in the film business. I was staying with some relations of mine in Maidenhead and there was a big building going up. I had to stop because I'd played squash in different places around Europe and I said "oh, there's a squash club being built". So I went and I climbed across. I said "who owns this place?" and they said, a little Irishman said something, so I said "Well, give me his address". So I 'phoned him and he said "Right, you can run it". And there was a huge leisure complex and I did that for about a year and I said "no, this is not my scene" because it was my hobby. I wasn't terribly keen on kowtowing to idiots quite frankly.

### **Whom you felt you could beat on the squash court...**

Well it was nothing to do with that! It was just in the leisure business, I found, it's just awful. But it was a great learning curve in running a business, I can tell you, but there were also a few hankie-pankies going on with the builders which I wasn't in control of and all sorts of stuff happened. In fact, they're knocking it down. It's just outside Windsor on the slip road. You know, there's a big wheel there now and the other side is the squash court. I don't know what it's called now, Cannons or something and they want to knock it down and build a brand new complex. But that's how I got back into it and yes, I fitted in very well. I've always been able to adapt.

**Do you find that your social group was still connected with end of empire? You made reference to your wife having been born in Singapore, her father being the head of the police, the Malaysian police in Singapore?**

No, not Malaysian, it was whatever the police was...

**The colonial police?**

No, I still get this wrong, it wasn't the...he was in the special branch of the police. I don't know what it was called but anyway...

**I'm just wondering whether you find that you gravitate naturally towards those who've got international experiences of empire and returning home?**

Yes, I enjoy it because I'm a part of it but I can gravitate anywhere really. You have to and I enjoy meeting people with different backgrounds but obviously, I didn't know my wife came from Singapore when I first met her because she was at British Airways. If anything, I've just got to know a lot of British Airways people, pilots and all sorts of people. Her mother actually, is 98; she's in a home up here.

**Is she really? 98, that's quite an age.**

(00:41:54) Talk about an incredible life, my God! But yes, Rhodesia to me was a great scar on British history I think, the way they handled it and it's one of those things.

**Do you think the war was worth it?**

If you look back now, you say obviously not. You can only say is something worth it by the results. Look at the results.

**It's interesting, Spike said "I'd have to think about that but in part – yes, in part – no" because he lost close friends.**

Yes but I think again, if nothing had been done and had been handed over, the Spikes of this world would probably have a huge feeling of regret. It was a case... I think at that time it was worth it because they were trying to stop something very virulent, not through trying hard. Now you look back and say and I can understand Spike's response, he's got to say...well of course if you look at it now you say, no, it wasn't worth it but then it was. But the tragedy is that the majority of people knew this would happen, including me, because you just had to look at what was happening in the north. You just had to look at the way things worked and it's human nature. Obviously Mugabe was going to woo the West and say "look, aren't I a wonderful man? Everyone's forgiven". But then, as soon as...and this is getting back to the old chieftain tribal system, you're either with me or against me. And I've always thought it's a strange thing, with Africans and us, the distinction is that in the West, we put reason first and intuition second. Even with intuition, we have to try and verify it. In Africa, even still now, despite what the guys that wear suits think, they put intuition first and then reason. Because the intuition comes from their ancestors

and it's got them through thousands of years in a very harsh environment and you're not going to knock that out.

**Well, their ancestors are with them**

Exactly. Now that's the difference and this is why perhaps a lot of people in the West don't understand that because they're very spiritual people and they're incredibly intelligent people. This is why I was saying about the farms. No-one is more perceptive than the African.

**When you were patrolling the farms, how aware were you of Spirit Mediums?**

Not really, never came across them. They were in the villages normally, not on the farms. No, in answer to your question, I don't think I ever met a Spirit Medium or Witch Doctor.

**How about shrines, the importance of shrines?**

Yes, there were shrines but you respected that. Oh yes, you respected all that, you had to. That was a part of Africa. You didn't in any way insult that.

**(00:45:21) Did you consider learning Shona?**

I wish I had done, but no I didn't. I can speak Hindi

**That wasn't very helpful in Rhodesia!**

I know, but I think I learnt to speak Hindi before I could speak English in India, but I couldn't speak Shona. But that's one of my lasting regrets, I just wish I'd taken the trouble because I was involved in a white society, very rarely did I come across the Africans, unless we worked with them or our people who were our houseboys and their families etc. But I do wish I'd learnt to speak Shona.

**So in your professional career, you didn't come across African businessmen?**

Oh yes, there were lots of Africans working with us.

**How were the African MP's regarded when you were there?**

I don't know actually. I think the council of chiefs were respected. I think there was respect but it was all centred on this little caucus of people that had to make decisions but the council of chiefs could stand up and say what they had to say and that was one of the beauties of it actually. They weren't necessarily listened to but generally speaking, I didn't come across any...I don't think I really came across any white MP's to be honest with you.

**Really?**

Yes

**Interesting, because given the size of the Rhodesian community, most people knew an MP.**

I can't say I actually ever spoke to...I spoke to Ian Smith but I never spoke to...

**Well, he counts!**

Yes, ok, but that was only when we were playing rugby and he came to the sports club. This was the beauty of it: he used to wander along with his dog.

**How important was club life?**

Very important, it was...when you say "club life" you see, if you're a sportsman, I used to play squash, cricket, rugby, you'd go to a club. If you were...you know there were theatres, art galleries (?) there was that side of things. It was a very male society and I'll never forget going into Bulawayo, it was a pretty rough, I won't say rough place but it was...

(00:47:35) **Different from Salisbury**

It was "Bumbazonki", they used to call it! But when I first went...

**Why did they call it "Bumbazonki"?**

Salisbury takes all, that was it. But I'll never forget actually the Sixties and Bulawayo: I think there were still fist fights and things going on. It was a very hard town but really lovely place, nice people.

**What, a railway/railhead town?**

Yes, there was. Railtons was one of the clubs and mining and Filabusi and they'd all come in. I was a member of the Queens Club and I remember the first time I went in there with the brother-in-law of this girl I was going to marry. The day after Tartsfield, the Wallabies had played Rhodesia at rugby and it had been one hell of a game. I went into the Queens Club and I met this chap called Ian Mackintosh who actually was coach of the Springboks rugby team after independence and I was wearing a pink shirt. There were these great Rhodies sitting at the bar with their hair cut up to here and sort of looked...it was so funny and do you know something? They were some of my best friends those guys after that because I brought in a different angle. There were little...come in from the mines or they worked wherever it was and it was pretty one horse town, but the thing is, I can play rugby.

**So you were ok?**

I was ok.

**So what made a good Rhodesian, besides being able to pl'ay rugby?**

No, no I think a good...



## **I'm serious because people did have, after all insidious unspoken ideas about what made 'a good Rhodesian'?**

I think someone who...a good Rhodesian? What makes a good Englishman? I don't know.

### **You don't know? Or you can't articulate it?**

I never really thought about it. If you say, there's the practical side, there's the generation side and there's the present thinking side. I would say a good Rhodesian obviously from the genetic side is someone whose parents came over with the pioneers, born and bred there, went to school there. Now that's on the bloodline side and I think a lot of them understood the African and were good to them; but they understood also that there was a dignity in difference. They also understood that one day Africans were going to be the majority.

### **(00:50:17) Well, they were already the majority**

Yes, but you know what I mean, in governing. There wasn't this fear of intimidation and that said, they were sensible people but they were terribly practical. They were probably a little patronising towards the African. You got the occasional outbursts, but a good Rhodesian – someone who loved his country. That's all you can say really.

### **Hospitable?**

Oh incredibly hospitable

### **Sense of fair play?**

Yes, now you're breaking it down

**That's what I mean when you're talking about what is a good Rhodesian, what are the pointers which actually start to define their sense of Rhodesian patriotism? Are these things that actually, if you start to unpack them, you go – "oh yes, of course" but in fact they are unspoken assumptions that can be so common among a group of people that they don't need to be articulated.**

Yes and Smithy was like that actually, believe it or not. The world would run into good chaps and not so good chaps, terrorists and traitors or whatever. He was brought up in that era of fair play. What did it mean?

### **That's the whole public-school thing...**

That's this twist in the British mentality, we dine out on it.

**I don't know, I think that different people can have a different sense of fair play. It doesn't make us communists or traitors**

No it doesn't. The great thing is I think being able to listen to other people's points of view and, yes, that's it, being able to listen to other people's points of view and say "look, you have a right to have a point of view" and I don't despise you for it.

**That's very much Voltaire, I disagree with you but I will defend to the death your right to say it.**

Yes but it is a tragic thing, the whole thing there but it's history now and...

**'The past is another country'?**

Yes, exactly and we can't keep on looking at it but it's interesting talking to someone like yourself, you're bringing back a lot of...especially for Spike because he lost friends and I'm sure Alan did and I knew people that were killed but they weren't...again, you see, there wasn't a bloodline. He was (00:52:56) probably at school with them and you'd been brought up together. You played together, you scrapped together and suddenly – boom – they've gone.

**Well, in terms of percentage of the population, the white population in Rhodesia bore the higher rate of casualties from the regular security forces. But it was the Africans in absolute terms who of course suffered more. As in any civil war, it's the...**

It was funny, it was actually quite... I remember it brought a tear to my eye. I was out in Zimbabwe, it must have been 10/15 years ago and there was a huge new shopping centre built in Harare. I can't remember what it was called actually and I was having a cup of coffee and I was sitting looking, there was a beautiful sort of big dome and I was looking down and this little African walked in, wearing a blazer and trousers. He walked in smartly and I looked and I said "that guy, I'm surprised they've let him carry on". I said to myself "that guy was in the Army" and I just thought, what's his life now? Because I mean, this is probably why you'd never be able to interview any of the Africans because they wouldn't want to be associated with it.

**Yes, I'm very aware of that although it would be fascinating to get that voice. But I'm asking people like yourself, like Spike, like Alan to remember things of thirty years ago and memories adapt.**

Yes, it's funny, you've jogged lots of things in my mind actually although I read a lot about it but just talking to you and you're asking very pointed questions but you need to think about it. I don't know whether you'd be interested, there's a chap I know called Van Der Syde who was one of the top civil servants in Rhodesia. He lives down in Bournemouth.

**I'd be very interested to talk to him.**

What I'll do, I'll phone him tonight. He's quite old and he worked with Smith so I'll mention it to him and see what he says, if he'd like to talk to you.

**If you can also explain, I've interviewed Brian and Averil Oliver? Thank you very much indeed, Ian, for talking to me.**

End of interview