

Simon Krige

Born in 1956 in Rhodesia to an English mother who travelled there in the early 1950s, and a Rhodesian father. His mother died when he was four and they grew up with their father and grandmother in Dorset, UK. His father remarried and they returned to Rhodesia. In 1974 joined the Rhodesian Army via national service. Went to South Africa for a year in 1976/77. Did a couple of call-ups voluntarily prior to undertaking medical training in 1978. Went to South Africa after being offered work there in 1979/1980. Tried living in Canada and Saudi Arabia, but now living in South Africa.

This is Dr Sue Onslow talking to Dr Simon Krige in Chelsea, 1 May 2009. Simon, thank you very much indeed for agreeing to talk to me. I wonder if you could begin by saying, please, how did you come to be in Rhodesia in the 1970's during the bush war?

Well I was born in Rhodesia. My mother was English, she came from Eastbourne and had come out to Africa in the early fifties. She married my father who was born in Rhodesia in Bulawayo and we were farming in Karoi. My mother died when I was four in a car accident so my father gave up farming because he had three sons with her and we moved to Bulawayo where his mother, my grandmother who was from Dorset in England...

Where in Dorset?

Sturminster Newton

Yes, very close to where I live now

Really?

Yes

So we, the three boys, were four, three and one, so my grandmother brought us up to begin with. Then a couple of years later my father remarried a woman and she had two children from a previous marriage so we became an amalgamated family; and we grew up the rest of our lives in Bulawayo apart from some...My father had a couple of mines; he lived in a small town outside Bulawayo, in Filabusi. And then we went to high school in Bulawayo and at the end of 1974, we were all called up to do our national service.

So where are you in the family of boys?

I was the eldest. When the family became amalgamated, I had a brother the same age and a sister three years older.

So the four of you boys were all called up at the same time?

One after the other. My stepbrother had to do another year at school because he moved from Gwelo to Bulawayo because that was to do with his...he was living with his father and eventually decided to come and live with us, so he had to repeat a year or take a longer 'O' level. Eventually a year later, he went to do his national service. And then my brother, my proper brother Eugene did his national service a year later and the youngest brother Joe...I mean, I can digress: there was a story because that was 1979 when it was his turn to do his national service and we as a family got together and told him to leave because we'd all been in the Army. You can imagine my father had to go through three and now four sons going through the Army. So (00:03:09) we begged Joe to leave - actually he's a teacher in Somerset now - and he said "I could never look you in the eye if I didn't do it". So I mean, my grandfather Peter Krige was from Prince Albert. He was a young boy during the Boer war and he fought with the South African regiment in France between the First World War and he was wounded; and my father volunteered at seventeen to join the Royal Navy. He had actually had special dispensation from the governor of Rhodesia at the time because his mother, the one who looked after us and brought us up from Dorset, said "look..." By then, she was a widow, she said "I can't make that decision. You're seventeen, if the governor will allow you to go to war, then I will". And he had to go and see Sir Godfrey Huggins and he persuaded Godfrey Huggins that he would go to join the Royal Navy because by the time he'd finished his training, he would be eighteen. So they allowed him to do that. So there was a bit of a family history. Not that there was ever any pressure: my father wasn't a redneck by any means. He was actually decorated, Military Cross. He and his brother when they were farming in Karoi which is up near the Zambezi escarpment actually started, this is just before my mother died, started a political party called The Capricorn Society. His idea was to enhance and progress blacks so that they could participate in government. So just a little remark, I remember as a young boy, this is after my mother died, we were in Bulawayo and I think the three of us were in the car and we leant out the car and said "kaffir" or something which you hear in school. He stopped the car and said "don't you ever dare speak to people like that". So we weren't by any means redneck, so I suggest that probably leads...Do you want me to carry on there?

I was just wondering where did you go to school in Bulawayo?

Milton

So was that a particularly liberal school? Was it on the...?

I think it was a very large school actually. About a third of the school were Jewish and that had a great influence on the way we thought. I mean a third of the boys in our class were Jewish and they were of a different...they saw the country differently and I remember, we had a lot of debate at our school. I remember one day in '74 - he's remained my great friend - Eli Elkheim said to me "in five years time..." there were a whole group of us, "there will be a black Prime Minister" and when he said that to us, it was just completely

inconceivable in 1974, to us. I said “what are you talking about?” It was inconceivable and I remember that remark; and of course almost to the day that happened. So I suppose in a way that gives you an idea of our state of mind. Bear in mind - you’ve probably heard this all before - but we were born...In 1964 or '65 when UDI was declared, I remember we were all sitting in our car. It was at lunchtime, we listened to the declaration sitting in the car and then of course sweets disappeared and all our British connections started to vanish.

And you remember that very clearly?

(00:07:15) I distinctly remembered it. We were all sitting there “what are we going to do?” and there were many people who were for and against it. I don’t know whether we were for it or against it, I never...we were too busy having ...I was about ten, I was born in '56 so...

What were your father’s views?

My father was quite liberal. We were a Catholic family so that gives you an idea of our approach to things. Until he died a couple of years ago, he was a devout Catholic, and so they were a big influence on the way we were brought up. The tragedy is I saw my father as the years progressed become more and more racist.

From starting off as you say, the Capricorn Society in the ‘50’s?

Yes, his best friend, one of his best friends was Mattress who was a black man. He was a Mkurikuri. Especially my mother dying, at one time I could speak Shona better than I could speak English because I played with the natives and then my father was...It took him a couple of years to get over my mother’s death because she was in labour; there was another child then, it was a dreadful story. So for a couple of years, as children, we ran wild. We had, people looked after us, a lot of us had lots of servants and we were running around the bush with them, so we could speak the language. But as the years went by, he became (more racist)...And of course every day you would...we were sixteen, seventeen, prior to going to do our national service, on the TV, security forces regret to announce the death of...and this went on and on you know and gradually he...and he was quite involved in the police reserve. It was a great thing to do. You didn’t want to be seen to not make your contribution, so he used to be involved in those convoys that you must have...people have talked about?

Yes

And he would be there and he’d be up at the Vic Falls, the bridge, guarding. To be honest he loved it. I mean, it was all exciting and in a way all men like that sort of thing.

You make it sound like “Boy’s Own” stuff

It is, it is. It wasn't when it finally did happen, but when you're a schoolboy and you get called up. I don't think we went...I don't know if you want me to do this, this way?

It's ok because I'm following where you're going. I'll start to fill in the gaps, don't worry.

I remember when we were at school, we hadn't written our 'A' levels but we all had to go and register at Brady Barracks in Bulawayo. Four or five of us piled into this Renault and driving into Brady Barracks to register and we took off our ties and it was all sort of gung-ho.

(00:10:20) **So you were about seventeen then?**

Yes

And this was a group of you going to do it?

Yes

It sounds like, very much a degree of bravado?

It was, yes. Off we went and we were suddenly...you're almost...above school year, you sort of felt that you were...Then you went back and did your 'A' levels and...

Had you known other people who'd served at this point?

Funnily enough, not. There weren't many, I didn't have elder siblings. I had a cousin who was older who had been in the Army but I wasn't very much exposed to it. I didn't know where everybody...Once they did their Army service, they sort of disappeared. You were in the Army a long time so they weren't around, you didn't fraternise with them and have drinks with them afterwards. We didn't have a lot of war stories or that sort of thing.

So it sounds like an awfully big adventure?

It was to begin with, yes

So the group of you who went down there: were you all conscripted into the same group? Did you go through training together?

Well we were quite lucky, we all got called up. If you did medicine, you were exempt. If you got into medical school, you were exempt from national service at that point, '74, I don't know if it changed. I, at that stage, didn't know what I wanted to do so I went into the Army. One of my great friends, he would love to have been in the Army, Philip Mitchell, and I don't think there was ever any doubt that Philip would have done. He wasn't afraid of doing it but his father had fought. His father was one of three or four brothers and they were old Miltonians, the father and his brothers, and as you go into Milton, Beit Hall, all the schools in Rhodesia had Beit Halls. If you go into them, on

the one side were all the people who had died in the Second World War and it was Mitchell, Mitchell, Mitchell. Three of his uncles were killed and his father said "you are not fighting in any war". His father was a wise man, actually, and Philip obviously got into medical school, went down to Cape Town; but even to this day, he regrets not having fought in that war, I daresay he would say that.

Your father didn't have any such concerns or qualms even though his father had fought in the First World War and seen the carnage of the trenches? He'd fought in the Royal Navy. There was no paternal, well, inhibitor for you?

(00:13:04) No, I don't think there was any...there was certainly no pressure to do it, absolutely not and I think if I'd said "I don't believe in this war", I think he would have backed me.

What did your younger brothers think?

About me going?

Yes. Just one of those things?

Just one of those things

"Everybody's doing it", so...

Yes and it was also a gradual thing. A lot of us who were at school together. When we got to Brady Barracks, no, we went to Llewellyn Barracks which is out of town and when we got to Llewellyn Barracks, we got together and we said "now listen, they're going through in groups of thirty, you can see that, that's a barrack room". So we sort of jostled and managed to get ourselves into a group of thirty, so we all went into the same barrack room.

I'm laughing just at the image of these boys making sure you travelled as a pack.

But as a consequence, we all knew each other. We won all the competitions because it was amazing because we all knew each other and helped each other. Because sometimes barrack rooms are quite dysfunctional, you know, because you get all walks of life and sometimes...

Was that quite an eye-opener for you?

Yes, it was amazing. I think in a way we'd lived a quite sheltered life because suddenly you've got guys who were pretty rough and ready.

In what way? So you're talking about farm kids coming in?

Not farm, but more rough guys, motor-bikers and guys who took a lot of drugs. Not that there was many drugs there, but there were some really

rough guys, from our point of view and we became great friends. It was quite a leveller.

You don't think of Rhodesia having its own chapter of Hell's Angels, I must admit

Oh yes, there were bikers and guys rocking up with long hair and denim jackets and leather jackets. They all lost those very quickly but...

So after your initial training, what happened then?

(00:15:10) Then I got into a leader training unit so I ended up in charge of a platoon so we got sent to 3 independent company in Inyanga which is on the Mozambique border.

In 1974?

Yes

So your training was what? Four months? Six months?

We did four or five months. So you did a basic training of six weeks or something and then we did LTU, leader training unit, and then there were battle camps and we ended up...I remember it was very cold so we must have gone up to Inyanga around about May/June.

So May '75?

Yes

So that was Mozambican independence, after the Portuguese coup?

I remember ambushing on the Gayezi River and someone had a radio and we listened to the Portuguese news so it happened, we were there. It was July wasn't it?

Yes

It was July because it was my birthday, 16th of July, I remember that, we were lying there and we were listening to this. We didn't realise Mozambique had fallen.

So before then, had you had much contact on the other side of the border with the Portuguese troops that were trying to fight the insurgency there?

No. Until then, we used to go to Mozambique on holidays, we used to go to Beira, lovely holidays.

What did you think of the Portuguese rule there before? Could you see that the writing was on the wall with the FRELIMO struggle?

No I don't think we really...from our point of view, at that stage of my life, I didn't... my father was a great believer of the Portuguese, this thing of assimilado, incorporating people into the country. He was a great believer in that; he thought it was good but I didn't...I think Caetano and this, we were aware of it but...

So all of this implies that you really didn't have much of an idea of what you were walking into, in 1975, being sent to the Mozambique border?

(00:17:26) No

How soon did you realise exactly what was going on?

Well, we weren't given a lot of information as soldiers. I mean there was no political...the last thing they want to do is tell you the grand scheme of what was really happening

The big picture?

Yes, I don't think I had the big picture actually. One of the great arguments we had when there was debate about what we should do was why are we doing this? We'd often say "why are we fighting here?" and one of the great things was...

So this is discussion among yourselves?

Yes, and families and farmers and one of the reasons was; if you don't fight...because now you jog my memory, we did have these debates before going into the Army because there were people who gapped. I think the government encouraged this idea of "draft dodging". It was frowned upon if you were a draft dodger; if you were a draft dodger and you came back to Rhodesia in the university vacs., there was a good chance you'd get beaten up.

Really?

Yes, in clubs, yes

So you've got social policing, not the government?

Yes, so a lot of them didn't come back. A lot of Jewish guys didn't.

I was going to ask you about your Jewish friends at Milton. What did they...?

Some did, some didn't. I would say by and large, I think I'd be correct in saying a lot of them didn't. I mean, there was a group about two years behind

me, when they were seventeen, we could do 'M' level which was sort of halfway, 'AS' type of thing which enabled you to go to university in South Africa at seventeen which was a good time to go because you weren't of age to be called up, and they were flown out en masse. There was a whole lot of them flown out. A lot of them went to New York and prospered, they're all big lawyers, they run banks, well I don't know if they run banks any more but the debate was...One of the thing was, look, these guys are coming over and killing us, if anything, you just need to defend yourself so even if you have no political agenda, self defence is a good enough reason.

It's survival

(00:19:55) Yes, self defence is a good enough reason to be in the Army so many of us who, if we had some doubt, that's a good reason.

I mean, that indicates a mind set of "I've got to fight my way out of here". Did you ever question why you were sent there in the first place?

I never dreamt...I'll tell you two things, I never dreamt of leaving Rhodesia. I thought I'd live and grow old there.

Die there?

Yes, well, you give me half a chance, I'd be there tomorrow. I'd go back there, I never left it

You haven't ?

No, it's my home. Having said that, my grandfather...my mother went out and she was an only child so when she went to Rhodesia and died, we sort of lost contact with my grandfather. I only met him when I was eighteen he came out in my last year at school, but he constantly wrote to us and we got presents from him and usually books. I'll digress briefly because this is off the subject; when I came over to England, I met him and he lived down in Sussex. I went for a walk with him and he must have been nearly eighty then and I said to him "what's a hedgerow?" and he looked at me. Because I'd been brought up with English books, "robins?" he said "that's a sort of bird. And that's a magpie". It was like being blind and everything I'd learnt, we didn't have Rhodesian books, we learnt about hedgerows and robins and...

The Tudors

"The north wind shall blow and you shall have snow, and what will the robin do then poor thing?" And it was like...

In the African bush you learnt all this?

Yes, what the hell was this? But the thing about it was...in a way, it was a part of my background, especially having had an English mother. There were a lot of us, we had another far away life that was here.

It's a cultural memory

Yes but I never dreamt of leaving Rhodesia, so it wasn't as if I was fighting my way out of something. In fact when I left, I actually wrote a letter saying "this is to confirm that I'm not leaving. I'm going travelling and studying, but this is nothing to do with the politics of this country. I'm not emigrating". I never did emigrate.

So how long were you on the Mozambique border at Inyanga?

(00:22:29) For the year

Just for the year. So that was when the war really started to accelerate then?

Yes, we used to sit there and watch. We used to have observation posts and especially from July onwards, you just saw these guys, porters carrying boxes and boxes and we weren't allowed to engage them. I think we had one contact across the river once, they opened fire on us.

Because that was the ceasefire?

Yes, we weren't allowed...we were ambushed, we used to ambush and there was a curfew at night and one time, there was an ambush. I did shoot a couple of people in that ambush. That was horrible. I remember getting called down and there was a Chinese guy, Eden Nissan, he was in that ambush, he was beside himself because the chap he's shot had died and he was weeping and didn't know what to do. Unfortunately the chap died and it turned out that there were two or three young boys. They had papers and they had maps on how to get out the country so they were...in other words, they hadn't killed any civilians but it was a shame. Eden actually got killed in a car accident going home on a ten day holiday from Inyanga, car rolled or something but I remember that. So yes, we used to ambush the road there and then...but we saw a lot of activity across the river.

Oh yes, you would have done. So at that point, you were having discussions with people about, "well now we're here, we'll just have to fight" or, "well, we have to fight to get out of this, to protect ourselves if we're attacked, that's then legitimate to defend ourselves." Where did you go next after Inyanga, after that attack?

Oh when I finished my national service, 8th December. I went back home to Bulawayo and then I was trying to decide whether to go to do agriculture at the University of Rhodesia because as I say, I wanted to farm or to do...

Did you still have the family farm at Karoi, or had you sold it? Had your family sold it?

It was sold and then I decided, I had a girlfriend so when she went to Cape Town.. it's always something like that. So I went to Cape Town and I was there for a year and then the next year.

So '77

At the end of that year, I went back in a Christmas vac. and I volunteered to do a camp. I remember going to Brady Barracks and a guy said "are you mad?" because you see, that was the thing, you felt you ought to do it and I (00:25:20) had a hairy time there. We were in Rutenga which was down in the South East. We had a lot of action there.

So you re-joined?

I didn't re-join. I just volunteered for the vac. six/eight week vac.

Oh right, ok

So I was in the Army for eight weeks

So which unit were you attached to?

We were 2 Brigade, based in Brady Barracks

And so, six to eight weeks in Rutenga in 1977/'78? Yes, things had started to hot up a bit by then

Yes

So you hadn't re-joined with any of your mates from before?

No, I just walked in. I walked in and just said "I'm volunteering" so I joined the group and went.

Did any of your family say "you're mad" as well, in addition to the person at Brady Barracks?

I don't know. You know, one of the things I suppose by then I was quite independent, I was eighteen/ nineteen. I'm not saying this with any disrespect but I didn't mind. I did what I wanted to do, I didn't ask for permission or anything like that.

But by this point, a number of your friends would have been taking the gap. People were leaving '77/'78, people that you knew?

Yes, oh yes, my uncle had left by then. He came to Norfolk and Mike Reynolds, he was LRDG Military Cross and all that. That was my father's brother, half brother actually because that's why he had, the surname was different from mine but he decided, he said "no, the whole family are leaving. We're not living under a black government" and they left

Oh really?

En masse

So he felt, “the writing’s on the wall.”?

We’re going, moved to Norfolk

(00:27:20) Because let’s think, Smith’s announcement on the television in September of 1976, how did your family respond to that when he had said “there’s going to be black majority rule in two years”? You said your uncle had decided “that’s it, I’m leaving, I’m going back to England.” But your father, how did he take that?

I think by then, as I said to you, he became more and more resentful and also it’s the nature of the man. He’s a complex man and he abhorred the violence that was being perpetrated by the “terrorists”. I’m going to use that word because that’s the way we described them at the time. That’s not the way I feel, not necessarily how I feel now but he abhorred the brutality. They were brutal, there were things that they did... As you know, it was abhorrent and I suppose he gradually became so resentful of the whole politics. And I suppose in a way, if you really sat him down and said...no, you know how gradually you start off hating the politicians and then it’s just easier just to hate all the black people. It’s just a blurring of what you actually specifically hate, what initiated that hatred. So he became more and more disappointed and angry; and I suppose also it was difficult to leave because it was financially difficult to leave, as you know. A lot of people were just financial prisoners; he had a lovely home, to give all that up? But he emigrated in 1980.

Did he?

Yes, to South Africa. I don’t think he went to South Africa specifically because he believed in the politics. It was the easiest place to go without...He very nearly went to England, came back to England but he just felt that he’d be too far away from all of us because we were...

So you talked about your brothers, your younger brothers, Eugene and Joe also signing up and that you’d tried to dissuade Joe from signing up. What was their experience of the war?

Eugene had much the same as all of us

Ok, so six months training and then...?

Exactly the same. Joe was the same. He actually ended up in the same unit, ended up in Inyanga where I was but by then there was a regiment. They had RAR, he was with the RAR so he had black soldiers with him.

Yes. I’ve been told by members of the BSAP that the average life expectancy of a police officer at Inyanga was six weeks.

I’m glad my father didn’t know that

Was he still in the police reserve at that point?

No, Joe was in RAR

And Eugene?

(00:30:42) He was...I can't remember you know because it's funny, I was at university and he was in the Army and you just tended to...I think at one time he was with the military police. He was an MP which my father hated. He couldn't stand him being involved with the MP's. He felt that he didn't...

Why?

Well it's just my father/. He hated prisons and torture and anything like that it was abhorrent and he somehow felt that the MP's...The MP's were quite notorious. Those of us, if you ever ended up in detention barracks, it was the MP's who gave you a hard time. If you had an accidental discharge or misbehaved or something, you were sent to Brady Barracks or one of the other ones and it was called DB, detention barracks, and the MP's ran detention barracks. That was a terrifying feeling for all of us, just something that you avoided. You didn't want to go to DB.

So they had a really bad reputation?

Yes, they gave you a hard time

Was it deserved? That bad reputation?

Yes I know, they gave you a hard time.

Raises ideas of taking out frustrations and all of that on your own side rather than directing it against "the enemy"

Oh yes, I can't remember the guy's name, it will come to me, but they were boxers so they used to make you box and...I never went to a DB, thank God but they'd make you box and run around with buckets full of sand and...

You didn't want to be there

Yes, you got drilled; you'd go to drill for hours and all that sort of thing.

Simon, while all this was going on, what did you think you were fighting for? You talk about self protection, self defence, did you have ideas that you were fighting for a particular country? Fighting for a cause? Fighting for values? Did you think about such stuff?

Well whilst you were in the Army, once you were in the Army and once I was in the Army, the preoccupation was being a good soldier. The preoccupation was...in a way...I mean sometimes sitting in an observation post for a week or something like that, you'd have time...Because you'd sometimes have a bloke who was intellectually interesting, and we could generate some debate

but sometimes you were with guys who were really just thinking about the next drinking venture or...

Beer or girl?

(00:33:17) Yes, so it depended but sometimes you'd have some really interesting times and discussing really interesting stuff, but most of the time, certainly for me, all I wanted to do was...I was in charge of a platoon so I was preoccupied with finding these terrorists. It completely preoccupies you because you want to know where they are, where they're tracking them and what's happening and where they are and radio communications so the whole thing's quite a thing. You're preoccupied, you haven't got time to sort of...

You're fixated on the hunt?

Yes

Yes, I could see that. So what did you think you were fighting against?

In practical terms, I was fighting against a guerrilla Army that had infiltrated the country and to an extent, it was only once you'd got to know, once I'd been in contact with them and we obviously killed and captured people, you knew...you became...you knew exactly who you were dealing with. I'll never forget the one chap we'd captured: he'd been wounded and I empathised with him. I looked him in his eye, I knew he could be someone I'd grown up with and I'll never forget that; God knows whatever happened to him but he obviously would have been killed after interrogation or whatever.

You say 'obviously' but wasn't there, in the latter part of the war a deliberate policy to try to turn people, to try to turn guerrillas?

Yes but I think a lot of them were killed

Just "tidier"?

Look, I am talking...there are people who would be...who are older than me and much more senior in the Army at the time who will know exactly what happened, and how people were disposed of or not disposed of. But my understanding was they were killed; a lot of them were killed if they didn't turn.

When you said you knew exactly what you were fighting against, a guerrilla Army that was being supported from outside?

Yes

Did you attach any ideology to what they were doing? Any agenda? What did you think of African nationalism at this point? You talked about empathising with this guerrilla fighter. You suddenly realised that in fact he was like the kids you met growing up. Like you?

Yes, when I went in the second time, you can imagine now, I've spent a year at a liberal university and I've had a wonderful time and now I'm back to this bloody war. Certainly once I'd been in there a couple of weeks, I said "what the (00:36:19) hell did I ever do this for anyway?" and then, you were just fighting to defend...just to bloody keep alive but we went through villages which had never happened before. The guys who'd been there had been in an Army for a long time and those were guys who hadn't gone to university, they lived in Rhodesia, they were apprentices, guys who just lived, working in shops and that. They did six weeks in, six weeks out, six weeks in, six weeks out and they were hardened...I remember going into a village and they were kicking and beating up people and I couldn't become part of that. I just didn't see the point of it so they got...you could see that they'd been doing it for a long time and they were fed up and they were...

Well, they were brutalised too?

Yes

Because the huge disruption, in and out

Yes, it was disastrous, it was chaos

As you say, that rupture of...

And in a way I suppose you felt that the least I can do is one six weeks. These guys were doing six weeks in, six weeks out, six weeks in, six weeks out and I think I did a couple of those. Because I ended up doing medicine in Rhodesia, I went back

Did you? From Cape Town?

Yes, I left Cape Town after eighteen months, got into medical school and went to Rhodesia and was a medical student there.

So were you a field medic as well?

No

You didn't do that?

I never did any more Army after that because it was by then '79. '78 I started medical school, I didn't do anything in the vac. '79. That was when my brother was in the Army and in fact Willie Loxton who was head boy in Joe's year was killed on a follow-up and it was... I think the ceasefire had already...and he got a bullet. He was clever, rugby, nice chap, just walked into an RPD and that was the end of him. I never did any more after...there were a couple of guys in our medical class who were in the SAS and one of the chaps, he was a year ahead of me, he went to...he was my age, he was in my first intake and he went to Chimoyo so he was SAS. He was called up

to Chimoyo and I can't remember...I think that happened when were on a vac.
I can't remember the date of Chimoyo.

(00:39:02) So do you think the Cold War, this fighting against communism had much to do it? At the time, did you absorb the government propaganda?

You know I think communism, I didn't believe...I mean it was constantly, "we're fighting a communist war, this is our last stand against communism" and this sort of thing but I didn't buy into that too much.

At the time or looking back?

It's hard to say, you see, trying to put myself back in my mind. I suppose I did believe in it to some extent.

But that was the line you were consistently fed?

Yes

That was the propaganda line in the media?

Yes

Did you ever ask yourselves, how can the other side, how can the guerrillas behave with such brutality to the...?

It shocked us

Well, you made reference to that, the atrocities?

Yes

Do you ever ask yourselves, how can human beings do that to others? How do they get people, the guerrilla leaders...?

To do that

Yes, how do they get them to do that?

Well I didn't try and understand it. It was incomprehensible. You became more and more convinced that they were something to be abhorred.

And to be defeated because of the brutality, but the war was intensifying wasn't it at that point?

Yes

How much of it do you think at the time Rhodesia was trying to achieve a political settlement through military means? Did you ever start to question “why the hell are we fighting this war?”

No

(00:40:52) **By the latter period?**

Well my national service, I finished it and you just knew had...towards the end you were just counting the days to get out and go to university and do what you were going to do. You've probably interviewed people who say...a couple of intakes after me, they extended it so it became longer and longer and those are the people who got fed up and left because “I expected a year, now I'd doing eighteen months, now I'm doing twenty one months” and so a lot of them would go on vac. and then...or go out on their ten day vac. ten day R & R as we called it and they'd gap it.

Ok so you were in med. school at the University of Rhodesia, the “Kremlin on the hill”?

Yes

In '78?

Yes, I started March '78

What did you think of Muzorewa and his brand of African nationalism, the internal settlement?

Yes, we liked...we thought that he would be, we were hoping for some sort of moderate leader. I mean I didn't even know who Robert Mugabe was. I didn't know he existed. I didn't know Robert Mugabe existed.

You knew who Joshua Nkomo was?

I knew who Joshua Nkomo was, I'd never heard of Robert Mugabe. The first I ever heard of Robert Mugabe was when Lord Soames came over and suddenly this guy appeared and Tongagara? I'd never heard of Tongagara.

So had you identified ZANLA with any particular political or military figurehead?

No

They were just there, these guerrillas?

Yes, I didn't know who they were. They were Russian backed, but I didn't know that there was an individual who was their leader. That might just be me but...

So you had a sense that there was this guerrilla rabble then?

Yes I mean we knew Nkomo was ZIPRA, was he ZIPRA?

He was ZAPU, but yes

(00:42:50) ZAPU

Yes and ZIPRA was of course its military wing

Yes, we knew they were Russian trained and sort of based in Zambia and the Mozambique or Robert Mugabe's crowd seemed to be more coming through there and they were trained in Tanzania and China. We knew that the communists were backing them or we were told they were backing them

Well, they were

Yes but I'm just trying to put myself in my shoes, 1978/'79

I was asking you what you thought of moderate African nationalism by this point?

Yes we liked that idea: Ndabagingi Sithole and Zimbabwe/Rhodesia, this sort of thing and then of course life was great. I mean, we still led a wonderful life and it was a funny thing. Once you got back into town, you could have been...you could be forgiven for believing there wasn't a war. It was all barbeques and parties. Typical countries at war: I mean you lived life, it was wonderful. Rugby, I used to play rugby and cricket and hockey and water polo, and we'd go out to Zambia and up to The Falls and fishing on Kariba, just go in convoy. So it was a great life and I guess we all were wondering what was going to happen, it was a much debated thing. Should we be going? Are we going to Australia? And then there'd be a lot of people saying "what the hell are you leaving? This is a great country". And Mugabe in the beginning was quite moderate. I'll never forget the day he got into power, I was a medical student and everyone is running around, Africans were running around with "jongwe" you know on bicycles and then we expected the worst and in retrospect there was a lot, it was a major change. I don't know why, I can't believe I stayed there actually.

How long did you stay?

I finished my medical school, I started my houseman-ship and then I got fed up because the standard of medical training and what was expected of us was, it was too hard. Not literally "too hard", it was just demoralising and I was offered a job in South Africa at Edendale at Pietermaritzburg, so I went there. And then I tried to go back to Rhodesia a couple of times after that, to Zimbabwe a couple of times; but the requirements for me was they wanted me to do my houseman-ship again and this and that, and so it was very difficult then. At that stage of my life I didn't want to do that, but I would have gone back.

So you went back down to South Africa?

Yes

So where did the rest of your family go? You said your father left?

(00:46:10) 1980, he went to Johannesburg

And your uncle had already left?

Yes

How about your brothers?

My step-brother...my father was instrumental in getting him out of the Army actually because by then he had done...he was the year after me so they were constantly prolonging his service, and he was going to be too late to start university. So my father managed to get him into university at Pietermaritzburg to do agric. and he went to Pietermaritzburg and has never left, he still lives there.

Does he?

Yes, apart from a short time; he came back for about six months and then he went back to Pietermaritzburg and he's never left.

So most of your family are now, the surviving members of your family are in South Africa?

No, Joe's in Somerset, he's a teacher and Eugene married a French Mauritian girl - that's my middle brother, Eugene married a French Mauritian girl and he lives in Mauritius.

Does he? Do you think Joe and Eugene as well as yourself regard yourself as Rhodesians? That that's "home"?

Yes, Joe would go back. And the thing is, I mean I went back last May

Did you?

A friend of mine, we used to go hunting on the Zambezi, no, the Limpopo river down near Beitbridge and this school friend of mine, medical school friend of mine was invited to a 50th party. He said "Simon, I've never..." he was from Harare, he says "I've never been down there, what's it like?" and I said, "no, I know it" he said "no ways, I'm not going" I said, "come on, you must go, it's nothing" so he said "come with me" so I said "alright, I'll come with you". So we flew to Bulawayo and with one of our friends who's a rancher there still. Now, Henry Somers, Jewish guy, now there's a family who never left. Somers never left, there were three brothers and one of the brothers who was in the Army with me was killed. Henry, what was his name? Michael Somers I think, he was shot and killed on the farm, they were ranchers, they still

ranch. Anyway, he lent us a truck and we drove...in fact his mother, Lionel's mother...

How did you get petrol? He'd got a supply?

(00:48:27) Oh he lent us his diesel buckie. We drove down, and we had a huge party there one night. One of our old school teachers is still there and he had too much to drink, woke up in the morning and he said "I can't come to Zimbabwe and not go and see my mother who lives in Harare". He's got a wild mother, a really interesting lady, who still lives there, Vivien. So we went from Bulawayo to Harare to see her, and I actually went and visited a couple of my wife's aunts; and then we drove down to Beitbridge, it was fantastic, absolutely fantastic, we had a wonderful time. And on the way back (?) when we went to this farm, it was in the middle of the bush, we were stopped by two soldiers so I said "Lionel, this is our last day and it's eleven o'clock at night..." and these two guys, they were young soldiers with their FN's and they stopped us and said "where are you going?" and I said, "we're going to the Knots farm" and they knew the Knots so he said "why? Have you got any diamonds? Have you got any weapons?" and Lionel's a very funny guy so the guys said "have you got anything for us?" so Lionel had two...do you know what a naatchee is? A mandarin

Yes

So he says "I've got two naatchees here" and they said "thanks very much" and let us go. And then, it was amazing though, on the way back, we stopped and we did a bit of a nostalgic thing you know, all these things. One of the things that they sell limon beans and they sell mealies, corn cooked in the husk, it's actually delicious roasted. Anyway we stop and buy them and back in this buckiee, we had so many people we were giving lifts on the back of this truck. We drove near to Gwanda, to Essexvale, to Bohlabela. In the end we just said "no, just women and children now. We can't take any more people" you know, and they'd stop and offer to pay. They offered to pay and I said "no". So it was fantastic, absolutely fantastic to go back but what I was going to say is when you say "would we go back?" you're going back to something different.

Oh yes

You're not going back to a British colony, but that doesn't mean to say that I don't want to go back because that's maybe what we had. That's what we were hoping for.

Simon, at the time, did you realise how much Rhodesia was a British colony? How much it was a displaced Britain?

Yes, it became more apparent over here because everything here was so familiar. But we had God Save the Queen, we were very British in the sixties.

But in a curious way, do you think the war helped to create a sense of Rhodesian patriotism?

Sure

(00:51:42) **And separation from Britain?**

Sure

So the laager mentality of sanctions, UDI, but actually the fighting itself. When you talked about that hunting mentality, being in the Army, whether that...?

It did unify us incredibly and if you think about it, the Second World War wasn't long ago. It was still fresh in the minds of older people. We all used to sit and listen to our parents' war stories and that ration cards and getting...the British approach to that sort of thing was there. So we all had petrol rationing and we shared coupons and so it wasn't too far from what people had experienced here. I daresay a lot of people from the generation that had fought in the Second World War loved the excitement of the war. It was the best thing and the most exciting thing that had ever happened, so to have this perpetuated? Not that it was the same, but it was easy to fall into that situation again: back to war and radios and...

And the role of the leader, "Smithy" as a...not quite a reincarnated Churchill, but you've got a leadership model there of Ian Smith as the redoubtable leader holding firm.

Oh yes, I mean years later I was working in Saudi Arabia and I watched Tim Sebastian doing a "Hard Talk" interview and he interviewed Mugabe one week and Ian Smith the other week. I remember him saying to Ian Smith... "let's get onto something else. You were shot down a couple of times during the Second World War and you had to join the Partisans and walk back and you were wounded and this and that". He said, "what emotional reserves did you have to do that? What did that help teach you?". "I'm not given to introspection. I had a job to do and I did it. Let me remind you, the British government..." and I said to someone "that's why we went to war, this is the sort of..."

Yes, Monsieur Ideefix?

Yes, single minded...

Yes, "Don't give into woolly minded thinking" or anything that could undercut your resolve, such as introspection?

Yes and if you ever look at that, it's fascinating. He said "you sent all these young guys to war and they died. Do you have sleepless nights about that?" he said, "No, it was a justifiable war, we were a colony...". I suppose he gets his logic a bit lost somewhere where some of our black people aren't entitled

to a vote and to government, but at the time, he felt completely justified in what he was doing.

Yes. Did you have ever the sense that you were fighting to prevent, I'm going to use the language of the time, "blacks coming on"? That there (00:55:01) was a degree of perpetuating white society? Or in the seventies in Rhodesia, did you see it in a rather different way? That there was an evolutionary process going on? That black Africans were having better access to education, that they were moving up the economic and commercial scale? Did you think about such things?

Well I think I must...that remark I told you right at the beginning when someone said to me at school that in five years time there's going to be a black government.

That's your Jewish friend, Eli Elkheim?

Yes and that was just inconceivable to me and to the rest so maybe that answers the question. That was probably the way we...

That was when you were a schoolboy. I'm just wondering, as the seventies progressed, whether you remember modifying your views?

Oh absolutely, hundred percent. A third of my class in medical school were black, the year after was entirely white, apart from some Indian girls because they made a rule that you couldn't go to medical school unless you'd done your national service so that just wiped out the blacks. In my year, that rule didn't apply so there were at least a third of the boys and girls in the class were black.

And you were enrolled in med school when?

'78 and I remember, but there was definitely something going on because one of the guys in our...you were put in groups when you had to dissect a body. One of the guys in our group disappeared one day and I can't remember his name and he went to Cuba or Jamaica to finish his medical school. He went in a hurry because I think he was politically active and there were people wanting to...

Talk to him?

Talk to him, yes

It's interesting if in '79 that they were making that obligatory, that you have to have done national service. Because in '79, that was the internal settlement, when supposedly that was black majority rule?

Well I guess a lot of the applications happened in '78

Yes, there would have been a lag in the assessment process. In '79, do you remember any discussion about the acceleration of violence? That the war was getting worse rather than better?

In '79?

(00:57:26) In '79

Oh absolutely. That's why we tried to get my brother out the country.

So you had Guard Force, the auxiliary forces, it seems that there really was this mass militarisation?

Yes, we knew that, we knew it was getting worse. We knew that South Africa was under pressure from America to stop supplying us with arms and we'd heard rumours that we'd got six weeks worth of ammunition left and there was lots going on. I remember Derek Wrathall was involved in some...there was some huge scam where politicians had stolen money. We never got to the bottom of that, you probably know more about it than I do now but there were lots...we knew that it was crumbling.

What did you think of South Africa at the time? After all, you'd gone down there, been at the University of Cape Town. But what was your view before going down to South Africa? How did you see South Africans in Rhodesia? Was there any sense of resentment towards South Africa bullying Rhodesia into accepting...?

No, we thought we were the greatest soldiers in the world so we looked down on the South Africans from a military point of view, although we probably were wrong about that because they had a much more powerful, bigger Army. But I think from a personal point of view, I had a South African grandfather so I didn't view South Africa with disdain. I mean I had a right to live there actually. I wasn't entirely aware of that at the time so I didn't look at it with...it was another part of my life or my ancestry.

When you went down to South Africa, did you discuss with your South African relatives the apartheid system? Because after all, that was post Soweto and...

No, I suppose...one of my relatives was Uys Krige, was quite a famous playwriting writer and the other one was Lance, his cousin was an artist, so most of the Kriges in my family were quite liberal people. One of them was actually married to General Smuts, Isie Krige was his wife so we were quite a liberal family. So I mean, when you went to South Africa, you were...

But English speaking Afrikaners?

We were English speaking. Well, my grandfather spoke Afrikaans, he was an Afrikaner. He migrated up to Rhodesia for some reason after the First World War and that's where he married the lady from Dorset. We went across the border to South Africa, I remember going there for athletics as a schoolboy.

We used to cross the border to go to Messina and there used to be a big athletics meeting there and the blacks, we'd sort of say "Jeeze, they're hard on their blacks here"; there was curfews and it was a palpable animosity between black and white which we didn't have in Rhodesia.

(01:01:00) Your colleagues from Rhodesia have all said that. That that sense of hostility, loathing, a racial loathing that existed in South Africa just didn't exist in Rhodesia so when I've asked questions "did you see the bush war in any way a racial war?" They've said "no, didn't think that at all".

Oh it's hard not to see it as a racial war though
At the time, did you see it as a racial war? Did you see it as black/white? Or not, given the number of black Rhodesian/Zimbabweans who were fighting with the government?

Well to be quite frank, I think my view of that, it was a bit of window dressing. I felt that it was...I never believed that those blacks who fought, fought with any conviction. I was a bit sceptical about it to be frank.

Yes, well there was a benefit system going on. So at the time, you thought it was a racial war then?

It had to be

Do you think that influenced how it was fought too? Racial wars have been described in literature as being "that much more violent, that much more brutal", because it's this creation of, a description of "the other"?

It must have been very confusing for us because we were brought up with black people and they were maids and in our homes and we loved them. They were parts of our family so it was very hard to...it was a bit schizophrenic to be at one time looking at black people as enemy in the Army, and then coming home and Mustard the cook boy would be making me tea and he welcomed me home from the Army. So it must have been very strange.

Did you ever talk to Mustard about what was going on?

No, no

Was there a resonance of Kenya there too? Mau Mau, another war against a guerrilla Army with a very different political agenda. I'm just wondering if there was any resonance?

Yes, we often talked about it, yes and I suppose in a way that was the argument that we were defending ourselves because look what happened in the Mau Mau, they came and hacked people up and then...this is what's going to happen if we don't and of course the brutality against their own

people...I presume...you know, you can't explain that, that's another whole story but it certainly reinforced in our minds what they were capable of doing.

(01:03:45) Well, violence is the politics of fear. It's to intimidate, it's to raise the trump card, so that you will fear us more than you will fear the government, the Rhodesian government

Yes so it certainly made you acutely aware that these...under no circumstances could we ever...an Army like that so you can imagine the steps in your psychological and trying to come to terms with this new black government. I think a lot of people...I suppose I'd become quite relaxed about... being a medical student and I was probably in a very viewed and viewed myself more as a liberal student in Rhodesia or Zimbabwe now, but a lot of people who were in Special Branch, literally, they had their cars packed and when the result came out, they drove out, they were gone.

I've spoken to Dan Stannard and know about that: there was a group within the Rhodesian security services who were being recruited by the South Africans and the idea of blowing up Mugabe, not just between the election and independence but actually at the independence parade, to assassinate him, to mine Rufaro stadium and to shoot down planes leaving Salisbury airport. The idea was that they would create such carnage that there would be a backlash of the blacks against the whites and then South Africa could come in to "restore order". Crazy thinking, really crazy thinking.

Did you know about Gukuruhundi? After independence the campaign in '82 in Matabeleland?

Yes, by then I was a medical student, '82, I was almost finished and we had an attachment at Mpila Hospital in Bulawayo and my God, there were...all we heard was, there's something going on, Fifth Brigade and their...because there were tanks and all the rest and then the war spread out into...because the tanks came right into the suburbs, just short of Bulawayo, Gwayi river, the Gwayi forest, that's where it started and then...My God, there were just bodies being brought into Mpila. They didn't even know what to do with them. People wounded and then...we knew the Fifth Brigade were in there but we didn't...then it sort of disappeared. One of my great friends, the chap I've told you who was a teacher. He taught us English, a wonderful guy, John Eppel, he's written a few books "The Great North Road" and...his wife was involved at the Amnesty International in exhuming these bodies. She's done a whole thing on it. Her maiden name was Robinson, Shari Robinson and she's...I daresay she's their (?) but she was involved with the Danish sponsored organisation and she was documenting all these atrocities, you've probably heard about this?

Yes I have. , I have also heard, "well we have no idea of the exact scale of fatalities". It seems to range from ten to thirty thousand, some even higher

Yes, it could be more but I think, yes, they killed a lot of people and just threw them down the mines, Antelope mines.

Simon, looking back on that war, it seems that your former colleagues in the Rhodesian security forces divide themselves between those who (01:07:45) say “yes it was worth it” and those who say “no it wasn’t”. Where would you put yourself?

Complete waste of time. I mean, in a personal thing, it’s quite a thing to have lived in, experienced. I think in a way I suppose it’s done me good and it’s probably learnt my family too, I don’t know. I’ve got three sons of my own and when I think...

How old are they now?

Twenty-one, twenty-three and twenty-five. I could not, in my wildest dreams, imagine letting them get involved in a war like that. Not in my wildest dreams. I cannot imagine what my father was thinking when he let us do that.

But Simon, he couldn’t have stopped you, could he?

No, but interestingly enough, if ever I’ve debated...because I do debate it, I’m not afraid of another war, I’ll fight in any war, a justifiable war and interestingly enough, my sons, particularly my eldest son said “I will never fight in any war – ever”. He’s absolutely convinced that there is no merit and I said “what happens if they invade the country?” and he said “I don’t know, I don’t know what I’ll do, I will leave the country but I’m not fighting in any war”

Obviously, he’s twenty-five, he wasn’t swept up in Namibia because he’s too young to have been in South Africa’s border war?

Oh yes, it was over

Yes exactly, but is that part of what influences him too? That the whole sense among such a swathe of South African male society, that war was a waste of time too.

Yes, I think the South Africans are...I don’t understand...their approach is...you see, the Afrikaner is a very patriotic man and woman for that matter. So a lot of them view South Africa as (their ancestral) home. They don’t view themselves as sort of transient British colonials; they’re much more rooted and even the English speaking people who may not have agreed with apartheid, certainly are very more...the South Africans are much more patriotic. “This is what we are, we’re not leaving.”

Like tribal?

Yes, we’re here

Do your sons see themselves as South African?

Yes, I would think so, they love it there, they love it.

Are they in Cape Town?

(01:10:54) Yes, well my middle son's here now. He's an engineer so he's going to do a post graduate course here at Oxford, but they're South Africans. They wouldn't dream of living here which disappoints me a little bit because I said "no, you've got to give it a try". They're very happy and we've lived in a lot of countries. We lived in Saudi Arabia and America because I was deracinated for a while because I couldn't...we had to try and get a new life you know. I tried Canada, I hated it; Saudi Arabia...But then we just settled in Cape Town and I've never regretted it.

Where do you live in Cape Town?

Near the University, Rondebosch

Yes, very nice too

Yes, we've been very happy there. I mean it's not without problems now, there's a lot of violence and I think violence is the main thing. Rands, money can go up and down, it's not that important but I think personal safety is an issue, a real issue now.

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

Pleasure

End of interview