

Clive Shelley

Clive is the brother of Rod Shelley. Father's family moved to South Africa from the UK around 1902. Mother's family landed in South Africa around 1915. Clive was born in Bulawayo, Rhodesia. Joined the BSAP in 1965 after leaving school in 1964. Left the Police in 1981. Left Zimbabwe for South Africa in 1981. Left South Africa for the UK in 2000 (?).

This is Annie Bramley interviewing Clive Shelley on Friday the 9th of January 2009. Thank you very much for coming here to Bristol. I wonder if you could start by talking about how you came to be in what was then Southern Rhodesia?

At school I met a guy who was in the British South Africa Police, in the traffic branch in Gwelo. This was in 1964 and after talking to him and getting some brochures on the police from the recruitment centre I decided that that's what I wanted to do. Before leaving school at the end of 1964, I sent applications in and in January 1965 I was called to Salisbury police general headquarters for an interview. I was accepted and I joined in January 1965.

But you had been in Rhodesia before that hadn't you?

Yes.

Can you tell me a bit about your family background?

Well I was born in Bulawayo. My father was in the post office; he had settled in Rhodesia after the war. He had been in one of the signal corps during the war, served in Italy, Egypt, India and a couple of other places. He ended up in Kenya where he met my mother; she had been brought up in Kenya. My father's parents were both from the UK, Rod will tell you more about that because he's actually studied it and knows more about it than I do. My mother's father was also from the UK and they had settled in Kenya; he worked on the railways. Mum and dad met in Kenya at the end of the war and were married towards the end of the war and then decided to settle in Rhodesia. He joined the postal service from the signal corps. I started my junior schooling in Bulawayo and then my senior schooling was in Gwelo at Chaplains School.

And can you tell me a bit about that schooling and what kind of values it instilled in you?

Yes, one memory I still have from my junior school days was the coronation of The Queen and the death of King George I think it was. I remember everybody listening to the radio, no TV's in those days; everybody huddled around the radio listening to the funeral and what was going on. So it was very influenced by – the country; the people were very connected to – Britain. The junior school I remember everybody got a coronation medal and we had a special assembly that day during the coronation. At schools until I left, the British national anthem was still sung and Union Jacks were flown. It was still

very much a British colony although it was self-governing. The standards of education for us were very high. We did the British examinations GCSE and 'A' levels and that sort of thing. And College of Preceptors, I think, was another one that was done, those were the government (00:04:34) examinations. It was only after '65 or '66 that they stopped doing those and introduced their own.

Also, what was your awareness of the wider world at that point?

Very limited, we were very sheltered and the media wasn't like it is today where it's in your face all the time. As a child I very seldom read newspapers or listened to news. So we were actually not very well aware of what was going on in the rest of the world.

And can you tell me about your experience of petty apartheid, or racial segregation?

At school it was a thing in Rhodesia. I think in a lot of the colonies we had servants, although my parents were not very well off so we really never had a servant in our house until later on, probably '62, '63 just before I left school. We used to have a servant in the garden and the house and I don't think I ever personally felt any sort of difference toward them. They used to live not in the same house, but on the property in a separate room basically with shower and toilet and what have you. We often used to go and sit in his room with him and talk to him. Although I never learnt any language, I used to pick up odd words but I never learnt the language. Outside of that I had Indian friends and we used to play with other black children though there weren't many of them in the white area – they were all mainly outside – those who were in the white residential areas. The majority of them were servants or some of them had their children with them. Some didn't and we used to just play with them.

What about your school as well?

School was white; there was no integration there. I didn't know the reason why then but it was obviously a political thing. In my last year or two there were quite a lot of blacks coming into school. From probably '63 I think onwards, they started integrating into the school and then obviously after '65/'66 onwards, up to the end when I left in '81, it was all integrated with a change in government. Unfortunately, I am a member of our old school association and I get photographs here today of the school in its current state and it's just absolutely ruined. It looks like it has never been maintained; no windows intact, they're all broken, filthy dirty walls and the playing fields that used to be meticulously kept, the cricket field and rugby field are now ploughed and they're growing maize in it. It's actually a disaster.

It must be sad.

And that was one of the top schools in the country and I believe that most schools have gone like that. The one boarding hostel that I could stay in,

apparently there are people living in it. Whether they're students or not we don't know; whether the school's still running it now, I don't know.

(00:09:35) What was the name of the school?

Chaplain. Funnily enough it was the same school that Ian Smith went to and I was at school with his two sons. One of his sons, and he had an adopted son, I was at school with them at the same sort of time.

And having been born in, it would have been Southern Rhodesia then?

Southern Rhodesia, yes.

Would I be right in saying that it was very much your "home"?

Very much so, yes it was.

Did you have a sense of Britain being "home"?

Well I didn't know anything else. We were Rhodesian but we also, I personally felt that I was very much – and I think society generally, or the white populace anyway felt that they were – British. And that's the sort of feeling that I had as a child growing up.

So British, but your home was Rhodesia?

Rhodesian, yes. In fact I think the fact that after Ian Smith declared UDI in '65 and the election results thereafter, it just showed the rest of the world – whether they agreed with what he did or not I don't know – that there was unity and loyalty to Rhodesia.

And can you remember, did you vote? Or when you started to vote?

I did vote, I must admit I wasn't particularly good at voting every time; but I did vote and I did vote for the Rhodesian Front, which was Ian Smith's party.

What age would you have been able to vote?

I don't remember when I first voted. I think you could vote from eighteen but I didn't; when I was eighteen I was up in Kariba and out in the bush for three years. So I couldn't tell you exactly when I started. Probably mid 20s I would guess, when I was about 25. And then elections thereafter were not often, I can't remember how many years; they were probably every four or five years.

And can you explain a bit about your perception of the structure of society and the different groups within it? We've got an idea that there were different groups, skilled workers and agricultural workers; where did you fit into that?

(00:13:02) Being in the police we obviously had contact and dealings with all different aspects of people. I don't think there was any...if you were a doctor

or whether you were just an office worker, I don't think you would ever distinguish class in that way.

So there wasn't such a hierarchy?

No, no, even in government. Later on I had quite a lot of dealings with ministers in the government and it was always more like friendship. Because, I think, the country was so small and you could communicate with people in higher authority quite easily, I think it reduced that hierarchy situation a bit. As far as labourers and that side of things were concerned, in Rhodesia I think 99.9% of all labour and menial tasks were done by the black population. The Indian or Asian population were basically shopkeepers and they had their own businesses; and whites basically were the managers in the office and civil servants and that sort of thing, that's how the structure was. The country itself was divided and certain areas were divided and allocated for. They were called Tribal Trust Lands, which were set up to allow the different tribes and different ethnic groups to have an area where they could keep their cultures and their lives going as they always traditionally had been without the effect of government. The government did influence them by trying to encourage better agricultural practice and that was a problem because they had been given the land to do as they wanted to and then they thought they were being interfered with by government. It was there to improve agriculture but that wasn't seen from their side of it and that caused quite a lot of conflict in the early days. Even while I was at school you would read that in the papers or listen to it on the news.

And so you've explained then that you had left school, in '64?

The end of '64 and I joined the police in '65. After my training, which was six months.

And that was in Salisbury?

In Salisbury, in the main training depot. And we stayed on an extra three months because we did all the police displays and escorts with the horses. Then I was posted to the district and no longer had I been posted I was doing farm patrols on motorcycles, UDI was declared and I was sent from the station – I was at Marandellas – to Mtoko to assist. There was one guy at Mtoko, the member in charge there; and I was sent there by my officer commanding to go and bolster him because he had to run a road block in case there were people deserting after UDI and put up a stop at the border through Mozambique.

And did you encounter many people?

No, there was nothing. They were up for a week or two and then they pulled them off.

(00:18:31) Because people weren't leaving?

Because nobody left basically, not that I was aware of anyway. I was only there for a couple of weeks and thereafter I was sent to Kariba. Now at the end of '64 there was the first terrorist incursion from Zambia through a place near Chirundu through to Sinoia. To counter that they sent five of us up to Kariba to carry out border patrols and those were the first patrols in this insurgency war. So we used to patrol the border from Kariba to Chirundu – that was our section – and I spent two and a half, three years doing that, just walking up and down the border. You worked two of you together; a black constable and yourself. You weren't armed at that stage; we just patrolled to see if we could find any signs of insurgency, any footprints, that kind of thing.

What was that like? Did you have a sense of what was going on?

Yes, we were briefed regularly and actually later on, halfway through that period, they started an organisation called VAT, voluntary anti-terrorist unit, which later became PATU, police anti-terrorist unit. We used to go on training courses and they were very basic because nobody knew very much about it.

They developed a lot didn't they, further on.

Yes, from there it started developing and they started getting information from the Americans, from Vietnam and from the Brits from...

Malaya?

Malaya and Burma and those sorts of things. They started getting information from outside.

To help with training?

Yes, and actually, some people who'd been training in Britain or in the States or in Australia actually joined us and they helped with the training.

Was that later on?

Later on, that's right. In the beginning it was very 'Mickey Mouse.' To start with, we never took firearms out with us at all. Later on we would have a .38 pistol or a revolver in the back of our pack, which you couldn't have got out anyway because they were underneath all the stuff. But that's how it started off.

Even just training on basic things like what equipment to have in which order in your bag is probably the most important stuff, isn't it?

(00:21:55) We were very naïve when it all started and from there, we started developing and learning. I can't remember when the first sort of fatality was on our side but I know that during that period as well the Special Air Service used to come and have a training day. They had a training camp at Kariba and I used to go with them because I knew the area and I used to show them around. So we did have contact with the military from that time already, that was '65/'66 or '66/'67. Then from Kariba I was posted to Kanyemba, which is

also along the Zambezi on the boundary of Mozambique and Zambia and there we used to do exactly the same thing, just patrol. By then we were still in police uniform, we hadn't been issued camouflage or anything like that, but then we did have firearms with us.

Can I just interrupt and go back to when you started; were your family still in Southern Rhodesia then?

Yes, yes all my family.

Actually, it had become Rhodesia at the point you started in the police.

Yes it was Rhodesia.

What were their opinions of you joining the police?

When I joined the police, the police force was recognised even here and throughout the world as being one of the best police forces in the world, equal to the Canadian Mounties. Our crime clearance rate was the highest and it was a very efficient and well-run police force. It was actually, I wouldn't say "an honour" but you felt privileged to have served in the force. Later on as it became more military, our crime statistics started taking a dive because we were spending too much time on military matters; and the serious crimes like murders and that being committed by insurgents escalated. A lot of those were never cleared because you could never identify...

Yes there was quite a crossover wasn't there, between what could be identified as civilian crime?

Yes. So you were a policeman half of the day, you'd get a 'phone call "will you change into your Army uniform?" and you were out doing a military role. As well as myself I had a brother in the police and I had one brother in the Air Force and two brothers in the Army. Although the Army were just a call-up for territorial forces, my brother in the Air Force was a full time pilot. But my folks, it became a way of life there. When I joined the police, it was a police force and none of the war thing had even been anticipated. Later on people came to accept the fact that their son had to join one of the forces or were going to be involved with it, like it or not.

(00:26:02) What did you think of conscription at the time because that came in a bit later didn't it?

Personally, I was in the regular force and we felt that it was the duty of everybody to perform. Whether I agreed with it...

It was just needed?

Yes, and as it was we were short of manpower anyway. So later on it became quite critical because as the war progressed and people were being killed, a lot more people were leaving the country and leaving more burden on those who were there; call ups became more frequent and so on.

And they were taking a wider range of people as well later weren't they?

Yes.

Older people as well.

Yes, and they even started training areas where there hadn't been that much political indoctrination from the ZANU and ZIPRA forces and getting them involved. And Ndabaningi Sithole's crowd, his guys actually weren't conscripted but they formed a separate unit, which came in to help at that stage, with what was like a coalition government.

But that was much later on, much later on. As far as the police force were concerned, the rank structure was that, when I joined, I joined as a constable. You had black constables and white constables. Towards the end of my training, they changed the rank structure and the lowest white rank was a patrol officer. Then the constable was a black constable and the black ranks were constable, sergeant, senior sergeant, sergeant major and sub-inspector. I can't remember when it started, also quite late, they introduced blacks into the patrol officer rank. The standards of education were obviously different and I think a constable had to have four years' secondary education whilst I think the white rank you had to start with GCSE. So that's how the structure worked and as more blacks got educated to GCSE status, they started introducing them.

What did you think about the other white-led security forces at the time?

The Army, Air Force?

Yes, and other sections as well within them. Perhaps some of them developed later on but things like CIO and Internal Affairs?

(00:29:55) Yes, in the police we had very close contact with them. Initially there wasn't but as I said, from 1966, Kariba, the SAS had started because they'd been a very small unit up to then and they started recruiting and training. The SAS I had contact with, but never with the senior officers and that. I think it was just the privates on the ground that I dealt with in the early time. The SAS were looked up to because of their specialised unit. The RLI, I did a few operations with in the early days and when I say operations, they were just like training exercises and patrols and that sort of thing. They were good soldiers but once again, the RLI was white, the SAS was all white, the Selous Scouts, which came into being later on started off as a white unit but they did integrate quite a bit. They needed them like we in the police needed our black compatriots because the majority of us couldn't speak the local language and we needed interpreters and we needed people who knew the culture and what have you. We relied very heavily on them and in the police we got on very, very well with our black compatriots. I never felt any sort of racist thing in Rhodesia. When I went to South Africa, you could feel it; I mean that was a totally different scenario.

A lot of people make that distinction, yes.

Yes, it was probably the worst move I ever made, going to South Africa. You could feel just by...but it wasn't only the blacks/whites there in South Africa. I know we probably shouldn't talk about it but as a comparison, the whites, the English speaking, the Afrikaans speaking and the black; all three didn't see eye to eye.

Had you been to South Africa, out of interest, when you were in Rhodesia?

We went on holiday twice.

So you had sensed that difference then? You had something to compare it against?

Yes we went on holiday for a week at a time twice whilst I was in Rhodesia and you could sense it. We did not enjoy it, we were very happy to get home again. But it was when we left Rhodesia after '81, after I left the police. The only reason we moved down there was because my folks had moved down and my wife's folks had moved down and a few of our family had moved down there already. If they had gone somewhere else we probably would have gone somewhere else and it was a mistake in retrospect. I hated every minute of the twenty odd years I spent in South Africa, I couldn't stand it. But Rhodesia, the black people there were totally different. I would say 80% of them were literate, could speak English, you could communicate with them. They were different people compared to the South African blacks. They were very helpful, sociable, because we used to do a lot of patrols in the rural tribal trust areas and they were always very pleased to see you when you got there. They looked after you, fed you and they'd give you a room to sleep in if (00:34:27) you needed one. It was very different to the South African scenario, if I can make a comparison.

Yes, it's interesting.

I never experienced racism as I did in South Africa, it was a totally different thing.

What was your sense of other people joining, within your ranks and within your group? Did many people come from outside Rhodesia?

Yes, when I joined I think our squad was probably one of the first squads to have had so many Rhodesians in. It was also the first squad to have people over the normal recruitment age of eighteen to twenty three because they'd started recruiting at that stage from other police forces. We had ex-policemen from Britain, from Northern Rhodesia – which, I can't remember whether it was Zambia, it was Northern Rhodesia because it was called the NRP – we had a couple of South Africans, people from the British Navy had joined, a few guys from Hong Kong and from the Met. Police. So it was the first squad to actually start with ex-servicemen from other countries and that did carry on for a while. But generally the police force was made up of British citizens I would say, the majority were. Very few Rhodesians at that stage had joined the police. Later on more of them did, yes.

Did that lead to any tensions between generations or different educational backgrounds?

Oh not at all, not at all. I think as policemen we all had the same sort of mentality and aim. Policemen I think throughout the world are – once you've been a policeman for a while – on the same wavelength. And those people irrespective of where they are now are still friends and we got on very well with them. The black ranks came mainly from Rhodesia but there were Malawian and some Northern Rhodesians in the force there. But they were predominately Rhodesian born.

And what about different groups, for example from rural and urban areas? Were there any divisions?

I've never even given that thought but I did instruct in the African police training school for three years and while I wasn't involved in the recruitment I was involved in the training of the recruits to be policemen. At that time, we never distinguished whether they came from the rural areas or the urban areas; I couldn't have told you whether they were, because they had to have a certain standard of education, they could all speak English and they could all communicate with me. They came from the whole of the country; I mean they were Matabele, Ndebele, predominately Shona because they were the predominant culture. They came from all over.

(00:39:04) And you would communicate in English?

Yes, all training, everything was done in English because that was a requirement that they had to pass English and that they understood it.

In the rural areas, the tribal trustlands, a lot of them that had decided to remain in their tribal group. Although there were schools and the majority of them did attend school, quite a lot of the older generation couldn't speak English. But I think, today, everybody in Zimbabwe will speak English. They were all educated and in fact the education of the black population was probably the highest in Africa at that stage.

And when did your experiences of the struggle start?

I started at the very beginning when it very first started.

So you were involved in monitoring some of these incursions that were happening?

Yes but as I said, it was just patrols at that stage, we had no backup, we didn't even have radios with us. We used to walk out for a day and then walk back; or you'd walk two or three days to another post or station where there would be a radio and so on, as you didn't have any communication with you. So if something had happened to you, 1) you didn't have anything to defend yourself with and 2) you didn't have any way to communicate. But those things we learnt about as we went on. As I say, my first three years after being posted were basically doing patrols out in the bush and I did very little

actual police work, it was all just bush work, walking through the bush looking for signs of incursions. Never in those three years did myself and the people who were patrolling with me come across anything. From there, I used to even go into Mozambique because Mozambique also had this insurgency problem. We used to communicate with the Mozambiqueans and do a few patrols in Mozambique as well to help them, and for us to get an idea of whether there were any incursions coming our way.

But as I say in those three years I never found anything. That was '66 I actually started. December '66/'67 I was moved out to a police station, a proper police station in the Marenwe area and there I started doing just basic police work. I wasn't involved with any counter insurgency stuff at all there; I was investigating normal crime and doing farm patrols and what have you. I was there for probably a year and then I was posted to the African police training school where, for three years, I trained African police recruits. After that I was posted to Rusape, which is where, as I said, initially I started the VAT training. By then it had become PATU, police anti terrorist unit, which I joined in Rusape which was now 1968. By '71/'72, just after the incursions through the north east, the Altena Farm attack and around there, (00:43:55) there had been proper professional people being trained to train us. So they knew something about the incursions and the way the insurgents were operating.

Were you in the area at the time of the Altena Farm attack?

No, no, I was sent to that Bindura/Mount Darwin area on a number of occasions. I don't know if you know how PATU worked at all? But basically it was small sticks; we had five people in a stick. Normally, you had one black guy in the stick that you took along as an interpreter and a lot of them were chosen for their bush craft ability as well.

Tracking?

Tracking and that sort of thing. You just operate in a five-man stick and you'd be dropped in a specific area, and you would patrol that area looking for signs of insurgency. If you came across anybody, if you had to, you would obviously have to engage them, but mainly we were to report back and then get the military in. Although we operated quite often in that particular area in groups next to each other, so you could call on the other group to come and help you.

Was joining PATU a choice that you had made or was that something that just came up?

Yes it was initially, when I joined. But later on you were seconded to it. As I say I was in VAT to begin with, which is a voluntary thing. I'd lived quite a lot in the bush and I just loved the outside and that's the main reason. But PATU I joined voluntarily. I operated quite a lot up in the Mount Darwin area and then from Rusape I was made member in charge of a station at Mayo and from that I couldn't do any. Because of my position, I couldn't carry on with counter insurgency operations because I couldn't be relinquished from the

station. I ran that station for a year I think and funnily enough, two days after I left that station it was attacked by mortar fire.

A close escape.

Although we'd been driving around our area in unprotected vehicles, there had obviously been insurgents there fairly close by or in the area because by then – Mayo was fairly deep into the country – the insurgents had got quite far in. Anyway from there, that was 1973/'74, I was made member in charge of Redcliff. It was a small town that had big steel works attached to it and I had two thousand odd police reserve members who used to be called up to go out on duty. From there I continued doing a bit of PATU work. At that stage I had two section officers under me so one of them could run the station if I was away. (00:48:40)

Can I ask about the shift in what you were doing when worked for VAT and then PATU? What was your training and how had that changed?

PATU training as I say, when it started off, we were very naïve. But as we got more professional by employing the expertise in the force to train, we started to learn more about the weapons we were fighting against: mines, explosives, that sort of thing. So we were trained in, not the use of them but how to detect them. We learnt to fire all the weapons that we would come into contact with, we learnt how the insurgents operated, what their aims were and we were always trained and led to believe that this was a fight against communism; and it was. All the documents, everything were all communist orientated, either Chinese communists from the ZAPU side or Russian communists from the ZANU side. It was all communists that we believed we were fighting; we were fighting against communism. We weren't fighting against Rhodesian blacks who wanted to liberate the country or whatever, we were fighting against the Russians or the Chinese. Basically, they were using our people and indoctrinating them to take over the country for the Russians; and that was also bolstered by the fact that the British and the American governments were fighting against the Soviet and communist governments at the time.

And did you come across these documents and things?

Captured documents and leaflets and propaganda, basically documented it and at training stations they were shown to us where presumably they had been picked up. And we did come across some of them in packs after contacts and that sort of thing, leaflets that had been made up and printed that these guys had on them.

And did you feel there were any particular values – British or Western values – that you were fighting for?

Definitely, yes, that's what the whole thing was all about, that's what the war was about, maintaining the values that we knew and lived for and lived with; and we were fighting against the bad communists. That's what we were led to believe. And I'm not that naïve to say we weren't indoctrinated ourselves, I

mean there obviously was that indoctrination although we couldn't see it. Even to the end when I was a senior officer in the police, I was on a daily basis communicating with senior government officials and other senior officers and we were still being fed a lot of garbage by the government. I mean the fact that we were told the results of the elections before they came out: The British government and Ian Smith had apparently organised a deal that Robert Mugabe wouldn't get into power and that's what we were told, as senior police officers. And it came to pass, as you know that he did get into power and that was a big shock to a lot of people. A lot of people felt at that stage that they had been betrayed but the betrayal had started a long time before. (00:53:42)

Yes, I've heard that a lot of people who were on the ground had a sense that it was going that way. Yet like you say, they were being told completely the opposite. Quite frustrating, knowing that you were being told the wrong thing?

Well a lot of people in the police actually, that very day that the election result came out, resigned and left. It was from being told one thing. Really you were being indoctrinated to stay and to help fight their cause. It's easy to say things in retrospect.

But it's interesting to hear you say that you notice it now but how strong it was at the time also.

It was, everybody felt let down. Would the British government have handed over to Robert Mugabe if they had seen what's happening there now? They wouldn't have, there would have been some compromise or something if they had known now.

Also, in terms of this indoctrination, what sort of things were forming your outlook at the time and what media were you able to access?

Mainly in training, through correspondence. In training we were updated as to what was going on in the security situation generally in the country, what forces were massing against us and what support they had from the outside from the communist countries: From both China and from Russia, and Cuba, Libya and all these other countries that had the same objective, as we understood, or I understood, and that was to take over Rhodesia. And we know there were Russians and Chinese and Koreans and others involved with our terrorists just across the border. Although none of them were actually ever caught inside the country, they were there ready to come in. We know that there were tanks amassed for a big push at the end and it was still this communist thing that we were fighting. I don't think race ever came into it; it was never a black/white situation. I don't even think we even saw the political thing, well I didn't.

Because that's an interesting question, what kind of war it was: Civil war, or ideological, or racial?

I think it was ideological more. I think we wanted to maintain at all costs the way of life we had and we certainly did not want the communists. I didn't

even know what communism was quite honestly; you just heard that it was a bad thing. Later on obviously I did read and educated myself a bit about it. But communism was what we were basically indoctrinated to believe that we were fighting against.

(00:57:51) Did you discuss the issue with friends, or colleagues, or family even?

I don't think I did ever discuss it. I think we were just basically looking to preserve our way of life and everybody was fighting for the same thing. We never really discussed that sort of thing at all.

And did you have a sense of how your country, Rhodesia, was being viewed by the outside world?

Well we knew obviously that Britain wasn't very happy with it, but that as well I think was more of a personality thing between Ian Smith and the British government. Whether it was Harold Wilson or whatever, it seemed to be more of a personal fight between those two rather than a Rhodesian/British conflict over UDI. We knew the South Africans were behind us because they were obviously in fear of the same thing we were, which was the control of the communists over Southern Africa. The Americans, we seriously thought were behind us because actually, I know we got quite a lot of equipment and stuff through, whether it be through the back door or not. I know we had quite a few American people join the force, either as auxiliaries or permanent members; and they used to make it quite clear that the Americans were definitely behind the cause. Obviously, again, because of the communist thing and they were loosing in Vietnam at the time. We just felt that although there was this thing going on with Britain, which was a lot greater than we actually knew, that the world really was behind us because we were also one of these countries who were fighting against communism. We seriously didn't think we would ever loose the war, because we had this support. Whether people said it openly or not, we felt that the support was there.

Would you say that this Cold War context was quite important? In who was fighting who and supporting who?

Yes I think so. It was like the west – and we felt part of the west – against the communist bloc, who were trying to take over the rest of Africa. They were very dominant in the north, Tanzania, Uganda, all those countries, not so much Kenya, but quite a few of the countries in Africa had actually been involved with either the Chinese or Russians.

And also in terms of who you were fighting against, did you have any awareness of things like Spirit Mediums, for example, or shrines?

We knew that they definitely did influence them. I personally didn't believe in anything like that but I knew that they did carry a lot of weight and that they were definitely a source of inspiration for the insurgents. They used them a (01:02:05) lot for their psychological powers to go forward with the war and

they believed that they were indestructible after taking Muti or being involved with the Spirit Mediums, so that did influence that quite a lot.

What about use of language? You said that you hadn't learnt any African language in school; did you develop any?

Later on I actually went on a course and I did learn to speak very basic Shona. I can't remember how long ago it was now, but I've forgotten 99% of it. When dealing with people in the rural areas you did pick up a lot more. I just wanted to know more about it so I did go on a course and learn and I could communicate a lot better towards the end. Matabele, the Ndebele language, I never did learn. But it sounds very similar to Zulu and I picked up a bit of that.

Was that mainly because you were in Shona areas?

Yes I was in those areas. I never served in Bulawayo. Although I was born in the Bulawayo area, I never served in Matabeleland.

I've been bogging us down in all the ideological talk, but could you tell me a bit more about any particular operations or engagements that you got involved in?

I operated in all the operational areas except those in Matabeleland. On patrols I was only ever in two actual physical contacts with the enemy. One of them was in the Nkai Tribal Trust Land where they'd started this thing where we'd been trained to go on Psyops. That's what they called the psychological operations where we would go into one of these kraals in the rural area, have a chat to all the residents and try and find out from them what the problems were. We'd try and put our side across just to make friends and try and win their hearts and minds and get them on our side.

Moving from one kraal to another, we stopped a bus and jumped on the bus. We travelled about fifty yards down the road and the bus was stopped by a group of insurgents. We were in the bus and they were outside and we started a fire fight from within the bus and of course nobody was injured or killed; but we got out and we radioed through and we got a Fireforce in, they followed it up and then the next day I think they killed four of them. So that was one. The other one was when we were just on a foot patrol in an area and we heard fire, so we went to find out what it was and we found that the police support unit had been ambushed on a road. We went and joined in with them and we just did a sweep under fire from them. One of our support unit guys was killed but we didn't get any of the insurgents. But we did recover fifty packs of what they'd been carrying with mines and bits and pieces. They were the only two actual contacts I was in.

In operations like that then, presumably you would have been in touch with other areas as well?

(01:07:11) Yes, we had radio communications by then, as we carried a radio. We normally carried two radios with us, one was a VHF and one was an HF,

higher frequency. The HF could communicate much further but the VHF, like in that incident, we could communicate with them because they were just a couple of hundred metres away. We didn't even know they were operating in our area and we thought it was maybe insurgents taking out a village or something. When we heard the firing we didn't realise what it was, we just went towards the fire and when we saw it was them, their military vehicle had gone to the channel and we called on the communicator and joined in on the follow up.

You could identify then that they were under ambush?

Yes. Those were the only two sort of operations.

Did you feel prepared for that change from those early days of just patrolling, to then suddenly coming under fire?

Oh yes, it was something that we had been trained for. It wasn't instinctive but we had been trained for it so we knew what to do. When I was in Redcliff, we had a few call-outs. This is an urban area and there was a township where a lot of the blacks on the steel works used to live. We used to get reports in that there were insurgents in different houses and we used to do SWAT-type operations and checks on the houses. We never came across anything. Whether the information came from disgruntled relatives or what, but we had to follow them up, you never knew. Those SWAT-type ops I also got involved in but they didn't carry many of them out. We were trained though; we spent quite a lot of time on training.

I'm aware that some people felt that it did happen quite suddenly and that they weren't so well trained...perhaps it depended which areas you were in?

If you were out on operations you had to be ready for any eventuality. I mean you could be driving from your station to an operational area and you could be attacked.

And you've also mentioned a little bit about the influence from Malaya and Kenya as well. Do you think that was an important factor in the operations?

I think those were taken into consideration. I think the government used a lot of that information when they started doing protected villages and getting the population under control in certain areas.

And ways of fighting as well?

(01:10:52) That obviously was involved. I think they obviously sat down with all that information and put it into training. They also got our own experiences; because once you were in a conflict situation you were debriefed afterwards and that debriefing was always used to try and improve the training of operations.

Who would you debrief with? Would it have been your senior within the police?

Yes, there was always an officer commanding an operation and somebody from that operation who commanded would debrief you. And there were debriefing reports we used to fill in; you know, what happened, how it happened, where the firing points were and how the ambush was set up or whatever. So we'd know what sort of area, what the ground was like, what you were looking for, so that you could anticipate where an ambush would be if you were travelling.

Did you come across protected villages yourself?

I never did, no. I was never in a protected village, I was never in areas where protected villages were. I don't know how they actually operated or whether they were even effective. I don't believe they were because I've read in quite a lot of these Rhodesian books that the insurgents just used to come through the wire at night and get fed and then he'd go back. So whether they were effective or not, I don't think so.

I suppose that they were an important element of control in that you could protect people as well, so that people weren't being captured and taken. But then if people could get in...

Yes, but the people were being killed. That was probably one of the main reasons it was done, to try and stop their recruitment campaign of kidnapping and taking them. But I believe there were some whole villages taken, so we weren't able to do a lot about that one.

And then also, what do you feel the war was doing for a sense of Rhodesian identity?

I think once again, what we were fed either through the news or through sit reps, was that we were always on top of the situation. In retrospect, I don't think we were. I think that maybe if the reporting or our sit reps and our own things told us the truth, there would have been a very different situation: I think maybe politicians would have been forced into doing something earlier and I think it was all a political cover up; that we were told what they wanted us to hear. We weren't told the bad stuff, or we were just told how well we were doing and we believed that we were. We were all so young and stupid and we were indestructible. We were going to win come hell or high water because we had not only all the resources of the government (01:14:50) and South Africa – and we understood, other parts of the world – behind us, so we couldn't lose.

Did you feel a sense of that changing or coming under threat perhaps? Particularly, for example, when sanctions started to be felt?

Yes, I think with the changes towards the very end. Even once Smith was forced into forming a coalition government under the Rhodesia/Zimbabwe situation, we realised that maybe we weren't so protected as we thought we

were going to be; and that the government had actually been forced to capitulate and to start some sort of agreement. Although everybody knew that Sithole and Muzorewa were just puppets basically. The government had put them into those positions so that they could say that they were negotiating with the opposition; whereas the real threat didn't come from either of them, the real threat was from Mugabe and Nkomo. But that's when I think we realised that maybe the situation wasn't exactly what we thought it might be. It was unfortunate because if at that stage, or even before that, some political agreement had come, then the whole situation would have been very different to that. Not only for the people in Zimbabwe now, but for the people who left.

Yes a lot of people did.

Because a lot of people wouldn't have left and the country would probably have still been very strong financially and would have survived.

On the same length as the Rhodesian identity, what do you feel made a good Rhodesian? Were there particular qualities or values that were instilled in them?

No, I think generally loyalty. All the people that I knew, whether they'd been born Rhodesian or who had immigrated, had decided to make it their home and were loyal to the Rhodesian cause. And the cause that we understood, was fighting for our country against the communist threat and that's basically what it was. A lot of the blacks were as much on our side, on the side of the government, although they wouldn't openly admit it. They were not for the war or fighting, they would much rather have seen peace as well.

To what extent could you differentiate between black Rhodesians and guerrillas or communist fighters?

I must admit, I never dealt with any actual captures and never spoke to any of them. As I say, the only contacts I had were very quick and fleeting, they were not long contacts. I never really sat down with any of them to find out (01:19:09) what their ideology was. But as far as I was concerned they were the enemy whether they were black, white, Chinese or whatever they might be; and we were fighting. If it came to the crunch, we would have to kill them and they would kill us, that's what it was all about.

Survival, yes.

And our own troops and our own policemen were as loyal as I was to the cause. Whether they'd been indoctrinated a bit more by the government than they were by the black politicians, I don't know. But they were as loyal and had as much respect from me as I did from them.

End of interview