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Questions for ex-Rhodesian combatants

Background info:

1. Why did you decide to emigrate? And why Rhodesia? What were your family links with Southern Rhodesia?

The UK was a dull place in which to grow up after WWII – Emigration presented itself through the advertising in the national press and without that ad I suspect I might never have left. I knew where So. Rhodesia was and had limited knowledge of the Federation and the impact of MacMillan's 'winds of change' Cape Town speech. No links there at all.

2. What were your family links with the UK (emigration from the UK; length of time in Rhodesia; schooling/university/profession).

I was born in Scotland but my family had been evacuated from Eastbourne due to the likely German invasion and returned there after the war. I left school at 16 on a Friday and started work in the Eastbourne office of a chartered quantity surveyor on the Monday. I knew the owner through his having spoken at a meeting of the Eastbourne Boys Scripture Union and also considered myself a conservative and was a member of YCs.

3. Where was 'home'?
Eastbourne, Sussex.

4. What were your formative experiences?
(family/school/environment/peer group)

My father had died when I was eight so I was influenced by the other men with whom I interacted as a youngster, and perhaps by my brother. He went to Germany for his national service. My mother had had 'paying guests' in the house as her work, to help pay for our upbringing. Two of them were from the Navy and RAF and perhaps put thoughts of travel in my mind. School was not a good time for me. My results were terrible and I was glad to start work. Made many good friends after leaving school and still meet them on every trip to the UK.

5. What did you think of white immigration/immigrants (post war? Post 1965?) How did you view South Africa? And Afrikaner residents in Rhodesia?

Many of the post '65 immigrants with whom I came into contact were as a result of criminal investigations. I'm struggling to recall anyone who I met as an acquaintance/friend for other reasons. Coming through South Africa when joining the BSAP I had little time to form any view. Over the years, seeing what was happening in Rhodesia I had a fairly sympathetic view of South Africa – believing that both countries were making a stand against communism.

6. When were you conscripted/join the security services? If a volunteer, why did you join? What did your family think?

After I had left the BSAP, in early 1973 I joined the Rhodesian Air Force Volunteer Reserve (VR). I made that decision because I knew that I would otherwise have been called up for any other role and the airforce was a good decision as my then father-in-law had served in that service during WW II. I had support from my wife and her family. Other members of my family in the UK were unaware of any decisions.

As combatants:

5. What/whom did you think you were fighting for?
What values/'standards'? (Western? European? British?)

Western standards I suppose although it was a way of life that was in many ways quite different from western lifestyles. Christian versus atheist. By the time the war was in full swing, we had seen what had happened in other countries to the north of us on the continent and the attitude of the OAU and efforts by Russia and China to influence developments on the African continent.

6. What/whom did you think you were fighting against?
What formed your outlook? Media/friends/music/religion?

Knowledge from both the media and on the job in Special Branch.

Was there political indoctrination/regular discussions from your commanding officers. Political discussions with your mates?

The only 'political' discussion from a senior officer was the direction to continue policing Rhodesia when UDI was declared. Very limited political discussion with colleagues.

7. How much understanding did you have of the war?

I was certain it was a likely 'no win' situation. Had the Portuguese territories remained in tact and the 'nationalists' defeated, the world would still not have recognised the country's right to exist under slow progress to majority rule.

What were your sources of information?
Mostly from media and the job.

How important do you think the international environment (Cold War) was in shaping your attitudes to the war/liberation struggle?

I believed that countries in opposition to the West in the Cold War were backing the nationalists and eventually wanted to get the minerals and other natural resources in both Rhodesia and South Africa and, with the increase in size of ships, control of the Cape sea route.

What did you think of your commanding officers?

I respected almost all of my superiors both in the BSAP and in the VR. Many of them had served in WWII or Korea and had true military experience.

What did you think of the 'protected villages' scheme?

Don't recall giving this much thought. The effort to gain hearts and minds was well placed but I'm not sure that it was executed effectively – but then cash flow was a real challenge.

8. How far do you think that the war helped to create – and sustain a sense of Rhodesian identity?

I don't believe that the war helped to create or sustain any sense of Rhodesian identity. Most of the indigenous people were not interested in politics and were fairly content. The war placed the Security Forces in an invidious position – we truly were a great Police Force and, in the main, had a good relationship with all citizens. That relationship was strained beyond sustainable limits by steps taken to protect the same citizens from those who set out to take the country by force of arms and intimidation.

What other factors do you think were important?

The economy and the impact of sanctions. The fate of “Portugal in Africa”.

How much had you travelled outside Rhodesia?

South Africa and Mocambique were the only countries I had travelled to in Africa.

Construct of ‘The Other’:

9. How much importance did you (and your family) attach to African nationalism?

We knew it was alive and well and likely, with support, political and economic, from the US and Britain, and militarily from communist countries, to prevail, certainly in the long term.

How far did you differentiate between black Rhodesians and the ‘terrorists’?

As previously stated, many in the indigenous population were not overtly or covertly supporters of terrorists but they were, and continue to be, susceptible to intimidation.

What was your relationship/contact with Rhodesian black troops?

Because of my departure from the BSAP and very specific role in the VR, my interaction with black troops was negligible.

How far did you feel it to be a tribal war? Racial war? Civil War? Ideological war?

I believed it was an ideological war, being fed with racial ammunition, funded by powers that sought long term influence in Southern Africa. I was aware of the efforts of the SA Communist party to undermine government in South Africa.

At the time why did you think the ‘terrorists’ were fighting?

I believed that many of the terrorists thought they fighting for majority rule but without knowing how that result had changed other countries on the continent which had succumbed to rule of dictators.

How far did you differentiate between ZAPU/ZANLA & UANC?

As an individual, very little.

How far do you think this affected HOW the war was fought?

That there were splits between the nationalists was an advantage to the SF which on the 'divide and conquer' theory did all they could to maintain those differences.

Leaving:

10. When did you leave Rhodesia/Zimbabwe?

1975.

When did you come back to the UK?

I didn't. We went to Cape Town and in 1980 came to the USA.

How did you find Britain? How different did you feel from British citizens? Why?

N/A

What did you think of the 'end of empire'?

I viewed it with a certain amount of dismay but on a practical level it was unsustainable. On the whole, I thought the world benefited from the efforts of Britain in its colonies but with history being re-written en masse, it seems, the UK eventually faced the inevitable.

What is your view of the struggle in the 1970s now?

My only comment must be 'look at Zimbabwe today, and, to a certain extent, the rest of Africa and tell me where true democracy exists'.