

***Why did you fight?* Narratives of Rhodesian identity during the
insurgency 1972-1980**

**An oral history project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research
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Final project report, October 2010

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This research project began in March 2008 with the aim of interviewing up to 120 members of the Rhodesian armed forces and police service who were in post in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in the period c.1972-1980. The dates selected were to co-incide with the intensification of the insurgency in Rhodesia, rather than the formal period of UDI. Naturally, however, the interviews also covered the period before the December 1972 attack on Altena Farm in Centenary District, as well as extending into the Zimbabwean post-independence years. The interviewing stage of the project was completed in early 2010 and the project officially ended in September 2010. The collection of audio interviews, with transcripts, has now formed a searchable catalogue, creating a future research resource. The catalogue is currently being completed, to ensure all participants are given time to check their contributions.

The project was originally conceived to complement the Rhodesian Army Association Archives, which have been fully catalogued at the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum in Bristol. It presented a unique opportunity to supplement this written documentary material, with oral history from former members of the Rhodesian forces. This report provides an overview of its findings.

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In total, 98 interviews have been conducted by Sue Onslow and Annie Berry, with 95 different people (82 men and 13 women, including 3 interviewed as a couple). All of the interviews were with white Rhodesians/Zimbabweans. An additional 24 questionnaires were received from people in the UK and overseas, who could not be interviewed; giving a total of 119 participants. The total duration of the interviews is nearly 160 hours.

Interviewees were a wide variety of ages; from late forties to eighties. Out of the 95 different people interviewed, 46 were associated to the British South Africa Police (both regulars and reserves, including Support Unit etc), 33 to the Army (many switching between RLI, RAR and including SAS, Selous Scouts etc), 8 to the Rhodesian Air Force (or RRAF), 3 to Internal Affairs and 5 were in civil service or civilian roles.

Interviews were all conducted in the UK, with the exception of one being conducted in South Africa. We travelled far and wide: The furthest north we made it was Northumberland (the Pagets); the furthest south was Penzance, Cornwall (Sherri Lynn); other than Penzance, our furthest west participant was Geraint Jones in Aberystwyth; and a large group of former Rhodesians were 'lurking' in East Anglia (as Bertie Cubitt put it, "like the Iceni"). We are extremely grateful to all participants for being so accommodating, showing us hospitality and kindness, and to those who made journeys to visit Sue or Annie, in London, Dorset or Bristol.

Fred Punter, Pat Lawless and Peter Petter Bowyer were enormously helpful in enabling us to make contact with many of our participants; as was Mark

Pilbeam's assistance in advertising the project on the Rhodesian Army Association website. Not everyone we contacted wished to participate or to be interviewed; some felt that their transition from the bush war back to civilian life, either here in the UK or elsewhere, had proved both profoundly difficult and problematic, and they did not wish to 'revisit those demons'. Without in any way seeking to minimize individual experiences and personal trauma, we were struck by an emerging pattern – that those who were more comfortable with their memories came forward earlier, and these were primarily members of the BSAP, whereas those who had seen a more violent and disturbing conflict only came forward in the later stages. Overall, it bore out Jonathan Lawley's comment in his recent book 'The View from the Malachite Hills' of Rhodesian friends sadly observing in the late 70s that there were hundreds, if not thousands, of young Rhodesians suffering from varying degrees of trauma and psychological disturbance as a direct product of their involvement in the bush war.

In the interviews themselves, participants varied widely in their willingness or otherwise to share details; and in their desire for those details, once shared, to be allowed to be brought to wider notice. We have been very attentive to follow participants' wishes on the access to interviews, following restrictions where stipulated. We were very conscious that an enduring sense of betrayal by successive British governments has reinforced suspicion and distrust of the British academic community, many of whom are seen as firmly left wing and critical of Rhodesia. We hope that this project will be viewed as a step forward in the understanding of Rhodesia's past situation, and the complex factors which shaped white settler society's perceptions and responses.

The successful conclusion of any ambitious project of this nature comes from structure, and motivation of all concerned. Invaluable oversight and advice was given by the project's Management Board: Professor Diana Jeater, Professor Terence Ranger, Dr Donal Lowry, Dr Michael Kandiah, and Fred Punter. And the unsung hero of the project was Mrs Sue Rodman, the transcriber. This highlights the key importance of the transcriber's role in any oral history project, as the first 'producer' of the raw documentary material, and also the vital need for team-work between interviewers and transcriber when organising, and carrying out a project of this size. We deliberately did not opt for voice recognition soft-ware: the variety of accents and particular Rhodesian word usage would have defeated Microsoft's best. Mrs Rodman acted not only as a neutral filter in the first editing process, but her insights and observations helped to fine-tune and coordinate the interviewing process. She was a self-confessed novice when it came to Rhodesian history, knowing simply that it was in Southern Africa, it had been ruled by whites, there had been a war, and then in 1980 Zimbabwe became independent. However, with prior experience in transcribing lengthy personal life-history interviews, she was able to act as observer, and monitor of the quality of the project. When asked to summarize the sentiments that had come through most powerfully in the 98 interviews she had transcribed, she was succinct: humour, but powerful anger; pride but victimhood; loss and defiant survival. All paradoxical views, and deeply conflicted. 'Each one had different enemies, and they were all shifting.'

The interviews present a significant body of data in themselves. They are now catalogued and the catalogue list will soon be searchable online, therefore increasing access to this valuable collection. Where participants gave their permission, the interview transcripts and audio will then be available on request to researchers at the University of the West of England library in Bristol. Sue has presented a number of papers referencing this project at national and international conferences in South Africa, the US and Lisbon, and Annie has presented a paper and seminar in the UK. A paper was jointly presented at the Britain Zimbabwe Research day at Oxford in June 2009. Sue and Annie are both writing articles for research journals and hope for these to be completed by the end of 2010, and there is no question that this project and the people we have met will provide inspiration for years to come. There are many opportunities for connections to be drawn between the Rhodesian Army Association Archive at the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum, and the interviews. With both catalogues available, we hope that people will make use of the supplementary information each can provide the other with, in future research.

Using oral history, we have been able to explore the intricate mindsets of the lower ranks in the Rhodesian bush war, using the apparently simple, but in reality, very complex question: 'Why did you fight?' This opens up aspects of mindsets and the constructed memory of what sustained the war effort. It looks at how these views have been refracted through subsequent circumstances in present day Zimbabwe, and the impact on the continuing identity of 'Rhodesians.' Therefore, this project has touched upon international history, comparative studies of nationalism, as well as social and diaspora studies. Interviews were semi-structured and conducted with reference to the same list of questions. This allowed us to be receptive to the diverse range of national origins, family backgrounds and generations within Rhodesian society, while also allowing us to compare the interviews to one another. As we expected, the interviews have proved to be an extremely rich and multi-faceted resource. They are broad and varied in their scope, reflecting multiple racial, political and ideological outlooks within Rhodesian society at the time; as well as demonstrating how these outlooks have developed and altered since. It would be impossible to encapsulate the breadth and depth of responses within this report, however, the following provides an analysis of some key themes that emerged.

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In these interviews, Annie and Sue have been looking at the self-described foot soldiers, not the policy makers. There is an inherent paradox in this, of course, as given the Rhodesian context, they were from the elite. This project is directly related to problems of researching the Rhodesian war (given the fragmented and scattered surviving written archives). It is also paralleled by other oral history projects (by Professor Jocelyn Alexander, and Dr Christine Tarawire) on liberation fighters and their experiences. The aim of this project was to gather a 'historical voice,' i.e. one of at least three parallel voices from the Rhodesian war; and in doing so, we have listened to a constructed 'hidden

voice' of the black Rhodesian participants. It must be said that this project also has to be seen against the backdrop of four other important aspects i) the production of 'Rhodesiana', ii) the age of the participants themselves, iii) that the interviews are being conducted in the UK, where this is a largely forgotten war, thus exacerbating a sense of being victims, and iv) the circumstances in present day Zimbabwe, which confers a sense of vindication.

These 'historical conversations' are grounded in memory, and memory is a highly subjective instrument for recording and relaying the past. It is always shaped by the present moment, and the individual psyche, and also the dynamic between interviewee and interviewer. We have been very starkly reminded of how important ethics are in conducting this oral history – perhaps more than other oral history projects because of the complex issues involved. Careful thought was put into the questions asked, the method of presenting them and the courtesy of dealing with interviewees. This project has involved interviewing white foot soldiers ('troopies'), airmen and policemen (both volunteers and conscripted men and women), many of whom could be said to still be suffering from varying degrees of PTSD. Some have developed better coping strategies and mechanisms than others. It must be said, however, that as both a direct product of the Rhodesian attitudes and construct of masculinity – failure to protect, failure to defend, dealing with loss – and the macho, buttoned up Rhodesian/British culture of the time, in addition to the attitudes of the prevailing military and psychiatric profession, the question of trauma was not openly addressed or discussed. There was still a popular perception, which infiltrated the Rhodesian medical and psychiatric profession (despite advances in European psychiatry), that wars are fought and end, and people recover. Therefore, as we discovered repeatedly, there were at points individual resistance, and outright refusal, to participating in this project. A number of those who agreed to participate (and who had seen the questions beforehand) became visibly upset or broke down. This has underlined the point that questioning past traumatic events is a revisiting of that trauma. Re-reading the transcript for approval after the interview could also prove deeply unsettling. These are *departees* – even double *departees* – men and women whose war was popular within their social group, but not in the space outside; furthermore, they have lost first Rhodesia, then their Zimbabwe.

A number of participants grew up or were educated in other countries and a 'nomadic' existence was fairly commonplace at some point in their lives. This ties in with other studies of European migration within the winding up of the British empire, and moving around Southern Africa in search of employment and political stability. Rhodesia brought a wide range of social classes and nationalities together, providing common ground in a shared objective of creating a safe and stable home. All interviewees remarked on the egalitarian nature of white Rhodesian society, although many would then go on to describe social distinctions. It is also evident that Rhodesian identity has changed with time. The complexities of racial identity and racial attitudes were often discussed in interviews; many felt misunderstood and that they had been, and still were, too often compared with apartheid South Africa in this respect. Rhodesians certainly viewed themselves as a cut above apartheid South Africa, and what was seen as its hard-line racism. Some

interviewees admitted that Rhodesia's racial attitudes did span a spectrum from hard line racism to tolerance and respect; and that Rhodesian attitudes could best be characterised as paternalistic and racist. Although class and racial differences did exist socially and in some cases legally, for example with land ownership rights and attitudes to miscegenation/mixed marriages, a shared memory of classless multi-racial Rhodesia has now been forged. This is firmly located within the conviction that Rhodesia was working to increase, not eradicate, multi-racial participation, as well as towards a universal enfranchise based on earning the right to vote.

It is clear that for those not born in Rhodesia, it very soon became 'home.' Family and friends were crucial in creating tight social networks, community values and connections. However, ties to Britain were still upheld in traditions such as Queen's birthday parades and standing for the *whole* national anthem at cinemas (a tradition which many noted was not even observed in Britain!). In some ways, Rhodesians saw themselves as more British than the British; Britain was seen as grim, grey (wet), increasingly decadent; and socialist. The run up to UDI, sanctions, the repeated attempts at negotiations, politics of the Internal Settlement, Lancaster House and the overseeing of the 1980 elections were experienced as acts of betrayal by kith and kin who did not understand Rhodesia's situation. These negative memories (and current experiences) of Britain only serve to strengthen the physical sense of freedom and beauty that Rhodesia offered as a country.

The vast majority of those we have spoken to harbour, to varying degrees, a profound sense of grievance against the British government. Firstly, for not supporting the Smith government, then Muzorewa's non-Marxist experiment, to ensure that the Patriotic Front, or at least Mugabe, did not 'win.' Secondly, for not openly confronting the Mugabe government in the early years of independence over the Gukurahundi campaign massacres between 1982-1985 (in which 10,000-20,000 Ndebele were killed). Finally, grievance for not being much more robust in supporting Morgan Tsvangirai and the MDC, and in opposing the chaotic land transfer programme. They are not fans of Blair's /Brown's Britain. They are also critical of South Africa 'pulling the rug' out from under them.

This sense 'betrayal' was reinforced by what was seen as a failure to acknowledge Rhodesia's aid of Britain in the World Wars, the Malayan Emergency, Kenya, Aden and Nyasaland. In addition to the BSAP being so deep-rooted in Rhodesian settlement history, military duty and defence went hand in hand with national identity and service, underlined by so many ex-British servicemen in the post-war period, (and the continuation of National Service in Britain until 1962). The psyche was also one of settler capitalism – building a new country, in a physically vast and largely empty space. The military tradition carries on today with many Rhodesians advising on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, or acting as security personnel in the Middle East and Somalia; and with subsequent generations serving in British, or other national forces.

In the interviews it came across strongly that children's education was considered fundamental within Rhodesian society. Different standards, and levels of financial support meant that black and white education was mostly, but not exclusively separated and latterly, multi-racial schools were more common. Some remembered completing correspondence courses as younger children, but the majority went to boarding schools often from the age of 7, or if they lived in a town, could travel to school from home each day. The school environment was crucial to learning how to be a good Rhodesian citizen. Schools were very much in the mould of British public schools, to instil British upper class social values of service, duty and fair play. Good manners, gender roles and discipline were to be observed at all times, something felt by most to be lacking in Britain today. One also learned initiative and to be resourceful, with self-defence tactics being learned in the playground and through sports, especially team sports.

The curriculum continued to be framed by the British education system, meaning that 'history' – an indelible part of a nation, and personal identity – was principally British imperial and European imperial history. The role of schooling appears key in preparing young Rhodesian men to accept the rigour of national service, and the demands of the war. The discipline that schooling instilled was reinforced in National Service, as well as voluntary and regular postings in the Rhodesian security forces. Corporal punishment was the norm. One comment was that the public school style of education, and the values instilled, were an excellent grounding for national service towards Rhodesia's cause. Another remark was that 'a soldier is a broken civilian', but the imbued values of duty and service were a necessary corollary.

University education was appreciated, but by no means seen as essential. The common nickname of the University of Rhodesia that came through repeated interviews was 'the Kremlin on the Hill' as a jocular reflection of students' left wing views (and with every interviewee also describing a key motive of their struggle as being against communism, this comment had a considerable edge). Vocational training was equally valued, particularly in the self-sufficient, sanction-imposed post-UDI years. Indeed, the withdrawal of conscription exemptions made it difficult for many to fulfil plans to attend university, motivating some to leave Rhodesia for their own university education or to avoid the conscription of their children. To some extent, this created divisions whereby those leaving for university were seen to be shirking responsibility, often resulting in barbed comments and banter when (and if) they returned to Rhodesia to undertake their postponed National Service.

The war was characterized by gradually increasing acts of insurgency and violence. Dependent on role, rank and location of posting, everyone experienced these differently. Indeed, although there was obviously a common narrative of conflict through all the interviews, Sue and Annie have been struck by the wide variation in interviewees' experience of the war. In terms of volunteering or National Service, it became increasingly difficult for people to do this in a section of the forces that they had chosen. Latterly, the role and area people ended up in was rarely of their choosing. It was,

however, firmly regarded as one's duty, demonstrating how internalized the disciplinary code of school had become. Those who left to avoid the war were seen as cowards: 'gapping it,' taking 'the chicken run,' or the 'wise owl run' as it later became known. However, the interviews have underlined that these views were, and are, not uniform, and how far Rhodesians were from being a homogenous bloc. We interviewed those who opposed the Rhodesian Front and the Smith government, but who fought all the same; those who believed in an accelerated political transition; those who 'took the gap' or deserted; those who fought to the last days, and supported the assassination attempts on Mugabe at independence; as well as those who scotched it. The role of African on African violence, or the relatively few but deeply shocking atrocities against whites, clearly had a profound impact on all participants' decisions and determination to fight. Scorn for guerrilla training, combined in some instances with pity. Hatred of those who committed atrocities was matched at times by respect for those who fired back. There were accounts of individual acts of humanity, and captured guerrillas being shot out of hand.

Experiences of war were quite marked between different security force elements. The BSAP were fundamental to Rhodesia and its traditions, taking the right of the line at parades. This role is not widely realised outside Rhodesian circles – even among historians of the Rhodesian war – yet as a paramilitary force the BSAP had been integral to the defence of the state, and its intelligence gathering network. Furthermore, the way in which the bush war developed and the manner in which the cycle of violence was viewed placed the police at the forefront. Regular police postings tended to be longer-term, providing opportunities for greater professional and social contact with Rhodesian Africans, and to build up trust amongst local populations. Although officer contact with black African servicemen was also true of the RAR, this sense of BSAP contact with black Rhodesians came through the interviews very strongly. The incremental 'slide' into war is remarked on by many BSAP interviewees, which dulled perceptions of what was going on – as did combining civilian policing and dealing with incursions by 'terrs.' Volunteers in PATU were increasingly put to use in their local areas. Likewise, those in the Air Force would return to their base more frequently, to the affectionate ribbing of 'glamour' boys, or the Bryl-cream boys. This joshing belied the evident admiration for Rhodesian pilots, and listening again to the Green Leader raid song had a very powerful effect over 30 years later.

This provided a striking contrast to Army, Support Unit and special services such as Selous Scouts, who did their duty in stints that increased as the insurgency intensified. The in-out nature of this work was increasingly wearing and even when interviewed decades later, it is plain this constant disruption made readjustment to civilian life difficult. The personal strain and disruption to family life of the final 6-weeks in 6-weeks out comes through in all the interviews of those who were there in the final stages of the war. It is also clear the extent to which Rhodesians involved in the fighting were desensitised and even brutalized by their experiences, and had to develop different coping strategies (black humour and hard drinking - 'He came back a different person', as one wife remarked - smoking dope (but only occasionally harder drugs) amongst them. RLI fights when off-duty were described as

common, but this outlet for aggression was not just confined to that regiment.).

The role of politics in people's motivation to fight was very much downplayed by participants. In part this seems to have been because of the tradition of the apolitical role of the security forces and police in British culture, and the engrained ethos of serving the government of the day, no matter its political complexion. Yet, it has to be said continued service to a state which was not recognised in international law and was in defiance of the British government under the Queen, was a decided political act. The role of the Cold War, and attitudes to communism, are a consistent thread running through interviewees' perceptions. These attitudes and perceptions were profoundly held, both as the corrupting influence of communism on African attitudes, and the reality of Eastern bloc support in terms of training, weaponry and ammunition. Likewise, African nationalism was not considered a legitimate political movement, but instead a political ploy to motivate and radicalise the masses, of little practical benefit to its supporters.

Although the BSAP had been crucial to the formation of Rhodesia and could in many ways be regarded as being in service of the political state, its apolitical objectives were firmly upheld by all. Its intelligence gathering role in the early days was vital: one remark from a senior army officer was 'If it wasn't for them, we would have been blind.' There was a strong belief that the security forces were fighting for each other, for their families, and for the country, for civilised values and standards, and not for the state represented by the Rhodesian Front government. Looking back, some now believe they were subtly indoctrinated by the state, newspapers and media, and by their superiors in order to fully draw them into the effort. The majority, however, believe that they were fully informed and served no political function. This is a matter of personal discrepancy.

Interviewees confirmed a propaganda battle did exist on the home front: the public media were controlled, and reports on the reality of the war in the rural areas was concealed from the wider public. This limited the amount that urban populations in particular could know about the full extent of the situation, and the truth of the growing scale of violence against the African rural population. Those in the security services (especially higher-ranks, Special Branch or JOCs) had exposure to more detailed information, but supported the political decision to down-play these reports.

What is particularly striking in these accounts of war and memory is that as a group there were multiple enemies: Britain, the international left, woolly thinking liberals, the world outside, African nationalism, different terrorist groups, the Soviet Union, China. As has been mentioned, South Africa also comes up under the charge of betrayal. There is little sense that the military capabilities of the Rhodesian white-led and white officered state eased the pressure on the RF government to accelerate Rhodesian /African political and economic rights; nor that the use of force by the Rhodesian state could be contributing to a spiral of violence and insurgency, and increasing backing from the communist bloc. This lack of dialogue resulted in increased violence

as a 'political language'¹ by the two nationalist minority armies – and an increasingly robust, if not brutal, response from the Rhodesian security forces. This was not widely appreciated at the time: instead, the focus was on the 'kill rate' of terrorists. It led to the progressive militarization of the Rhodesian response – and progressive expansion of conscription: 6 weeks in, 6 weeks out. Resistance was expressed to black, female and coloured conscription. Thus, a politicization of the military; and a militarization of Rhodesian politics can be observed.

As insurgency increased so did recognition that the country was at war. Although very well trained, many experienced a sudden realisation of the gravity of the situation they were in, and some were alarmed at how naturally combat and aggression had become to them. A subtle expectation was incorporated into people's social and cultural lives: that Rhodesians would cope (and were tough enough to cope) with war and the trauma it brought with it. Women became increasingly involved and in the mid-70s could become commissioned officers. Their involvement in voluntary services and canteens provided troops with a sense of normality in sometimes extraordinary situations. Given the disruption of male conscription, by the end of the 1970s women had assumed far greater roles of responsibility and influence, on farms or in urban professions. Despite this involvement of women, operation details or intelligence were not to be discussed within the family. This need for confidentiality, combined with constant readjustment after weeks in and out has resulted in a toll on personal relationships lasting long after the war.

All of the interviews conducted within this project have underlined that the length of the protracted conflict and the resilience of the white led government and its security forces, was also intimately connected to the perception of the collaboration of African elites, soldiers and policemen and the passive acceptance of the conflict by the majority of society. Again, with historical hindsight it is possible to explain this as black Rhodesians/Zimbabweans with their own agenda of the maintenance of power, status and access to political influence and economic resources, and employment. But the attributed black 'voice' of the white members of the security forces is consistently that their black soldiers, colleagues and mates, uniformly loathed the 'terrs,' and this voice acts as important self-justification for their white counterparts. There is a very important 'missing' or hidden voice in narratives of the liberation struggle; however, there are enormous impediments to gathering accurately black participant opinion – death, as well as the controversial question of admission of black 'Rhodesian' identity against the backdrop of present-day Zimbabwe.

The interviews also underline the extent to which the Rhodesian civil war cannot be fully understood outside the context of the Cold War in Southern Africa. Current histories of the Rhodesian war do not sufficiently address this point. This was not a simple bipolar model of an all-out contest between

¹ Wilfred Mhanda, chief Political Commissar to ZANLA, in conversation with Sue Onslow, workshop on Histories of the Liberation Struggle, University of Cape Town, September 2008.

Washington and Moscow, and their respective allies. Instead, the Cold War in the region was a reflection of the global struggle between two competing ideologically driven economic systems. This intersected with the principle process in train in the Southern African region: namely, decolonisation from the European powers. In the course of decolonisation, African nationalist political parties transmuted into liberation movements intent on black empowerment and a minority of these chose armed struggle, using what today would be termed 'terror tactics' as a force multiplier. The resilience of the remaining white minority governments encouraged black liberation movements to look outside for help and support. Therefore, Southern Africa became a cauldron of the Cold War from the mid-1970s, accelerated by the collapse of the Portuguese empire, which changed the geo-strategic landscape by drawing in the superpowers and their ideological allies.

Over its course there was an extraordinary degree of external involvement in the Rhodesian civil war. This was in political, ideological and logistical terms, which profoundly framed and influenced the outcomes. The very fact that the white-led Rhodesian forces found Russian, East German or Czech weapons, ammunition, uniforms, and political commissars with Maoist instruction booklets for peasant mobilisation and insurrection, *confirmed* their view that they were facing a communist onslaught; that the 'terrs' were criminal, deviant and directed, or even deluded, by outside hostile powers bent on Rhodesia's destruction.

Thus the global ideological environment of the Cold War radicalised the struggle, facilitated and enabled military confrontation and response. It must be said that the Rhodesian Front government and its supporters regarded themselves to be acting in self-defence, and, the interviews are with people who believe they lost the political struggle, but not the military battle. This has all fed into a shared sense of Rhodesian identity, community and nation building, emphasising the common belief that the Rhodesian people – white and black – were united in their fight against communism. Thus, 'losing' the war can also be seen as having been politically out-manoeuvred, hence the slogan 'Rhodesian War games, Second Prize' on T-shirts worn by some ex-RLI troopies post-independence. In summary, the interviews bear out that the Rhodesian state/nation building project and the war became intimately linked. Three further influences of war frame the Rhodesian case:

War against the outside world: The laager mentality born of the unilateral declaration of independence from Britain in November 1965, and the imposition of sanctions by the international community against the illegal Smith regime. This sense of community in adversity – pulling together in war, rationing, defiance of the world outside – drew directly upon generational experiences of Britain and the Second World War and the part played by Rhodesians in WWI, and WWII.

The Cold War and the perception of threat: These interviewees bought into the Cold War paradigm of external threat perception. The threat was real, but not in the way they perceived it. The Rhodesian military elite and ordinary soldiers failed to appreciate the extent to which Soviet, Chinese and Cuban

backing for the liberation movements was a direct product of their own obduracy.

The Bush war: Belief in collaboration and support of the wider African community. In fact, as has been shown, chiefs (themselves not a monolithic group) had their own strategy of mediating between the white-led state, alongside a determination to maintain their own residual power base, which was being challenged from below. This was a war which they believe they won. The fact was that Rhodesia lost the international propaganda war.

A number of additional themes repeatedly cropped up in the course of the interviews. As well as the feeling of loss already mentioned, are the sense of personal and group identity (and its source); and the impact of the circumstances of departure and historical distance upon collective memory of the war. The interview project has thrown light on experiences of return to the nominal 'motherland' or 'homeland' – echoing experiences of other returning 3.5m Europeans from former colonial possessions post-1945 – and the means subsequently used to maintain contact and social identity through informal networks and support systems (in particular the role of the internet and regimental associations.) The context of 'historical conversations' of this oral history project is key: the political turmoil and recent economic melt down of current day Zimbabwe brutally underlines that the country which this community fought to create and protect no longer exists.

Indeed, it has become clear that the circumstances of today's Zimbabwe prevents 'closure' of the war of the 1970s. Numerically relatively small, scattered and diverse, the Rhodesian diaspora is the antithesis of a politically organised, wealthy and vocal community. Some – but by no means all – fit within the wider Zimbabwean diaspora and its political opposition to ZANU-PF, its use of violence, intimidation and the abuse of human rights in the country now. Britain (the US, Canada, South Africa, and increasingly now also Australia or New Zealand) is now their notional home; though Rhodesia/Zimbabwe overwhelmingly seems to have remained their emotional home. In particular, these interviews highlight the challenges of post-conflict transition and adjustment of white minorities leaving Southern Africa. The Rhodesian/Zimbabwean white community now merit the term 'diaspora' in terms of self definition. These Rhodesians were fighting for an idealised state, for 'their' country which did not necessarily bear any connection to the reality of the Rhodesia of the black majority of the territory's inhabitants. Their sense of identity was shaped by an amalgam of British imperial, cultural and social values, underlined by the British public school ethos of the government or private schools in Rhodesia in the 1960s and 1970s. In addition was a particular sense of imperial history, founded on the myths of Rhodesian heroes: Wilson (the defiant last stand), Rhodes (the adventurer and entrepreneur), Livingstone (the missionary, although not so much!), against a backdrop of violence and conquest.

These Rhodesians' sense of identity appears to have been framed much more easily by what they were *not*: i) feeble British socialists; ii) insular racist Afrikaners; iii) communists, iii) perpetrators of atrocities (some have been

more candid than others and responses ranged from 'the war got pretty nasty by the end, but we were nowhere near as bad as the other side,' to 'it was like Apocalypse now'). Interviewees were much more fluent when it came to articulating what they were fighting against, than what they were fighting for. Most of the interviewees have a very strong sense of frustration at having lost the propaganda war of the 1970s, in which the guerrilla forces were much more adept at convincing the international reading public that the principal atrocities were being carried out by the white forces.

The subtleties of difference of the use of English by different groups is also striking. This goes beyond sometimes incomprehensible Rhodesian slang. 'Politics' as a phrase was viewed by most participants with suspicion and mistrust, possibly due to Rhodesia's fateful brush with British politics and politicians. Given Rhodesia's geographic and political isolation, it is apparent that time moved at different speeds for the Rhodesian white community and its leaders, and British government and society. There were also differences in the way that influences such as the Cold War were understood and explained between various levels of Rhodesian society. Whilst political cycles in Britain might regard the Cold War as fundamentally a clash between the superpowers and their respective allies, and principally confined to Europe, in Southern Africa it seems to have been understood in a much more contemporary fashion: as a clash of economic political systems and ideas. This underlines the truth that the Cold War was viewed and experienced differently in Europe (where it made for stability), to Southern Africa (where it produced instability and conflict) – and that the Cold War meant different things for different groups at different times within those regions too (which helps to explain the way it ended).

While Rhodesia's politicians emphasised the country's crucial role on the front line of violent communist insurgency – which could be seen as either self-justifying propaganda, or profoundly held beliefs – to the Police and those in daily contact with it, this violence was seen as far from political; it was deviant and criminal behaviour, and should be dealt with accordingly. Some identified that violence was a 'political language,' a political language of 'fear' in which the 'terrs' sought to up the ante of intimidation, over and above observing the rules and norms of the Rhodesian state. Some members of the Forces studied communist philosophy and in many cases, this was put to use, by Special Branch for example. For the majority of conscripted soldiers, studying political philosophy was the least of their concerns compared to defending their families and country. But one telling remark was that they now realise that they were fighting for an idealised Rhodesia that did not exist for the majority of Rhodesians at the time.

Participants left Rhodesia or Zimbabwe at a range of times, some arriving in Britain decades ago and others only having arrived within the past months. Many had lived in other countries – predominantly South Africa – in between, again reinforcing their status as double departees. This produced interesting nuances in people's responses and interpretations of the past and present situation in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. Reasons for leaving were varied; some didn't want children growing up amidst conflict, or to see their children fulfil

their National Service obligation in a rapidly deteriorating situation. Others needed stability for their families, children's schooling, and to secure careers or pensions. Some believed things didn't bode well for Rhodesia's future, or didn't agree with the country's political future. The shared experience of the rupture of departure is very striking, again, as much in what was *not said* in the interviews, as in what was said. This contrasts very markedly with the ease and fluency with which people described their first journey 'out' to Rhodesia

Those leaving earlier, pre-1980, have had far longer to adjust to life here and are relatively settled, depending largely on where they returned to in the UK and whether they picked up family ties, or settled in more provincial communities. Many of those who left later are pension-less and working hard to make ends meet. All of the interviews have been conducted against the economic breakdown and political problems of current day Zimbabwe. These recent developments in Zimbabwe have instilled a sense of vindication within those who fought for Rhodesia. Devastation in the country also stands to symbolise a deep-felt sadness for a country and a home that no longer exists. A sense of loss and displacement is emphasised by the lack of public space to memorialise Rhodesia. This is particularly bitterly experienced around Remembrance Day celebrations with Rhodesia's formal exclusion from the London Cenotaph march; and the importance of the installation of the Troopie statue at Hatfield, and the Last Parade at the National Arboretum in Staffordshire in July 2010. Reunions and braais are one way in which Rhodesians can come together to remember and to forge a space in which their past can be accepted and understood, free from any sense of judgement by today's values.

All of the interviews have raised issues of post conflict transition, and personal techniques of adaptation to trauma and dislocation. The sense of disconnect between past experiences in Rhodesia (whether Rhodesian born and bred, or first-generation migrants) and a current sense or lack of 'rootedness' in this country is bound temporarily. Therefore, the 'historical conversations' of this oral history project also have to be set in context: all of these interviews have been done in the UK with a cohort of people involved either peripherally or intimately in a bush war in Southern Africa, fought over thirty years ago. Indeed, it appears to have reinforced a determination to keep Rhodesia and the war alive through memory. Furthermore, this is an aging diaspora and there is both a personal interest in recording their experiences and a group interest in 'keeping the memory alive.' It is apparent that individual memories have been affected by the 'collective memory' of personal or social reminiscences, and there appears to be a well-rehearsed format for 'what Rhodesians do when they now get together' (the men sit around, drink beer, and tell stories, with the women on the periphery). Memories are very much defined by place, rather than movement between places. Some have commented that reading the transcripts of their interviews to be a very strange, and unsettling experience, as if it was describing someone else's life, or articulating someone else's views, not their own.

Moreover, this diaspora has only emerged over time, with the progressive departure of white Rhodesians/Zimbabweans from the 1970s. It is also paralleled, and overshadowed in current popular perceptions, by the fact that over 3.5m black Zimbabweans now live outside their country. As mentioned with the wide range of reasons people had for fighting (or not), timing and circumstances of departure varied amongst participants: From a deliberate choice to avoid a son's conscription; personal rejection of the war and all it stood for; a sense of the inevitability of defeat; loss of farm and livelihood; and impoverishment. Adaptation and integration clearly depends very much on age and time of return to the UK, and patterns of settlement. They are physically scattered throughout the UK, influenced by property prices and prospects of employment.

A sizeable portion of these members of the security forces also feel a certain sense of vindication in fighting the war (though it must be said that it is very debatable whether *all* former white Rhodesians would be predominantly similarly of this view). A common question asked in the interviews was, 'Was it worth it?' Responses vary between, and sometimes consist of both answers: 'No,' because of the loss of life, loss of siblings and friends. Or more commonly, 'Yes,' either along the lines of Ian Smith's 'it bought 15 more years of Rhodesian life,' or 'we were fighting to stop what has happened *now*.' Yet it is equally plausible to ask (and we occasionally have) whether Rhodesia's military resistance did not radicalise their black nationalist opponents, and remove the necessity on the Rhodesian Front politicians to compromise and secure a more advantageous political settlement earlier in the 1970s (in this sense, how far are they participants of their own misfortune?). But they are still adamant that the Rhodesian Africans were behind them. These opponents are depoliticised as 'deluded,' 'criminal' and 'duped,' reinforcing the sense that their opposition was the product of a growing campaign of terror, sustained by the indoctrination of unwilling abductees. This is further compounded by a sense of anger, bewilderment and futility at being accused of being racists by other British people, and feeling 'strangers in a strange land.'

As many project participants have suggested already, the voice of black Rhodesians/Zimbabweans who fought for Rhodesia is missing from this project. It is hoped that this voice will be researched and recorded by others in the near future. As a result, there is little questioning of what Africans who fought alongside the Rhodesian state actually thought. Only occasionally did this come through, for example in the statement one participant reported a black colleague saying fiercely: "We want to eat what you eat," which now seems to be a much more significant statement in retrospect than it was taken to be at the time.

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Although interviewing has now been completed, a small amount of work still remains to be done on the cataloguing of the interviews, once they are checked and returned to us. The searchable catalogue list of interviews

should hopefully be available from January 2011 and we will be informing participants of the project/catalogue website details when it is finalised.

The interviews have provided a fascinating insight into life in Rhodesia and its years of war. They have demonstrated the complex reasons behind why people choose to fight for their country, and why they were prepared to fight even if they didn't have much choice in the matter. In addition they have shed light on the different levels of understanding people had of the war, dependent on so many factors including rank, post in the security forces, locations of postings, combat experience, family background, family situation, education, nationality and profession. The Britain many had left, or imagined, also no longer exists, and yet its values are also eerily familiar.

Rhodesia/Zimbabwe remains their emotional home, even though Britain is currently their notional home. 'Africa is in my blood. It is in my bones. I miss it every day of my life here.' There is another irony: the mother country this community rejected, fought to resist and whose foreign policy and post-imperial project was so spectacularly blown off course by their Rhodesian nation building project, has allowed the right of return, shelter and ensured their physical safety. Some are profoundly grateful; others are not. Viewed one way, Rhodesians do represent the remnant of an imperial white Dominion experiment in southern Africa; the antithesis of European 19th century intellectual ideas of nationalism founded on shared culture and language. Rhodesians could be seen as both perpetrator and product of a failed capitalist multi-racial state-building project in an age dominated by conflicting notions of class and race. This protracted bush war, and associated huge disruption and casualty rate left a deeply traumatised white Rhodesian community, for both those who stayed, and then those who later left Zimbabwe (by choice, or force of circumstance).

Whatever the motives of the more or less self-imposed exile of this exodus, many of the interviewees have remarked that our questions revived thoughts, memories or prompted discussion that they have not addressed before, or have quite deliberately suppressed. Several have commented that they find the description of deeply painful experiences cathartic, or that our 'historical conversations' have made them realize the extent to which they have not come to terms with the past, emphasizing the strong perception of betrayal, rather than defeat. The sense of personal loss and frustration can be quite palpable, together with the quiet mourning from wives who often sit in on the interviews. Inevitably, there are strong memories of the loss of young lives, the 'loss' of the blithe young man they married, the loss of close community and camaraderie, the loss of families who are now scattered, and the upheaval of leaving. There is a common thread of a sense of enduring exclusion, enforced by the fact that the contribution and experience of their diverse community is denied a legitimate place in Zimbabwe's recent history. As Professor Jeater commented at the Britain Zimbabwe Society research day in June 2009, she had hoped that sufficient time had passed for reconciliation between the history of nationalist discourse, and the experience of the white Rhodesian community; yet the tone of questions from the floor suggested that even now, 30 years later, it is still perhaps too soon. However,

we are convinced that this is happening, from private comments and encouragement from the wider community: that there is an acknowledgement of parallel histories in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, without claiming one superior truth.

We were very struck by the pride people held in Rhodesia and can only hope that others will experience this too when they access this body of knowledge to which you have contributed.