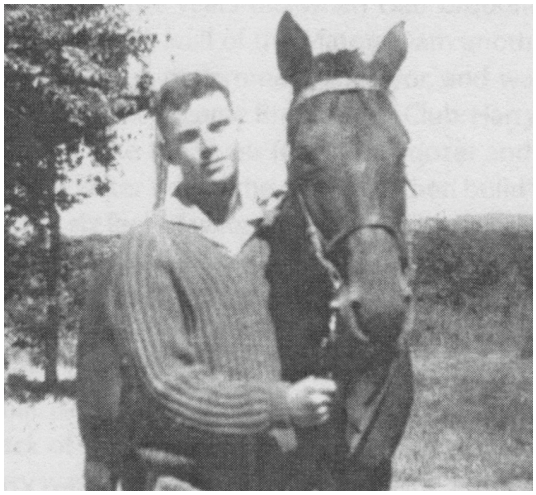
Rhodesia. Beginning to End
Ron Morkel

Part 3.
Ronald Norman Morkel.

Born 1946, emigrated 1978. (1, p151 - 309)

Ron was born on January the 5th 1946. His father, Cliff, was at that time in the process of securing his new ranch in Que Que when he heard that Ron, one month old, was very ill and had died in hospital. He rushed back to find to his relief that the child was alive. Ron remained a weak and sickly child until his teens. Ron was about three years old when his father brought in bulldozers again to raise the dam on the Matoro river running through *Mazuri Ranch*. The surveyor, Harry Snook had a pet baboon on a chain that he brought along on his pickup truck. While inspecting the dam site with Cliff, the baboon came loose and attacked Ron. His screams brought the men back and they wrestled the animal off the child. He was bitten and bruised and they took him to Que Que where the doctor examined him. Fortunately there were no serious injuries. In his years at the ranch Ron had a few close encounters with wild animals but this was the closest he came to being killed.



Ron Morkel *(1, p149)*

Cliff continued to improve the Ranch and living conditions. By 1949 the kitchen and bathrooms had been added with piped water and flush toilets. They still lacked electricity and used pressurized kerosene lamps. Cliff constructed a cool room with water dripping over charcoal embedded in mesh.

On September 13, 1949 the third child, Tony was born in the Que Que hospital. About six weeks after the birth Sheila flew to Nairobi with Tony. She realized that she never wanted to return and a few weeks later Tony was put on a plane in the charge of an air hostess and flown back to Salisbury. They agreed to divorce and Cliff looked after Ron and Tony while Cynthia went to live with Sheila in Nairobi. Baby Tony was initially looked after by Joy Glenny from the neighbouring *Wanganui Ranch,* until he was about three years old. Ron could not remember any arguments or acrimony and Cliff never said a disparaging word about Sheila.

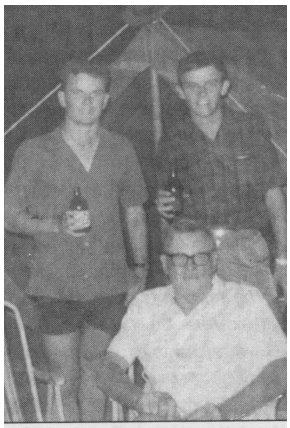
More sections of the *Rhodesdale Estate* were cut up and Cliff was allocated land along the Sebakwe River, suitable for crops. His neighbour, Guy Savory on *Moreena Ranch* also received adjoining land at Sebakwe. They agreed to swap and consolidate. Savory preferred crop farming and had the

consolidated property along the Sebakwe River, while Cliff now owned both *Mazuri* and *Moreena* Ranches -a total of about 28,642 contiguous acres.

One afternoon a person was striding up the road to their house, carrying an empty petrol can. He had run out and asked for help. John Guinness had a refined accent with an air of British elegance. John and his wife and three children had fallen on hard times, unsuccessfully seeking his fortune on the Chrome mines of the great Dyke. Cliff loaded him and the petrol in his car and drove to the mine where John's wife Joyce and their children were staying in a one roomed mud hut. After listening to their story, Cliff had sized them up and invited them back to *Mazuri Ranch*. They stayed for three years. Joyce brought a woman's touch to the home which exuded laughter, warmth and happiness. and John helped out and went into business with Cliff transporting Chrome ore from the mines to the railway station and later to the smelting plant in Que Que.

St Andrews and *Mazuri Ranch*

At nine years of age in 1955, Cliff drove Ron 1200 miles to Grahamstown and enrolled him in the Prep School of St Andrew's college. He spent the next ten years at St Andrew's traveling by train back to *Mazuri* for vacations. It was a happy and productive time for Ron. He made many good friends and learned from the dedicated and caring teaching staff. Sport formed a big part of his activities at the School. He played tennis, rugby, and cricket and participated in athletics and swimming events. Although he was small and suffered from respiratory issues, his health improved over the years, under the solicitous care of the staff at the school. In the shorter vacations he was invited to the home of a good friend on a farm near Adelaide, not far from Grahamstown. The train journey back to Que Que now took only three days and nights, much shorter than in Cliff's days. Cliff took Ron and Tony with a faithful servant, James for memorable campouts, including in the Wankie game reserve. He was a master story teller around the campfire in the evenings.



Ron, Cliff and Tony enjoying campfire stories
(1, p178)

In his sixteenth year Ron had the opportunity to go on a hunting safari on a large cattle ranch. He was allowed to drive to the ranch with two friends and workers from *Mazuri Ranch*. They had a successful stay and his friend shot a large kudu. They grilled impala fillets and made biltong and drove home. back at *Mazuri* they found Cliff in a quandary. Ron's brother Tony and James had found themselves in the way of a charging hippo and they had fired a shot into his mouth in self protection. Two days later the hippo's carcass was floating in the dam. Hippo was protected game and they could be in serious trouble with the police. Cliff felt he had to do the right thing to call the police, but that could see his son go to jail. After much deliberation, Cliff and some of his trusted workers sliced up the hippo and dumped it into a well. It remained a family secret that had only been revealed in writing the book.

Ron completed his studies and was worried he could fail mainly because Afrikaans was a compulsory subject and he knew very little of that language. When the results came in the post, Ron asked his father to open the envelope and a proud dad was able to congratulate him on the successful result.

Ron was now back on *Mazuri Ranch* and as the oldest son he wanted to take up farming and relieve his father of some of the duties o the Ranch. Their old friend and neighbour, Robin Tulloch encouraged his own sons to go to university and accept that they would not follow him into farming. His prophetic words were that 'One day we are all going to have to leave with nothing but what is in

our pockets'. His sons went on to careers in medicine and business. In spite of Robin's warning, Ron decided to be a rancher and farm *Mazuri Ranch*. Cliff arranged that he first worked for a top cattle breeder to broaden his knowledge and experience.

Cliff and Ron belonged to the Rhodesdale Club where they could attend sporting, dances and other social activities. As good horsemen, they enjoyed regular games of polo cross, similar to polo but with basket shaped polo sticks to scoop and throw the ball, rather than hitting it along the ground.

Life on the Ranch was pleasant but Cliff made sure that Ron worked hard and diligently. Once they needed about forty strong fencing posts and Ron selected four men to go out and cut ten posts each. Cliff intervened and called one of the men back and handed the axe to Ron who had to work with the men, saying, 'Son, never ask anyone to do a job that you are not prepared to do yourself'.

Ron met an Irish nurse, Brigid and there was mutual attraction. She came out to *Mazuri Ranch* and they had ten days together before she flew back to England because her contract had expired. Ron became frustrated being stuck in the bush and enrolled for a degree in animal husbandry at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg. However, after a year he had to return because Cliff had become ill with diabetes and had a partial stroke while undergoing surgery. In the meantime Brigid returned to Africa as a nurse at *Grootte Schuur* Hospital in Cape Town. They met up again and were married in the Salisbury Catholic Cathedral with a wedding reception on Ceres Farm.

In a moving sequence of events, Cliff farewelled Ron and then travelled to see Tony and his new wife Alida in Salisbury. Cliff died peacefully after showing Tony where the family started out at Avondale in Rhodesia. Cliff was buried in the family cemetery on Ceres Farm, next to his parents. A week later their baby, Sarah Jane was born on the 4th September 1971. Ron borrowed money to pay out Cynthia and Tony and he was now owner of *Mazuri Ranch*. Standard Bank with whom the family had banked for decades refused to advance working capital while the deed transfers were still in progress. Ron drove past a new bank, Grindlays and was helped out within the hour. Over time they became good friends with their new bank manager.

Brigid settled well into *Mazuri Ranch* and brought a woman's touch to the house and the garden. She taught the women on the Ranch to cut cloth and sew dresses and clothing and also knitting. As a qualified nurse she attended to minor burns and abrasions and sent patients to the hospital for more serious medical care. Word got around and soon she was attending neighbours' staff as well. She looked into starting a clinic for the local people as the closest hospital was forty miles away. However, to her frustration, there were so many barriers imposed by local government that the idea was abandoned. Ron continued to make improvements to their home and found an electricity generator when the previous owner became connected to the grid. They now had electric lights and and a back and white twelve inch television. On September 24, 1974, Brigid gave birth to their second child, Patrick.

Ron kept busy with cattle ranching and was in the saddle on his horse Petite for much of the day. Apart from the regular routines, they had to guard against tick-borne and other disease, as well as poisonous flowers that appeared in spring. There were leopards in the rough hills of the Great Dyke that had to be culled when they attacked the young calves but Ron was keen to carry on his father's tradition of preserving the wildlife on the Ranch.

He became involved in the Intensive Conservation Association to preserve the environment and discourage bad farming practices. In one case a fly-over spotted badly degraded land and he had to visit his father's old friend, Robin Tulloch. Robin took him to the area and it was clear that the land

was not damaged by Robin's farming but by strip mining for chrome ore, leaving no vegetation and exposing infertile subsoil. Miners were causing problems degrading the soil and causing pollution of the rivers and serious soil erosion. The mine workers left farm gates open, poached wildlife and. with inadequate sanitation, spread tapeworm and other diseases among the livestock and humans.

In general, farmers hated sharing their land with miners., but Ron remembered his father Cliff who viewed them as an evil which one could not get rid of. Ron decided to profit from the miners by selling supplies to them. It turned out a very lucrative income for many years. He supplied firewood from dead trees lying around the Ranch. His workers on the Ranch cut hardwood trees to size for mine props and other mining timber. He built a store on the main Ngezi Dam road where he sold groceries such as sugar, tea, food as well as blankets, clothes and bicycles. Later he added beer and liquor, and a butcher shop using culled cows from the Ranch. All these projects were possible because of the Windsor Chrome Mines and were collectively more profitable than cattle ranching.

From the mid nineteen sixties, Rhodesia was inexorably and progressively drawn into a war. Britain was keen to hand over her colonies to the local population and the rest of the World was actively hostile against the whites in Rhodesia. The war on terrorism had started and escalated year after year. Communist terrorists led by Nkomo came in from Zambia to the north, supported by Russians, while those led by Mugabe supported by the Chinese attacked from Mocambique. Initially, young men on reaching eighteen were called up and sent to Llewellyn Barracks just outside Bulawayo for a four-and-a-half month boot camp. The depot for the Midlands was Royal Rhodesian Regiment 10th Battalion (10RR) or 'tenth bat' as it was informally called. The drill hall was in Gwelo and Ron, who was called up in March 1965, was assigned to 10RR for fourteen years.

The 24-pound Bren was not a 'light machine gun' *(1, p239)*

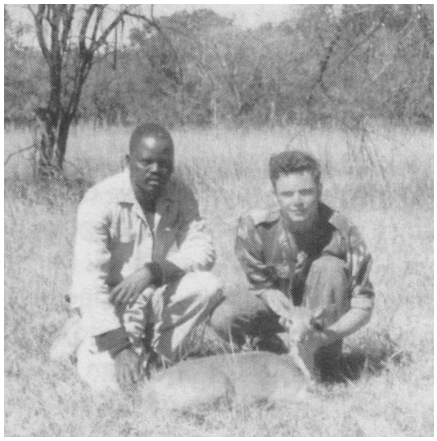
The boot camp was a harrowing experience. The instructors were ex-British army soldiers who had volunteered to drill and toughen up a bunch of kids from all walks of life to look and think like mind-numbed robots ready to obey every order. The recruits learned to conduct their lives with meticulous detail to hygiene and cleanliness including immaculate barracks, perfectly ironed uniforms, polished brass and boots, all accomplished in the few precious hours that they were not marched around the parade by loud mouthed drill sergeants. In weapons training they learned the workings of the SLRs (self loading rifles) so well that they could assemble them in the dark. Ron qualified as a marksman and then moved on to Bren 'light machine guns'. They were heavy to carry but very accurate. Ron scored so well at target practice with the Bren that he became known as 'Machine Gunner Morkel'. and was doomed to lug the heavy gun and bullets in the heat and dust for the rest of his service in the army. He tried several times to be relieved of the burden, but the Bren was assigned to him every time.

In 1965, the war had barely started and civilians were initially called up for a two week camp once a year. As the war progressed, they had to leave their homes and farms for longer and longer periods. It was a month a year, then six weeks, then six weeks twice a year and in 1977 and 1978 it was six weeks on six weeks off. It was particularly demoralizing to complete a mission and be told to do an extra week or two - which always came off the time supposed to be home.

It was demoralising to leave wives and children unprotected at home and go into the sweltering and rugged valleys and bushland to fight against an enemy whom they could not tell from the local

inhabitants. During the day the terrorists blended in with the locals so that they would appear to be happy rural people going about their daily routines. All the while they were watching troop movements and look for opportunities to kill. At night they would lay land mines and otherwise inflict as much hardship, destruction and death as they could. The terrorists rarely picked a fight with the soldiers. They concentrated on brutalising and killing civilians, particularly the blacks which had a far greater impact, and was easier to do than fighting soldiers. Raping women and young girls was used by Mugabe's fighters and they have continued with this in modern Zimbabwe as a method of intimidation and control. The international media were virulently hostile to the Rhodesian whites and ignored the atrocities perpetrated by the terrorists.

Ron describes how their commanding officers lacked Rhodesian background and understanding of the languages and customs of the local tribes and their actions and insensitivities often alienated innocent locals going about their daily lives. While they did not see much active combat, they were constantly on patrol in inhospitable bush country in the dust and heat and pestered by Mopane and tsetse flies and other insects by day and mosquitoes by night. This went on for years. On one occasion they were camped on a tabletop hill which happened to be the mating place for stinkbugs. As the evening cooled down, the grayish-brown beetles emerged from every crevice and covered their bodies as bees covered an apiarist. They plugged their ears and nostrils with toilet paper to keep them from crawling inside . They scooped them by the handfuls from their sleeping bags. When they batted them away and killed them, they emitted a putrid odour. Nothings seemed effective against them. They tried to light a fire, but the light only attracted more of them. At dawn they crept back into the cracks and shelters between the rocks and vegetation. The next night was not as bad and within a few days their season seemed to be over.



Johnnie and Ron displaying a hunter's oribi trophy
(1, p284)

Inspired by the example and teachings of their father Cliff, Ron and Tony saw themselves as custodians of wildlife on *Mazuri Ranch*. They valued the kudu, impala, zebra and especially treasured the beautiful sable antelope herd. The great variety of birds added to the wonder of their live in this special part of Africa. In discussion with neighbours, it became clear that carefully controlled hunting could provide welcome additional income for the family. Individually they could not sustain a safari hunting business, but as a group of ranchers they had a delicate but valuable resource. The first visitor was a friend of a friend from South Africa whom Ron allowed to shoot a lone kudu bull at an agreed price. He was then approached by a group of South Africans who wanted to come to the Ranch on a 'biltong safari'. Ron felt uncomfortable with their demands and refused their business. He was approached by an entrepreneur who wanted to buy his whole herd of sable antelope, which he also refused. These animals were not for hunting. They teamed up with the Tolmays who started *International Sportsman's Adventures (SA)* and had small hunting groups come to the ranch, primarily from the US. They enjoyed their visitors and Brigid excelled as a perfect host. She found them interesting because they brought life from outside to the lonely cattle ranch with a refreshing change in conversation from the usual farming, war and politics. For the hunters their stay surpassed their wildest dreams and they went home with treasured trophies. On one occasion a group of muzzle loader hunters visited. With their old style guns, they needed to approach the game closer than usual and Ron enjoyed shooting with the kind of guns his grandfather Arthur used when he settled in Rhodesia in 1891.

Cliff had a great love and interest in birds and this rubbed off on Ron. They built an enormous aviary on the ranch, filled with many local species. Bill, one of the guests, collected birds and Ron enjoyed his stay immensely, talking birds and their habits. They collected and skinned and mounted selected specimens. Bill and Ron travelled to Salisbury where they met Terrence Coffin Grey who ran a museum and a taxidermy business. He was generous with his advice and this experience proved valuable in later years when Ron became a professional taxidermist after emigrating to the US.

Leaving Rhodesia

Brigid spent years trying to convince Ron that they should start again in a new country where there would be a future for their family. By 1978 it became clear that she was right and they had to emigrate. By this time Ron had spent years fighting a war he believed in, but he had seen enough of what the terrorists were doing to know it would only be time before tragedy struck their home. A few of their faithful Shona workers quietly indicated to Ron that no one with a white skin would be safe, and that included his wife and children.

The whole world were against the white Rhodesians. The black terrorists were hailed as freedom fighters and Nkomo and Mugabe were lionised in the media which overlooked their atrocities and communist alliances. The final straw came when South Africa under John Vorster betrayed Rhodesia - apparently under the mistaken belief that if they sacrificed Rhodesia they would be left alone.

Brigid organised a two week visit to her family in Ireland for their family. While there, Ron explored career possibilities and felt attracted to trout farming. They had made their decision to emigrate. Back in Rhodesia the process of moving countries began. Ron was fortunate to get an offer for *Mazuri Ranch* $40,000 for 13,468 acres of paradise, including an operating ranch with all the cattle. At that stage the Rhodesian and US dollar were roughly at parity. It was enough to pay their debts and have $2,000 left, which was all they were allowed to take out of the country.

Ron spoke to his key Shona workers individually about their plans. They were sad but felt he was doing the right thing. They quietly indicated that there was at least one terrorist 'sleeper' amongst his workers, if not more and it was time to get out.

During his final six weeks service he said his farewells to his fellow soldiers and buddies and the major gave him light duties as a way of saying thanks for his years of service.

Ron had to report to Gwelo one last time to obtain his discharge papers for emigrating. At the drill hall a lance corporal in the Quarter Masters Store was scornful. Without looking at Ron he told his sidekick that here was another one getting on the 'chicken train' and that he had no time for 'deserters'. He went through the records and charged Ron for all items issued and not returned, including one toothbrush, socks and underwear issued during the fourteen years of service. He gritted his teeth because he needed a certificate to leave the country. He wanted to remove his service medal ribbons from his drill shirt but was told, incorrectly, that it belonged to the military. Ron was thirty-two years old and had served many years under adverse circumstances and was being belittled by a junior NCO in his late teens or early twenties who would never see action in the field.

They left on Ron's 32nd birthday on 5th January 1978 and flew to Johannesburg, looking out for the last time over *Mazuri Ranch*. From there they went to Ireland and eventually to the US.

Robert Mugabe became the leader of the new Zimbabwe in 1980. He took control of what was then known as the 'gem of Africa', a country of great mineral resources, thriving industry and productive farms that fed the entire population while being major exporter of food. The country had first world infrastructure and modern schools and hospitals accessible to the population. The people were tired of war and Mugabe had the blessing of the entire world.

Mugabe systematically strengthened his grip on power. He systematically eliminated his black rivals and, through countless atrocities, forced whites to abandon their lands and as well as brutalising the local black population, particularly among the Matebeles (Mugabe was Shona). He entered an agreement with Kim Il Sung of North Korea to train soldiers as his personal army, trained in intimidation, brutal tactics and murder. Many whites were murdered and most of the others left the country. During the first three years of 'land reforms' (which in reality meant farms were taken from the whites and distributed to Mugabe's cronies) about 250,000 farm employees and their 1.3 million dependents were forced from the farms by Mugabe's thugs. The farms and homes were looted and then abandoned. Food production collapsed and starvation became rife. Foreign aid was used by Mugabe as a weapon to reward those loyal to him and punish everyone else.

Mugabe blamed first the former White Government and then sanctions by the West for his self inflicted woes and received standing ovations at the United Nations. He and his family became immensely wealthy with vast land holdings, palatial properties within Rhodesia and in other countries around the world. A good source of income for him and his cronies were so-called 'blood diamonds' minded in Zimbabwe and sold for his account. Industry collapsed and it is estimated that unemployment was as high as 95% at the time of writing. Infrastructure had collapsed with potholed roads, electricity and water shortages, closed schools and hospitals and raw sewage dumped into dams where drinking water was sourced from. Cholera became rife and HIVS/AIDS soared. Life expectancy declined from around sixty years in 1980 to about thirty eight. Inflation became so rampant that the Zimbabwe Reserve Bank issued notes of one hundred million dollars - which could not buy a loaf of bread. The main beneficiaries, apart from the Mugabe family has been China. Without losing a single man in combat, it gained preferential access to the mineral riches of Zimbabwe, in return for supporting Mugabe in the early years and providing relatively modest aid, while Mugabe continued to blame the Whites and the West for his problems.

Author Ron Morkel

(1, Back cover)

Source

1. Ron Morkel 2010. Rhodesia. Beginning to End. ISBN 145378943X. www.amazon.com, www.bookdepository.com. Our story is extracted from this book.

Family Line for Arthur , Cliff and Ron Morkel

Symbols: * born, x married † died ÷ divorce # name not available

a1 Philip MORKEL 1677 – 1735 x Catharina PASMAN 1691 - 1764
b3 Willem MORKEL 1718 – 1788 xx Helena Catharina MALAN 1759 - 1825
c5 Willem MORKEL 1764 – 1825 x Anna Margaretha WIUM 1763 - 1830
d2 Willem MORKEL 1785 - 1839 x Esther Leonora LOUW 1788 - 1859
e6 Pieter Loret MORKEL 1818 – 1878 x Susanna Petronella WESSELS 1821 - 1905
f3 Petrus Johannes MORKEL 1844 – 1905 x Sarah Margaret RUBIDGE
g1 Arthur Loreth Rubidge MORKEL *14.5.1871 † 11.7.1937 x Alice Hendrina SOUTHEY xx Lilian BELL
g2 Hilda Rubidge MORKEL *3.10.1872 x 1907 John J. ELEY
g3 Minnie Gertrude Rubidge MORKEL *6.3.1874 † 1950 x 6.8.1896 Frederick Augustus ALEXANDER
g4 Ian May Rubidge MORKEL * 29.6.1875 x 1897 Harry Edward CORSER
g5 Olive Maud Rubidge MORKEL * 1.5.1879 x 14.6.1905 James Robert TOWNSEND at Salisbury
g6 Ernest Reginald Rubidge 22.5.1883 x Agnes Hildegarde JACKSON
g7 Ivy Crause Rubidge MORKEL * 22.4.1890 x1913 Theophilus Cecil FLYNN at Avondale Salisbury

g1 Arthur Loreth Rubidge MORKEL *14.5.1871 † 11.7.1937 x Alice Hendrina SOUTHEY
h1 Rhoda Southey MORKEL *20.11.1897 x Charles Campbell MORGAN xx Sinclair Graeme FENWICK-WRIGHT
h2 Arthur Reginald (Reg) Southey MORKEL * 20.8.1901 x1929 Amy (Doodie) Anne Philippa THORNE *1897
i1 Arthur John (John) Phillips MORKEL *1930 x Rosemary Elizabeth DUNLOP
j1 Philippa Mary MORKEL
j2 Jeremy Campbell MORKEL
j3 Anthony John MORKEL
i2 Reginald (Rex) Phillips MORKEL *17.10.1932 x Patricia (Trish) Clara SCOTT-LANE
j1 Diana Susan MORKEL
j2 Arthur Alan MORKEL
j3 Brian Patrick MORKEL
j4 Keith Rex MORKEL
i3 David Phillips MORKEL *1936 x Joan WILLIAMS
j1 Patricia Ann MORKEL
j2 Coral Lyn MORKEL
j3 Deborah Jane MORKEL
h3 Vincent Graham Southey MORKEL *5 10.1903 † 17.1.1950 on RMS Winchester Castle at sea.
h4 Cecil Frank Southey MORKEL *5.8.9108 x Elizabeth Margaret GAUNSON at Salisbury
i1 Clive Cecil Gaunson MORKEL *29 Dec 1939 x Patricia STOBART
j1 Brian MORKEL *1964
j2 Derek MORKEL *1967
j3 # MORKEL *1970
i2 Meryl Joan Gaunson MORKEL *6.1.1943
i3 Alan Gaunson MORKEL *8.6.1945
i4 Barry Gaunson MORKEL
h5 Clifford Earle MORKEL *6 12.1906 †29.8.1971 x 1941 at Salisbury ÷ 1949 Sheila Almon NORMAN
i1 Cynthia Yvonne MORKEL * 12.9.1943
i2 Ronald Norman MORKEL *6.1.1946 x÷ Brigid # xx ÷ Ruth #
j1 Sarah Jane MORKEL *4.9.1971
j2 Patrick MORKEL * 24.9.1974
i3 Anthony Brian MORKEL *12.9.1949
h7 Ernest Hector MORKEL *1913 † 1931