

WAR SINCE 1945 SEMINAR AND SYMPOSIUM

Rhodesia: Tactical Victory, Strategic Defeat

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7 June 1983

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Synopsis:

This paper, which describes the guerrilla war in Rhodesia conducted from 1966 to 1980, is divided into four chapters. Chapter I describes the history and background of the country from its establishment at the end of the 19th Century until the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from Great Britain in 1965. Chapter II is devoted to an examination of the guerrillas - their leaders, politics, strengths, weaknesses and tactics. The Rhodesian government forces are analyzed in Chapter III, while the final chapter describes major actions of the war, and lessons applicable to future conflicts. Although the nation is presently called Zimbabwe, this paper will use the name Rhodesia, since this was the official title during the period in question.

The two major guerrilla factions involved in the war were the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU) headed by Joshua Nkomo, and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) eventually led by Robert Mugabe. This split, caused partially by dissatisfaction with Nkomo's leadership and partially by tribal differences, was a major source of guerrilla weakness. ZAPU and ZANU received material and training support from the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China respectively. Black leaders of the nearby nations, Zambia, Angola, Tanzania, Botswana and Mozambique also supported the guerrillas and furnished training areas and base camps.

Initial guerrilla efforts were hampered by lack of proper training, superior intelligence obtained by the Rhodesian forces, lack of coordination between the guerrilla groups and failure to properly prepare the large black population of Rhodesia. It was only in the latter stages of the war that the insurgents were able to effectively neutralize the government's intelligence sources through "persuasion", and to field sufficient forces in rural areas to force the Rhodesian government to the bargaining table. The split between ZAPU and ZANU, however, was never healed, and manifests itself in the present day problems in Zimbabwe.

In opposition to the guerrillas, Rhodesia formed a well trained, moderately equipped, and integrated armed force. In 1976, the regular Rhodesian Forces consisted of three infantry battalions, supported by one Special Air Services Squadron, and several specialist units. By 1979, the country's reserves were mobilized, and the Security Force included an additional 8 infantry battalions. These units were composed of 10,800 regulars and approximately 15,000 territorial reserves. The Air Force

consisted of eight operational squadrons. These included a fighter bomber squadron, two fighter squadrons, one reconnaissance squadron, two transport squadrons, and two helicopter squadrons. The British South Africa Police, a supporting force with military training had approximately 8,000 active members and 19,000 reservists. This unit was neither British nor South African. The name originated during Great Britain's colonial era in Southern Africa, and was retained by the Rhodesian Government upon its declaration of independence.

Although the Rhodesian Security Forces were small and its Air Force was supported by well-worn equipment, it was one of the finest counter-insurgency units in the world. Its lack of sophisticated weaponry and equipment was the basis for its success. It was an army which dealt with the insurgent on his own level. It lacked extensive lines of logistics support, and the Air Force was incapable of dropping tremendous quantities of bombs. Yet it was very adept at small-scale operations throughout a broken and ragged countryside. In order to compensate for its small numbers, the Rhodesian combatants had to rely upon the basic ingredients of victory - professionalism, training and an intimate knowledge of the terrain. It operated in small units, and relied upon mobility, surprise, flexibility, and tactical dispersion for success. The Army tended to confront the insurgent on his own ground in a man-to-man fashion of combat. The Security Forces also reflected the spirit of the Rhodesian culture. It was a highly efficient organization. The tight bonds within the Rhodesian society reduced the elements of traditional friction between soldiers, civil servants and politicians. The Army and Police Forces were not plagued by a sense of social isolation. The European population was willing to endure the necessary taxation, and the required conscription of its children in order to achieve a gradual and moderate transition of power to a black majority which would tolerate a privileged European minority.

To this end, in April 1979, Rhodesia attempted to pacify its critics throughout the West, and relieve the increasing pressure from the insurgent forces inside and outside of its borders. Prime Minister Ian Smith relinquished his position to a moderate black leader, Bishop Abel Muzorewa, whose first official act of government was to offer amnesty to all insurgent forces, and to invite Mugabe and Nkomo to return to Rhodesia in an effort to form a coalition government. This offer was rejected, and the war began to intensify. By the summer of 1979, Nkomo's conventional forces positioned in Zambia had increased to approximately 20,000 men armed with MiG fighters and armoured vehicles. The newly created British peace talks at Lancaster House in England provided an additional impetus to both Mugabe and Nkomo. If these talks produced a settlement, they would need to rush as many of their troops into Rhodesia as possible in order to secure a majority status in their traditional tribal areas.

The Rhodesian Security Forces were being assaulted from all sides. The elected and appointed officials within Muzorewa's government were beginning to prepare for what appeared to be the inevitable assumption of power by the insurgents. No one wanted to be associated with any element of the white minority government which had caused the guerrillas so much pain throughout their struggle. Yet the military remained the single cohesive element of power within this fragile nation. Although the government was administered by a black Prime Minister, the Rhodesian Security Forces remained an instrument of the white minority. It realised it was incapable of halting a full-scale invasion of the country by the black nationalists, but it could delay such an advance long enough to persuade Nkomo and Mugabe to accept the moderate and guaranteed conditions of the Lancaster House settlement in lieu of a costly invasion. If this occurred, a peaceful transition of

power under British supervision would result with a degree of political guarantees for the white minority.

The Security Force developed a strategy which would delay ZAPU's use of their mechanized assets as the basis for their invasion. The Rhodesian Special Air Services (SAS), the Rhodesian Light Infantry (RLI), and the Selous Scouts were tasked with the destruction of the major bridges along the Zambian lines of communication leading to the Rhodesian border. This was accomplished with surgical precision under the guidance of the SAS. They had already destroyed the road and rail bridges along the major thoroughfare which linked Zambia to Tanzania. Because this route served as the primary means of import/export exchange with the international community, it had a significant impact on the Zambian economy. In a period of approximately three weeks, the SAS directed the destruction of 8 additional road and railway bridges in Zambia. This action crippled Nkomo's invasion force, and virtually halted all Zambian trade in the international community. At this point, Zambia's President, Kenneth Kaunda, added additional pressure upon Nkomo by assuring him that his support of ZAPU did not include the physical and economic destruction of his nation.

The SAS is credited with accomplishing Rhodesia's final political and military objectives. Nkomo decided to disregard the advice of his Soviet, East German and Cuban advisors to continue the war. He was forced to accept the negotiated terms of the Lancaster Peace Settlement. An "all party" agreement was signed on December 17, 1979. On December 12, Lord Christopher Soames had entered Salisbury and assumed the role of British Governor. This act officially returned the nation to a colonial status. Great Britain's dominion ensured the peaceful transition of power through free elections held between February 14-29, 1980. As a result of this vote, Robert Mugabe was elected Prime Minister, and the nation state of Zimbabwe was born.

CHAPTER I

THE SEEDS OF CONFLICT

In order for one to understand the seeds of the recent guerrilla war in Southern Rhodesia, it is important to briefly examine the geography which has played such an important part in the nation's development. Rhodesia is a relatively small, land-locked nation located in south central Africa. Its dominant geographic feature is the high central plateau.

Unlike so many of the states created by the European partition of Africa, it is not an artificial entity owing its shape merely to the political bargains of the chancelleries of Europe. On the contrary it has had for centuries a geographic unity of its own and it possesses natural frontiers; on the north the formidable barrier of the Zambezi; on the south what Kipling erroneously called 'the great grey-green greasy Limpopo River, all set about with fever trees'; on the west the dry sands of the Kalahari desert; on the east the mountains which divide Rhodesia from Mozambique and provide the pleasantest scenery and climate in the country.¹

Several points about the geography are important. Although Rhodesia does not possess the huge natural resources of its neighbours to the north and south, its central position made it a significant buffer during the last thirty years, between the emerging black African nations and the conservative apartheid government of South Africa. Secondly, the temperate climate of the high plateau made this region very desirable to European colonists. With this geographic frame of reference in mind, we will now examine the tribal background of the black majority in the country.

British anthropologists working in the central plateau of Africa have discovered some of the earliest ancestors of mankind. The earliest people known to have inhabited Rhodesia were relatives of the Bushmen now relegated to the Kalahari Desert. The Bushmen were displaced by the Shona (also referred to as Mashona) tribes from the north.

By the second millennium A.D. this culture was erecting stone structures. The largest complex of buildings, located at Zimbabwe, served as the center of a loose sociopolitical confederation that reached its zenith during the fifteenth century.²

Pictures of the Zimbabwe Ruins indicate that they achieved an architectural level comparable to the Mexican tribes of this era. Unfortunately, little is known of the history of the time, since no written records were kept.

During the period 1500-1700, Portuguese from East Africa (the area now known as Mozambique) made sporadic attempts to contact the Shona tribes. Although several missions were established, the missionaries normally met an untimely end. One method used by the Shona to discourage

missionary zeal was to occasionally flay a priest alive. Portuguese attempts to establish settlements in this area ceased as Portugal's influence in the world began to wane.

The next significant series of events to affect Rhodesia was the migration of Dutch and British settlers to what is now known as South Africa. As the British placed pressure on the Boers, the latter moved inland, in turn displacing the Zulu tribes to the north. The Zulus, an extremely aggressive and warlike tribe, had formed a well-organized military machine. About 1837, the Ndebele (also known as Matabele) broke away from the Zulu and moved across the Limpopo River into the southern portion of Rhodesia. The more peaceful Shona were no match for the fierce Ndebele. By 1890 the location of the Shona and Ndebele had become stabilized as shown on Map 1. The dominance of the Ndebele, under King Lobengula, is even more striking when one notes that they made up only 15 percent of the country's population.³

In 1867 an event occurred which was to mark the beginning of the end of Lobengula's reign - the discovery of gold. Various British companies vied for mineral rights for the next thirty years. At this time a young British businessman who had made a fortune in South African gold and diamonds appeared on the scene - Cecil John Rhodes. A charming but ruthless man, Rhodes decided to challenge the various groups attempting to secure mining rights.

Rhodes outwitted his competitors and the king by bribing Lobengula's white missionary translator to incorrectly translate a paper which Lobengula signed. The paper was, in fact, a treaty between the king and Rhodes, giving Rhodes' British South Africa Company 'complete and exclusive charge over all minerals situated and contained' in Lobengula's kingdom. When Lobengula discovered the trickery, he sent a letter to Queen Victoria repudiating the document, but to no avail.⁴

Efforts to trade with the Ndebele came to naught.

The Ndebele judged wealth mainly in terms of cattle and captives, and showed little interest in trade.⁵

Rhodes decided that in order to fully exploit his exclusive treaty he would have to resort to subterfuge. He was able to get King Lobengula's permission to introduce no more than 10 miners, who would promise to obey the laws of the Ndebele.⁶ As events unfolded, Rhodes intended to neither limit the party to ten, nor make mining their principle business. In 1890, Rhodes' now famous Pioneer Column moved north from South Africa and established settlements at Fort Victoria and Fort Salisbury. The "ten miners" had expanded exponentially to become slightly less than 700 adventurers. Lobengula was not amused.

For several years, the success of the colony was in doubt. Climate and disease took their toll among the early settlers. Finished goods had to be transported long distances overland, and were consequently expensive.

The interplay between the native tribes and the white settlers was somewhat complicated during the period between 1890 and 1893. The Shona tribes looked to the settlers to counterbalance the

aggressive Ndebele who regularly conducted raids on them. Conversely, the dominant group resented the Pioneers for entering their territory in larger than the agreed upon numbers, and for engaging in pursuits other than mining. The settlers, for their part, had to contend with a paradox. Although the inhabitants of Fort Salisbury would have liked to deal directly with the more cooperative Shona, this would have imperilled the treaty signed with Lobengula which recognized him as the native authority.⁷

In July 1893, an incident occurred which would forever shape the future of the country. One of Lobengula's impis, or warrior groups, attacked a Shona village near Fort Victoria and slaughtered a large portion of its inhabitants. Although no white settlers were injured, the carnage inflicted by the raiders convinced the leaders of the company that something must be done.⁸ They presented Lobengula with a series of ultimata which he could accept only with the loss of his prestige and authority. War ensued in which the Ndebele were decisively defeated. Although African historians describe the war as simply a triumph of rifles over assegais (the Zulu thrusting spear), the Ndebele ensured their own defeat by engaging in conventional tactics over open ground.⁹ Their descendants would not make the same mistake eighty years later.

Although it had no effect on the outcome of the war, an incident took place in December 1893 which would significantly impact upon the psychology of white Rhodesians. Thirty-six settlers under the command of Major Allan Wilson were trapped by the Ndebele at the Shangani River and annihilated in an action quite similar to Custer's defeat at the Little Big Horn River. Blake comments with tongue in cheek,

The episode has come to be a symbol of Rhodesian history, a symbol of courage, heroism and endeavour, a symbol too of the civilized few among the savage multitude. The fact that it was utterly futile and affected the war in no way whatever is irrelevant.¹⁰

Throughout the course of history, the final defeat of one party to a conflict usually sows the seeds of the next conflagration. The war of 1893 was no exception. Earlier in this paper the importance of cattle to the Ndebele was emphasized. When Rhodes' settlers confiscated Lobengula's grazing land they destroyed the basis of the Ndebele economy and main source of wealth. Furthermore, there was an inability or unwillingness on the part of the settlers to realize the difference in status between the various tribes, or the hierarchy within the tribe itself.

As so often in colonial history the fault of the whites lay not in failing to treat blacks as equals but in failing to realize that some blacks were more equal than others.¹¹

The third cause of the second Ndebele uprising was the fact that although the natives were decisively defeated in 1893, many of their impis remained intact and anxious to redeem themselves.

The British South Africa Company failed to establish an adequate intelligence gathering network, and were therefore surprised when the Ndebele attacked in force in the southwest during march 1896. This time the Ndebele avoided many of their mistakes of 1893. They had practiced their marksmanship and revised their tactics, avoiding the set-piece battle and using rough terrain to their

advantage. Shortly after their offensive began, the Ndebele surrounded a large contingent of settlers at Bulawayo (see Map 2) on only three sides. Some historians feel that this was done on purpose in order to leave an escape route for the settlers. Others contend that lack of unanimity on the part of the Ndebele chiefs left this side open. In any case, it provided an access for the reinforcements which saved Bulawayo and routed the Ndebele.

In June of 1896, just as the settlers were making some headway against the Ndebele, the Shona tribe attacked in the northeast, killing ten percent of the white population there.¹² The whites were aghast at what they considered to be incredible treachery on the part of a tribe they had protected. The Shona, led by a chief named Mkwati, were simply taking advantage of the Ndebele uprising to free themselves of the settlers.

Rhodes, faced with a war on two fronts, decided to get personally involved. In August, he met with the Ndebele chiefs and carried on negotiations for several weeks. Two months later they had agreed upon a peace treaty. Rhodes was now able to turn his full attention to the rebellious Shona. When the latter retreated into caves found in their area of the country, the settlers used dynamite to close the openings - a tactic to be utilized by United States Marines in the Pacific a half century later. Eventually, the pressure grew too great for the natives.

The Shona Chiefs surrendered in increasing numbers. Mkwati, now on the run, vanishes from the scene. He is said to have been chopped up alive into pieces at the order of disillusioned chiefs who thought he had made enough trouble in his lifetime.¹³

The campaign against the Shona, waged with ferocity by the settlers as a result of the perceived treachery of the natives, was completed in July 1897 with the elimination of the last pockets of Shona resistance.

It is interesting to speculate if the early surrender by the Ndebele further poisoned relations between themselves and the Shona. In any case, their uncoordinated attacks and surrenders were a harbinger of troubles to come among black Africans in their struggle to free their country from Rhodes' descendants.

At this point in Rhodesian history there were four major groups with responsibilities to be exercised, or interests to be protected. First, the Ndebele and Shona tribal groups, although numerous, were relatively weak. The interests of the settlers and the British South Africa Company did not always coincide, for obvious reasons. Finally, the British government was forced to introduce an element of fair play into the game. Although Great Britain was obviously interested in spreading her influence throughout the world, this desire was tempered by a need to justify her actions by appearing to improve the lot of the "heathen."

In 1899 the British created the Legislative Council, the first attempt to administer the territory gained by Rhodes through the use of political intrigue and, when necessary, war.

The Legislative Council was composed of five company representatives, four elected settlers, the company administrator - who served as chairman - and the British resident

commissioner; all but the latter could vote.¹⁴

It should be immediately obvious that one of the major groups - the African - was left out of the council. Apparently the British decided that they could discern the needs of the natives better than the natives themselves.

Another example of early racial (and perhaps sexual) discrimination was the Immorality Suppression Ordinance of 1903. This law made extra-marital relations between black men and white women illegal and punishable by death. The law was curiously silent concerning relations between white men and black women. Later, even this law proved bothersome to the settlers because a white woman attacked by a black would obviously suffer a social stigma if the black were convicted. The law was therefore amended to include an “attempted” rape. Any white woman then involved in a trial could claim that the act had not been consummated, and that she had defended herself in the best traditions of Wilson at the Shangani River.¹⁵

Although the settlers chafed under company control during the early part of this century, efforts to modify the government were temporarily halted during World War I. Upon conclusion of the war, however, Great Britain studied ways to alter the status of the colony. She finally presented the settlers two choices in 1923 - either merge with the Union of South Africa, or create their own colony. The Rhodesians, wary of being dominated by the more numerous South Africans, chose the latter course. The British government reserved for itself veto power over legislation, yet never exercised this power.

The formal body created by the British for the purpose of ruling the white community was the Rhodesian Legislative Assembly.

The colonists, however, rapidly came to regard this structure as the territory’s government, responsible for administering all of the affairs within the colony.¹⁶

Interestingly enough, during the early colonial period the Africans seemed far more interested in holding on to the land than in holding on to their vote. The vastly outnumbered whites decided that they would have both the land and the vote.¹⁷ One of the most bitter pills, therefore, for the Africans to swallow was the Land Apportionment Act of 1930. In retrospect the act was very similar to American legislation creating reservations for the Indians. Both efforts ostensibly created protected areas in which the indigenous native could exist in safety. In Rhodesia, as in the United States, the best agricultural areas and land near major cities was reserved for the white settlers.

During the remainder of Chapter I, the authors will examine the development of Black political parties and organizations. Although several White leaders and parties will be mentioned, our purpose is not to dwell on this aspect of Rhodesian history. This is done because there was not a large difference between the political philosophy of the parties. Their political outlook toward the Black natives varied from very conservative to reactionary. At each election, the various parties vied with each other to tag their opponents with the label of being “soft on the native question.”

By 1910 the basis for African political movements had begun to materialize. The first

Africans to develop political awareness were labourers in Bulawayo and rural Ndebele farm workers. Bulawayo was developing more rapidly than Salisbury as an industrial and commercial centre, and there was greater mobility and short-term migration among rural Ndebele in the south of the territory than among the Shona. The Ndebele izinduna (chieftains), moreover, had been the first to send their sons to school in South Africa - one of the heirs to Lobengula's throne was studying law - and a small educated urban elite composed of clerks, teachers and clergymen was emerging in Bulawayo.¹⁸

Obviously, these political groups had to be somewhat circumspect during their formative years. In their attempts to better the lot of their people, they could not directly threaten the position of the White establishment. Their position was somewhat analogous to that of Blacks in the United States during the same time period.

By the 1930s the basic patterns of African political movements in Rhodesia had been established: Ndebele nationalism had presented its case and failed; attempts to build on the basis of an African electorate had not succeeded because of their limited numbers; government obstruction and other limitations had caused the organization of African workers to fail; and lobbying had proved ineffective. Alternation of these techniques was continued through the decade with little increase in success. The most significant development was the shift in leadership in African associations from the uneducated to new groups of educated Shona and Ndebele.¹⁹

Most of these early African political groups were either organized on religious grounds, or in conjunction with established labour unions. An example of the former was the Old African National Congress (OANC); of the latter, the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union.

By 1955 all African labour and political organizations had become interracial and had disappeared into European organizations.²⁰

In retrospect, 1955 proved to be a pivotal year in Rhodesian history, for in that year the African Youth League was formed. Although the league was made up of Africans, it should be noted that they were certainly not all youths. By mid-1957, it was leading strikes and boycotts to increase pressure on the White government. A few months later this group was significantly expanded to include the OANC, and given a new name - the African National Congress (ANC). Joshua Nkom was elected president of the congress, and James Chikerema his deputy.

This group gradually increased its influence and power until February 29, 1959, when the Rhodesian government moved to simultaneously ban the ANC and arrest its members. Davis B.C. M'babe (not to be confused with Robert Mugabe, later leader of the country) provides a vivid description of the events that followed.

The ban came on a Saturday morning in an operation coded 'Operation Sunrise.' Immediately after midnight police contingents backed by the army moved into African towns in groups of twelve or more. They knocked doors down with the butts

of their rifles and as the house lights went on they rushed in with guns at the ready. A policeman read the proclamation banning the party and detaining a particular individual. They gave him ten minutes to throw some clothes on his body and in thirty minutes the individual was in a police truck with many of his fellow party members. If the man was really a top official of the party or a member considered to be dangerous, he was put on a plane to a remote security prison at Khami, some forty miles outside Bulawayo. If he was a middle level leader or a very active supporter of the movement, he ended up at one of several internment camps that had been built within fifty miles of Salisbury and Bulawayo.²¹

Two observations concerning this roundup of leaders are pertinent. First, one has to be impressed by the thoroughness of the Rhodesian intelligence effort. Not only was “Operation Sunrise” a complete surprise, but it netted almost every leader of significance. This leads to the second observation - the only leader to escape was Joshua Nkomo. On the day the raid commenced, Nkomo was out of the country - a not unusual circumstance for this gentleman, who enjoyed life’s pleasures, many of which were not available to him in his native land.

Early in 1960 a new organization began to arise, the National Democratic Party (NDP). There were two main factions in this young organization. The dominant faction, led by Michael Marvema, Sketchley Samkange and Nazario Marondera, wanted to continue with the goals and methods of the banned ANC. The rival faction, headed by Ndabaningi Sithole, Daniel Madzimbamuto and James Maluleke were more radical and favoured some sort of guerrilla campaign. For the time being, the second group was suppressed.

In June of 1960, Prime Minister Sir Edgar Whitehead decided to curb the growing influence of the NDP by ordering the arrest of Michael Marvema and his deputy, Leopold Takawira. In doing so, Whitehead seriously misjudged the African reaction. A huge protest in Salisbury was followed by riots in townships all over the country. The government, after a series of hasty conferences, backed down and released Marvema and Takawira. The Africans wildly celebrated their first significant political victory. The victory was, however, to be short-lived. Two months later Joshua Nkomo returned from exile in London and used his political power to assume the leadership of the rejuvenated NDP.

In 1961 a new constitution was drafted and approved for Rhodesia. The Declaration of Rights was featured as the centrepiece of this new constitution. Upon close inspection, however, it was discovered that “the Declaration of Rights was an eleven-page document covering items that have been protected in English tradition. Nearly every right granted, however, was hedged by exceptions and restrictions that left the declaration little power.”²²

The Constitution provided for a Legislative Assembly of 65 seats. Fifty of the seats were elected by voters on the “A” roll and fifteen were reserved for voters on the “B” roll. The requirements for the “A” roll were constructed of income, property and education parameters so that almost all whites and no blacks could qualify. The requirements for the “B” roll were such that enough blacks could qualify to control the seats. If inflation ever threatened white control of the “A” roll, the requirements were simply raised. (In practice, the rules were much more complicated, but the above

discussion suffices for the purpose of this paper.) It should be noted that a two-thirds vote of the assembly was required for any change to the Constitution - a number which was no problem to the whites, who controlled fifty seats.

There was a significant amount of discussion by the blacks prior to the elections of 1962. Moderates were excited by the prospect of fifteen seats, a voice in the Legislature, and a hope for more in the future. More radical elements felt that the only way majority rule would be achieved was by force. Nkomo finally called for blacks to boycott the 1962 elections. It is interesting to speculate on the outcome of Rhodesian history had this not happened. In any case, the black boycott enabled Ian Smith's extremely conservative Rhodesian Front party to secure control of the Legislative Assembly.

At this point it is necessary to return to the development of the black political parties. In December 1961 the National Democratic Party was banned by the authorities. Almost immediately, the leading members of the outlawed body simply changed their name to Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU). When the authorities banned ZAPU in October 1962, the party changed their name again to the Peoples Caretaker Council (PCC). The former name was used by party members outside Rhodesia, and the latter within the country. On August 8, 1963, dissident members of ZAPU/PCC, who had originally challenged the leadership of the old National Democratic Party, broke away to form the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). As will be shown, this split was much more significant than the similarity of the names would imply. Ndabaningi Sithole was elected president of ZANU, Leopold Takawira vice-president, and Robert Mugabe secretary.

One concept of the reason for this split is as follows. "The division had almost no ideological basis, nor was there any lasting important disagreement over tactics. Ethnic and regional interests played only a minor part, although most Ndebele stayed with Nkomo, who was a member of the Kalanga, a branch of the Shona but one closely associated with the Ndebele. At first the split also reflected some differences between rural and urban interests. The basis of the conflict, however, was largely over Nkomo's leadership.²³ Although Nkomo's leadership, or lack thereof, may have been the proximate cause for the final fracture of ZAPU and ZANU, the authors have described in detail the historical antagonisms between the Ndebele and the Shona. Although it is possible that a strong charismatic leader might have been able to unite all Black factions in an attempt to overthrow the Smith government, the present situation in Zimbabwe indicates that tribal enmity continues unabated today.

The period which followed was, all writers agree, the lowest ebb of the Black political parties. Gangs from ZANU and ZAPU/PCC attacked each other's leaders and meetings, wasting lives and efforts in an ever rising spiral of hate and violence. The internecine struggle between the parties continued throughout 1963 and 1964 unabated. The Rhodesian government made no discernible effort to separate the two parties, apparently willing to let them eliminate each other. By the middle of 1964, however, ZAPU/PCC had lost control of its youth gangs and the government was finally forced to intervene lest the violence spill over into the white community. In August 1964, both ZANU and ZAPU/PCC were banned in Rhodesia, and Nkomo and Sithole were arrested and given a sentence of ten years in jail. The remaining leaders of the outlawed political parties fled Rhodesia and set up operations in nearby sympathetic African nations. Since ZAPU was an older organization,

and Nkomo better known than Sithole, his followers began with an advantage in organization and in recognition by foreign governments. With ZAPU and ZANU outlawed and in exile, their leaders in jail, they will be left until Chapter II.

The final act of the preliminary drama took place in 1965. As described earlier, Ian Smith's Rhodesian Front gained a narrow victory in the 1962 elections when Nkomo urged a black boycott. In 1965, with the troublesome ZAPU and ZANU banned, Smith won an overwhelming victory in the May election, and claimed the two-thirds majority necessary to amend the Constitution. On November 11, 1965, Smith published the famous Unilateral Declaration of Independence. Although the results of this document are well known, the reasons for doing so are not clear. Some authors feel this was simply done by the Rhodesian Front in a mood of euphoria after their smashing electoral victory. This theory ignores the careful planning and coordination Smith carried out with South Africa and Portuguese-ruled Mozambique. Others feel that the grievances between Rhodesia and Great Britain had accumulated over a period of time, and Smith simply took advantage of the relative weakness of Harold Wilson's leadership in Great Britain. This theory ignores the fact that the White inhabitants of Rhodesia had, for all practical purposes, ruled themselves since 1923. Finally, no-one has ever been able to prove that Great Britain ever had a secret plan for the imminent imposition of majority rule.

The opinion of these authors is that Smith and the leaders of the Rhodesian Front were aware of the overall trend towards Black rule on the African continent. With the United States engaged in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic, world interest was fixed elsewhere. South Africa appeared to be a solid and sympathetic friend, and Wilson's narrow majority in the British Parliament made intervention unlikely. Emboldened by their election victory, Smith and the Rhodesian Front simply decided that this was the best opportunity to buy time for the future of the White minority.

This chapter has traced the general development of forces which shaped the country of Rhodesia, concentrating on the period since 1890. No attempt was made to discuss the common heritage of Whites in Rhodesia and South Africa. A detailed examination of the White governments since 1923 and the interplay of the political parties was similarly beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice to say that the parties varied little in their determination to maintain White control of the nation. If the reader is interested in studying these aspects of Rhodesian affairs, "A History of Rhodesia" by Blake (listed in bibliography) is strongly recommended.

1Robert Blake, "A History of Rhodesia" (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), p.4

2Howard D. Nelson, et al. "Area Handbook for Southern Rhodesia" (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1975) p.9

3"The Boys in the Bush," Time; 31 December 1979, p. 33

4George M. Daniels, "Drums of War" (New York: Joseph Okpatu Publishing Co., 1974), p. 10

5Nelson, "Handbook", p. 16

[6](#)Blake, “History”, p. 47

[7](#)Blake, “History”, p. 100

[8](#)Blake, “History”, p. 105

[9](#)Blake, “History”, p. 107

[10](#)Blake, “History”, p. 109

[11](#)Blake, “History”, p. 119-120

[12](#)Nelson, “Handbook”, p. 22

[13](#)Blake, “History”, p. 142

[14](#)Nelson, “Handbook”, p. 22

[15](#)Blake, “History”, p. 159

[16](#)Blake, “History”, p. 150

[17](#)Nelson, “Handbook”, p. 28

[18](#)Nelson, “Handbook”, p. 24-25

[19](#)Nelson, “Handbook”, p. 30

[20](#)Daniels, “Drums”, p. 25

[21](#)Davis B.C. M’babe, “The Nationalist Movement of D’Zimbabwe,” in “Drums of War” (see note #20), p. 28

[22](#)Nelson, “Handbook”, p. 151

[23](#) Nelson, "Handbook", p. 179

WAR SINCE 1945 SEMINAR AND SYMPOSIUM

CHAPTER 2

THE GUERRILLAS

Chapter I outlined the background of Rhodesian society - both Black and White - from the distant past until 1965. This chapter will examine the Black participants in greater detail. First, the major political personalities of the guerrillas will be introduced. Phase I of the war, which took place during the late 1960s, will be described from the point of view of the insurgents. The FROLIZI splinter group will be introduced, followed by Phase II of the war. Finally, small unit tactics and formations used by ZAPU and ZANU will be considered.

Michael Raeburn, in his book "We are Everywhere", describes the three stages of the insurgency in Rhodesia.¹ The first period, from the 1920s until the late 1950s was characterized by efforts to achieve equal opportunity and higher wages for the Black population. During the second period, from the late 1950s to 1965, the emphasis was placed on gaining majority rule by political means. These two periods have been described in Chapter I. The final period, the armed struggle, began with the Unilateral Declaration of Independence by Ian Smith in 1965. This chapter will examine the organization and leadership of the guerrilla - or, as some call it, liberation - forces.

In other revolutionary movements, like those which took place in Cuba and China, it is relatively easy to describe these forces, since they were homogeneous and dominated by one strong leader. Such was not the case in Rhodesia. As was described in Chapter I, the original split between ZAPU and ZANU occurred at least partially due to the lack of a strong leader who could unite the various bickering factions.

Black Political Leaders

The best way to begin this chapter is to examine briefly the background of the four principal political leaders who vied with each other for power. Joshua Nkomo, a member of the Ndebele tribe, was born in 1917 and educated in Rhodesia and South Africa. He received his BA in economics and sociology from the University of South Africa. Nkomo began labour union work in 1951 and was involved in the founding of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1957, the National Democratic Party (NDP) in 1960 and ZAPU in 1961. The best known international figure of the guerrilla movement of the 60's and 70's, he was nevertheless criticized by the more militant factions for the amount of time he spent outside the country and was described by some as an "Uncle Tom".² Although not as anxious to compromise as Muzorewa and Sithole (in his later years), he was certainly easier to deal with than Mugabe. The following two quotes reveal something of his personality and ideology. When asked about the allegiance of the guerrillas he replied, "They cannot go around waving guns and saying they are in charge. They are not fighting to be the bosses. It is not everybody that must shoot."³ A second statement was made during the peace talks of September, 1976. "I do not want people to say, 'Oh, my, why are they taking so long?' It has taken us 85 years to

get where we are today. Therefore we can afford to take a few more days or a few more weeks to work out the future of our country."⁴

A second early leader among the guerrillas was Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole, who was the early leader of the ZANU faction which broke away from ZAPU in 1963. The former mission teacher did his theological work at Newton Theological College, Andover, Massachusetts.⁵ Early in his revolutionary career he was perceived as somewhat more militant than Nkomo. After Mugabe displaced him from the leadership of ZANU, Sithole began to create a new image of himself as a moderate in order to increase his appeal as a compromise candidate for majority rule. In this effort he was competing with Muzorewa for the middle ground.

Bishop Abel Muzorewa, born in 1925, was a high ranking official in Rhodesia's Methodist Church.⁶ Like Sithole, he received his theological training in the United States. Muzorewa first stepped into prominence in 1971 as leader of the African National Council, formed as a moderate alternative to ZAPU and ZANU. Supported by the black members of his large church, he was seen as the chief hope by Rhodesian Whites as their situation became more tenuous. Muzorewa lacked the strength and charisma of Nkomo and Mugabe, but most important, he needed an army to back him in the final struggle for power.

Robert Gabriel Mugabe, who rose to a dominant position within the guerrilla ranks, was the most ideological of the revolutionaries. He was born in 1924, and received his early education at a Roman Catholic mission. His scholastic achievements are impressive. In 1951, he received a BA from the University of South Africa before beginning a career as a teacher, Ghana and Zambia.⁷ While in detention from 1964 to 1974, he completed by correspondence three degrees from the University of London, a BA, BS and LLB. Mugabe was not shy about stating his beliefs and affiliations. He once said to a correspondent of the New York Times, "I don't like the fact that I have certain fundamental principles behind my political philosophy which stem from Marxist-Leninist thinking."⁸

Sentiments of this nature and a willingness to resort to ruthless tactics to achieve his ends make Mugabe the most feared of the guerrilla leaders. Robin Moore, in Rhodesia,⁹ alleges that some of his hatred of Whites was due to a long unarrested case of syphilis that became cancerous and necessitated surgical removal of his testicles while in detention in 1972. The authors were unable to verify this allegation by any other source.

Phase I of the Guerrilla War (1964)

In Chapter I, the banning of ZAPU and ZANU in 1964 and the jailing of the principal leaders were described. When the two groups moved to Zambia, Herbert Chitepo became leader of ZANU and organized a military wing of the party, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA). Not to be outdone, James Chikerema of ZAPU formed the Zimbabwe Peoples Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA). Although they decided that the time had come to initiate guerrilla warfare, like the four principal leaders just described, neither Chitepo nor Chikerema had any formal military training.¹⁰

Unfortunately, the displacement of ZAPU and ZANU to Zambia did not result in elimination of their quarrels.

ZANU and ZAPU in exile began to compete with each other for legitimacy in the eyes of Zimbabweans at home. They began to undermine each other, each claiming to be fighting in Zimbabwe and inflicting damage on the Smith forces. To fight militarily in Zimbabwe both ZAPU and ZANU needed money and military hardware, for which they depended on the Organisation of African Unity and friendly states. But to put pressure on the donors, ZANU and ZAPU had to appear to be fighting. Thus, fighting was sometimes initiated by both ZANU and ZAPU not necessarily for revolutionary effectiveness but for the sake of appearing to be involved in liberation activity.¹¹

During the period 1965-1968 ZAPU and ZANU conducted a series of uncoordinated and rather amateurish raids across the border from Zambia. Two of the problems faced by the guerrillas have already been described - lack of coordination between the two major factions, and lack of a real plan of how to conduct a campaign. A third problem is the terrain. After crossing the Tsetse-fly and crocodile infested Zambezi river valley, the infiltrators were faced with relatively open, rolling countryside which exposed them to observation by Rhodesian forces.

Yet another obstacle faced by the guerrillas was lack of standardized training. Michael Raeburn describes this problem after interviewing the members of a ZAPU platoon.

The men who made up the platoon had all received military training. But they had been taught in different countries. Joseph and a young man called Tami Ndhlovu had gone to Cuba; Fireworks and two others had been in Algeria; the Commander and three others went to Moscow; the young boy of sixteen had trained in Lusaka, and Lovemore had been in Cuba. In all these countries the men had been taught how to shoot, but they all had varying concepts of how the war should be waged, and they all had different political attitudes.¹²

It is important to understand that although the guerrillas for the most part grew up in the bush and were used to the terrain, they were certainly not supermen. If they operated in large groups of 75-100 men, they were easy for the Rhodesian forces to spot. On the other hand, extremely small forces were incapable of creating any significant results. Their constant nemesis during these years was the efficient Rhodesian police force. Supporters of the Smith government attributed this efficiency to the loyalty of the Black Rhodesians and their desire to compromise the murderous terrorists. The leadership of ZAPU and ZANU, conversely, charged the Rhodesian forces with brutality, intimidation and torture of the populace.

There was probably truth to both charges. In most campaigns of this sort, the peasants in the field simply want to be left alone. Terrorised by guerrillas at night and intimidated by police during daylight hours, they can only hope to survive until one side or the other wins. In any case, this emphasizes one of the primary weaknesses of the efforts of ZAPU and ZANU during the early years of their campaign. They did not make any significant effort to prepare the population for liberation. Details of the fighting will be described in Chapter IV; however, suffice to say, guerrilla actions were limited to ambushes and attacks on isolated farms. Reaction by Rhodesian forces was usually swift and fatal. By 1968 the guerrilla campaign had come to a standstill.

At the end of Phase I of the guerrilla offensive, it is useful to look at the relative strengths and weaknesses of the guerrillas, and why this initial campaign failed.

Advantages

1. The Black population was much larger than the European stock. In theory, this would force the White forces to spread themselves over the country and expose them to defeat in detail. This advantage in numbers was negated in many ways by the Rhodesian forces. Their efforts to recruit Blacks into the armed forces, superior mobility and use of intelligence will be discussed in Chapters III and IV. Further, since ZAPU and ZANU were operating only from Zambia, it was relatively easy for the Rhodesians to concentrate their forces.
2. A long-term conflict would hurt the Rhodesian economy. An economy based primarily on farming and light industry, beset with sanctions by the rest of the world, would have difficulty supporting a large-scale military force.
3. To be effective, the guerrillas did not have to hold terrain - they simply had to challenge government control by hit-and-run tactics, ambushes and intimidation.
4. The guerrillas had considerably more foreign support from which to draw. This support took many forms. Moral encouragement and sanctuary were provided by other Black nations in Africa, such as Zambia, Botswana, Ghana and Tanzania. A major addition to this alliance occurred when Mozambique gained its independence from Portugal in 1975. Training and weapons were provided by the major communist powers - ZAPU supported by the Soviet Union, ZANU by the Peoples' Republic of China. Finally, monetary and psychological support was furnished by various liberal organizations such as the World Council of Churches.

Disadvantages

1. The first major disadvantage, already described, was the political split between ZAPU and ZANU which prevented them from coordinating the insurgency effort. Although this did not prevent ultimate victory, it prolonged the war, caused many additional guerrilla casualties, and contributed to many of the difficulties remaining today in Zimbabwe.
2. Lack of logistic support was another major obstacle to be overcome by ZAPU and ZANU. Lack of modern communication equipment and sufficient medical supplies made life difficult for groups infiltrating from Zambia. Food generally had to be obtained from sympathetic areas in the Tribal Trust Lands. The Rhodesian police forces carefully monitored the tribes' food supplies, making it difficult to supply any substantial guerrilla force.
3. Terrain and climate on the Rhodesian-Zambian border was difficult. The Zambezi river is swift and inhabited by unfriendly crocodiles. Disease-carrying Tsetse flies infested the valley. After climbing out of the Zambezi lowlands, the guerrillas had to cross wide expanses of open land to reach areas where they could hide.

4. As mentioned earlier, groups had to be small enough to avoid detection, yet large enough to accomplish military objectives.
5. Early in the war the major guerrilla leaders were primarily teachers or ministers - not trained soldiers. Most of these leaders were incarcerated for 10 years, beginning in 1964.
6. Although most of the guerrilla soldiers received basic military training, it was from a variety of sources and non-standard. Russian training emphasized more conventional military aspects, while the PRC concentrated on political indoctrination.
7. Finally, the guerrillas were faced with an extremely effective Rhodesian intelligence network, and superior mobility through the use of motor vehicles and aircraft.

Strategically, the authors feel that the major reason that the early offensive failed was that the rural population within Rhodesia was not properly prepared before the armed struggle began. Tactically, the guerrillas were not properly trained, were weak in numbers and acted too predictably.

Frolizi Splinter Group

Beginning in 1968, the fighting ebbed while the guerrillas attempted to regroup. Unfortunately for them, another chaotic split soon developed within their ranks. Kapungu, in "Rhodesia: The Struggle for Freedom", provides the following description of events as they unfolded:

In early 1970 the desire for propaganda to boost the ZAPU image precipitated a crisis that fragmented not only ZAPU but also ZANU. James Chikerema, the vice-president of ZAPU and the leader of the party in exile, without consulting his colleagues invited a team from the British television programme "Panorama" to film operations of ZAPU guerrilla fighters. Chikerema's colleagues were taken by surprise when the program appeared on British television stations. It is said that the Zambian government was also angered by the fact that it had not been consulted, since some of the scenes that appeared were filmed on Zambian soil.¹³

D.B.C. M'Gabe attributes the split in ZAPU to tribal differences. He states that Chikerema and most of the enlisted men were from northern Rhodesia and Shona, while many of the mid-level officers were Ndebele.¹⁴ Chikerema was attempting to use these tribal differences to establish a splinter faction. In order to further legitimize his position, he made overtures to members of ZANU and formed a new party, the Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe (FROLIZI) in October 1971. Further "encouragement" for this union was furnished by the Zambian government, which was growing tired of the violence between the two major groups of guerrillas.

President Kaunda ordered ZAPU and ZANU to settle their differences or get out of the country (August 1971). His government underlined its displeasure in a cold-blooded way by deporting 129 recalcitrant ZAPU men to Rhodesia, where they immediately fell into the hands of the police. Some received death sentences in Rhodesian courts.¹⁵

The major leaders of FROLIZI were as follows:

James Chikerema - Acting President of ZAPU

George Nyandoro - General Secretary of ZAPU

Nathan Shamuyarira - Financial Secretary of ZAPU

F. Kashiji - Chief Political Organizer of ZANU

S.G. Parirewa - Welfare and Labour Secretary of ZANU

Although FROLIZI claimed to have produced a common front which would carry the struggle to Rhodesia, large portions of ZAPU and ZANU refused to join the new organization. With limited funds available, and lack of support from the two major guerrilla organizations, its existence seemed rather precarious. There were two major reasons that it survived: 1) The leadership of Chikerema, and 2) the failure of ZAPU and ZANU to conduct effective military campaigns against the government of Rhodesia.¹⁶

In any case, FROLIZI received permission from President Kaunda to establish a training camp in eastern Zambia near the border with Rhodesia and Mozambique. About 70 men underwent military training there. What manner of men were these guerrillas who followed Chikerema? The following background of Amon Sibanda is probably typical:

He had left Rhodesia in 1963 to look for work in Zambia. In 1968 the Zambian government apparently made it compulsory for all expatriate Rhodesians to join one of the exiled Rhodesian parties in Zambia. Sibanda chose ZAPU. In less than a month, with the active help of men from the ruling Zambian political party, ZAPU pressed him into service as a full time military recruit. They first quartered him at a camp fifteen miles from Lusaka and then sent him by road to Tanzania for training. Together with 160 other recruits he learned how to handle weapons. He had instruction in judo and bayonet charges, and learned the use of mortars and bazookas. From Tanzania he went on to Bulgaria for five months artillery training. He came back to Tanzania in 1970 and moved from there to Zambia. His experiences had not yet converted him to ZAPU's cause, and he promptly deserted their camp, going to stay with an uncle who lived nearby in a rural district. One day he went to town to sell some cabbage; a colleague from Tanzania days spotted him in the street and informed the police. Two detectives arrested Sibanda and took him to Lusaka police headquarters, where a Zambian police superintendent struck him and called him a coward. The police returned him to his camp. In 1971 he transferred to FROLIZI.¹⁷

Sibanda was hardly the dedicated freedom fighter!

In early 1973, FROLIZI launched a raid into Rhodesia to attempt to establish their credibility. The two six-man groups caused some alarm by conducting several robberies and murders, but were quickly and efficiently rounded up by the Rhodesian authorities. Shortly thereafter the ZANU leaders who had joined FROLIZI resigned in a dispute with Chikerema and Nyandoro. For the next

three years, FROLIZI remained in the background until merging with ZAPU and ZANU to form the Patriotic Front in 1976.

Phase II of the Guerrilla War

At the same time that the FROLIZI splinter group formed in Zambian exile, another attempt was made within Rhodesia itself to unite ZAPU and ZANU. The African National Council (ANC) was created in October 1971, and Bishop Abel Muzorewa was chosen as its first leader. Since ZAPU, ZANU and FROLIZI had "staked out" the revolutionary left, and moved outside the country, Muzorewa decided to occupy the centre and organize opposition within the country. Leaders of the guerrilla forces, however, were not enthusiastic about either Muzorewa's goals or his leadership.

The next significant political development was the release from detention after ten years of the incarcerated leaders of the guerrilla movement.

When the nationalist leaders were released from Rhodesian prisons in December 1974, they were persuaded by the presidents of Zambia, Tanzania and Botswana to merge their rival movements, of which ZAPU and ZANU were the biggest, under the umbrella of Bishop Muzorewa's African National Council. The union was short-lived. Mr. Nkomo, the ZAPU leader, wanted to talk with the Rhodesian government. Mr. Sithole, the ZANU leader, thought talks were hopeless and wanted to prepare for war.¹⁸

To add to the confusion, Robert Mugabe now emerged to claim that he was the true leader of ZANU and claimed that all dealings should be through him. After concluding an agreement with guerrilla forces fighting the Portuguese in Mozambique, he moved his followers to that country. It is interesting to note that Mugabe, alone among the top leaders, lived with his men in the field.¹⁹ At this time there were an estimated 400 guerrillas inside Rhodesia and 5,500 outside the country.²⁰ The majority of the latter followed Mugabe, who gained some significant military advantages when Mozambique gained independence in June, 1975.

In early 1975, the guerrilla forces continued their divisive bickering. After secret talks were held in Salisbury between Ian Smith from the Rhodesian government, and Muzorewa, Sithole and Nkomo, Sithole was arrested for plotting to kill his political rivals. Two weeks later, Herbert Chitepo, one of the major ZAPU leaders, was killed by a landmine in Lusaka, Zambia. ZAPU blamed ZANU for the murder, while ZANU blamed the Rhodesian government. No-one has been able to conclusively prove either theory.

To further complicate the political picture, Sithole, after being released from arrest, formed an external wing of the ANC called the Zimbabwe Liberation Council (ZLC). At the same time Nkomo and Muzorewa parted ways, with the latter forming yet another wing of the ANC outside Rhodesia. Once again the actors changed roles. Nkomo, attempting to appear as a moderate, opened negotiations with Ian Smith. Shortly thereafter, Sithole returned to Rhodesia after two years in exile, became a "born-again" moderate and renounced terrorism. Three months later, Muzorewa returned to Rhodesia and changed the title of his faction to the United African National Council. Only the implacable Mugabe remained outside the country denouncing the rest as collaborators. Not to be

outdone, however, he also formed a new party called the Zimbabwe Reformed African National Council.

Although this constant shifting of party names and posturing by leaders sounds a bit like a comic opera, the guerrillas were increasing their attacks against both White settlers and Black Rhodesians who were not considered sufficiently fervent in their revolutionary beliefs. Judging by the amount of intelligence gained from captured guerrillas, it is reasonably certain that the police used beatings and torture to gain information. The guerrillas, on the other hand, were far from bashful about committing atrocities to gain their ends. Several quotes serve to illustrate the plight of the rural Blacks.

Whatever his sympathies, a Black villager in Belingwe is in a cruel predicament: he faces severe punishment from either the guerrillas or the government if he fails to cooperate. He can be sentenced to death for recruiting or encouraging guerrillas; if he reports them, on the other hand, they may well kill him. One villager, known to be a government informer, was pinned by guerrillas to a bed of straw; his young son was forced to set it on fire.²¹

A second incident is related as follows:

One tribesman suspected of informing on the guerrillas had his nose, ears and lips cut off - and his wife was forced to cook the bits of flesh.²²

1976 continued with little real progress on the diplomatic front. Nkomo, Mugabe and a few elements from FROLIZI formed the Patriotic Front, theoretically uniting ZAPU and ZANU once more. Those two leaders were invited by the British government to London, along with Muzorewa, for talks. Sithole demanded to be included, claiming that he, not Mugabe, headed ZANU. The talks broke up when a date for majority rule in Rhodesia could not be agreed upon. A significant setback for Muzorewa and Sithole occurred in January 1977 when the presidents of Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia agreed to back the Patriotic Front. Although later in 1977 Ian Smith reached an agreement with Sithole, Muzorewa and Chirau (a hereditary Chief) to have them join the government in an attempt to pre-empt the more militant leaders of the Patriotic Front, this effort was doomed to failure, since these leaders were now seen as collaborators by their people.

Before examining the final political settlements, this chapter will examine the organization of the guerrilla forces of ZANU and ZAPU, ZANLA and ZIPRA. On the following pages are organization charts and maps of areas of responsibility for the two armies. By late 1977, estimates of guerrilla strength varied from 9,500 to 15,000 in various periodicals of that time. All sources agreed that the ZANLA forces outnumbered those of ZIPRA about two to one. During this phase of the insurgency, the guerrillas modified their strategy and began a grass roots programme to indoctrinate the peasant population of Rhodesia. Their logistics problems from the earlier years were significantly eased with Mozambique added to the revolutionary fold. As they gained momentum militarily, the population was far more ready to assist them.

Small Unit Tactics and Formations

The authors have attempted to determine specific information on small unit tactics and formations which were utilised by guerrilla forces. The task was made difficult by the fact that any materials published by members of, or sympathizers with, ZAPU and ZANU, have been oriented toward the political aspects of the struggle. We have obtained an unpublished manuscript entitled "ZANLA's War in Zimbabwe-Rhodesia: A look at Strategy and Tactics", written by Captain Paul Melshen, USMCR. Captain Melshen, who currently lives in London, observed the war in Rhodesia during 1979. He and others were hired by farmers in remote areas to assist in providing security. Descriptions of guerrilla tactics are drawn from this manuscript.

The largest tactical unit of ZANLA was normally the company, consisting of 90 to 100 men. The company was subdivided into three platoons of equal size, which were further organized into two 15-man sticks. For infiltration from Mozambique into eastern Rhodesia, the company would be broken into these smaller units which would reassemble at a designated time and place across the border to receive final instructions.

Most movement through the bush by the sticks was done in column formation for ease of control as follows:

Insert diagram

The interesting aspect of this formation is the position of the political commissar near the rear of the column to aid with straggler control. The riflemen carried AK-47s or SKS rifles. Battle formation was achieved by simply shifting the axis 90 degrees and flanking to the left or right.

One of the most common types of action initiated by the guerrilla was the night attack on an isolated farm or outpost. Since most villages and homesteads were protected by a combination of barbed wire, electric fence and anti-personnel mines, the guerrillas usually approached no closer than 200 to 300 metres from their objective. Documented evidence indicates that they preferred to attack between 1800 and 2200 hours during the last quarter of the moon. This tactic enabled them to move into position under cover of darkness and then withdraw rapidly when visibility was slightly better. In order to elude the highly skilled trackers of the Rhodesian Security Forces, they would use the "bombshell" method - that is, the members would split up and each move by a different route to the predetermined rendezvous point.

In addition to this form of night attack, the guerrillas often conducted ambushes on civilian or military vehicles if they could be isolated from strong military forces. ZANU was also quite active in employing land mines along the many dirt roads which run throughout the country. Some interesting and unique Rhodesian countermeasures will be explored in Chapter III.

Using these tactics, the guerrillas stepped up their pressure against the government of Ian Smith. Smith agreed to meet secretly in Zambia with Joshua Nkomo in August 1978, the first time he had singled out the ZAPU leader over Mugabe. When the ZAPU guerrillas shot down their first Air Rhodesia airliner with a SAM-7 on 4 September, 1978, Ian Smith broke off the talks. Twenty-eight people were killed in the crash, and ten of the eighteen survivors were massacred by ZAPU forces.²³

In the spring of 1979, Smith backed Bishop Muzorewa in an election, hoping to install a moderate Black who would allow the Whites to retain de facto control of the country. As one would suspect, Nkomo and Mugabe ridiculed the election results. When the leaders of the Black nations of Africa, as well as the Carter administration, refused to recognise Muzorewa, his end was in sight. Warfare continued sporadically throughout the summer, with ZAPU and ZANU attacking each other as often as the Rhodesian forces. Finally, in the fall of 1979, the leaders of Mozambique, Zambia, Angola, Tanzania and Botswana put pressure on Nkomo and Mugabe to negotiate with the Rhodesian government.²⁴ From September to December the difficult negotiations were carried out. Thousands of members of ZANLA and ZIPRA returned to designated camps under British supervision.

Intimidation and charges of malfeasance characterized the elections in early March, 1980. Two assassination attempts on Mugabe did not improve his disposition. Most White Rhodesians prayed for a victory by Muzorewa which, they hoped, would prevent a bloodbath. They were stunned by the overwhelming victory of Marxist Mugabe, whose party captured 57 of 80 contested seats.²⁵ In retrospect, his victory should not have been surprising. Not only was Mugabe a member of the Shona tribe which comprised 80% of the population, he was also the leader of the largest guerrilla army and showed the least inclination to negotiate with the government of Ian Smith.

Since becoming Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, however, Mugabe has shown himself to be a pragmatic statesman.

Zimbabwe's White farmers have profited from high produce prices and expanded markets since Mugabe was swept into power in 1980. Many of the White farmers have warmly supported him, although by their conservative nature they oppose his socialist policies.²⁶

Unfortunately, Mugabe has not been as successful assimilating the members of ZAPU into the country's government. Many whites and Blacks have become victims of the continuing violence in the southwestern part of the country where the Ndebele are dominant. This is the area where two young American tourists recently disappeared.

An interesting epilogue to the final Black victory occurred last year. Edgar Z. Tekere, a member of Mugabe's cabinet, was convicted - to many people's surprise - of murdering a White farm manager. He was then freed under a law enacted by the Ian Smith government which shielded ministers from criminal charges if they acted in good faith to suppress terrorism.

The following chart has been constructed by the authors to assist the reader in navigating through the stormy seas of the Black parties in Rhodesia.

¹ Michael Raeburn, "We are Everywhere", (New York: Random House, 1979), p. 27.

² Richard Hall, "Black Victory in Rhodesia: How Bloody will it be?", New York Times, 11 July, 1976, Sect. 6, p. 14.

³ Hall, p. 14.

- [4](#) Michael T. Kauffman, "Turning Point seen ahead for Rhodesia by a Black Leader," New York Times, 26 Sept., 1976, p. 1.
- [5](#) L.H. Gann, "Prospects for White Resistance," Africa Report, Sept-Oct 1977, p. 13.
- [6](#) Hall, p. 14.
- [7](#) Robin Moore, "Rhodesia", (New York: Condor, 1977), p. 34.
- [8](#) Gregory Jaynes, "Rhodesia's Resolute Leader", New York Times, 5 March 1980, p. 8
- [9](#) Moore, p. 46.
- [10](#) Leonard T. Kapungu, "Rhodesia, the Struggle for Freedom", (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1974), p. 135.
- [11](#) Kapungu, The Struggle, p. 135.
- [12](#) Raeburn, Everywhere, p. 107.
- [13](#) Kapungu, "The Struggle", p. 138.
- [14](#) Davis B.C. M'Gabe, "The Nationalist Movement of D'Zimbabwe," in "Drums of War" (see note 20, Chapter I) p. 55.
- [15](#) Tony Kirk, "Politics and Violence in Rhodesia", African Affairs, January 1975, p. 5.
- [16](#) Kirk, "Politics", p. 6
- [17](#) Kirk, "Politics", pp. 9-10.
- [18](#) "ZIPA Up" in "The Economist", 3 July 1976, p. 53.
- [19](#) Kaufmann, "Turning Point", p. 1.
- [20](#) Gann, "Prospects", p. 10.
- [21](#) "Caught in the Middle", Time, 12 Sept 1977, p. 25.
- [22](#) Richard Steele, "White Africa at Bay", Newsweek, 7 June, 1976, p. 35.

[23](#) "Rhodesian Airliner shot down by Guerrillas," New York Times, 5 Sept. 1978, p. 1

[24](#) "We are going Home," Time, 31 December 1979, pp. 32-33.

[25](#) John F. Burns, "Mugabe reassures Whites in Rhodesia," New York Times, 5 March 1980, p. 1.

[26](#) Joy Ross, "Zimbabwean Whites assail Breakdown of Law and Order," Washington Post, 19 Sept 1982, p. A26.

WAR SINCE 1945 SEMINAR AND SYMPOSIUM

CHAPTER 3

THE RHODESIAN SECURITY FORCES

Prior to the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1953, the British South Africa Police (BSAP) had been responsible for Rhodesia's defence. The BSAP had formed the nucleus of Rhodesia's military contribution to the British Empire during the Boer War and World War I. Its officers and non-commissioned officers led the Rhodesian African Rifles against the Japanese in World War II. When the army (Security Force) was established in 1953, it was viewed with a benevolent tolerance by the BSAP. This attitude continued through 1963 when the Federation ended. At that time, the commissioner of the British South Africa Police recommended to the newly-formed government of Southern Rhodesia that the army be dissolved, and the BSAP enlarge its Police Support Unit as a means of "ensuring the national defence." This recommendation was rejected, but a concept known as the State of Emergency Procedure was developed. In theory, the BSAP and the army held co-equal status within the government, with each element assigned separate missions. In reality the army was reduced to a secondary status. The BSAP held the right to call upon the army for assistance, or simply "hand over" a particular problem to the security force. The police controlled the power of initiative and decision. This status quo prevailed until 1966.

The institution of a Rhodesian Security Force began to develop in earnest after the Sinoia Battle of 28 April 1966. This incident was commemorated as "Chimurenga Day" by the guerrillas, and marked the official beginning of the Rhodesian War. During this action, the BSAP, with the assistance of local police reservists and air force helicopters, deployed against a force of ZANLA insurgents. The event resulted in the deaths of 7 guerrillas with no BSAP casualties. As a result of the inept handling of the situation by the BSAP, the government became convinced that the BSAP were policemen and not soldiers.¹ A shift of emphasis resulted in 1966, and the Rhodesian Security Force became the government's primary instrument for the conduct of counterinsurgency operations.

The Sinoia incident also marked the official introduction of dedicated insurgent forces into Rhodesia. These insurgents were organised into small groups of 8-15 men operating from bases in Zambia. Throughout this early phase, the insurgents had two modest objectives - attack European-owned farms and attempt to destroy the oil and powerline link between Rhodesia and the Portuguese colony of Mozambique. These initial attempts were unsuccessful.

In 1967, small groups of insurgents continued to enter the country from Zambia with similar goals. They remained unsuccessful, but an additional element was added to the formula. A number of captured guerrillas were identified as members of military components of the South African "African National Council." This led to the introduction of South African Police and prison guard detachments into Rhodesia to assist in the "counter-terrorist" effort. This allied force effectively sealed the border with Zambia, and guaranteed peace through 1969.

The result of this diminished activity had a long-term negative effect on the Salisbury government. In 1969 the Security Forces felt they had absolutely defeated the guerrilla threat and, as a result, they were reluctant to accept the evidence of increased and more sophisticated insurgent activity. In addition, the guerrilla forces spent the year under the guidance of their Soviet, Chinese and Cuban advisors. They entered 1970 better trained and organized. There were two major incidents during the year: a partially successful attack on a police garrison in Chisuma, and an unsuccessful attempt to cut the railway line running from the northern frontier to Salisbury.

From 1971-1973 the complexion of the war began to change. The insurgent activity developed to a point that demanded the total commitment of the Security Forces. Initially, the army was able to isolate the war to the northern border region with Zambia. As the Portuguese failures in Mozambique became more apparent, the basis for support and operations for the Rhodesian Black nationalists began to expand into Mozambique. This extension, when linked to a larger and more well-trained insurgent element, resulted in several guerrilla military successes throughout 1973. The insurgents began to effectively utilise landmines, small rocket launchers, grenades and automatic weapons, including light machine guns. Their tactics became more sophisticated, but remained essentially "hit and run." They would select an isolated farm and mine the access roads prior to initiating an assault. Once the attack began, it would be broken off very quickly. Local elements of the Security Forces would rush to the scene along the access road and detonate the mine.

These tactics resulted in very few White casualties. The primary victims were the local Blacks who supported the European-owned farms. There is little evidence that the majority of the Rhodesian black population supported the nationalist cause, but it was also not an enthusiastic supporter of the white minority government. Throughout this stage of escalation, the brutalization of the black tribesmen by the insurgents may have increased their sympathies for the minority government, but it also undermined their confidence in that government's ability to protect them.

From 1973-1975 both sides of this conflict began to learn the lessons of unconventional warfare. The guerrillas received a higher degree of training, and demonstrated the discipline required to wage an effective campaign. The Rhodesian Security Forces developed the counterinsurgency tactics which would bring it so much positive recognition in the following years.

The withdrawal of the Portuguese from Mozambique in 1975 allowed the "Frontline" nations to form a loose confederation in order to direct their support and some limited resources to the overthrow of the white minority government in Salisbury. Rhodesia's position worsened when South Africa bowed to President Carter's pressure; Pretoria withdrew its auxiliary forces from combat and eventually from Rhodesia. As a result of greater Chinese and Soviet support, the numbers of insurgents began to increase, and units in excess of 100 men moved through the northern and eastern border regions. By 1976, the pressure on the Rhodesian military began to intensify. Insurgent attacks were initiated from Botswana. The addition of Botswana a guerrilla sanctuary had a noticeable impact on white Rhodesia. The main railway from Rhodesia to South Africa passed through this country. Salisbury could no longer depend upon a secure line of communications with its only ally. This resulted in the construction of the Beit Bridge-Rutenga railway line. Throughout the war, this route served as Rhodesia's only direct link with the international community.

In order to counter the escalation of insurgent movement into the country from virtually all points of the compass, the Security Forces separated the country into five military districts. The northern district was identified as HURRICANE; THRASHER covered the Eastern Highlands; REPULSE included Fort Victoria and the majority of the BEIT BRIDGE-RUTENGA railway; TANGENT was established in the area adjacent to Botswana, and GRAPPLE occupied the centre of the country.

The immediate result of this intensification of guerrilla effort was that the Rhodesian Armed Forces lost control of the African Trust Lands in the northeast, and most of the rural areas of the country. As in the United States' experience in the Republic of Vietnam, the Security Forces controlled the rural areas by day, and the guerrillas held the territory at night. This increase in strength and capabilities of the nationalist movement resulted in an increased measure of popular support from the indigenous black population (the tribesmen). This began to ensure the insurgent of a local source of food and shelter, but, of more import - indigenous recruits.²

In the face of these realities, and provided with only a relatively small force and equipment, sometimes both obsolete and elderly, General Walls, first as Army Commander, and then as Commander Combined Operations, waged a campaign of extreme professional competence that will deserve a place in the world's military Staff Colleges for many years to come.³ Under Walls, the Rhodesian forces accepted their inability to control the terrain, and directed their operational planning toward limiting and reducing the growth of the insurgent forces within Rhodesia.

The tactics developed to accomplish this mission were based upon an accurate evaluation and the dissemination of intelligence, ambushes, ground and aerial reconnaissance, the rapid deployment of forces in order to gain and maintain contact with confirmed enemy movement, and the development and use of a unique military organization known as a "PSEUDO-GANG" to disrupt enemy forces in a particular area.⁴

In addition, the Rhodesians tended to disregard the international boundaries of the five black nations that had proclaimed themselves as "Front-Line" states: Botswana, Zambia, Mozambique, Tanzania and Angola. The insurgents countered these incursions by the skilful use of the media. The publicised violation of these borders greatly tempered the military benefits the Rhodesians derived from such operations. The international reaction was intensified by the number of non-hostile Blacks who were killed and wounded during these raids. The guerrilla base camp served as the living compound for its soldiers. Inevitably, a large number of women and children became casualties of a Rhodesian attack.⁵

As a result of the United States' involvement in the Republic of Vietnam, Americans tend to equate their experiences and perceptions to other conflicts involving an insurgent movement. At the height of the Vietnam War, Washington had over 500,000 troops in the Republic of Vietnam. In contrast, the Rhodesian Security Forces in 1978-1979 consisted of 10,800 regulars, 15,000 territorials (reserves), plus 8,000 regular BSAP, with a police reserve of approximately 19,000 strong. This force was patterned after the British model, with a separation of the Army into branches or "arms." The Air Force was a separate service, but closely linked to the ground element by its primary role: close air support and helicopter operations.⁶

The command and control of all combat operations was centred in the Combined Operations Headquarters in Salisbury under the direction of General Peter Walls. The five military districts in Rhodesia were controlled by Joint Operations Centres (JOCs) which were linked directly to Salisbury. The individual JOC was a combined operations centre with representatives from the Army, Air Force, Police, Central Intelligence Organization, and Internal Affairs. The Army commander was eventually designated the senior service representative. The operational units assigned to a military district were task organized in accordance to specific mission and terrain, and remained under the tactical control of the JOC commander of that district.⁷ Although the combat elements in each Joint Operations Area were task organized, the Air Force remained the most structured of all components of the Rhodesian Security Forces.

THE RHODESIAN AIR FORCE

The Air Force consisted of eight operational squadrons. These included one light bomber squadron, one fighter-attack squadron (Hunters), one fighter-attack squadron (Vampires), one reconnaissance squadron, one counter-insurgency squadron, one transport squadron, and two helicopter squadrons. The major aircraft types available to the Air Force included:

AIRCRAFT: Rhodesian Air Force⁸

- **25 Fighter Ground Attack**
 - 9 "Hunter" FGA9
 - 12 "Vampire"
 - 4 OV-10 "Bronco"
 -
- **19 Trainer-Reconnaissance**
 - 8 BAC "Provost" T-52
 - 11 T-55
 -
- **30 Counterinsurgency-Reconnaissance**
 - 12 AL-60
 - 18 Ce-337
 -
- **17 Transports**
 - 1 Be-55 "Baron"
 - 6 BN-2 "Islanders"
 - 10 C-47
 -
- **77 Helicopters**
 - 66 SA-316/-318
 - 11 Bell 205

The air service unit was composed of approximately 1300 personnel. Pilot training was unique by American standards, but it followed British traditions. The pilots and crew members were trained to become individually proficient in the maintenance of particular parts of the aircraft. If the aircraft

experienced a malfunction, the entire crew was able to perform fairly sophisticated levels of maintenance. This system included the incorporation of maintenance technicians as members of helicopter and transport carrier crews.

In 1978 the serviceability of the Rhodesian Air Force was 85%. This is exceptional when 60% is considered as "good" throughout the western world. This is a greater accomplishment considering the international sanctions levelled against Rhodesia in 1965 and 1970. The majority of its military resupply was built upon a system of improvisation and invention.⁹

THE RHODESIAN ARMY (C.1979)

The Rhodesian Army consisted of one Armoured Car Regiment, six Infantry Battalions, four Special Air Service Squadrons, one Artillery Regiment, six Engineer Squadrons, and two Special Scout Groups.¹⁰

The history of the Rhodesian Army included participation in World War I, World War II, and the Counterinsurgency Operations in Malaya. A former Commander in Chief of NATO, General Sir Walter Walker, described the Rhodesian soldiers as "the toughest counterinsurgency force in the world." In a letter to the London Times newspaper he stated, "the Rhodesian Army will never be defeated in the field by terrorists or even a much more sophisticated enemy."¹¹

The Army's lack of sophisticated weaponry and equipment was an important element in its success. It was a force which dealt with the terrorist on his own level. The Security Forces lacked extensive lines of logistic support, yet they were adept at small scale operations throughout a broken and ragged countryside. In order to compensate for their small numbers, the government forces had to rely upon the basic ingredients of victory - professionalism and an intimate knowledge of the terrain. The combat forces operated in small units, and depended upon mobility, surprise, flexibility and tactical dispersion for success. The army tended to meet the guerrilla on his own ground in a man-to-man fashion of combat. The Armed Forces reflected the spirit of the Rhodesian culture. It was a highly efficient organization. The tight bonds within the Rhodesian society reduced the elements of traditional friction between soldiers, civil servants and politicians. The combat and police forces were not plagued by a sense of social isolation. The majority of the white population was willing to endure the necessary taxation and the required conscription of its children in order to ensure the Prime Minister Ian Smith's final objective, which was a gradual and moderate transition of political power to the black majority. The Rhodesian armed forces were the instrument of these policies.¹²

In order to appreciate the effectiveness of this counterinsurgency force an understanding of the structure and mission of its principal components is necessary. Each of the elements of this force had a distinct mission, and a unique character.

THE RHODESIAN LIGHT INFANTRY (RLI)

The RLI remained one of two "all white" units in the armed forces until the very end of the war in 1979-1980. It was established in 1961 as a conventional infantry battalion. In 1964 it was assigned the mission of a commando unit, and based its reorganization upon a British pattern. The regiment

was organized into five sub-units: three combat commandos, a support commando and a base group. Each commando consisted of approximately 100-150 men. The support commando was similar to the Marine Corps' Weapons Company, and the base group consisted of those elements found in our Headquarters and Service Company. The regiment contained approximately 1,000 men.¹³

The mission of the unit became purely counterinsurgency. The emphasis of organizational training was centred upon search and destroy operations. In addition, the Rhodesians spent a great deal of time developing their non-commissioned officer corps. As a result, their operational commitments were at the "stick", or squad, level.

The RLI was also unique because of the large number of foreign nationals who served in its ranks. It has been estimated that this participation went as high as 30%. They were primarily British, South African and American. The majority of these men acquitted themselves well. The tendency was for the foreigners to approach Rhodesia with mercenary mentality, but this was a misperception. All foreigners enlisting in the Rhodesian Armed Forces received some degree of basic training, with an emphasis on discipline. The Rhodesian Security Forces had a higher standard of military discipline than most western armies, and Americans were generally surprised by the intensity and severity of this system.¹⁴

The basic training for RLI volunteers was provided within the regiment. This consisted of 16 weeks of recruit training. The instruction consisted of basic military skills: drill, weapons, leadership, small unit tactics, and an emphasis on focussing these skills toward the destruction of the insurgents. Upon assignment to a commando, the soldier could expect to spend 4-6 weeks in the bush, and 10 days to 3 weeks in the RLI Base Camp at Llewellyn Barracks, near Bulawayo. These periods were dedicated to retraining and refitting the commando prior to another assignment.¹⁵

RHODESIAN AFRICAN RIFLES (RAR)

The RAR was an elite organization and enjoyed the distinction of having more black volunteers for billets than were available. There were two reasons for this interest. The RAR was an hereditary organization. The sons of RAR soldiers were anxious to follow in their fathers' footsteps. Of equal import, membership in the regiment would guarantee a higher standard of living, and more prestige to the young black than he would have been able to achieve in most civilian pursuits.¹⁶

The RAR was originally established during World War I, and designated the Rhodesian Native Regiment (RNR). The RAR was disbanded at the end of World War I, but with the outbreak of World War II, the RAR was reformed and renamed. The regiment saw service as a member of the East African Brigade in Burma, and won praise for their actions against the Japanese during the Battle of Tankwe Chung on April 26, 1945.¹⁷

By 1977, the RAR was organized into four battalions. Each battalion consisted of approximately 700 men. The Regiment was fully integrated with both black and white officers. The internal structure of each battalion consisted of three rifle companies. When a unit was assigned a combat mission, its base unit for deployment was a company, but in the field it rapidly broke into 5-7 man squads. The

emphasis was on small unit tactics, ambushes and tracking. Squads may have operated for as long as a week as an independent element.¹⁸ Because of the natural bush abilities of the black soldiers, the RAR enjoyed a solid reputation, and performed very well.

THE RHODESIAN ARTILLERY REGIMENT

The Artillery Regiment was designated the 1st Field Regiment. This unit reveals a disparity between the American concept of an artillery regiment and the reality of its Rhodesian counterpart. The 1st Field Regiment consisted of two batteries, one active and one reserve. The reserve battery was dependent upon British 25 pounders for support. The active battery consisted of six M101 105mm Howitzers; it also had an additional responsibility for approximately 10 ZPU-4/20mm anti-aircraft guns which were posted throughout Rhodesia at strategic points. The AA guns had been captured from elements of the Patriotic Front during raids into Zambia and Mozambique.¹⁹

THE RHODESIAN ARMoured CAR REGIMENT (RAC)

The RAC was established in 1972 to fulfil an armoured cavalry mission. Its primary duties involved reconnaissance, patrolling, escort duty, crowd control, and road blocks.²⁰

The RAC had a basic table of equipment of 60 Eland, 54 S/90 Scout Cars, approximately 50 UR-416 armoured personnel carriers, and 20 Ferret armoured cars. The latter were four-wheel drive vehicles mounted with either a 50 calibre machine gun, twin Brownings or a 20mm aircraft gun. The Rhodesians manufactured two additional combat vehicles. The *Bullet* was a wheeled infantry fighting vehicle. It carried a 10 man crew. The vehicle commander was also the squad leader. The second was the *Vaporizer*. It was a scout/reconnaissance vehicle, built upon a light chassis with a fiberglass body. It was manufactured for less than \$1500, and mounted with a 30 or 50 calibre machine gun.²¹

The organization of the regiment was similar to its NATO counterparts. There were four armoured squadrons; each squadron had four troops. Three of the squadrons were commanded by a cadre of regular officers and NCO's, and manned by reservists who were activated for incremental periods. The fourth squadron was a regular establishment.

The tactics initially used by the RAC reflect its British heritage, and the United Kingdom's association with NATO. However, as the war progressed, the RAC began to incorporate Israeli mechanized doctrine. Although Israel fought her major armoured campaigns on a scale which paralleled World War II desert operations, it developed many innovative and small scale armoured cavalry movements for use in the "occupied territories". The Rhodesians studied these tactics, and modified them to the terrain and character of an African insurgency.

The armour column always moved with the supported mechanized infantry, with one of the elements of combined arms in support. Air support was used only when absolutely essential. In order to compensate for the lack of an "aerial umbrella", the armoured car units developed a tactical doctrine which emphasized movement, speed, and offensive action.

The RAC was reported to have achieved contact with insurgent forces in excess of 90% of their operations. This was impressive, but should be tempered with the knowledge that a squadron was never committed until military intelligence had established a large concentration of guerrilla forces.

Although the Rhodesian Armoured Car Regiment was small and virtually self-reliant, it was a potent force which included an anti-armour capability. The Rhodesians never possessed tanks, but they had modified a number of their vehicles to carry anti-armour weapons. Throughout 1978-1979 they became justifiably concerned over the introduction of approximately 200 T-34, T-54 and T-62 Soviet tanks into Zambia accompanied by Cuban military advisors.²² With the introduction of this force into one of the *Frontline Nations*, Rhodesia received considerable assistance in upgrading its anti-armour capability from South Africa and possibly Israel. It has been impossible to define the exact nature of its anti-armour capacity, but both *Jane's* and *World Armies* speculate upon the existence of a credible deterrent.

THE GREY'S SCOUTS

The Grey's were one of the most unique military organizations of the latter 20th Century. They were a horse mounted infantry unit of approximately battalion size which specialized in tracking, reconnaissance and pursuit. Because of the terrain characteristics of Rhodesia, there were very few places within the country that were not accessible to horse mounted infantry. The unit was operationally deployed as a squadron. This was roughly equivalent to a Marine Rifle Company with approximately 160 men. The squadron consisted of three troops; each troop had four 8-man sections. The Grey's consisted of three *saber* or combat squadrons and a support squadron which contained a combined 60mm and 81mm mortar section, a reconnaissance troop, and a tracking troop which was assisted by specially trained dogs.

The published advantages of the Grey's Scouts were primarily its rapidity of movement and shock effect. A mounted 8-man section could cover a frontage of approximately 550 metres.²³ Although the unit was widely known because of its unique fashion of movement, it was not a particularly effective combat vehicle. The horse provided the rider with height and visibility, but it also exposed him to enemy small arms fire. Although the Grey's suffered very few casualties throughout the war, it is possible that this was due more to the poor marksmanship of the insurgent than the effectiveness of the unit. The horse was certainly much more quiet than an armoured car, but it was also much more vulnerable to enemy destruction.²⁴

THE SELOUS SCOUTS

Every war produces its élite unit, and the Rhodesian War was no exception. The professional reputation of the Rhodesian Security Force was justified, but the skills of the Selous Scouts have become legendary. The founder and commander of the Scouts was a Rhodesian born officer, Lt.Col. Ronald Reid-Daly. He entered the Rhodesian Army in 1951 and served with the Rhodesian Squadron of the British Special Air Services (SAS) in operations against insurgents in Malaya in 1951. Rising to the rank of Sergeant Major in the Rhodesian Light Infantry, he was later commissioned and achieved the rank of Captain. He retired from the Army in 1973. In late 1973 he was persuaded to return to active duty in order to form the Selous Scouts.²⁵

The unit remained on active duty until Robert Mugabe was elected Prime Minister in 1980. One of his first acts was to order the immediate disbanding of the Scouts; Mugabe also threatened to bring its members to trial as war criminals. During the transition period under British protection, most of the unit's members left Zimbabwe. In 1981 *Newsweek* magazine reported that the Republic of South Africa incorporated the majority of the unit as a combat element into its Self Defence Force. Its former commanding officer is currently serving as a Major General in charge of the Defence Force of the Transkei, an independent black state within the border of the Republic of South Africa.

Prime Minister Mugabe's reaction to the Selous Scouts is of interest. Upon assuming office he made a concerted effort to ensure the dignity and structure of the minority European community. This was particularly evident in the Army. Mugabe realised that his link to a peaceful future for Zimbabwe lay in its armed forces. He was very cautious in handling this delicate issue, but with the single exception of the Selous Scouts.

The basis for the new government's mistrust of the unit was founded upon the efficiency of the organization. During the war the Scouts were credited with the deaths of 68% of the insurgents killed within the borders of Rhodesia.²⁶

The purpose of the unit was the clandestine elimination of the Nationalists without regard to international borders. The foundation of the unit's effectiveness was its members' ability to live off the land, combined with the tracking skills of the individual soldier. All members were volunteers and combat veterans. They were initiated into the Scouts via a very severe indoctrination programme which eliminated approximately 85% of the respondents. The training course was six weeks in length and incorporated an excess of physical and psychological stress. The unit was entirely integrated and all soldiers had to pass the same course of instruction in order to win access to the unit. The final test included a 90 mile forced march with a 70 pound pack. This may not seem excessive to American Marines, but the hike was divided into four "courses". At the completion of each course, the volunteer was given a difficult combat task to accomplish prior to continuing onto the next phase.

The emphasis throughout the entire training cycle was the development of "Bush and Tracking" techniques. The Scout had to become absolutely self-reliant. The unit incorporated the same tactics that the British had initiated in Malaya and Kenya. It was defined as a *Pseudo-Gang* concept. A team of 4-7 men was deployed into an operational area. All other friendly forces in that region were withdrawn. The team was dressed in insurgent uniforms, carried communist weapons, and gave the appearance of being a guerrilla force. The key was that they were better trained and more disciplined than the nationalists. Once they ascertained the presence of an insurgent force, they began to stalk them. They were proficient at remaining undetected throughout this phase. This gave them the advantage of initiating contact with the insurgents at their discretion.²⁷ The Selous Scouts achieved remarkable results by carrying the war directly to the guerrillas. Their success carries the key to an effective counterinsurgency campaign. They were simply much better at guerrilla warfare than their opponents.²⁸

SPECIAL AIR SERVICE (SAS)

The Rhodesian SAS was modelled directly after its British counterpart. Its mission was the most diverse of any branch of the Rhodesian Security Forces. Its primary task consisted of reconnaissance. The training for the SAS involved static line and free fall parachuting, light and heavy weapons training, demolitions, tracking, scuba, and in indigenous languages. A fully trained member of the SAS would require over three years of instruction.²⁹

The SAS remained an entirely European unit throughout the course of the war. From 1975-1977 the unit was utilised in accordance with doctrine. As the war intensified, its role became more clandestine. It mounted a number of pinpoint strikes at insurgent headquarters in Zambia and Mozambique, and conducted numerous combat patrols along the border with these two nations. The unit never consisted of more than several hundred men. It was a very professional and effective force, but limited because of its size.³⁰

THE BRITISH SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE (BSAP)

The BSAP was a supporting force with military training. This unit was neither British nor South African. The name originated during England's colonial era in southern Africa and was retained by the Rhodesian government upon its declaration of independence. The unit consisted of four elements. The regular police force could be equated to our state police in a mobilized status. It was augmented by a specialised regular force known as the Police Support Unit or *Blackboots*; and two reserve or volunteer elements: the Special Reserve and the Police Anti-Terrorist Units.

The Special Reserve was charged with the responsibility of maintaining law and order within their residential areas. They were an unpaid paramilitary organisation similar to an auxiliary police force found in American communities. It was nicknamed Dad's Army because the average age of volunteers ran between 55-65 years. The unit was integrated, but in a very limited sense. Because their ranks were drawn from residential neighbourhoods, these were always segregated. There was active participation from both the Asian and European communities, but the black community was a non-participant.

As terrorist attacks on the civilian population increased, the paramilitary Anti-Terrorist Units were formed. Their main function was to ensure the security of national key points such as power stations, waterworks, pumping stations and bulk food areas. This was later expanded to include shopping centres, major sporting events and other public gatherings.³¹

The primary counterinsurgency arm of the BSAP was the Police Support Unit. The unit was originally formed as an Askari Unit whose sole function was ceremonial guard duty. With the advent of civil disturbances and riots in the early 1960's, it was felt that there was a need for a force that could be used to support the police efforts in various districts. This was not intended to be a regular component of the police, but a temporary reserve during periods of unrest.³²

Each troop consisted of both black and white participants. The black troops served as permanent members of the unit while Europeans were either regular policemen, or servicemen who elected to fulfill their military obligation as a member of this organization. The training was thorough and

covered familiarisation with weapons and counterinsurgency tactics. A good deal of the basic recruit training occurred in the field in “Battle Camps”. This training included a tough period of physical indoctrination and an emphasis on bush warfare. The emphasis was on aggressive and offensive tactics.

The extensive use of native blacks in this unit had several advantages. These men came from a variety of tribal backgrounds and possessed a keener awareness of unusual behaviour pattern of local villagers than their European counterparts. In addition, they were general excellent natural trackers who were capable of following human trails for long periods. Once their training was completed the men joined a “troop”. This unit was comprised of 5-7 men who operated exclusively in a single area.³³

THE MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS (INTAF)

Although the IntAf was not considered an element of the Rhodesian Security Forces nor a supporting unit similar to the BSAP, it had a direct impact upon the course of the war.

The mission of the IntAf was the “programming and motivation of the tribal African towards active participation in the development of a new and better way of life which takes into account the socio-political and agro-economic potential of the community as a whole.”³⁴

The role of the IntAf was frequently misunderstood. They were not organized for participation in combat, but solely as an administrative auxillary. This was a government agency with a mission to provide advice and the necessary skills to assist tribal farmers to combat disease and increase their agricultural productivity. With the increase of insurgent activity, their mission was expanded to include that of an arbitrator between the tribal blacks and the security forces.

The methods of infiltration and extortion used by the guerrilla forces resulted in making the tribesman the man who was “caught in the middle”. On one side the insurgents demanded food, shelter, and money on threat of torture or death. On the other, the security forces prosecuted the tribespeople for providing aid and comfort to the enemy. This resulted in massive numbers of tribal blacks abandoning their homes and flooding the urban centres of Salisbury and Bulawayo.

The requirement to provide more protection for the tribesmen resulted in the establishment of a paramilitary wing of the IntAf in 1977. The formation of this military element, IntAf National Servicemen (IANS), was important primarily because of its mission. As the guerrillas increased their pressure on the minority government, they endeavoured to demonstrate to the non-aligned blacks the inability of the security forces to protect them. This resulted in an increase in the number of vicious and bloody atrocities. It also assisted the nationalists by flooding the capabilities of a strained government with a sizeable refugee problem. By 1979 both Salisbury and Bulawayo had developed serious social and health problems due to the influx of over 500,000 tribespeople attempting to find safety in the large cities.

In order to check the insurgents’ use of the indigenous population and counter the refugee flow from the bush to the cities, Rhodesia embarked upon its most controversial policy of the war, the

Protected Village concept. This policy was initiated and administered through the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and monitored/enforced by the IANS.

This idea was not an original strategy of the Rhodesian Government. It evolved as a result of Rhodesia's participation with Commonwealth Forces during the British crisis in Malaya. This concept served as the basis for the British pacification effort. The United States attempted to use a similar strategy in the Republic of Vietnam: the Strategic Hamlet, and the Portuguese had initiated a similar programme during its war with the Frelimo insurgents in Mozambique. With the exception of the British effort, the tactic has been a failure.

The Salisbury government attempted to reinforce British success by incorporating tribal heritage with the village concept. The Tribal Trustlands were divided into existing communities. The denominator consisted of a formula based upon arable land, traditional grazing areas and water supplies. On the strategic ground within this area the government established the village. The intent was to ensure that the tribesmen would be able to continue their normal pattern of existence.

The protected village was to place an additional strain on the guerrillas' supply source. Within the village the store merchant was required to restrict his sales only to registered villagers; and he could also sell only in designated quantities. Every person was checked upon entering or leaving the compound to ensure that excess food and equipment did not leave the village, and that unauthorized weapons were not introduced into the hamlet.

The physical structure consisted of a wall around the entire compound with a fortified "Keep" located at its most strategic point. There was a single entrance which was guarded "around the clock". The area was patrolled throughout the night, and a perimeter sweep was accomplished at dawn, prior to allowing the tribesmen to leave for the day.

In actuality, the protected villages were of limited value, and the government suffered a great deal of international criticism because of this effort. The tribesmen remained unenthusiastic participants. By the time the concept was introduced into an area, they had probably come to some type of arrangement with the local guerrilla cadre. They obviously resented the interruption of their lives and the loss of their individual freedom of movement.

Although the Rhodesian Security Forces and the Salisbury government made a sincere effort to create a bi-racial and professional armed force, they were hampered from the beginning. The intensity of the insurgent pressure and the refusal of any nation other than the Republic of South Africa to recognize their right to existence combined to create an atmosphere of intransigent resignation throughout the entire society. The decision to create an integrated security force with black officers was heralded as proof of Ian Smith's desire to create a co-equal bi-racial society. In actuality, the decision was reached only after the strength of the insurgent forces had increased to a point that the principally European-manned army was in danger of being overrun.

The Salisbury government never retreated from its desire to retain as much European domination of the country as was possible. Throughout the 1960's and early 1970's it refused to consider a negotiated settlement to its political status. The white minority could never have imagined the depth

and conviction of the blacks to have “their” nation returned to them. Even when Bishop Muzorewa assumed power in 1979 and the state of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia was formed, the white minority controlled the key element to power – the Security Forces. Any effort to reach a settlement within the government, or a racial compromise within the security forces only surfaced when the story of Rhodesia was in its final chapter. The blacks were aware of the inevitable outcome and were unwilling to accept anything other than “their” own nation – Zimbabwe.

[1](#) Lt.Col. Ron Reid-Daly, *Selous Scouts, Top Secret War* (Galago, RSA, 1982), pp. 261-262.

[2](#) John Keegan, *World Armies* (New York: Facts on File, 1979), pp. 587-593.

[3](#) Keegan, *World Armies*, p. 588.

[4](#) Keegan, *World Armies*, pp. 587-593.

[5](#) Keegan, *World Armies*, pp. 587-590.

[6](#) "Rhodesia", *Deadline Data on World Affairs*, 1 October, 1979, pp. 1-5.

[7](#) Captain James K. Bruton, Jr., USA, "Counterinsurgency in Rhodesia," *The Military Review*, Vol. LIX, March 1979, pp. 26-39.

[8](#) *Deadline Data*, pp. 1-5.

[9](#) Captain M.L.M. Blackman, *Fighting Forces of Rhodesia*, (Salisbury, CentAfrican Publications, 1978), pp. 4-11.

[10](#) *Deadline Data*, pp. 1-5.

[11](#) Blackman, *Fighting Forces*, pp. 4-11.

[12](#) Robin Moore, *Rhodesia*, (New York: Condor, 1977), pp. 155-161.

[13](#) Barry Cohen, "The War in Rhodesia: A Dissident's View," *African Affairs*, vol. 76, #305, October 1977, p. 493.

[14](#) Bruton, *Counterinsurgency*, p. 33.

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[19](#) Keegan, World Armies, p. 589

[20](#) Robert K. Brown, "The Black Devils", Soldier of Fortune, January 1979, pp. 38-43

[21](#) Bruton, Counterinsurgency, p. 33

[22](#) Moore, Rhodesia, p. 132-136

[23](#) Daly, Selous, p. 14

[24](#) Daly, Selous, p. 14

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[28](#) Bruton, Counterinsurgency, p. 33

[29](#) Moore, Rhodesia, pp. 148-151

[30](#) Blackman, Fighting Forces, pp. 19-29

[31](#) Bruton, Counterinsurgency, p. 33

[32](#) Blackman, Fighting Forces, pp. 19-29

[33](#) Blackman, Fighting Forces, p. 45

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WAR SINCE 1945 SEMINAR AND SYMPOSIUM

CHAPTER 4

THE CONFLICT

The Rhodesian War has been classified as an unconventional conflict. Our examination of the Rhodesian Security Forces demonstrated that the Army was structured in a conventional fashion, but task-organized to counter a guerrilla insurgency. The majority of combat occurred at a low level of intensity: small groups of Rhodesian soldiers making contact with the insurgents, a brief episode of combat and an extended period of tracking. Throughout the war there were very few large-scale battles at the level to which Americans became accustomed from 1965-1970 in the Republic of Vietnam.

In order to review this research in a fashion which is both interesting and instructive, we will present a synopsis of operational commitments of the Rhodesian Security Forces in a chronological order between 1975-1979. The operations we have chosen will provide a basis for a historical development of the conflict, and demonstrate the manner in which a small and well-organized force was able to adapt to the pressure of an increasingly powerful insurgent army.

JUNE 1975: OPERATION NEWTON

By 1975 the black nationalist cause had begun to draw increasing numbers of volunteers from the Tribal Trust Lands. These enlistees were sent to Mozambique for very rudimentary training and returned to Rhodesia as members of an insurgent unit. The majority of guerrillas were ill trained and without technical expertise. Those men who had demonstrated good potential and possessed some degree of education were sent to Tanzania from Mozambique for additional training. Consequently, in the initial stages of the war the most inept and poorly trained fighters constituted the majority of the Patriotic Front's combat force. The problem was compounded by the total lack of radio communication assets between guerrilla forces in Rhodesia and headquarter elements in Mozambique. In order to disseminate information and orders, the insurgents relied upon messengers and couriers. In 1975, Rhodesian Intelligence began to unravel the intricacies of the nationalists' system of communications. Each insurgent operational sector had a contactman who received information from the Military High Command in Mozambique. He was responsible for the dissemination of these directives on a monthly basis. As a result, the guerrillas became prisoners of their own system. If the regularity of the meetings were altered or the rendezvous points changed, the various insurgent units would lose contact, and have to return to Mozambique in order to re-establish a base connection.

In June, the Security Forces in the Northern HURRICANE Operational Area were prepared to exploit this weakness. The final element of information required was to determine the approximate date of the assembly of guerrilla forces. The Intelligence Branch had ascertained the identity of the contact man and his village CODE NAME-VIETNAM. The date was established by using a simple graph. The periods of guerrilla activity were plotted on a monthly basis over the span

of a year. Two points stood out. Each month had a seven day period in which insurgent activity diminished. then followed by a sharp increase. In addition, each period coincided with the full moon and first quarter of the lunar cycle. It was felt that the insurgents preferred to decrease their activity during this period because the Security Forces became more active in the conduct of night operations. This intelligence indicated that another major gathering of guerrilla forces in the HURRICANE Operational Area would occur between 18-25 June. Elements of the Selous Scouts established observation points throughout the area, and the SAS conducted reconnaissance patrols. Twelve infantry companies, two engineer squadrons, a mortar platoon, and sixteen helicopters were staged and prepared to strike.

On 24 June, intelligence and spot reports verified the presence of a large number of insurgents assembling in the area around VIETNAM. A cordon area was established consisting of approximately 40 square kilometers. Throughout the next 24 hours, as the cordon was tightened, 33 guerrillas were killed and 6 captured. The results were good, and the Rhodesian forces had learned a valuable lesson. The cordon area had been too large, and the majority of nationalists had escaped through gaps in the perimeter.¹

OPERATION LONG JOHN: JUNE 1976

The Rhodesian Security Forces had been conducting raids and operations into Mozambique since 1972, but as the war intensified these operations became almost routine. Although a state of war did not exist between Rhodesia and Mozambique, the latter was the firmest supporter of the ZANLA guerrilla faction. On 9 May 1976 the New York Times reported:

An estimated 1000 guerrillas are inside Rhodesia. Another 1400 are thought to be encamped across the border (in Mozambique) and anywhere from 5,000 to 10,000 more training in Mozambique and Tanzania.

As a result of the size of the nationalist element staging and training inside Mozambique, the Salisbury government authorized its forces to begin clandestine operations inside the border regions.

Operation LONG JOHN serves as an excellent example of the type of mission mounted against guerilla forces in Mozambique. This operation was an attack on a guerrilla transit camp at Mapai and staging post identified as Chicualacuala. The plan involved the first use of a tactic that would become known as the "Flying-Column Attack". The transit camp was located approximately 60 kilometers inside Mozambique. It was necessary to introduce a reconnaissance force into the area in order to determine the exact location and size of the camp. It was confirmed that approximately 90 ZANLA insurgents were staged at Chicualacuala, and a large ZANLA arsenal was located at Mapai. The confirmation of an arsenal" meant that the attacking force would come in contact with FRELIMO soldiers of Mozambique. The new government of Mozambique was willing to provide sanctuary for the Patriotic Front Insurgents, but they would not allow them to travel throughout the countryside in armed groups. Their weapons were maintained and guarded by FRELIMO soldiers, and issued immediately prior to their infiltration into Rhodesia.

The plan involved a mechanized assault across the border utilizing armored cars, trucks, and

several buses. The attack would bypass Chicualacuala, and strike directly at Mapai. The former would be eliminated on the return trip. On the morning of 25 June, the assault force crossed the border, and proceeded to the Chicualacuala railway staging area where it was observed by FRELIMO sentries. The column had the markings of ZANLA insurgents, and was not challenged. The force reached Jorge Do Limpopo by the evening of the 25th, and established a perimeter. At 0600, 26 June, the formation reached Mapai. A battle commenced in which several Rhodesians were killed, but a large quantity of arms were captured, to include a number of Soviet RPG-7 rockets.

On the return trip, the column attacked the staging camp, and killed or wounded 37 ZANLA Insurgents. This operation was an absolute success, and the “Flying Column” became the standard tactic for cross-border operations.²

This war reveals an impressive point concerning the limited size and nature of this conflict. The attacking force of Operation LONG JOHN consisted of 55 Rhodesian soldiers, and approximately 8 vehicles. The only air support provided for the attacking force was a helicopter medevac for the wounded at Mapai. The Rhodesians favored the use of its fixed wing assets on an “on-call-strip alert” basis. The close air support aircraft were only used in an emergency situation. Helicopter vertical assault tactics were very seldom used because the insurgents had a SAM capability, and the Rhodesians’ heliborne assets were virtually irreplaceable because of the international sanctions.

OPERATION ELAND: August 1976

Throughout the summer of 1976, Rhodesia became aware of a major ZANLA staging and training camp located in Mozambique and identified as the Nyadzonya Base. This camp appeared to be the main insurgent and logistics base for operations conducted in the THRASHER operational area. Both aerial reconnaissance and captured guerrillas had confirmed that the camp contained a large hospital, and approximately 5,000 ZANLA personnel.

This constituted the largest center of insurgent activity discovered to this point in the war. As a result, a combined force was organized to include members of the RLI, RAC, SAS, Selous Scouts, and members of selected Territorial Units. The success of the “Flying-Column Attack” during the Mapai raid served as the basis for the tactics devised for a strike against the ZANLA forces at Nyadzonya. Once again, air support would be provided for serious medevacs on the objectives, and close air support would be available in the event of a dire emergency. The planning included a table model of the camp and its surroundings. Captured insurgents provided information concerning the defenses, positions of the armories, hospital, living quarters, the daily routine, and a general outline of the escape drills of the ZANLA insurgents. The “Flying-Column” consisted of 14 vehicles and 85 men. The vehicles were of two types: 10 UNIMOGS and 4 FERRET Armored Cars. The transports were armed with a wide assortment of weapons: 20mm aircraft cannons, medium and light machine guns, and a captured Soviet 12.7 mm heavy machine gun. The men were dressed in captured Mozambique FRELIMO uniforms with their distinctive caps (the European members of the force wore black ski-masks). The vehicles were painted using the FRELIMO colors, and Rhodesian Intelligence had provided genuine FRELIMO registration numbers for the vehicle license plates.

The detailed planning depended upon achieving total surprise in conjunction with both FRELIMO and ZANLA demonstrated inability to mount a rapid response to a decisive strike. The route to the objective utilized a secondary road which SAS Reconnaissance Units had found to be guarded and patrolled only during the hours of daylight. Once the objective was reached, it would be necessary to destroy the Pungwe River Bridge in order to isolate the area, and allow the column to move north from the objective without fear of pursuit from a numerically superior force equipped with better mechanized assets.

The Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organization had established that an “all hands” formation took place each morning at 0800. This muster was attended by everyone with the exception of cooks, patients, and hospital staff. The assault force set 0810 as the time of attack. At 0005 on August 9, the Rhodesian Force crossed the Mozambique border. The FRELIMO guard detachment was absent as had been anticipated. At 0200, the convoy entered the town of Vila De Manica, and passed without incident while returning the salutes of several FRELIMO sentries. At 0330, the column established a bivouac several kilometers past the Pungwe Bridge. At 0700, the force moved toward Nyadzonya without incident. By 0825, the column reached the entrance to the camp. There were six ZANLA soldiers on duty. They should have been accompanied by two additional FRELIMO soldiers, but they were absent. The ZANLA were never allowed to forget that they were guests in Mozambique, and were reluctant to interfere with a FRELIMO convoy. The Rhodesian Force was allowed to enter the camp.³

Upon entry, the vehicles moved to pre-established positions surrounding the camp. As the lead vehicle moved forward-

the parade ground suddenly opened up in front of them, and there were few men in the column who did not gasp in amazement at the sight which greeted them... there could never have been enough rehearsals... never enough briefings and mental preparations to have readied them for the sight which met their eyes. A short distance away from them as their UNIMOGS formed into line just off the parade ground, was the largest single concentration of terrorists mustered which would ever be seen by any members of the Rhodesian Security Forces, throughout the entire war. (one soldier simply commented), I just hope we don't run out of ammunition.... (approximately 4000 insurgents) were milling around the parade ground in a state of flux.⁴

When all the vehicles were in place, a Rhodesian soldier announced over the vehicle loudspeaker in SHONA, the native language of the ZANLA, “Zimbabwe tatona”...we have taken Zimbabwe. The crowd immediately began cheering and singing, and ran toward the vehicle on the edge of the parade ground.

Soon 4000 yelling and singing terrorists were jam-packed around the vehicles and more were streaming in from all corners of the camp.”⁵

Then the Rhodesians began firing with their machine guns and rifles. An 81 mm mortar section dismounted, and fired into the crowd. The firing continued at a maximum sustained rate until all movement in the kill zone had ceased. There was some return fire, and five Rhodesian soldiers

received minor gunshot wounds. Two Ferret armored cars had been positioned to block the escape route. These vehicles killed an additional 150 ZANLA before the retreating crowd broke toward the river. In their attempt to cross the Pungwe tributary, another 200 insurgents were drowned. At this point, the Security Forces had been in the camp approximately 45 minutes. The task force had captured 14 prisoners, and a good deal of documentation. As the main force withdrew from the camp, the Pungwe Bridge was destroyed.

The Rhodesians turned north along their planned route of withdrawal. Along the road, the column entered a village with approximately 100 FRELIMO soldiers. As the convoy passed through the hamlet, the lead vehicle made a wrong turn, and the force drove onto a football field without another exit. A FRELIMO officer approached the lead vehicle and offered directions. As the column began to withdraw, two of the vehicles stalled. The FRELIMO officer became suspicious, and noticed several European soldiers. A brief firefight ensued, and the attacking force required the assistance of a section of Hawker Hunter jets in order to fight their way to the Rhodesian border.⁶

On 22 August, 1976, the New York Times reported the attack:

This was seen as the beginning of a campaign to strike out at the guerrillas before they entered Rhodesia in small units, spreading thin the limited reserves of the Rhodesian army. The international condemnation of that raid, and the private protests made by South Africa, which has feared the provoking of a wide-ranging racial war, prevented other strikes at encampments across the Mozambique border ...(in addition), South Africa withdrew 50 helicopter pilots who had been flying with the Rhodesian Air Force.⁷

Both the ZANLA and ZIPRA factions claimed that Nyadzonya had been a refugee camp. In May, 1976, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) had visited the camp, and verified its refugee status. After the attack, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, the High Commissioner of UNHCR, issued a statement in Geneva.

I have no doubt that a settlement of Zimbabwean refugees which has been receiving United Nations' assistance was attacked, and that hundreds of refugees were killed and wounded. To be a refugee is in itself, a tragedy. That such large groups of refugees should have been made victims of indiscriminate bloodshed makes this incident particularly shocking and abominable. It escapes my understanding as to what those responsible thought they were accomplishing through such an atrocity.⁸

This appears to be convincing evidence that the Rhodesian Forces had attacked a refugee center. It is balanced by three facts. The Salisbury government claimed throughout the war that the inspection of refugee camps by UN officials was never impromptu, and that prior to these tours the insurgents were removed, and their families with augmentation remained. In addition, it is interesting to note that upon Robert Mugabe's assumption of legitimate power in Zimbabwe, this incident was never mentioned, and there were no "war trials". The final fact remains the most conclusive. The official ZANLA Report, dated August 19, 1976, clearly indicates that Nyadzonya was an insurgent camp. It specifies that

on August 9 there were 5250 personnel in the camp, of which 604 were “povo” or refugees. The ZANLA Report gives the casualty figure as 1028 killed, 309 wounded, and approximately 1000 missing. The report is exceptionally candid. The paragraph entitled ATTITUDE OF COMRADES offers the final synopsis:

It should be mentioned once again that the comrades have only one desire, to go for training. This desire more than strengthened after the massacre on the 9th instant. The attitude of the comrades towards the revolution is now much deeper than before. They are highly committed to the cause of the liberation of ZIMBABWE more than they ever were. Keeping them in bases often referred to as “Refugee Camps” keeps robbing them of their morale and their desire to concentrate seriously on revolutionary matters.⁹

OPERATION AZTEC: MAY/JUNE 1977

This operation is examined because it illustrates the impact of the international community’s economic sanctions upon Salisbury’s ability to wage war, and the manner in which Rhodesia compensated for this liability. In addition, the commander of the principle combat element was Captain John Murphy, Rhodesian Army. Captain Murphy was an American citizen who had served as a 1st Lieutenant with the U.S. Marine Corps’ 1st Reconnaissance Battalion in the Republic of Vietnam in 1969.

He was released from active duty in 1971, and attended graduate school at the University of South Carolina. He was commissioned an officer in the Rhodesian Army in 1975, and served until 1979. He was commissioned in the South African Defense Force (SADF) in 1980, and died in a parachuting accident with the SADF in 1981.

In May of 1977, it became apparent that the Rhodesian Security Forces did not possess the depth required to stop or reduce the infiltration of insurgent forces from Mozambique into the southeastern REPULSE operational area. It was decided that a major attack against ZANLA guerrillas in Mozambique was required.¹⁰ Before the operation was completed in June of 1977, a total of 700 Rhodesian soldiers would have crossed the border, and participated in action against ZANLA insurgents and FRELIMO forces.

The operation commenced on the border at Gona-Re-Zhou. The 2nd Battalion, Rhodesia Regiment, pushed approximately 10 kilometers into Mozambique to strike at a ZANLA staging camp in order to create a diversion. At the same time, a commando company from the Rhodesian Light Infantry would conduct a heliborne assault on a ZANLA installation at Rio while a second commando would conduct an airborne assault on a ZANLA base camp at Madulo Pan. The commando companies would secure strong points at these locations. Once this was accomplished, a “Flying-Column”, under the operational control of Captain John MURPHY, would enter Mozambique and follow the rail line as far as Jorge Do Limpopo, destroying all ZANLA camps and installations along the route. Elements of the “Flying-Column” would also move west to Mapai to destroy ZANLA camps in the area. The Rhodesian Air Force would be used only in the event of an emergency. During Lt.Col. Daly’s brief to Captain Murphy, he stated:

I made it crystal clear he could likely be in for a stickier time than he had ever dreamed possible while serving with his old outfit...the very fine U.S. Marine Corps in Vietnam. There would be nothing to parallel the instant and massive air support he would have had there if he got into difficulties. He would be almost completely on his own...there would be the sparing support, on call only, of two old Hawker Hunter fighter bombers...but he would only be permitted them if his difficulties were in the extreme.¹¹

The principle reason for this reluctance to use air support, was not political. It was economic. Rhodesia lacked the foreign exchange required to buy ammunition and spare parts for the aircraft. They remained the government's most valuable asset, and would not be used until absolutely necessary.¹²

The "Flying-Column" for operation AZTEC consisted of 110 men, task organized into a combat element, supported by an organic 81mm mortar group/platoon. The unit was out-fitted in FRELIMO uniforms, and the trucks were painted in FRELIMO patterns. On May 28, the operation commenced. After heavy fighting, the commando units secured the strong points, and the column advanced to Jorge Do Limpopo. The town was rapidly overrun, and Murphy learned that the main ZANLA base had been moved to Mapai. The commando company at Madulo Pan was brought forward to secure Jorge Do Limpopo, and the column turned west to attack Mapai.

The assault element moved toward Mapai without incident until it reached the airfield on the "outskirts" of the city. A large force of FRELIMO and ZANLA units were well "dug in"; they were also equipped with 61mm mortars and several 14.5mm heavy machine guns. After several hours of intense combat, the ZANLA and FRELIMO forces were driven from the airfield, and a subsequent attack pushed them from the city.

On May 30, one of the unique elements of this war occurred. Until then, there had been several sharp engagements in which 32 guerrillas had been killed.¹³ This had been a good operation, but not necessarily remarkable. Upon entering Mapai, Captain Murphy had captured a vast quantity of ZANLA arms and ammunition, and his force had discovered a number of ZANLA vehicles. Captain Murphy requested and received Dakota aircraft at the Mapai air-field to return the arms and ammunition to Rhodesia. The aircraft also brought several teams of mechanics and drivers trained and equipped for the specific mission of repairing and returning the captured ZANLA/Soviet vehicles to Rhodesia.

At 2000, May 30, the last Dakota was leaving the Mapai air-field when it was struck with an RPG-7 rocket. The passengers and most of the crew survived the crash. At first light, on May 31, an air force salvage team flew to the airfield by helicopter, and retrieved every piece of serviceable equipment prior to the final destruction of the plane. The retrieval of this equipment was considered such a high priority that the entire combat operation halted until this mission had been completed.

On May 31, the column returned to Jorge Do Limpopo. At this point, Murphy was told to prepare for withdrawal because of the international pressure being placed on Rhodesia by the United States

and the Republic of South Africa. Although the military was told to anticipate this order, it had not yet been given, hence the column commander was ordered to move an additional 20 kilometers south of Jorge Do Limpopo and destroy as much of the railway as possible within the limitations of that distance.

Captain Murphy turned south, but disregarded the restrictions on his movement. He moved to Mabalane which was 200 kilometers from Jorge Do Limpopo. During his movement, he destroyed a number of railroad bridges and stations. Upon reaching Mabalane, he discovered the only railway steam crane in Mozambique. His unit destroyed it. It is interesting that this crane was replaced in a matter of months by the Republic of South Africa. The column turned north, and moved through light resistance toward the Rhodesian border. The operation ended on June 2, 1977.

The final evaluation of this operation was summarized by Lt.Col. Daly:

The total kills achieved on the (operation) was never accurately ascertained, but even the minimum figures were in excess of 60. The major achievements had not been kills... it had been the final elimination of the Mozambique railway in the Gaza Province along which the ZANLA terrorists, their equipment and stores had been moving to the Rhodesian border, the destruction or capture of a large number of military vehicles being used for the same purposes, and the capture of a vast quantity of terrorists' war material. [14](#)

OPERATION VODKA: DECEMBER 1978

1978 has been called the "Beginning of the End" for the white minority government of Rhodesia. By June, Military Intelligence and the Central Intelligence Organization had completed a study which documented that the kill ratio inside Rhodesia was significantly less than the level of infiltration. Rhodesia was being over-run by nationalist insurgents.[15](#) The Rhodesian Army had spread itself too thin and had become ineffective. As a result, several new policies were instituted. The country was reduced to vital areas. These areas included the most productive agricultural lands, the industrial centers, and the lines of communication with the Republic of South Africa. The remaining portion of the country would be ceded to the insurgents, and swept by the armed forces on occasion. This was a pragmatic decision, based upon the fact that the civil administration in the abandoned areas had already "broken down."

The territorial units and the Rhodesian African Rifles would be responsible for operations within these areas. The Rhodesian Light Infantry, SAS, and Selous Scouts would continue operations in the newly established "Insurgent Liberated Areas," and continue their raids into the Front-Line border states.[16](#)

Within the parameters of this new policy, Operation VODKA commenced. This attack was directed against Joshua Nkomo's ZIPRA forces in Zambia. Until this point, Nkomo's military objectives had remained obscure. It was felt that he was purposefully allowing Mugabe's forces to do the majority of fighting while holding his own in reserve and building his strength. When the ZANLA operations had sufficiently "worn down" the Rhodesian forces, and its own strength was

diminished, Nkomo would strike. He hoped to mount a conventional invasion of Rhodesia from Zambia with the assistance of Cuban troops and East German advisors.

As the focus of the war turned to Zambia, it became known that a ZIPRA camp had been established approximately 140 kilometers north of the traditional Rhodesian border at Mboroma, Zambia. This camp held a special interest because it was identified as a ZIPRA prison compound. Rhodesian Intelligence had confirmed that members of the Rhodesian Security Forces and ZIPRA dissidents were held in this area. The Rhodesians were anxious to free their countrymen and have the additional advantage of gaining a great deal of information from the liberated dissidents.

The Selous Scouts, whose strength now numbered approximately 1000 men, were assigned the responsibility for this raid. The attack would be synchronized with an air strike on the town of Mulungushi, and an SAS assault elsewhere in Zambia as a diversionary action. Throughout the early days of December, reconnaissance elements had confirmed 120 prisoners within a fenced camp, and approximately 50 ZIPRA guards. The insurgents were very conscious of air activity, and had fired upon several Zambian aircraft which had flown over the compound. The guerrillas were well “dug in,” and armed with several Soviet 14.5mm anti-aircraft guns.

On December 22, an air strike attacked the ZIPRA barracks and non-prisoner installations. Immediately following the air-strike, a company size element of Selous Scouts made an airborne assault on the camp. Upon consolidation, the Scouts seized the camp while killing 18 ZIPRA insurgents. During the initial sweep of the compound, only 32 prisoners were located. While these men were being processed, the search teams began to prepare to detonate several underground storage chambers. As they set their explosives, the recently liberated prisoners told them to stop.

When these chambers were examined, the Rhodesians found underground detention cells. As the soldiers assisted men from their cells, it was obvious that some of them had not seen sunlight in months. They were covered with their own faeces, suffered from rat and insect bites, and were malnourished to the point of starvation.

Many of these men had been members of the Rhodesian Army who had been kidnapped from their home villages while on leave. A number of the dissidents were young men who were offered educational scholarships for higher studies in Botswana. Once they entered Botswana, they were marched to Zambia and worked in the ZIPRA Publicity Department. At this point, they were evaluated. The zealots entered the ZIPRA forces while those who remained reluctant were sent to Mboroma for re-education.

While this operation served as an emotional victory over insurgent forces, it also marked the beginning of a concentrated effort of the Rhodesian forces against Nkomo's ZIPRA insurgents, and the involvement of Zambia in the final year of the war.¹⁷

OPERATION ASSASSINATION: APRIL 1979

As the pressure of the war continued to turn against Rhodesia, desperate plans were introduced. The country had held free elections, and Bishop Abel Muzorewa was elected Prime Minister of the

newly formed State of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. The international community refused to recognize its legitimacy because neither Robert Mugabe nor Joshua Nkomo were participants in the elections. Bishop Muzorewa immediately declared an amnesty for all insurgents who surrendered to the government forces. His offer failed. As the new government began to form a policy for the continuation of the war, two dramatic incidents occurred which served as the final catalyst for the initiation of assassination orders. On February 9, a commercial Air Rhodesia Viscount was climbing to altitude after taking off from the resort town of Kariba in northern Rhodesia. It was struck by a Soviet SAM-7 missile. The civilian aircraft was carrying 54 passengers. The plane crashed with 18 survivors. The ZIPRA insurgents who had fired the missile proceeded to kill 10 of the 18 surviving passengers.¹⁸ Within a short span of time, ZIPRA guerrillas downed a second Viscount. Joshua Nkomo claimed responsibility during a radio broadcast “and horrified white Rhodesians heard him chuckle over the slaughter.”¹⁹

The mission for the assassination of Nkomo was given to the SAS. A force of 25 men began preparations in early April on an isolated peninsula on Lake Kariba. The raid was to be conducted with the use of 7 Land Rovers painted in a Zambian camouflage pattern, and manned by the raid element dressed in Zambian Army uniforms.

On April 14, a radio message from the capital of Zambia, Lusaka, confirmed that Nkomo had returned to his residence. The operation commenced, the convoy was ferried across Lake Kariba, and landed on a remote beach in Zambia. Reconnaissance flights had photographed a road through the “bush” which would bypass most of the Zambian Army check points along the main highway leading to Lusaka from the Rhodesian border. The road was almost impassable, and one of the vehicles had to be abandoned. When the column reached the main highway, it was approximately two hours behind schedule. The principle concern throughout the entire operation was the crossing of the bridge which traversed the Kafue River along the Lusaka road. The bridge was reported to be protected by two Zambian Army units stationed on either side. They were well equipped, and possessed Soviet anti-aircraft guns. As the Rhodesian force approached the bridge, they found it was manned by a lone sentry who waved them through his check point without incident.

At 0240, the column entered Lusaka and moved through the capital to Nkomo’s home, the Zimbabwe House. This residence had been the former Zambian Prime Minister’s home. It was located across the street from the residence of the British High Commission, and within several hundred meters of the State House, the home of President Kenneth Kaunda. The lead vehicle crashed through the iron gate of the fence surrounding Nkomo’s home. An intense fire fight began, and the insurgents proved to be well trained and disciplined fighters. The SAS was armed with a number of Soviet RPG rockets, and this weapon served as the decisive factor. The insurgents withdrew. As the SAS began to search the wreckage, they realized that Nkomo was not amongst the dead or wounded.

The Nkomo strike force withdrew, and moved to the Liberty House, which was the ZIPRA headquarters building in Zambia. Upon entering Lusaka, a team had struck the ZIPRA Headquarters as a secondary mission. The entire column consolidated at this point.

After the destruction of the building, at approximately 0500 the force withdrew from Lusaka with

only three casualties. The convoy crossed the Kafue Bridge, and moved to a rendezvous point on Lake Kariba while avoiding Zambian spotter planes. Fortunately, the Zambian government believed that the raid force had been parachuted into the country near Lusaka and obtained the vehicles on the ground. The Zambian Army concentrated its efforts in the capital by establishing road blocks and questioning the European population.

Joshua Nkomo claimed to be present in his residence when the attack commenced, and escaped via a window in the rear of his home. The raiding party disputed his claim by asserting “that no one left the building alive after the attack had begun.”²⁰

OPERATION DICE: (NKOMO’S PLAN FOR A CONVENTIONAL INVASION OF RHODESIA): 1979-1980

Throughout the Rhodesian War, Nkomo had received considerable aid from the Soviet Union and East Germany. This assistance included a number of advisors to his War Council which was located at his Military Headquarters, the Liberty House, in Lusaka. These advisors were primarily Cuban and Soviet military officers who were attached to their respective embassies.

During the early months of 1979, the insurgents were convinced that they would emerge as the victors in their war against Muzorewa’s coalition government. The tenuous bonds of the Patriotic Front began to dissolve as Nkomo and Mugabe focused their plans upon their attempts to consolidate their own power within Rhodesia in order to seize control of the government once an insurgent victory was achieved.

The Soviet Union began to increase its assistance to Nkomo in order to ensure his control of Zimbabwe, and to enhance their sphere of influence with southern Africa. Nkomo and his Soviet sponsors became concerned over their lack of influence throughout the black population of Rhodesia in contrast to Mugabe’s ever increasing popularity, and his recognition as Muzorewa’s most probable successor. In order to counter ZANLA’s influence, the Soviet and Cuban advisors to the War Council provided a complete revision to the ZIPRA Order of Battle within Rhodesia, and its long term military objectives. This revision outlined the necessity of developing a conventional ZIPRA Army while using its guerrilla forces to open the way for a full scale invasion of Rhodesia.

The plan was based upon the training and equipping of at least five battalions of ZIPRA soldiers which were task-organized following the model of Soviet Motorized Infantry Battalions. It was estimated that this would be the minimum force required to defeat both the Rhodesian Security Forces and Mugabe’s ZANLA insurgents. The scheme of maneuver involved an assault along two axis of advance across the Zambezi River. The first was along the northeast border to seize the airfield at Kariba while the second would occur at Victoria Falls in order to capture the airfield at Wankie. Once this had been achieved Libyan transport aircraft would airlift those remaining ZIPRA forces in Angola and Zambia into Rhodesia. MIG 17, 19, and 21’s would be provided for air-support, and manned by ZIPRA pilots. It was assumed that additional aircraft would be manned by Cuban and Libyan volunteers if they were required. The capital city of Salisbury remained the principle objective. Once the bridgehead was established at Wankie and Kariba, three armored columns would speed toward the capital. The first would move directly from Kariba. The second

would attack from Wankie via the city of Que Oue. The third element would move from Wankie to Kariba in order to consolidate the northern frontier, and then advance toward Salisbury. The second largest city in Rhodesia, Bulawayo, was by-passed because it was in Matabeleland, which was Nkomo's homeland and base of power.

In order to achieve these ambitious objectives, the Soviets took charge of training the ZIPRA conventional forces. Two training areas were established. The first was at the former Zambian Army Barracks at Mulungushi, and the second at the Boma camp in Luso, Angola. As the emphasis of the war became focused upon Nkomo's conventional forces, his ZIPRA insurgents in Rhodesia were confronted by two serious problems which manifested themselves into a single element - ZANLA. The ZIPRA guerrillas in southern Matabeleland were confronted by ZANLA soldiers who were pushing as far into Rhodesia as possible in order to consolidate ZANU power.

Nkomo's unconventional forces were required to wage war on a dual front against the Rhodesian Security Forces, and the encroaching elements of the ZANLA insurgents. To add to this dilemma, both of these components were much better equipped than the ZIPRA guerrilla.

Nkomo had made the decision to use the majority of his Soviet supplies to equip his conventional force. As a result, the ZIPRA insurgents began to express their resentment against their role as an ill-equipped force facing the enemy while their conventional counterparts enjoyed the security of Zambia. The result was large scale desertions as the disenchanted Matabele tribesmen returned to their villages.

Once Nkomo realized the seriousness of the situation, he began to commit his conventional force. This should have made a dramatic impact, but it did not. Nkomo had made the decision to allow his principle guerrilla commanders in the various insurgent regions to exercise operational control over the regular forces. This was a serious mistake. These leaders demonstrated their resentment of the newly arrived forces by splitting their unit integrity and using them as replacements to existing guerrilla elements. Into the midst of this situation moved the Rhodesian Security Forces, intent upon using every ZIPRA problem to their advantage.

ZIPRA was being trained by the Soviets on their usual rigid pattern and probably, to them anyway, any area of African bush seemed to a degree mysterious and easy to move through without detection... even though this view certainly wasn't held either by the ZIPRA personnel or by the Rhodesians. The consequences were that ZIPRA regulars, on Soviet orders, infiltrated at set crossing points, and the culling of their numbers by the Security Forces became a daily almost boring routine. Generally, because of their lack of subtlety and, provided one is willing to accept the evidence of one's eyes at face value, there is nothing particularly mysterious about Soviet tactics which are rigidly bolted to their strategies...both are one and the same, in fact, as they try to control tactics from the top, giving the man in the field little flexibility.²¹

In addition to his ZIPRA regular forces, Nkomo had approximately 300 South African - African National Congress Insurgents. They had trained and lived with the ZIPRA guerrillas since the early 1970's in preparation for carrying the war of liberation to the Republic of South Africa.

During this period, they had entered Rhodesia and were committed to the ZIPRA operational area surrounding the city of Gwanda. Their primary mission was to assist Nkomo's forces in halting the ZANLA advance into Matabeleland. At the end of the Rhodesian War, these forces were reconstituted, and were preparing to continue their mission in the Republic of South Africa. At this point, the British peace-keeping force that had been introduced into Zimbabwe to oversee the general elections, intervened and caused the return of this element via RAF transport aircraft to Zambia. To the British government's credit, it did not allow an insurgent base to develop in Zimbabwe under its protection.

By the summer of 1979, Nkomo's conventional forces began to mass at a complex identified as CGT-2 Camp. Rhodesian intelligence estimated that approximately 20,000 men were being assembled. It was confirmed that MIG fighters had arrived in Zambia, and the armored vehicles which were to be supplied to ZIPRA forces via the Zambian Army began to appear. Joshua Nkomo received an additional impetus from the Lancaster House Peace Talks. If these talks produced a settlement, he would need as many of his forces in Zimbabwe as possible in order to achieve majority status in Nkomo's traditional tribal area.

The Rhodesian Security Forces were being assaulted from all sides. The elected officials under Muzorewa's government were beginning to prepare for the insurgent assumption of power. No one wanted to be associated with the element of the white minority government which had caused the guerrillas so much pain throughout their struggle. Yet the military remained the single cohesive element of power within this fragile nation. Although the government was headed by a black Prime Minister, the Rhodesian Security Force remained an instrument of the white minority. It realized that it was incapable of halting a full scale invasion of its country by ZIPRA forces, but it could delay such an advance long enough to persuade Nkomo to accept the conditions of the Lancaster House Settlement in lieu of an invasion; if this occurred a peaceful transition of power under British supervision would result.

The Security Force developed a strategy which would delay ZIPRA's use of its mechanized assets as the basis for its invasion. The SAS, Selous Scouts, and the Rhodesian Light Infantry were tasked with the destruction of the major bridges along the main Zambian lines of communication leading to the Rhodesian border. This was accomplished with surgical precision under the guidance of the SAS. They had already destroyed the road and rail bridges along the major thoroughfare which linked Zambia to Tanzania. This had a major impact upon the Zambian economy because this route served as the primary means of import/export exchange with the international community. In a period of approximately three weeks, the SAS directed the destruction of 8 additional road and railway bridges in Zambia. This action crippled Nkomo's forces, while virtually halting all Zambian trade in the international market.²²

The SAS is credited with accomplishing Rhodesia's final military objective. Nkomo was forced to reconsider his participation in the Lancaster Settlement; thus an "all party" agreement was signed on December 17, 1979. On December 12, Lord Christopher Soames entered Salisbury as the British Governor and officially returned the country to a colonial status. Great Britain's dominion ensured the peaceful transition of power through free elections held between February 14-18, 1980. As a result of this vote, Robert Mugabe was elected Prime Minister, and the nation state of Zimbabwe

was born. Further details are described in Chapter II.

SUMMARY

COMPARISON WITH BRITISH ACTIONS IN MALAYA (1947-1962)

Throughout the research for this project, we found that many of the Rhodesian sources made analogous comparisons between their struggle with the Patriotic Front and Britain's problems in Malaya from 1947-1962. The foundation of these comparisons were based upon two facts. The first, that Britain had developed an effective counterinsurgency program in Malaya and the successful elements of this concept could be used in Rhodesia. The second, that members of the Rhodesian security forces had fought in Malaya and were experienced in this type of warfare. We will examine these hypotheses.

In the early 1950's, the campaign in Malaya was going badly for the commonwealth forces. The British were fighting in a conventional fashion with modifications for jungle warfare. Their primary tactic appeared to be centered upon patrolling from one rubber plantation to another along the fringe of the jungle. There were very few contacts with the insurgents. The local police and government officials remained the guerrillas' prime targets, and they suffered heavy casualties. The insurgents appeared to move throughout the country at random without concern for the British presence. As a result, the British crown commissioned a recently retired General, Sir Henry Briggs to serve as Director of Operations in Malaya.

The fifty-five-year old Briggs introduced a new operational concept. The Briggs' Plan...recognized that the key to the situation lay in winning support of the civil population or at least depriving guerrillas of that support. So long as guerrillas controlled large segments of the Chinese "squatter" population, police and troops would be deprived of intelligence concerning Communist village infrastructure and guerrilla movements; conversely, guerrillas would continue to receive intelligence regarding police and military movements. How to prevent this? Briggs answered this question with an imaginative resettlement plan that called for rounding up and moving almost 500,000 people into 400 newly constructed villages. Like earlier segregation schemes that concentrated people in camps such as those the British introduced in the Boer War, the Briggs' Plan aimed at collapsing the insurgency by depriving guerrillas of civil support.²³

General Briggs also realized the need for a unified headquarters. He introduced a War Council of civil, police, and military representatives. It was not a command element. It was a Joint planning and coordinating committee which was responsible to the unified commander.²⁴ As these programs were being instituted, the British activated the Special Air Service Regiment which consisted of three squadrons. Two were formed in England, with one consisting of Rhodesian volunteers.²⁵ The unit was to be used in the third phase of the Briggs Plan: the ability to carry the war to the insurgents in his jungle strong points.

In a further attempt to stabilize the Malayan situation, the British government created a new post of

Supreme Commander. They selected General Gerald Templar for this position, and provided him with extraordinary powers.

Templar, who had quickly realized the war could not be won by military means alone, drew the civil administration into the planning phases, ensuring finally that the political, military, and civil administrations dovetailed neatly into his place for them in the common strategy to defeat the enemy.²⁶

The Rhodesians attempted to adapt these policies to their own insurgency, but without a great deal of success. The concept of the Protected Village worked in Malaya, but was a dismal failure in Rhodesia. The reason remains that Malaya was unique while the failure of this policy in the Boer and Vietnam Wars should serve as the standard. Although, when instituted in South Africa, the policy was a moderate strategic success, it so thoroughly antagonized the indigenous population that Britain eventually lost control of the colony, and it is still remembered in the Republic of South Africa with a great deal of negative emotion. The key difference between the use of this concept in Malaya versus Rhodesia, Vietnam, and South Africa is found within the classification of indigenous population. The British had attempted to introduce a new political arrangement on the Malayan Peninsula known as the Union of Malaya. This was an effort to provide a balanced system of political power between the minority Chinese and Indian ethnic groups against the majority Malay population. It failed because of the well entrenched Malayan bureaucracy.²⁷

The insurgent war in Malaya was waged by the Chinese minority. When the protected villages were established, the majority of people who were moved belonged to the Chinese minority. The Malays were relatively untouched by the resettlement, and were quite pleased to have the Chinese put to the inconvenience. In Rhodesia, this concept was introduced into an environment in which the indigenous population consisted of two major tribes. Although their tribal differences were pronounced, their racial commonalities served as the focal point for their opposition to the program. The majority of the population in Rhodesia resisted the concept.

The Rhodesians had a great deal of difficulty in instituting the concept of a Supreme Commander. Because of the unusual degree of influence that the BSAP exercised, it was reluctant to relinquish any of its power or authority to the Security Force. A compromise plan was established in the form of the Joint Operation Center. It was an unsatisfactory system. It was war by consensus. Each nomination for a Supreme commander would fail due to inter-service and inter-agency rivalry.

So the arguments about the Supreme system... continued as the war escalated. The nominations for the position were always there... and always in triplicate. The Police and Army... considered... an Air Force Supremo as untenable, the Police considered the appointment of an Army Supremo as unthinkable, while the Army and the Air Force jointly considered the appointment of a Police Supremo as unspeakable...the government, outwardly stern and confident, vacillated and fidgetted nervously beneath the comforting cover of a blanket of censorship. In the case of the appointment of a Supremo it would have become a tacit admission that the terrorist insurgency... had actually blossomed into a full scale war... It also crossed their

minds, so it was said, that if they built up the authority of the Security Forces so there was a commander perched on the top of one great pyramid... they might, if they continued to approach the war in their current fashion, find themselves removed from office...in a military coup d'etat.²⁸

It was not until 24 March, 1977 that the Rhodesian government appointed General Peter Walls, Rhodesian Army, to the post of Supreme Commander, Rhodesian Security Forces.

EFFECTIVE UTILIZATION OF THE PRINCIPLES OF COUNTER INSURGENCY WARFARE

In January 1983, Lieutenant Colonel P.A.C. HOWGILL, Royal Marine Commandos, provided the Command and Staff College with nine principles which should be adhered to while conducting a counterinsurgency campaign. Although the text of his class was directed toward the British involvement in Northern Ireland, the principles have a universal adaptability. These principles will be discussed in relation to their use during the Rhodesian War.

1.REQUIREMENT FOR GOOD INTELLIGENCE: The Rhodesians generally received high marks in this area. Their collection agencies were divided into three groups - The Central Intelligence Organization, Military Intelligence, and the Special Branch of the BSAP. Although some rivalry existed, the Security Force received timely and good intelligence. The majority of their collection means involved prisoner interrogation, aerial photography, and ground reconnaissance missions. Once the Supreme Commander established unity of command with the Headquarters for Combined Operations, the dissemination of this material became much more efficient.

2.CO-LOCATION OF MILITARY AND POLICE HEADQUARTERS, AND AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY: The Rhodesian government had recognized the necessity of this from the early days of the war. When they implemented the concept, they failed to include its most important ingredient. The necessity to ensure unity of command. As has been discussed, this was not accomplished until 1977.

3. THE USE OF MINIMUM FORCE TO ACCOMPLISH THE MISSION: This was the Rhodesians' finest trait. They had the ability to gather the facts, plan a mission, organize a task force, and strike. Much of this was driven by the nature of the war and their lack of sophisticated equipment. Yet they had developed a unique capacity to examine a situation, and tailor a force to counter or eliminate its threat.

4.ADEQUATE MOBILE RESERVES: They utilized the American doctrine of a helicopter-borne reserve element (SPARROW HAWK) which was developed in the Republic of Vietnam. Due to their inability to obtain parts and equipment, this reserve was used in a sparing fashion. Their assault elements developed the mentality that the reserve would only be committed as an absolute last resort.

5.ADEQUATE TRAINING: The Rhodesian soldier was a much more well trained fighter than his European counterpart. He was driven by the knowledge that the enemy was "on his door step."

Consequently, he was a much more willing participant in the training. On an average, the minimum instruction he received was 16 weeks. After being posted to an operational unit, the entire unit would “stand down” for periods of retraining. Because the European population carried the major share of the fighting, the system of national reserve training ensured that the soldier stayed proficient in his skills.

6.GOOD COMMUNICATIONS: Although the Security Forces never enjoyed the advantage of satellite communications, they developed an effective system of tactical and strategic communications utilizing British, American, South African, and Israeli equipment.

7.PUBLIC RELATIONS: Rhodesia was an international outlaw. It was a nation attempting to justify a system which had been by-passed by the 20th century. The advantage of modern communications brought this war to the forefront of international attention. When the British crushed the Malayan Insurgency, it was during a period when the world still accepted the vestiges of imperial dominion. Rhodesia attempted to prolong this status in an era and a geographic location dominated by the people who had shouldered the burden of colonialism for centuries. They made a good attempt to justify their existence, but it was doomed from the beginning.

8.ESTABLISHED TACTICAL AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY: The Security Forces recognized the necessity of this principle, but they were unable to utilize it because of their lack of strength. As the insurgents increased in numbers, the Rhodesians were forced to accept a defensive posture. They exercised the ability to strike at the enemy in force, but they were unable to control the terrain.

9.CONTINUITY: Because of the size of the Security Force, continuity was a major advantage. The members were familiar with one another, and able to communicate in a very efficient fashion. The National Reserve System also helped to ensure the continuity of the force.

Although the Rhodesian government and its Security Force were basically successful in their adherence to these principles, they were simply unable to resist the flow of the 20th century.

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