

**Newsfronts
Special**

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HAIL ZI

*A Nation Is Born . . . will
it grow in peace and
prosperity or die in
bitterness and bloodshed?*

jean claude francolon/gamma

Birth Of A Nation



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BABWE!

Within a few days the new government of Zimbabwe will be announced and the curtain will finally come down on one of the most defiant acts in modern political history. This is Rhodesia in its final days

by GRAHAM BOYNTON



ROBERT MUGABE is holding court in Salisbury's Monamatapa Hotel. Journalists from the four corners of the globe are crammed into the hotel's small conference room; film and TV cameramen drape cables all over the place while their lights blaze down on the principal characters; reporters bent double over their notebooks, scratching furiously; motor-driven cameras wheeze away while their operators recline in the safety of the second row, making sure they don't cop a stray bullet when the assassins start shooting the place up.

This Press conference was called — amid typical confusion — at the last minute after scribbled announcements had been placed in hotel foyers only half an hour before the event. That the room is jam-packed with correspondents is testimony to Mugabe's towering significance in this election.

Nobody is searched when they enter the room, a strange omission at a time when the whole country seems to be balanced precariously between peace and wholesale anarchy.

White special branch policemen drift in and out, trained eyes sweeping the gathering, looking for a face or a sign; the remote-control photographers in the second row are more sceptical and reckon if anyone's going to do it this is the time and place.

EVERY hack in the room is straining forward to catch Mugabe's words, tumbled out at a leisurely ramble one would expect to hear in the British Houses of Parliament and not in a passionate African election campaign.

He sails through the standard daily newspaper questions with well-oiled charm — the

possibility of an alliance with Nkomo, Lord Soames' continued threats to ban ZANU(P) candidates, and daily allegations of ceasefire breaches.

He is a polished and articulate speaker whose confidence is often taken for conceit and arrogance, particularly by hostile Whites. But whatever else he may be, Mugabe is a charismatic leader, a performer at ease in the public eye.

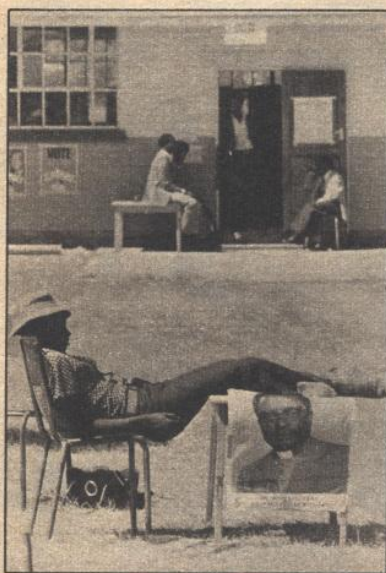
But at this Press conference Mugabe the cool media favourite, gives way to Mugabe the ruthless disposer of political enemies. For a few brief minutes the politician's mask falls and the cold-hearted idealist is on view to the world. The man the Whites most fear.

IT takes a nervous stuttering dissident, one of the 64 released from Mozambique



jean-claude francolon/gamma

Patriotic Front supporters give vent to their feelings. But what will happen if their man doesn't win?



maggie steber/sipa press

Sleeping on the job... one of Bishop Muzorewa's campaigners uses his candidate's poster as a handy foot rest. Will the Bishop's opponents wipe their feet all over him?



Voting takes place under

prisons by Mugabe in accordance with the Lancaster House agreement, to throw the PF leader. The man steps forward uncertainly, names Mwera Ncube, Clever Chiremba and two others, then asks politely if the honourable comrade would tell him where they are.

"I would like you to tell us, so their mothers and fathers can understand how these honourable comrades fell. If they fell under the bullet of the enemy or if they fell under our own security forces."

Mugabe's reply is hesitant: "You have asked about four people. I don't know them personally. If they were on a mission when the ceasefire was announced . . . they might either have rehabilitated and come back, or they've remained in the refugee camps in Mozambique."

The dissident is clearly not satisfied with this reply but by now the Party heavies at the

back of the room are bellowing at him to shut up. Mugabe blusters on: "You said you sent this Clever Chiremba to us? Are you saying you gave him into our custody?"

NOW the trembling man lets go and his words cut the heavy air like a knife: "You see, Comrade, I know he was beaten to death in Mapayi . . ." The heavies at the back shout him down, orchestrate a general commotion and allow Mugabe's aides to redirect the line of questioning.

But the dissident won't be cowed. For some reason he moves towards the back of the room, right on to enemy ground, and tells Mugabe he wants the world and the nation to know the answers to these questions. Mugabe's tone is flat but he's delivering a fire-and-brimstone tirade that would send shockwaves through the leafy suburbs of

Salisbury.

"I know who you are. You are a dangerous dissident," he thunders. "You are dangerous because you attempted to commit an act of revolt, participating in this act, kidnapping some of our officials. There were ambushes laid upon the lives of Comrade Tongogara and Comrade Nhonga; although they failed, there were four or five attempts.

"We had to act in those circumstances. You were dangerous, you were planning a coup."

This has fired up the heavies and they're threatening the little man, suggesting he come outside with them. Then Mugabe delivers the final judgment, to the accompanying laughter of his audience.

"You are a dangerous dissident — and we shall treat you as such. If you have repented then come to the ZANU office, if you haven't



maggie stieber / zipa press



jean-claude francolon / gamma

Joshua Nkomo at a pre-election rally. Many Whites feel he would be the lesser of two Patriotic Front evils.



michael hubert

Robert Mugabe . . . the man the Whites fear most.

then you remain just that."

THE reason I recount that exchange in such detail is that it was one of the few honest moments in the confused and chaotic six-week run-in to the elections. For the rest it was high-powered politicking, posturing, evasiveness and conciliatory gestures; but for those few moments the world Press had a brief preview of what life might be like under the rule of Robert Mugabe.

Which isn't to pass any kind of judgment, merely to point out that the politics of Africa are often brutal and harsh, that *coups* and political assassinations are endemic, and that iron-fisted dictatorships are quite often the necessary evil required to hold everything on course.

By the time you read this the die will be cast although the results won't have been announced. And if the British are to be

believed, the "infallible" secret ballot elections will have decided who is to control Africa's newest independent state.

Whether the British fully realised what they would have to contend with is currently a point of acrimonious debate. They have doggedly led the country into what amounts to a shotgun election with a degree of ruthless commitment. After all other methods of persuasion had failed this was the last chance.

AND so, after a decade and a half in the political wilderness, Rhodesia as it is or Zimbabwe as it will be within weeks, is thrust back on to the international stage with the velocity of an RPG rocket. A stroke of a pen at Lancaster House and suddenly everyone can start doing business above the counter again.

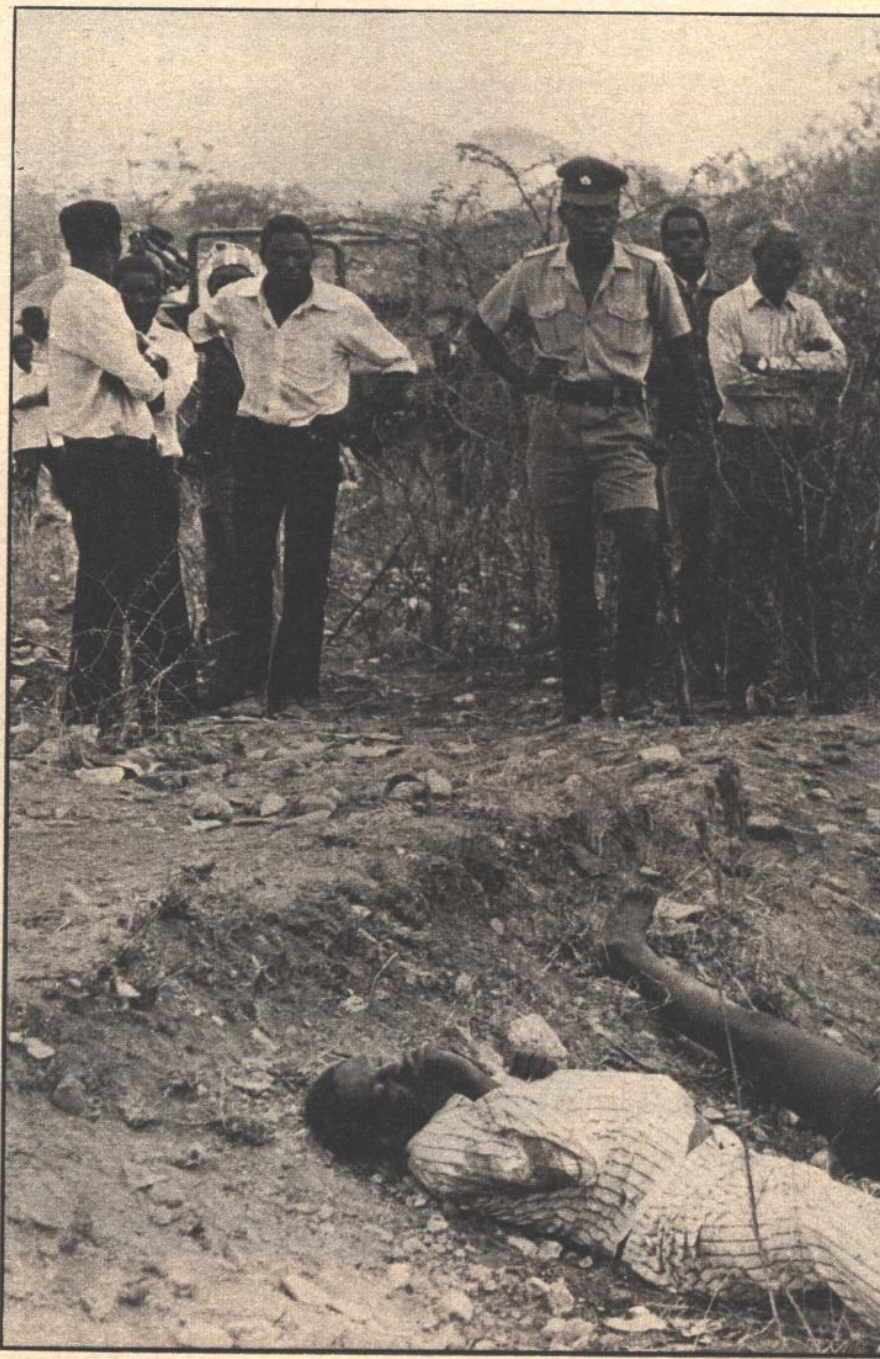
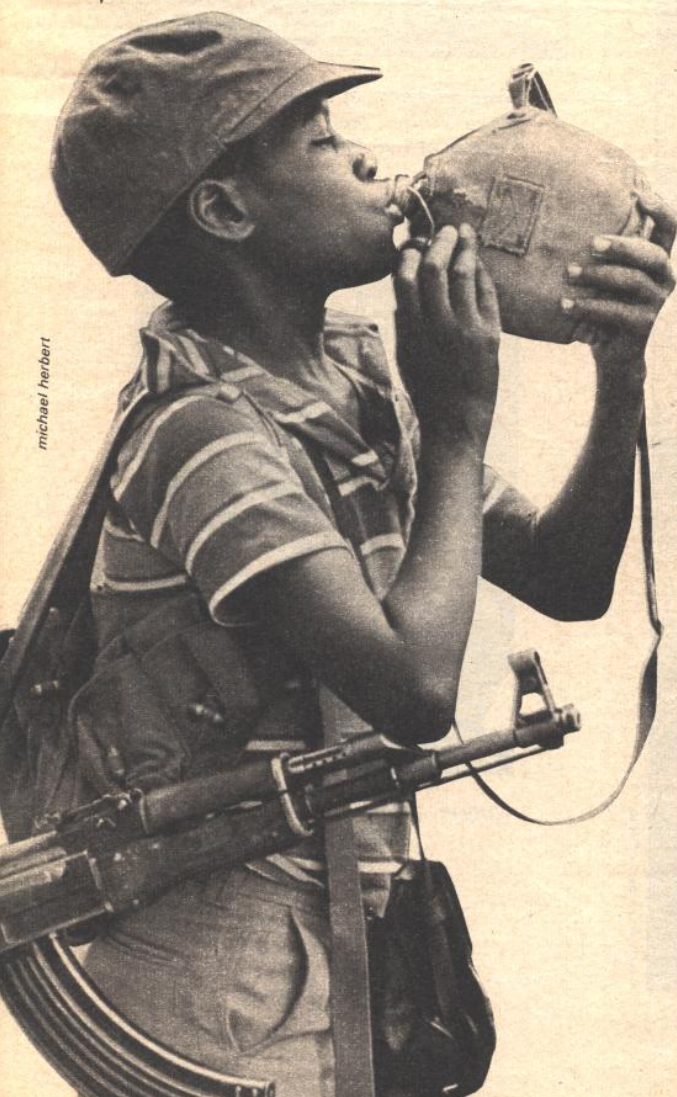
The fast operators didn't even wait for the official word on sanctions, they were in Salisbury before the ink had dried on the

London agreement. By the time canvassing was in full swing there wasn't a hotel room to be had in Salisbury, and even the sanguine second city, Bulawayo, reported a visitor boom of pre-UDI proportions.

Election traffic (Commonwealth observer monitoring forces, United Nations observer members of the Election Commission, journalists, photographers, thrill-seeking voyeurs) takes up much of the available space but there's still a fair sprinkling of businessmen from every major Western country you care to think of.

Salisbury hotel foyers are like UN field days: Japanese burrowing through piles of souvenirs and taking photographs of each other; Germans standing stiffly to one side, making sure their immaculate suits aren't soiled in the continuing rush; and British, all sunburnt noses and thinking how good it is to be back in one of the *real*

Babe in arms . . . many of the terrorists at the ceasefire assembly points are little more than children. This teenager claimed to have been in several firefights, but many observers fear there are large bands of guerrillas hiding out in the bush until the outcome of the election is known.



colonies.

DISTINGUISHED journalist Jan Morris once described Rhodesia as "a rich, provincial society with an endearingly nostalgic air, as though life is being played onstage in a Noel Coward comedy."

Even today, during one of the most momentous periods in the country's history, there remains a graceful air of colonial languor about the place.

Bougainvilleas in full bloom lend a little dash to the uniform layout and meticulous cleanliness of Salisbury's city centre. On the wide, scrubbed streets you see Black and White mingle as if there had never been such a thing as a race war exploding around them; all manner of recent model cars pass by in defiance of the sanctions that would, in Harold Wilson's words, bring Rhodesia to its knees within a week; and everybody and

everything moves at a leisurely pace under the dry, burning sun, as befits colonial society in repose.

It's only when you take a closer look that you realise this is not an ordinary society. You begin to notice more and more amputees in the streets and you see that the pavements have been modified with ramps to help users of wheelchairs.

Then in the mid-day traffic, a massive troop carrier thunders past the shoppers, guns bristling from its flanks, its innards packed with Black soldiers grinning aimlessly. You see a nine year old standing outside the elegant Meikles Hotel, clinging to an Uzi sub-machine-gun — she's waiting for her father, but it's still a chilling sight.

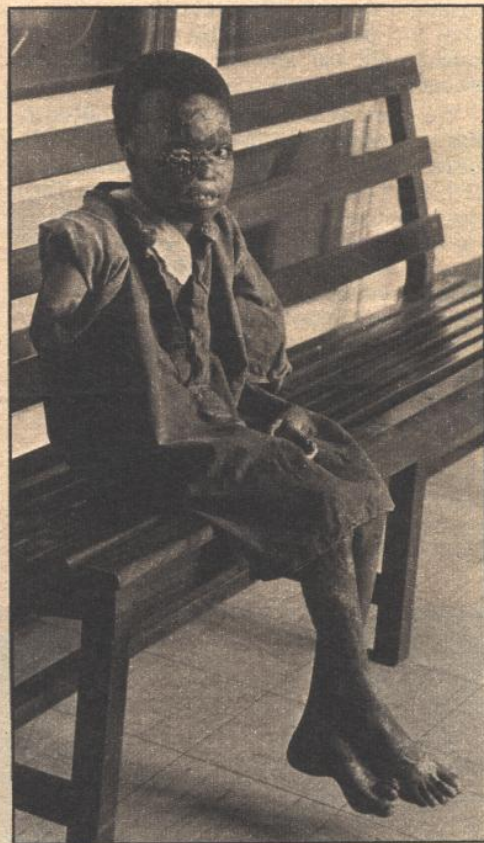
The radio announces a rocket attack on a bus carrying guests home from a wedding. Fifteen people have been killed and 22 injured. One of the renegades responsible is

found dead in a nearby ditch and he's identified as one of Robert Mugabe's ZANLA terrorists.

THE evenings harbour the same disturbing dichotomies — virtually no traffic rumbles through the centre of Salisbury during the night but the bars and restaurants are packed with merry-makers, all quaffing pints of excellent Rhodesian beer and gorging themselves on ludicrously cheap T-bone steaks (R\$1,80 for a slab of prime beef the size of a dinner plate).

Then the sound of a single revolver shot reverberates through the city — and a young White man slumps over the bar at the luxury Monamatapa Hotel with a bullet in his brain. He had been playing Russian roulette.

And nothing illustrates the close proximity of these strange bed-fellows, war and peace, better than the location of the ZANLA/



▲ *Babe without arms ... this horrifying picture epitomises the awful reality of a decade of war. The child — Nicholas Mawiner — was disfigured for life after being hit by the flaming contents of a phosphorus grenade. He is nine years old.*

◀ *Last ditch ... bodies of innocent civilians murdered by terrorists near Shabani. Will the election put an end to this sort of horror ... or will it continue unabated?*

ZIPRA military headquarters. They are situated in a disused school in the Mount Pleasant area, and all day long you'll see imposing looking Black men in a variety of combat uniforms playing football on the lawns.

Directly across the road, four white-clad ladies are playing bowls, just as they did last week and all those other weeks for the past 30 years.

THE sight of these determined colonial ladies and menacing uniformed revolutionaries, side by side and yet not taking any notice of each other, confirmed my suspicions. This country had become schizophrenic — half the time it was fighting a bitter, tragic civil war and the other half it was an anachronism of gracious, pampered living. And I heard several White territorial soldiers admit there was something vital and exciting about the bush war — although, all but a few hotheads are very keen to see it end. There's no choice about fighting; if you're a male adult and reasonably healthy then you've fought in the war; and like everyone else, you probably made the best of it.

"As crazy as it might sound to an outsider, that's just what happened. I had never voted for Ian Smith, I had never been in favour of UDI, and I didn't want to fight in a war. Then I was called up in 1972, about the time the war was hotting up. The terrors were hitting the farmers, and it was getting serious. From then on Ian Smith had nothing to do with it — I was fighting to stay alive.

"And I won't leave just because there's a Black government coming into power. That should have happened ten years ago. I'll only leave if it's unsafe for my children, or if my livelihood is threatened. Nobody knows. I think it would be all right if Nkomo and the Bishop got in. Mugabe could be tricky. We'll just have to wait and see; we're good at that, we've been waiting for this for the past

fourteen years."

Like all the other White Rhodesians to whom I spoke, this man asked to remain anonymous. It's another phenomenon that's developed in a society that was once forthright and outspoken — everyone's trying to remain as anonymous as possible for fear of recriminations, and on the evidence of the past few weeks no-one could blame them.

DESPITE the years of senseless slaughter and the knowledge they were always fighting what the Americans call a no-win war, and despite the uncertainty that hangs over Salisbury today, most White Rhodesians are staying. Their reason is the same as the one offered by many White South Africans: they say they have nowhere else to go. They see themselves as Africans.

Whether the man they fear most, Robert Mugabe, agrees with those sentiments is another key issue in the transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe. As an exile and co-leader of the Patriotic Front, Mugabe was wont to issue some very black messages, crammed with contempt for "the White settlers" and threatening revenge on Muzorewa's "sell out" supporters; Smith would be tried for treason along with other prominent members of the Rhodesian Front; White farms would be "liberated" and given to the people; the Selous Scouts would be rounded up and brought to trial . . . and so on.

There were hundreds of such terrifying stories circulating — some had probably been true, but many were alarmist fiction. Mugabe claims that the notorious death list he was supposed to have master-minded was nothing more than an outrageous fabrication of the right-wing media. And since he arrived in the country he has been conciliatory beyond belief.

"We shan't discriminate against any people on the grounds of race or colour. We have never adopted the policy of racial

discrimination within the Party, and this is our position. Whether this will allay the fears of our counterparts, I do not know."

THE answer is no, mainly because there is a White Rhodesian around who'd trust Mugabe over anything. To them, the very ideology this man espouses is enough to condemn him to hell for eternity. They see him as thoroughly evil, perhaps even a messenger of the Devil himself.

Their righteous anger is graphically illustrated by a locally-written song which well in the Rhodesian hit parade a while back. It's called *Green Leader* and celebrates a famous raid the Rhodesian forces made into Zambia, when they laid to waste the encampments that they claimed were terror bases, but which Joshua Nkomo swore were refugee camps. After the raid, the singer croons: "This is what God would have will. Kill or see the children killed/My little country cries for peace/No-one will hear her case at least."

ALTHOUGH life goes on for the dwindling White minority, apprehension hangs over the perfectly manicured suburbs of Salisbury and Bulawayo like a mid-summer thundercloud. Should they go or should they stay a couple of months to see what happens?

And anyway, where else could they go to maintain this standard of living? No point in going Down South because it's coming there next. And who wants to live in damp social England? Might as well sit it out. You never know . . .

Nobody knows. It seems ridiculous to him who fought a war with such conviction and dedication merely to arrive at this point of indecision.

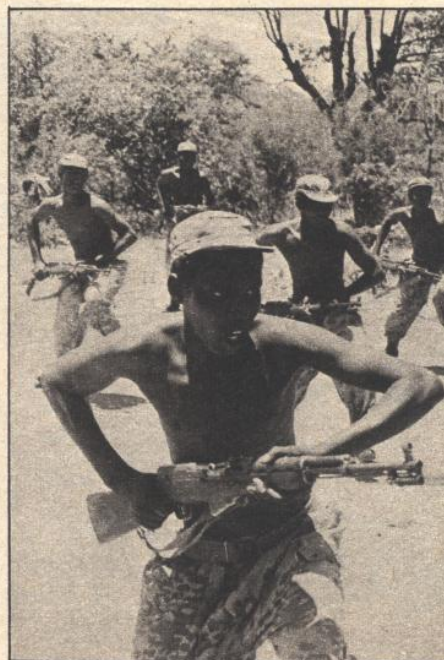
All they seem to have done is bought 14 years of champagne lifestyle, and the price they've paid has been heavy.

And they have become so used to the blood war, so accustomed to friends being killed



louise gubb/gamma

War games . . . in a land where war has become a way of life, the good old game of cops-and-robbers has taken on a more immediate aspect for these White Umtali school-children. Now they play army-and-terr.



War Games Of A Different Kind . . . ZIPRA assembly point. These men will probably be killed in Zimbabwe.

maimed in action, so familiar with the disruptive call-ups that they've come to accept their circumstances with an equanimity outsiders find difficult to understand.

They came to terms with the fear of dying violently years ago and have accepted the hazards of civil war as a part of everyday life, a part of growing up in Africa. When you've been brought up on a daily diet of bullets, bombs and land mines you either learn to enjoy it, get used to it or get out.

WHILE it's virtually impossible to assess accurately the effect a decade of war has had on the people, you need only spend an evening in a Rhodesian bar to realise that a generation of young men has grown up knowing little else but war. You can hear it in their talk, you can witness it in the inevitable bar-room brawl . . . and you can see it in their eyes.

Like the young American GIs in Michael Herr's *Despatches*, the young Rhodesians have had their youth squeezed out of them in a ludicrously short space of time. These are teenagers who have killed more men than they have loved beautiful women.

Today, even the hard boys in the bars are talking, discussing the possible political alliances that'll determine the future of the country they've been fighting over. It's the major topic of conversation from the Zambezi to the Limpopo, and it's ironic that it took a decade of civil war for Black and White to find a common subject to discuss. Never have they been so united in conversation.

Quite where conversation becomes coercion and then coercion becomes bare-faced intimidation has been another contentious issue in the past few troubled weeks. Intimidation and thuggery, virtually unknown in European elections, has always been rife in the African political arena, but only the cynical White Rhodesians thought it would escalate to this level.

AMID a daily litany of violence and intimidation the foreign army of journalists, election traffic and businessmen sit in Salisbury and Bulawayo and await the results. Multimillion dollar deals now hinge on a contest that's become more like the Kentucky Derby than a democratic election.

The man the multinationals and the West least want to win is Mugabe; however, he's strongly backed by the Eastern bloc. Mugabe views his predicament with typical clarity: "ZANU is an anathema, isn't it? They don't want us to win the elections, they feel we are committed to a socialist state against the principles of free enterprise which they would like to see established here.

"The British, who're supposed to be neutral, and Bishop Muzorewa believe we are the enemy force. The British would rather have puppets, people they can control, than strong-willed men who would want their own party policies implemented.

BUT we are the people they should regard as their partners. The governor would never have been here but for the war that we waged; now we have created a political base. The British seem to forget that we were instrumental in bringing about this situation."

He accepts media bias as an occupational hazard: "I understand the statutory difficulty of the media here. It's still a creature of the government of Rhodesia-Zimbabwe, or is that Zimbabwe-Rhodesia — I can never work out which is the surname."

Those omniscient beings, the "informed observers," estimate Mugabe will win no more than 35 seats that, with almost exclusively Matabele support, Nkomo the gargantuan father of the Rhodesian nationalist movement, will take up to 20 seats and that the remaining 25 will be taken mainly by the Bishop with perhaps one or two going to characters from the six minority parties.

The multinationals like Lonrho and Anglo

American are backing a Muzorewa-Nkomo alliance to shut out the Marxist bogey man. This is called the optimist's coalition.

At the same time, Mugabe and Nkomo have stated repeatedly that they were natural allies despite their contesting the election as separate parties. Such a coalition would probably see Mugabe as prime minister and the Old Man, Nkomo, as president. This is called the pragmatist's coalition.

A Mugabe-Smith coalition was also discussed briefly one evening — but the participants were far too drunk to take the debate beyond a gusty roar of laughter.

FOR the next few days Salisbury will hang in limbo. In the wings big business waits. According to estate agents foreign businessmen are taking six-week options on premises in all the major centres. Added to which, the first legitimate exports to Common Market countries are about to be loaded up; the German truck manufacturer, M.A.N., has announced plans to build a million-dollar assembly plant in Zimbabwe; and British airways and other major airlines have resumed regular flights to Salisbury.

It's as if an enormous resuscitation machine were poised over the ailing body, waiting for the magic word (in this case "stability") so it can begin pumping it with nutrients.

And so to the last few days of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, née Rhodesia. The two main cities still boast the prettiest women in the world; there's nowhere else on the planet you can get a T-bone steak the size of a frisbee for under two rands; the beer is beautiful, the climate is champagne and the people, Black and White, are the friendliest in the world.

Hopefully, not too much will be changed in the coming weeks, whoever takes power. If the transition is smooth, that resuscitation machine will move into action.

If . . .



louise gubb/gamma

fighting men show their stuff at Lima form an integral part of the new army.

FACES OF THE FUTURE



FOR more than a year now all schools in Rhodesia have been fully integrated. According to teachers I spoke to there have been no problems with the children — "It's only the parents' attitudes that need working on."

Ten years ago there were only a handful of Black children at selected private schools, while today famous government schools such as Milton High (the *alma mater* of apartheid's creator Hendrik Verwoerd) have more than 30 per cent Black pupils.

Amid the heated political rhetoric, the threats, accusations and fear, this is the picture that holds the greatest hope for the future of the new Zimbabwe.

SLAUGHTER OF

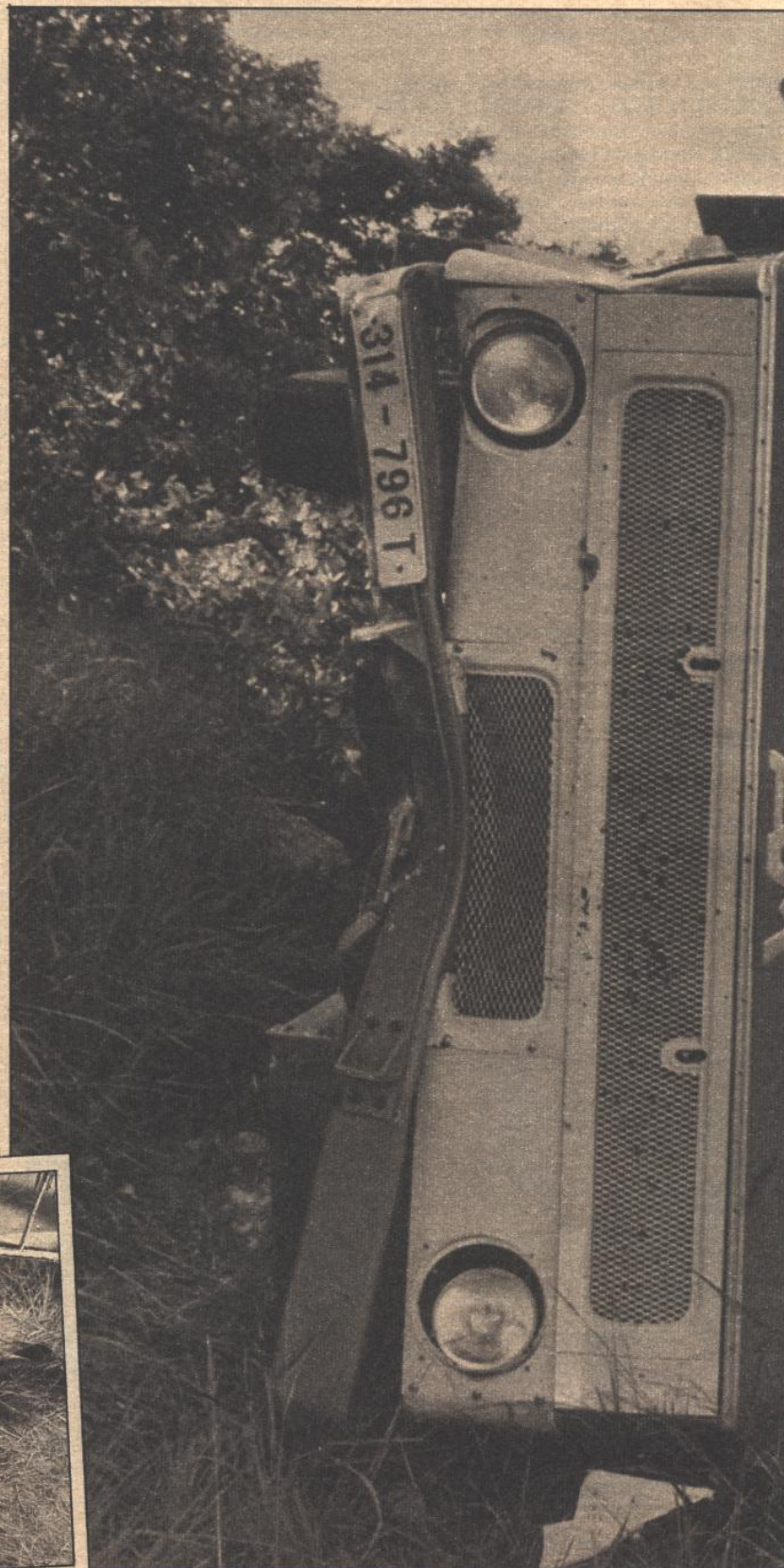
ONLY one hour before these grim pictures were taken these people were celebrating a wedding. Now they will never know what it's like to live in an independent Zimbabwe. What is even more ironic is the fact that they were murdered by the very people who have been fighting for their liberation.

This was the one single tragedy that completely overshadowed all the unrest that has marked the troubled weeks leading up to the election. Fifteen Black civilians were killed and 22 others injured when a group of renegade terrorists — thought to have broken out from the Echo assembly area — ambushed this bus carrying guests home after a wedding.

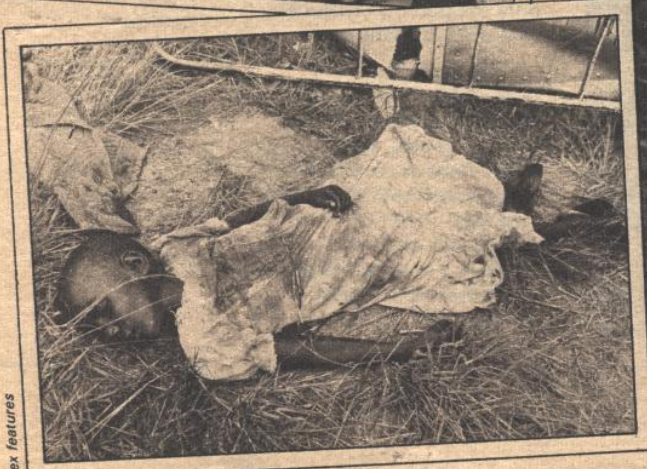
Using Russian RPG 3

rockets and small arms the bandits attacked the bus on the main road between Umtali and Salisbury. One of the terrorists was found dead in a ditch at the scene of the attack — he had apparently tripped and his rocket launcher went off and killed him. He was found with a box of Australian matches in his tunic, thus supporting the theory that he had moved out of one of the camps monitored by Commonwealth soldiers.

Nobody expected absolute tranquillity in the run-up to the elections after almost a decade of civil war. But the daily slaughter has continued long after the cease-fire, and, as it was during the war, the victims are often innocent civilians. ■



rhodesia info



rex features

THE INNOCENT

