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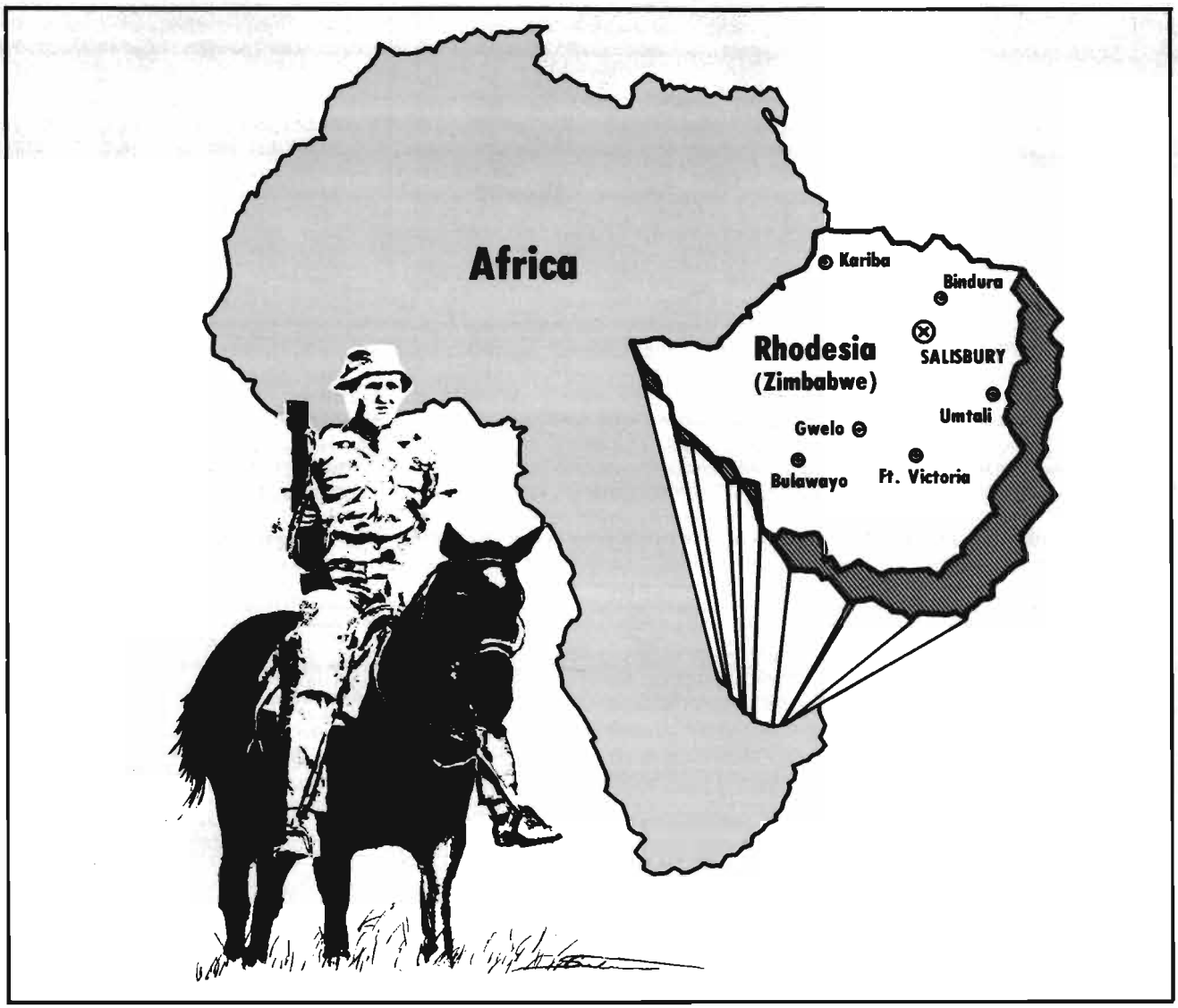
Urbanization, the spread of agriculture, and the growth of highway strip development have changed the terrain of Europe, bringing into question current armor doctrine about European land defense. Lieutenant Colonel Massimo Dal Piaz, Italian Army liaison officer at the Armor Center, describes the problems and outlines some remedies to overcome these limits on firepower and mobility on page 11.



Greys Scouts in Rhodesia's Counterinsurgency

by Mark L. Urban

The most unusual and one of the most successful innovations of Rhodesia's late bush war was the formation of the Greys Scouts, an elite horse cavalry regiment. Enormous hurdles had to be overcome before the value of the concept became apparent. Many senior officers took the staff college view that cavalry had died in WW I and that sending horse soldiers against *Kalashnikovs* would result in the same pitiful slaughter that ensued by sending horse soldiers against the Germans' *Maxim* machineguns. These fears were unfounded, not because the cavalry had become less vulnerable, but because their employment in the bush did not involve mass charges against a dug-in, machinegun-armed enemy.

During the 1970s, Rhodesia's war escalated to major proportions and large tracts of the countryside became infiltrated by guerillas. To combat this situation, the army divided the country into four major operational areas:

Hurricane (northeast), units of the 2d Brigade with headquarters at Bindura; *Thrasher* (east), units of the 3rd Brigade with headquarters at Umtali; *Repulse* (southeast), units of the 4th Brigade with headquarters at Ft. Victoria; and *Tangent* (west), units of the 1st Brigade with headquarters at Bulawayo.

Three smaller defense zones were also organized. *Grapple* (Midlands) with headquarters at Gwelo; *Splinter* (Zambezi) with headquarters at Kariba, and *(SALOPS),* in the Salisbury Area.

The joint operations centres (JOC) in each of these zones were the key counterguerilla bases, each having army, air force, and police resources. The JOCs were also the home of the Fire Force, which was constantly ready to move at once to points of contact. Fire Force became highly efficient at trapping and eliminating guerilla elements, but was dependent on other branches to provide intelligence as the need to trace the infiltrators became more paramount.

There were a number of approaches to the problem and while some, like the manning of rural observation posts,

were conventional, others were not. The Selous Scouts used black troopers, often ex-guerillas, to form "pseudo-gangs" that impersonated ZIPRA (the Nkoma faction) and ZANLA (Mugabe) fighters. The Greys Scouts, in common with other units, stayed out of "frozen areas" in which the pseudo gangs were operating.

Engineers involved in the construction of the *cordon sanitaire* on the northern border rediscovered the use of the horse for tracking. They were building a barrier of minefields intended to stop Mugabe's ZANLA men from crossing the border from newly-independent Mozambique. The sappers decided to use their mules and horses for mounted inspections of the wire and discovered that they were able to find intruders much quicker than when on foot.

Police and other elements also saw the utility of horses for rural patrols. One advantage was that the greater height of a mounted man gave him a significant advantage when following tracks. There were also the more obvious benefits of speed and the ability to cover great distances without unduly tiring the rider.

Tony Stephens, a Rhodesian, began to collect men and horses to form an experimental group known as the Mounted Infantry Unit. In 1975, its name was changed to the "Greys Scouts," an altogether more suitable title which harked back to a British cavalry regiment used in Matabeleland in the late nineteenth century.

In the beginning, the regiment had a somewhat anomalous status as it was not officially recognized by Army headquarters. Stephens used his considerable charm and influence to win recognition for the regiment and in January 1977, it shed its experimental status and became a full-fledged element of the Rhodesian Army.

Initially, the regiment consisted of just one 90-man squadron. "A" Squadron, as it was known, was subdivided into three sabre troops; one of regulars (i.e. professionals), one of national servicemen (draftees) and one of territorials (similar to the U.S. National Guard). Each troop was based on the British infantry platoon structure of three 8-man sections with a platoon commander and a platoon sergeant. Squadron headquarters contained about 22 men; the commanding officer, his second in command, two signallers, two mechanics, two clerks, two farriers (blacksmiths), two stablemen, a veterinarian and his assistant, and eight vehicle drivers. The latter drove specially converted Mercedes 7.5-ton trucks, each of which carried an 8-man section and its animals. Some experiments were conducted with mortars when it was believed that the squadron might have a mortar troop equipped with two Hotchkiss 60-mm weapons, but this idea did not progress beyond limited trials.

The Greys were based at Enkomo garrison near Salisbury where they shared the camp with the Selous Scouts. In common with the Selous Scouts, the Greys mixed black and white soldiers as well as national servicemen and territorials. Most of the original members of the regiment had been trained as infantry and 8-week riding courses were held at Enkomo to help them adjust to this novel form of warfare.

In 1977, Tony Stephens was replaced by a new CO, Mick MacKenna, who was Sandhurst (the British West Point) trained. MacKenna was determined to mould the Greys into a properly disciplined unit. Stephens, in his attempts to gain recognition for the regiment, had taken in a number of "foreign adventurers" many of whom had been rejected by the SAS and the Selous Scouts. MacKenna wanted to impose uniform standards of training and drill on the Greys and organized a major series of exercises for "A" Squadron in Northern Rhodesia in the autumn of 1977. He was also unsatisfied with the basic training of new soldiers and by the end of 1978 the Greys had started their own 5-month training course for new recruits at Enkomo garrison. At the same time, the territorial troop was expanded into a full squadron ("B" Squadron).

"B" Squadron became a highly efficient force even though its men only served 6-week tours. Many of its troopers were professional men in civilian life with considerable personal wealth and responsibilities. The regiment retained this two-squadron structure and never exceeded 250 men. The squadrons were deployed under the JOC commanders and served in all the operational areas and individual troops were often placed under JOC control. Although the sabre elements of the Scouts roamed throughout the bush during the war, regimental headquarters (RHQ) remained at Enkomo. Most of the Greys combat actions took place at section and troop level across the entire breadth of the country, so it is difficult to report on their movements and actions in a logical or chronological manner.

Most patrols were undertaken by 8-man sections divided into two groups of four. One half-section was normally responsible for supporting the other and they remained a kilometer or so apart. Both half-sections normally carried the same weaponry. General purpose machineguns were too heavy for most troopers to control with one hand (the other being required to hold the reins), but were, nevertheless, sometimes used. The standard weapon was the FN FAL assault rifle, although some troopers found AK-47s with folding stocks easier to handle. Each half-section commander was an experienced tracker; the importance of these men led many to describe the Greys Scouts as an "NCO outfit."

Communications often caused problems. Each section commander normally carried two very high frequency and one shortwave set in order to reach both his supporting half-section and the parent troop. Aircraft were often used as relays when communications became difficult due to the topography.

Most of the guerilla groups encountered numbered 10 or so men, so the sections often faced an enemy of equal size. As the war progressed, the Scouts modified their tactics. Initially, they had dismounted on contact, but they soon realized the value of staying mounted for as long as possible. This enabled them to pursue an enemy who might quickly change direction. Firing from the saddle remained highly inaccurate, and when half-sections acted as a fire-base they invariably dismounted. Movements to the attack start line were made on horseback and the Scouts only dismounted to fight on foot to the objective. Battle experiences showed that it was during this final phase of the attack that remaining on horseback (and thus presenting a much larger target) became hazardous.

Often the enemy groups were too large to handle. During a deployment in Operation Tangent in 1978 the Scouts encountered ZIPRA groups that were 40 strong. These were believed to be training units on their final exercises from camps in Zambia. In these circumstances, the Fire Force was called in for support.

The Greys Scouts really excelled in tracking and pursuit. One often-used technique was "cross-graining." This involved the tracking unit warning others along the contact's expected line of movement. They would then cross this line and take up the tracks if they found them, saving a considerable amount of time and distance. Whilst cross-graining by foot units was rarely successful farther than 5 miles from the original contact, the Greys used their superior mobility to discover tracks up to 15 miles away and this same mobility made pursuit easier.

During 1979, the Rhodesians refined their tracking

operations and clandestinely purchased 16 foxhounds in England, half of which were given to the Greys. They were flown by helicopter to points of contact and were particularly successful in these grisly manhunts. The other eight dogs were given to the Selous Scouts who often attached radio beepers to them and followed the pack by helicopter.

Indeed, the Greys became so efficient at tracking that the guerillas sometimes took desperate measures. They normally carried a spare pair of shoes so that they might be able to change their tracks. The use of horses also had a psychological effect since many tribesmen believed that causing the death of a horse would incur the wrath of evil spirits. One group of ZANLA men were pursued dragging a *ZPU* quad 14.5-mm antiaircraft gun through the bush. They finally decided to break the weapon into its man-pack loads and scatter in all directions. The ZANLA men were widely dispersed and the security forces never saw the *ZPU* again.

The horses often caused problems. During contacts they often became startled and bolted, but were usually to be found back at the previous night's camp. If, however, the animal was injured in a firefight or became lame the section was usually forced to abandon its mission. If one rider had to continue on foot the entire section could only proceed at walking pace. The problem remained a serious one for the Greys throughout the war.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Greys operations was their unique logistic demands. We have already seen that the squadron headquarters troop was roughly twice the size of an infantry company headquarters because of the additional specialists required. Horses were obtained from a number of interesting sources. The majority were apparently outright gifts from charitable associations in South Africa. Some territorial men brought their own horses on their 6-week attachments, and, indeed, there was some consternation at army headquarters when troopers from Rhodesia's uppercrust demanded the army insure their valuable polo ponies.

Troops normally spent 14-day patrols in the field, but interestingly, the length of operations was often determined by logistic considerations. During the winter when there was less fodder to be found in the bush, patrols were often as short as a week. The troopers, who each carried 200 rounds of ammunition, 2 grenades, 2 weeks' supply of dried rations and saddlebags full of their own kit, could carry little food for their mounts.

The horses often required a great deal of attention. In the Wankie area they were particularly prone to losing shoes. During a tour there by "A" Squadron every horse had been reshod within 5 weeks.

During the war, the Greys Scouts obtained a fearsome reputation among their adversaries as they were capable of enormous speed through the bush. When combined with their superb tracking skills, this often gave them total surprise.

However, the concept was not without its problems. Principal among these was the cost of raising and maintaining the unit. Training men for this bizarre form of combat also created peculiar difficulties. In the field, the Greys' patrols could often be ruined by one horse becoming lame. For all of these problems, however, it is clear that the idea of using cavalry in the bush was a completely sound one.

The Greys won the respect of their adversaries and did not share the fate of the Selous Scouts who were disbanded. The South Africans have also kept the concept alive, using mounted units on the border between Namibia and Angola. Indeed, even the British Army has now found a place for horses in its defensive arrangements on the Falklands.

The spectacular results achieved by the Greys Scouts show that even in the missile age there is still a place for the horse in warfare.

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