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Tests SSG-69 and Reveals Secrets of
Modern Battle-Axe Fighting

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SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

The Journal Of Professional Adventurers

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SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

Table Of Contents

- 6 FLAK**
- 10 BULLETIN BOARD**
- 14 FULL AUTO**
CHUCK TAYLOR
- 18 TERRAIN & SITUATION**
JERRY AHERN
- 20 COMBAT PISTOLCRAFT**
JEFF COOPER & KEN HACKATHORN
- 24 IN REVIEW**
IDI AMIN
RHODESIA
COMMANDOS AND RANGERS OF WORLD WAR II
- 26 WE ARE ALL VICTIMS**
N. E. MACDOUGALD
- CHICOM SILENCED ASSASSINATION PISTOL
- 30 WHISPERING DEATH**
J. DAVID TRUBY
- SSG-69: MOST ACCURATE .308?
- 34 GRADELY GREEN GUN**
JEFF COOPER
- TEST & EVALUATION
THE L.E.S. P18 9MM PISTOL
- 40 JAMMAMATIC**
CHUCK TAYLOR
- W. E. FAIRBAIRN FOUNDED S.W.A.T. FIFTY YEARS AGO
- 44 SHANGHAI EXPERIMENTS**
WILLIAM L. CASSIDY
- AMERICA'S UNDERWATER ELITE
- 48 U.S. NAVY SEALS**
PART TWO — CONCLUSION
DANA DRENKOWSKI
- ANTI-STOCK THEFT FORCE ON A RHODESIAN RANCH
- 54 VIGILANTE!**
ROGER L. BARNES
- SPEAKING OF VINTAGE WEAPONS ...
- 60 SECRETS OF MODERN BATTLE-AXE FIGHTING**
JEFF COOPER
- CONCLUSION OF BLUDGEON HISTORY & USE
- 64 BLACKJACKS, BILLIES, AND BATONS**
DAVID E. STEELE
- IT READS BETTER THAN IT LIVES
- 68 MEMOIRS OF A GUN RUNNER**
AS TOLD TO NEAL SAMSON BY CHARLES HORMEL
- AN OPPOSING OPINION
- 74 THE WILD GEESE LAYS AN EGG**
AL BOLTAR
- EDITORIAL
- 92 THE TAIWAN BETRAYAL**
ALEXANDER M. S. MCCOLL

Anti-Stock Theft Force On A Rhodesian Ranch

Vigilante!

by Roger L. Barnes

A loud whisper jolted me awake: "Baas, baas! Maninge mombi!" It was my tracker Chapota who had the last watch. It was 0630 hours and we were 900 feet high on a *kopje* (hill) overlooking some of the most rugged terrain in southeastern Rhodesia.

The day before, 30 head of prime beef cattle, called "mombis" in Rhodesia, had been stolen and after a long chase covering 15 Ks or more we had come up empty handed. Fairly sure that the thieves had holed up in the "no-go" to make us believe they had escaped, we laid a couple of ambushes on the most likely routes. Now it looked like our patience was going to pay off.

I had been on Klipspringer eight months now and learned the average life expectancy of a cattle thief was two thefts; if we missed him the first time, we damn sure got him the next!

My partner of many journeys in Central America and now Africa, Skip Cheal, was now awake and grabbed the ranch radio: "Joe, this is Skip. Do you read?"

"Skip, this is Joe. Send your message, over".

"Joe, we've got 25 mombis with four Africans visual. Should E.T.A. your LOC in two zero minutes, over."

"Roger that, Skip. Will advise Bob to make blocking movement to northeast — out."

About 20 minutes later they walked into two FNs and a 12-gauge Browning. Ignoring the command, "*mira* (Shona for stop)," the thieves took off closely followed by a hail of automatic fire. One was dropped with a full load of buckshot in the back of his head, another went down with a 7.62 round in his hip but was immediately up and running again; straight towards our blocking force. The thief who was already hit collected two more in the chest and had five minutes to live. Another took a round in his gut and lost his arm just below the elbow; he wouldn't make it either. The last of the



Above: Author spent year on one of Rhodesia's largest ranches with anti-stock theft force. Goggles provided protection against choking dust during vehicle patrols.

bunch was hit too, because he was tracked for a couple of miles by his blood spoor but he wasn't found. We discovered some time later that he had gone to an Episcopal Mission to get patched up and return to cattle rustling. We weren't surprised, though. Most of the missions in Rhodesia aid thieves, murderers, and that combination of both — terrorists.

Like the rest of the country, for many years Klipspringer was peaceful and prosperous. Charles McFadden, who started the ranch, wasn't one of the original pioneers of Rhodesia, but he can be counted as an adventurer and explorer of the early 19th century. Born in Britain in 1874, he spent his childhood in Patagonia, raising sheep on his father's farm. In 1909 at age 34 he started a large farm in Tierra del Fuego named Estancia Viomonte, raising Merino sheep, which made him quite wealthy. By 1911 he had crossed the

Andes Mountains into the wild, uninhabited area of the Gulf of Penas and opened the Baker River Ranch, another huge sheep and cattle ranch. McFadden then did his duty in the army during World War I. In 1919 he resigned his commission and started exploring some overseas British possessions; soon he was starting another sheep ranch, this time in South West Africa. It wasn't long though, before he cast a glance at Rhodesia.

Before arriving in southern Africa, McFadden had been in the offices of the British South Africa Company in London. He had a look at the incomplete maps of Southern Rhodesia. He saw a large area of land in the low veldt along the Sabi River Valley, marked rather ominously in red ink, "Unfit for White Settlement." It was like placing a T-bone steak in front of a starving man. There was no doubt in his mind where to go next.

Rhodesia had been a British Colony for about 20 years and it was barely that long since the last Matabele uprising. The white population of the country could have filled a small midwestern town in the U.S. and neighbors could be as much as 60 miles apart. Population centers were mainly on the high elevations such as Salisbury, Umtali, and Ft. Victoria. These areas were somewhat healthier because colder temperatures kept down the incidence of many tropical diseases, especially malaria. So, the low veldt areas were avoided by settlers, and as a result, roads and communications into these areas didn't exist.

The natives that lived in the Sabi River Valley were of the Shona tribe. Few in number, these people were not a warrior tribe as the Matabele, who are directly related to the Zulu, and who inhabited the Zambezi Valley in the western part of the country. The Shonas lived with intense heat, and multitudes of lions, leopards, crocodiles, snakes, and diseases like bilharzia and black water fever. Into this formidable area came Charles McFadden,

guided by famous hunter Ally Hamman, to explore the Sabi River Valley and peg the boundaries of Klipspringer Ranch.

Soon there were cattle, sheep, and an irrigated area for tobacco and cotton. Work was hard, but with determination and the able help of local natives, Klipspringer took shape and grew, until today, it covers hundreds of thousands of acres of some of the wildest, most beautiful land you could hope to see.*

Bordered in the west by the Bikita T.T.L. (Tribal Trust Land) and on the east by the Sabi River, terrorists from Mozambique found welcome cover in the dense bush. With only 18 Ks from the southern end of the ranch to the Mozambique border, it is a favorite infiltration route. Using poacher's and game trails, the Charlie Tangos (Communist terrorists) move swiftly through stands of mapani and thorn trees toward the TTL where they receive shelter and food either by willingness or by force. From there they fan out into the farming areas, killing or stealing cattle and sheep, burning crops, murdering whites and blacks indiscriminantly. At any one day of the week we could count on 200 or more terrors coming in, or going back to Mozambique for resupply.

When I started for Rhodesia on September 19, 1977, I really had no idea what I was going to do once there. I did know I wanted to get involved in *something* to help out against the Commies. I must admit that when I first arrived, my visions of making a lot of money were quickly shattered. Even if there had been a lot of money around, there was no way to get it out. The Rhodesian government's exchange control had sewed up all the loopholes and those that were still foolish enough to try a bit of smuggling quickly found themselves in big trouble. I was also disappointed to discover that there were no merc units operating in the country; there is a legitimate standing army and air force who have the situation well under control. I recall that in December 1977, Walter Cronkite had reported hundreds of mercenaries from Rhodesia had attacked Mozambique. In fact, it was the Rhodesian Army carrying out raids against terr base camps! Whether it was Cronkite's fault or another irresponsible reporter from that news service, the report, as usual, was hogwash!

I checked out various military units and was turned down by the Rhodesian Air Force for flight training; I'm a low-time Cessna 150 driver and 34 years old — way above the 25-year-old limit. They were only taking people my age who were high-time pilots — preferably with combat experience. I took a long look at S.A.S. and Grey's Scouts and had decided on the Grey's since I'm crazy about horses and it had the correct romantic appeal. I have always envied my grandfather and his experiences in the old days of the U.S. Army with their use of horses and mules.

But wanting to see some of the country before settling down, I decided to put off my enlistment for a couple of weeks. I put only the necessary articles into my Lowe Alpine pack; the assistant manager of Salisbury's Courtney Hotel put the rest in storage. I was well armed with an AR-15 equipped with 30-round mags and Gerber Mark I and Mark II. Not having an overabundance of cash in my pocket, I decided to "thumb it," and discovered that rides came very quickly for an armed hitchhiker. Rhodesians travel under the danger of road ambushes everywhere in the country and an extra gun in the vehicle is always welcome.

For the first week, I traveled all over the north and southeastern section of the country. When I got to Fort Victoria, I called Owen Parnell on Klipspringer Ranch and asked for a few days visit which he granted. In the morning, I took the convoy to Birchenough Bridge where a Land Rover picked me up for the 40-kilometer journey to Klipspringer Headquarters. They had no problems locating me, with all my American gear strapped on, and as the Land Rover skidded to a halt in front of me, I was greeted by a mischievous smile behind a full beard belonging to Bob Miller, ex-U.S. Marine and ex-Rhodesian S.A.S. With him was a rather serious faced Norwegian, Lars Borg.

After the usual pleasantries we were off: I was up front with Bob and Lars was in the back to provide more fire in case of ambush.

"How long you been in-country?" Bob asked.

"About two weeks."

"You been revved yet"? (Rhodesian slang for ambushed)

"No", I replied, almost ashamed to admit it.

"Well, I'll give ya the drill; if we get hit, we drive on through the kill zone, go off the road, and then we go back, kick ass, got it?" I suddenly became engrossed in a close study of likely ambush points of which there were many. We soon reached the Klipspringer Halt which changed from single lane tar to dirt. As we turned left the sign said Klipspringer Headquarters 21 kilometers. I was beginning to get an idea of just how big this place was with that long a driveway!

Impala and duiker scampered out of the way as we roared on, raising a huge dust cloud behind us.

"You guys ever have trouble with mines?" I asked, eyeballing the speedometer hovering around 80KPH.

"Nope, not yet."

"Do you or the army sweep the road occasionally?"

"Yeah, we're doing that now." He chuckled and gave me a wink as if that was the standard issue joke to play on newcomers. I gave another tug on my seat belt. "This vehicle is mine-proofed with steel plates in the wheel wells and a steel plate on each side in the truck bed. If we hit one it will likely throw us about 30 feet, but with our seat belts and the roll cage over the roof we should be okay. Won't do Lars much good though!"

We negotiated a stream bed and finally approached the gate of Klipspringer Headquarters. The entire compound was surrounded by a chain link security fence, 12 feet high, topped by barbed wire. As

Below: Author and SOF staff photographer Daryl Tucker take 10 at native store.





Above: Travelers in Rhodesia must cope with the danger of mines. In this incident four Africans were killed, including the driver.



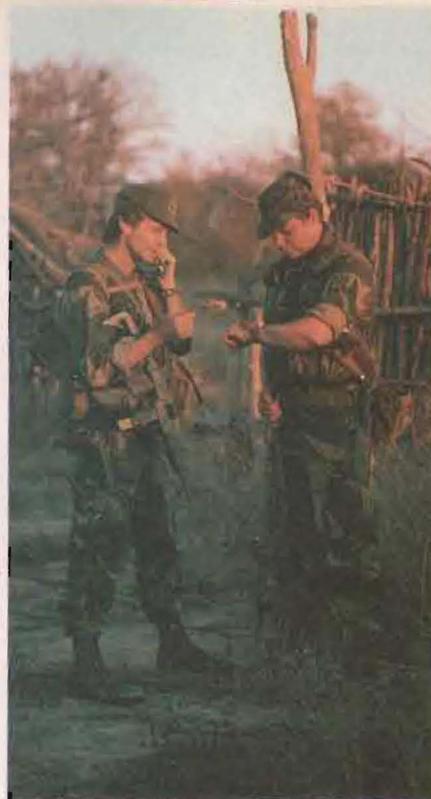
Above: Russian general-purpose mine makes a large crater. Bus's momentum carried it another 60 meters before coming to a stop.

Below: Terrorists and cattle thieves alike feared armed men on horseback. Author is joined on right by Robert Brown.





Above: SOF editor Robert Brown with author prior to morning patrol.



Above: Skip Cheal, Barnes's companion on numerous Central American adventures and a welcome addition to anti-stock theft force, calls in information on fresh cattle spoor. Radios were invaluable for controlling ranch reaction to cattle thefts.

Below: A variety of weapons are available for issue on Klipspringer.



Below: Weapons practice and keeping abreast of new models was a must in terr-infested area. Here L.D.P. submachine gun gets workout.



we drove through the gate, an African guard with a rather weatherbeaten Enfield snapped to attention and gave us a British style salute. This was Nacuto, who had spent many years in the British South Africa Police and was to become one of the trackers I would work with in the future.

The compound was large with a motor pool and storage depot and no less than eight domestic houses of brick or cinder block. Each had its own bunker in case of mortar attack, although I immediately noted the lack of grenade screens, firing pits, and extra barbed wire, especially tangle-foot, in the yards. Outside the compound, running parallel with the longest section, was a 4000-foot grass runway wide enough to take Dakotas if the need arose.

As we approached the manager's home we passed one of the larger houses which was full of camouflaged troopers, some of them quickly saddling their horses. This was the mounted section of the B.S.A.P. Support unit. In the thick bush of the low veldt, horses were very effective and greatly feared by the terrorists.

We climbed out of the vehicle as Owen Parnell, Klipspringer's manager for seven years, approached and welcomed me to the ranch. His wife Mary was serving up hot tea as we entered the spacious living room of their home. As we sat down to pleasant conversation I noticed she kept a Browning H.P. by the serving tray, prompting me to ask if she always kept a pistol close by.

"The house servants are of course trustworthy, but a number of ranchers have been killed because terrs walked into the house and there was no firearm nearby.

The knowledge that ranchers and farmers always have guns nearby and ready for use in their homes keeps such incidents to a minimum. When the terrs do manage to screw up enough courage to storm a house, the issue is always decided in the rancher's favor by a high volume of fire from their rifles and pistol." It was sound logic and I had to wonder again at the idiocy of our own politicians who would disarm all Americans to leave us to the mercy of our own brand of terrorists.

An hour later I had been assigned quarters and was meeting with the seven-man anti-stock theft force. There were two Americans on the team; Bob I've mentioned before as an ex-Marine serving in Vietnam and then in the Rhodesian S.A.S.; the other Yank, Joe Harcourt, spent his time in 'Nam with the 173rd Airborne, then spent some adventurous months in Chad and Angola before hitting Rhodesia. Dan came from Belfast; it was as difficult to understand his speech as it was his way of thinking; he was an I.R.A. regular. The I.R.A. has a saying, "once in, never out." Lars spent his military commitment in the Norwegian Navy. I soon learned his lack of bush experience didn't matter. He kept his ears open and mouth shut on missions and soaked up information like a sponge. Peter wasn't much of anything. An Australian, he fancied himself a ladies' man, the bush generally scared hell out of him, and he held slightly racist views. With all the wrong combinations he lasted two months. Mike was a tough ex-British paratrooper; aggressive in the boonies, he didn't mind mixing it up anywhere, anytime. George fled Hungary in the late '50s, fought in the Congo with Mike

Hoare as a teenager, and has seen most of Africa's troubles since. Since their force allotment was eight, I was already getting ideas, but I was in with a rather select group and it was obvious I would have to prove myself before being fully accepted.

I stayed a week and was in the bush six of the seven days, either patrolling or ambushing, so I got a good look around, found I could get along with everyone and decided this sort of life was for me. Question was, would Parnell be willing to hire me?

I popped the question of my employment just before leaving for Salisbury and was told to call back in a week or so. It seems there had been so many "crazies," and other undesirables on the ranch, that Parnell wanted to check me out with the other guys and think it over himself for awhile.

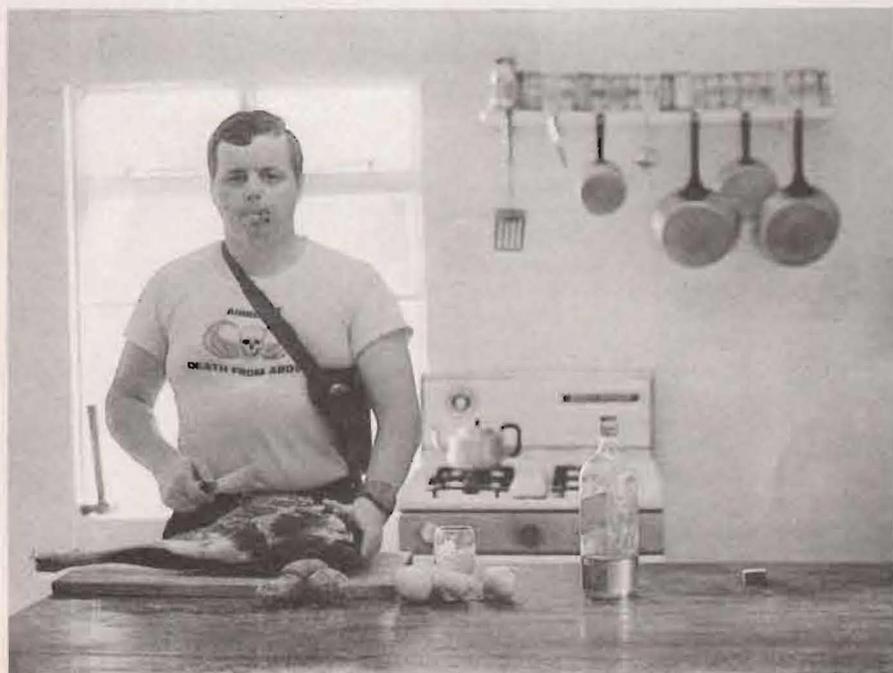
A week later I called and got the good word, so three days more and I was back on the ranch. The choice of weapons which the ranch had for issue was 12-gauge shotguns, UZI submachine guns, FN rifles with selective fire, and Browning HP handguns. Each came with a basic load of ammo plus 50 rounds per month for practice, and for shooting game for meat rations. In spite of a heavy terr presence, mere mention of a Bren Gun or heavy barrel FN, or a few grenades was enough to send the Police District commissioner into a frenzied fit. These items, even though readily available, were for "responsible" military personnel, and not issued to civilians regardless of need.

I decided to stay with my AR-15 which brought a fair amount of good natured abuse in my direction, as a ".22" wasn't really considered adequate for the job. I took it all in good humor though and went to work, hoping for a chance to prove everyone wrong as soon as possible. As it turned out I was convinced of my folly long before I had to shoot someone with it. I'd had my doubts about this weapon in previous combat, and my suspicions regarding its stopping power were raised again when it failed to drop a 40-pound duiker or 100-pound impala with as many as three solid hits in the chest, on a regular basis. Two more incidents finally moved me to switch to an FN.

On ambush about six weeks after I started working, one of our number put a .308 round through a cattle thief's shoulder and his backup put a load of 00 buckshot through his chest. The African went down, got up running, and didn't stop for almost half a mile! He died from loss of blood.

A week later on night ambush of a *donga* (corral), three of us opened up on a rustler, hitting him in the leg. It was too dark to follow up and we moved to our secondary position. Much later, someone showed up again and when he started to open the gate on the *donga*, we opened up again. He took off at the run and we set-

Below: Barnes carves up Impala leg for evening chow. Colt .45 never left his side.



tled down to await daylight. In the morning we found him by a stream bed, with three more holes in him; one in the lower back and two more near his left shoulder blade. He had gone over 400 yards before dying, and three of the four wounds were .308s. It was this that had me drawing an FN the next day and I have been cured for all time of using the .223 as a combat round except in an emergency.

Daily routine on Klipspringer was always interesting. At 0600 hours we started off with the morning patrol. Eighty kilometers in length, we travelled through the various cattle paddocks looking for cut fences, stray cattle, and any strange human spoor. Large game animals such as zebra and hippo would simply plow right through barbed wire fence if they didn't feel inclined to go under or jump over it, allowing cattle to escape.

All our Land Rovers were equipped with C.B. radios, so reporting any incidents to headquarters was quick and simple. Also, on those occasions when we had two or more cattle thefts at the same time and everyone was spread over a large area, these radios became invaluable in controlling constantly changing situations and allowed instant liaison with the police based at ranch headquarters.

Our five trackers were all Africans and with one exception had spent their entire lives on Klipspringer. Two were on each morning patrol, pulling duty in rotation. To say that these guys were amazing is putting it mildly. When I was a kid I buried myself in books such as James Fenimore Cooper's *Leather Stocking Tales* and marvelled at the feats of tracking and endurance of our Indians and frontiersmen. Our trackers were every bit as good; they could run 20 miles or more after cattle thieves and then herd the cattle home again. Chapota, on many occasions, would find spoor on rocky ground where there didn't seem to be anything at all, and I swear he could hear an impala fart at 200 meters! All of this talent wasn't wasted on me as I decided to talk Chapota into a little instruction. At the end of my tour I could track pretty decently and knew such things as which plants were edible, what tree bark is used for healing minor wounds or curing a hangover from too much chibuku, the native beer made from corn.

Standing operating procedure for a cattle theft was kept simple. Once the patrol discovered the theft, trackers swept the area in a large circle, determining four important pieces of information; 1. Numbers of cattle, 2. number of thieves, 3. age of spoor, 4. what direction they were headed. This information is then relayed to Klipspringer headquarters. Since we didn't use regular call signs on our radios, the conversation would sound something like this: "Klipspringer, this is Roger. Do you read?"

"Roger, this is Klipspringer; send your message, over."

"Klipspringer, we have had a cattle theft at Loc Stats 710681X530770. 22 mombis with three Africans headed southeast, spoor is five hours old, copied?"

"Roger, this is Owen; I copy that. Go to Loc Stats 710890X530781 and look for spoor crossing at that point. Report back A.S.A.P. if you require aircraft. I'll alert police and will request permission to enter the Tribal Trust Land."

As we moved to our new location the rest of the crew was jumping into Land Rovers, always kept fueled and on standby at the quarters of those men off duty. Radio conversation was kept to necessary information only and each vehicle was given a specific location to head for. Often, by the time the back-up force was



Above: Author with tracker Chapota. Without these talented men it would have been impossible to follow wily rustlers over rugged terrain of Klipspringer Ranch.

moving into their positions, the morning patrol had fresh information on the direction of the cattle. Vehicles were then moved like pieces on a huge chessboard over the network of ranch roads by the manager, either from headquarters or from his own Land Rover in the field. Each time cattle spoor was found, a vehicle was moved to the area ahead of the general direction of flight until the spoor was picked up again. In this manner, we not only gained a little time on the rustlers, we also could get a team deployed more quickly either on foot or, as sometimes happened, placed in ambush ahead of them.

The hardest part of these chases was also the most important. Once it was determined we could get no closer by vehicle, a chase team started on foot, led by two or more trackers. The pace, in a word, was rugged; during the summer with the temperature over 100 degrees F. by midday, the chase team, with weapons and water rations, moved just short of a run over rocky hills, through grass seven feet high, or through thorn thickets so dense the daylight was blotted out. Soon everyone was bleeding from a hundred cuts with gnats, blowflies, mapani flies, and a dozen other insects all feeding hungrily on the bonanza of fresh blood. Then there were the snakes; intertwined in shrubs and trees were black mambas, vine snakes; boomslangs; on the ground were Mozambique spitting cobras, Egyptian cobras, puff adders, Gaboon vipers and black scorpions that grow to a foot in length.

Crossing rivers presented dangers, such as crocodiles and hippos. An enraged hippo can move astonishingly fast and bite a man in two for no other reason than disturbing his bath. Coupled with the natural dangers was the problem of terrors. With the constant movement of terrorists in large numbers through the ranch the chance of a five-man chase team bumping into 40 or 50 well-armed terrors was ever present. When it happened there was never time for tactics like fire and movement; it was Dodge City with everyone reaching for their iron and shooting it out eyeball to eyeball.

Ed. Note: The author wishes it known that the incidents were rearranged in this story not to deceive the reader, but to protect those still working in Rhodesia. The story is an accurate account of everyday events on ranches all over Rhodesia.

*Author Barnes acknowledges thanks to Sommerville's *My Life Was A Ranch* for historical details of Klipspringer Ranch.

Roger L. Barnes was an adventurer at an early age: at 19, he was racing Formula II race cars in Europe. In 1966, he joined the Army, was assigned to Special Forces, in Viet Nam. In 1969 he was a part owner in a guard dog business, and finished school with a B.S. in psychology. Unfulfilled, he sought excitement and in 1971 the first "interesting" job came through in a South American country. With a reputation for reliability, the opportunities to visit other countries have been many.

