

ARMED FORCES

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● The G.6 (HMSP)

ARMED FORCES

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Cover Picture:

South African Air Force Maritime Recce Aircraft inspects a ship near the S.A. Coast. Picture by Photographic Section AFB Ysterplaat.

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EDITORIAL

Recently there have been numerous statements by senior officers of the South African Defence Force concerning the need for economy due to the shortage of State funds. It is to be hoped that this shortage of funds in the defence budget is not affecting our state of preparedness for total strategy and all other aspects of present and future life revolves round the pillar of a competent and strong Defence Force. Despite the other pressing and important claims that might be made on the Treasury, under present conditions Defence must have priority.

The question of military service for non-South Africans who are resident in the Republic has now reached the stage when an announcement of a definite commitment can be expected soon. During the Vietnam war the US had a number of citizens who went to Canada, Sweden and a number of other countries to avoid military service. Now Johan Kriek whose business is tennis is reported to be returning to South Africa as an US citizen to earn money here playing tennis, and there are a number of questions that have to be asked and answered. A South African Defence Force spokesman said "If Kriek is a South African citizen he is liable by law for national service. This liability exists until the age of 55". It would appear from reports that Kriek has recently assumed United States citizenship and when he was selected by the local tennis selectors to represent South Africa he was at that time either a South African or assumed by then to be a South African citizen. Johan Kriek earns his living, albeit a very good one, playing tennis, as far as he was concerned this took priority over his responsibility to do his two years military service and he left for overseas. The question now hinges on whether he was in fact called up for military service before he left the country. If this is the case, legal opinion is that his subsequent adoption of any number of other nationalities will not afford him protection from prosecution under South African law. The funding of this tennis series is by Standard Bank, but the bank say that they have nothing to do with the selection of the players who were selected by the South African National Selectors to represent South Africa. As South Africans take a very serious view of any form of avoidance of military service and considering the publicity that has been given in the past to Johan Kriek the question must be asked if the selectors have acted wisely. Is Kriek wanted in this country and should he be granted an entry visa? This is the opinion of the majority of South Africans who are not tennis fanatics or stand to benefit financially from a tennis spectacular.

If a present proposal is accepted it will obviate one instance of stupid bureaucracy. As the law stands a driving licence issued by the South African Defence Force is invalid when the holder drives any vehicle other than one belonging to the SADF. The soldier can drive from A to B in a military vehicle but if he returns from B to A in exactly the same type of vehicle but with a civilian registration he is liable to be arrested. At present there are thousands of military vehicles using the road systems in the Republic and it is indeed very, very rare to witness any instances of bad driving by their drivers. The SADF driving courses are thorough and are conducted on a full time basis and require the same knowledge of the Ordinance. To obtain a driving licence at most centres is a time-consuming operation with first a learners licence and weeks or months later the actual test itself. Owing to the number of aspirant drivers and a claimed shortage of staff -obtaining an appointment is often like finding a hens' tooth. But despite this bureaucracy currently requires that all holders of SADF licences undergo another test, while drivers who have a sub-standard licence issued by a neighbouring state legally cause havoc on our roads.

Strike of the Silver Osprey

Incidents from the Rhodesian War

These incidents are true – names, dates, places are sometimes changed as the persons involved may not want attention drawn to themselves.

The bird launched herself from a near vertical cliff, 400 feet above the dam. It turned into wind, and started drifting slowly across the sparkling waters below. An almost imperceptible movement – a fish half rolling – the wings of the bird closed. She dived down to hit the water with a clap which could be heard two hundred yards away as the talons sank into a two pound bream – and were not to let go. *Pandion haliaëtus* – The Osprey.

Selous Scouts became a legend, both in the Army and amongst the Enemy. Admired and respected by the former, feared and hated by the later. Scouts (the Greys Scouts were referred to by their full name, or simply Greys), was the first choice unit, of youngsters called up for National Service. Never mind jets, armoured cars or fireforce – it was the winning of the coveted brown beret, with a silver osprey badge, which became the aim of so many. At least one highly decorated helicopter pilot opted for a transfer to Scouts.

The selection course was something else. Five out of eighty applicants – many already combat tested soldiers, were often all who survived the arduous survival tests, at the Charara training area, near Kariba.

The operations of the Scouts were little publicised. As a result, the Regiment was accused of many atrocities committed by Zanu. Typical was the Elim Mission Massacre of 14 Europeans on January 23rd 1978. The surviving priest stated categorically the Zanu was responsible – Mugabe's Men. Yet, the left wing press had the temerity to claim Selous Scouts' pseudos did the job. In August 1978, the Army shot two of the twenty-one terrorists who had been involved. Evidence, from matching cartridge cases and a diary, but this still did not settle the issue for some people.

Partly because of such allegations, Security Forces produced a film on Scouts depicting them as a Tracking Unit. The members could supposedly trail a terrorist gang, and survive for days on end, with no access to food or water, barring that which they could find in the bush – scorpions under a stone, the entrails of a dead kudu. No doubt true enough, but the film gave just one glimpse into a battalion, characterised by the brilliance and daring of its operations, many of which to this day, remain unknown except to a few unbelievably brave and dedicated black and white soldiers.

The Canberra of No 5 Squadron, Rhodesian Air Force, banked gently near the coastline, just inland of Beira, and turned back for its run in. The navigator crouched down, checking the graticule. A perfect day for taking photographs.

The Canberra with its undersurface painted a grey-blue was at 55 000 feet. The pilot reduced power, until the two Avon turbines produced hardly a whisper. The plane lined up on a specific glide path, towards the Rhodesian Border, a distance of nearly eighty miles. The pilot glanced in the rear view mirror – no tell-tail contrails behind him. The met people had been correct. No-one on the ground would either hear or see him.

The target for the cameras, was a Zanu Base, some six miles from Chimoio. The terrorists had a large training establishment on a plateau, ringed by minefields, barbed wire entanglements and pill boxes, and with only one access road into it.

A great deal of information was already available about this base – since one of the Selous Scouts, posing as a potential Freedom Fighter, had spent nearly four months there. This african soldier, whose real identification, would have meant death by burning at the very least, returned to Rhodesia, and reported back to Inkomo Barracks. (14 miles north-west of Salisbury).

The Canberra's photos would provide last minute details of the camp, but specifically, if any new weapons had been installed, or new buildings erected.

The cameras started clicking, and recorded details of all that lay below. By the time the aircraft had reached the border, it had lost 25 000 feet, or nearly five miles of altitude. The engine temperature gauges read desperately low. With a sigh of relief, the pilot watched the fuel flow needles swing, as he opened the throttles.

The photo-interpretation section, eagerly set about developing the films, and printed photographs to a scale of 1 : 500. With this sort of enlargement, individual bushes and even people could be picked out quite easily. It is claimed that American recce photos, can now pin-point golf balls on putting greens.

Several copies were taken over to Inkomo for study. The Scouts' Officers, nodded approval. Everything matched up with earlier runs, except on either side of the main gate, and twenty yards from it, were two dark patches. Paths led from the two patches back to the camp. What were these? New gun emplacements, mortar pits, some explosive devices for closing the road in the event of an attack?

Trooper Chimungo, the man who had spent four months with Zanu in the camp was called in and questioned. He could not throw any light on the mystery at all.

The whole operation hung in the balance. Would it now be a death-trap? The decision – Green – it would be seen through.

The eighty-four men selected for this 'External' gathered. Most were regulars. A few european territorials received innocent telephone messages at noon. "Sam wants to play poker tonight", "George will pick you up soon". The man left immediately and after collecting their kit, went out to Inkomo.

Within 48 hours, the operation would be over.

All weapons, although in perfect condition, were checked and fired. The weapons were cleaned, heavily oiled and reassembled.

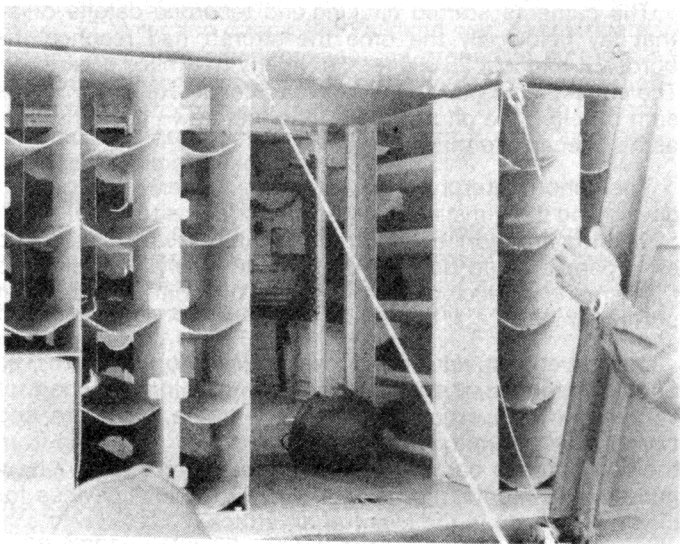
During the night, fourteen vehicles left Inkomo at irregularly staggered intervals. They drove first to Umtali, which they reached after a three and a half hour drive. No stopping there, on through the darkness.

Dawn came. The vehicles were now individually hidden at different points on fruit farms, along the Eastern Border.

The day seemed an anti-climax. Would the operation be called off? Only eight of the eighty-four men knew the exact plan. At 18.00 hours, since not a single radio message had been received throughout the day, they broke open sealed envelopes and divulged, for the first time, details to their men. The daring appealed to them all.

The released specification of the G6 are:
Calibre 155 mm.
Elevation minus 5 to 75 degrees.
Traverse of turret not known.
Rate of fire, not given probably 2/3 rounds per minute.
Ammunition used all Nato 155 mm, including nuclear.
Ammunition carried 32 rounds in rear compartment plus two forward bins with 6 rounds each. Range 3,000 meters to plus 40,000.
Crew 5.

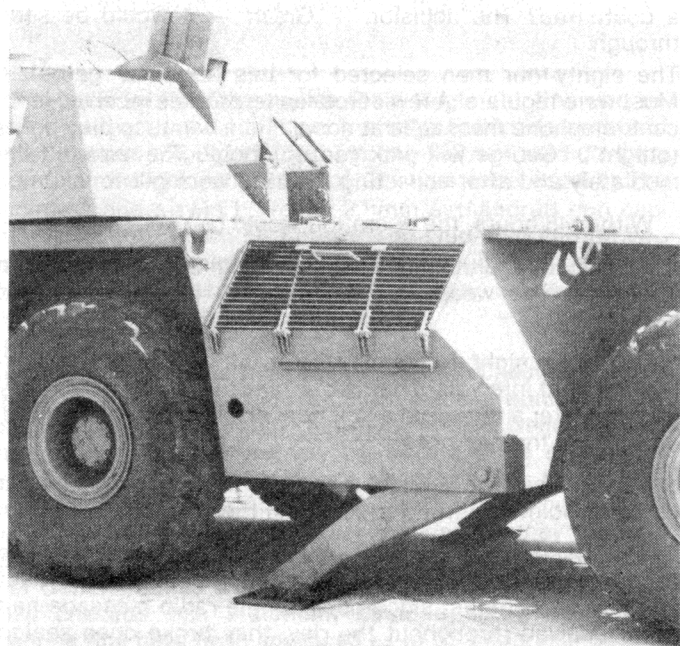
Power plant produces 600 Hp.
Weight 35/38 tons.
Length 10 meters
Width 3 meters.
Road range 400 kilometers.
Road speed 90 Kpm.



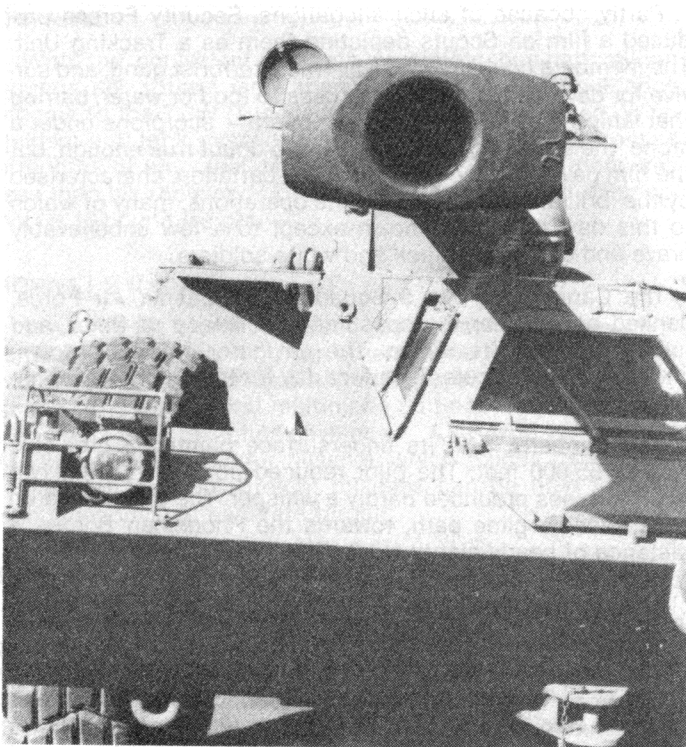
The rear ammunition storage bins.



The G6 travelling at 90 kmp on a section of the test track.



Two of the hydraulic jacks in position for firing.



Frontal View of the G5 Howitzer.

At 22.00 hours, the engines were started, and the trucks moved off for their rendezvous point — only a mile from the border. A tanker topped up each vehicle with dieseline — a couple of pints of oil.

01.20 hours. The message came. — The men climbed aboard their specially equipped vehicles.

On, to the Mozambique side. They had a rough drive through six miles of bush, before they reached anything even resembling a dirt track.

The convoy gained the track, which enabled it to reach the main Umtali-Chimoio road.

The time 04.30 hours. Just one and a half hours to go. The convoy, now of nine vehicles continued.

05.25 hours. Thirty-five minutes before zero hour. Five miles to go.

The vehicles wound their way up the plateau, in the hills north of Chimoio. Captain Reiders stared intently at what had been the two dark spots on the air photographs. Nothing too serious. The barrels of two ZPU 14.5's covered the roadway. Merely two extra gun placements.

The gate guards waved at the 'Frelimo' supply trucks passed through. From the third truck, a soldier threw out a carton of cigarettes to the sentries. They scrambled together for them. Nice touch there, as the operation centred round a classic naval tactic — crossing the T of an enemy squadron, so that one can fire a full broadside, whilst only half the enemy guns can be brought to bear.

The vehicles moved along the road, past the parade square, towards the buildings on the east side of the camp. They drove slowly.

On the parade square were 5,000 soldiers of the Zanla Liberation Forces, all felled in, with just shorts and boots on, and their webbing and rifles. the pre-breakfast parade, under the camp commandant. Time 05.55 hours.

The line of trucks stopped.

Their sides fell away, revealing for the first time, the hidden weapons.

Corporal van Rensburg, the gunner behind the Browning, gazed in amazement at the enemy hordes in front of him. Eighty-two men against eighteen hundred. He would be lucky to survive. Right in the heart of a major enemy camp — the men who could lay land mines blowing up innocent civilians, who could murder and torture their own people, whose idea of

a heroic battle was to eventually kill a seventy year old man and his wife, at their ranch in the Mateke Hills. His grandparents. Also murdered was his little four year old sister holidaying with them — her head cracked open by being thrown against a wall. Like a broken doll in a blood stained floral dress. A dress, he had bought for her as a birthday present.

van Rensburg pressed the trigger. The smell of cordite reached him, before the first rounds had left the barrel — 900 rounds per minute.

They wanted war. They could have it.

A swathe of collapsed men fell away in a gentle curve right across the 80 yards of solidly packed terrorists. Never, had he come across a target like this — the sort of thing one only dreams about.

Fifty men fired their weapons at the Zanu masses — less than two platoons against two battalions.

A 20mm crew swung their weapon round, not at the parade ground, but at a specific target — the headquarters building of the camp. It erupted in a ball of flame.

The Captain in No. 3 vehicle, ran up an aerial for the VHF radio. The set was already on and warm. A short message. "The ospery has struck target lilac."

The carnage on the open ground reached unbelievable proportions. The fire from the automatic weaponry, swept and re-swept across that field. Not an uninjured person remained — hundreds had managed to flee the hail of death. They didn't stop, — over the hill crest, through their own barbed wire and minefields — anything to get into the valley below.

Scouts found themselves in complete control of the whole camp — all that remained were a few senior Zanu representatives firing back from isolated points. They didn't last long either.

A column of black oily smoke rose from the camp.

For four hours, Scouts occupied the camp. Documents were collected, weapons sorted out, supplies fired, (many courtesy of UNO and the Scandinavian countries), and time fused explosives placed in the vast underground munitions depots.

A selection of weapons were to be taken back, including the two 14.5's from the gateway — the rest destroyed.

Like the Osprey at Maleme Dam in the Matopos, Scouts had been in the right place at the right time.

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