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MAJOR MIKE IS
A SOLDIER OF FORTUNE, A MERCENARY.
HERE ARE THE BRUTAL TRUTHS BEHIND WHAT
HE THOUGHT WOULD BE HIS "ONE LAST WAR,"
THE BATTLE AGAINST COMMUNIST INSURGENCY
IN RHODESIA.

MAJOR MIKE

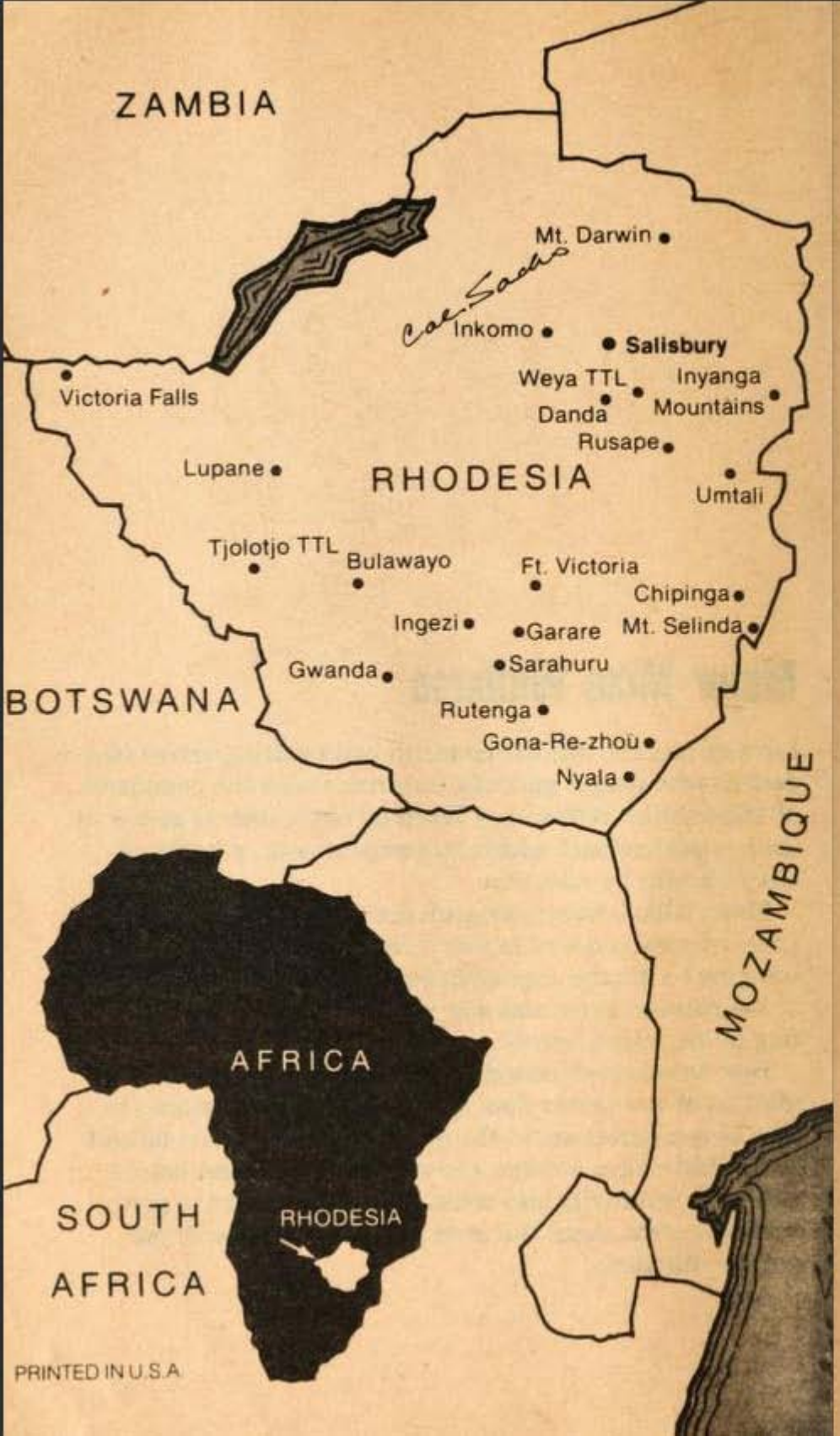
Major Mike Williams
as told to Robin Moore

Major Mike Williams

Love of country was the common bond uniting native Rhodesians who fought guerrilla terrorists under the command of Major Mike Williams, a Texan by birth, man of action by choice, professional soldier by temperament, a leader of Grey's Scouts by selection.

Major Mike's hair-raising adventures create all the suspense, drama and wry humor a reader could hope for, bringing to life the appealing innocence and ingenuousness of the nannies, picannins and witch doctors . . . all in a setting of incredible beauty.

Few writers understand the agony and camaraderie and idiocies of war better than Robin Moore, whose stories of The Green Berets are in the classic tradition. Here, he and Major Mike have written a new genre of wartime adventure with sensitivity and colorful directness, sure to give readers insight about the most controversial area in our world—Rhodesia.



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Major Mike Williams as told to Robin Moore

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MAJOR MIKE

Foreword by Robin Moore

Foreword

During the two years I ran an unofficial American Embassy in Salisbury, Rhodesia I met most of the "Crippled Eagles," as Americans fighting in the Security Forces there called themselves. Crippled by their own government despite the fact they were fighting a Communist enemy trying to "liberate" a democratic, pro-Western country.

At age 52, Major L. H. "Mike" Williams and I were the two old men among the Americans. We had both seen combat as far back as World War II and Mike had gone on to become one of the first twenty men to form the U.S. Army Special Forces, or Green Berets.

Mike was an impressive soldier and I followed his adventures in Rhodesia more closely than those of most of the other Yanks. No young trooper in his early twenties was more active than Mike as he led his horse soldiers—black, white, and colored—against the Communist terrorists.

"When this is all over we'll have to sit down and write a book about you," I said to Mike one day at the "Embassy." Unfortunately that time came sooner than either of us expected. The last chapter of this book tells for the first time the story of the controversial and spurious newspictures that were responsible for Mike's leaving Rhodesia before the war was over.

You can be sure that the sort of battles described, political and field, are actually occurring even as you read "Major Mike." It is an honest story about an honest horse soldier.

Robin Moore
Westport, Conn.
September, 1978

Part I

Major Mike and His Galloping Goffles

CHAPTER 1

– Rutenga

SOMEONE ONCE SAID, "If you spend more than ten years as a soldier, you'll never be worth a damn as anything else."

How true that is I don't know, but on 20 December 1975, I found myself heading back to Africa for the second time. Back into the killing business. World War II, Korea, and the Congo were behind me. I felt like the male counterpart to Jonathan Winters' Granny Frickert, World's Oldest Airline Stewardess. Only in my case, I wasn't a stewardess, just another mercenary looking for that "one last war."

Angola in 1975 was coming apart at the seams. As a direct result of the United States government's timidity in 1975, Soviet-trained and equipped Cuban troops landed in Luanda on Angola's western coast.

Immediately after landing, the Cubans took command of the MPLA, Angola's Communist Party forces, and quickly overran the greatly outnumbered pro-Western UNITA troops, seizing control of the northern portions of Angola's vast landmass.

UNITA was the determined anti-Communist force headed by Dr. Jonas Savimbi whose aim was to free Angola from the Marxist rule of the MPLA.

Unable to hold off the Cubans, Dr. Savimbi's troops withdrew to the jungles of southern Angola near the border with South Africa where he would wage a bitter, no-quarter fight against the Communists. Masters of the bush and heavily supported by Ovambo tribesmen in the area, UNITA forces would begin exacting a heavy toll in Cuban and MPLA lives through ambushes, sabotage and lightning hit-and-run raids.

In 1964 I had flown to Johannesburg, South Africa from Frankfurt, Germany to enlist in a mercenary force commanded by Colonel Mike Hoare. After assisting in the recruiting of other mercenaries for several weeks, I left Jan Smuts Airport and arrived at Kamina Base in the Katanga province of what was then the Belgian Congo, now Zaire. I planned to join Dr. Savimbi's forces, using contacts I'd made with members of that group, now calling themselves "Wild Geese." I had heard that ex-Congolese mercenaries weren't popular in Zaire. However, the UNITA Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Jorge Sangumba, was hiring at the Intercontinental Hotel in Lusaka, Zambia. PanAm to London, East African Airways to Nairobi and Zambian Airways to Lusaka got me to Dr. Sangumba. Unfortunately, 3,500 MPLA and Cuban troops had overrun the town of Huambo before my meeting with Dr. Sangumba. He had no communications of any kind with Dr. Jonas Savimbi and therefore could make no decision relative to hiring me at that time.

Three days in Lusaka convinced me that anything was better than Zambia. A chap I'd met at the Intercontinental Hotel suggested I try the Rhode-

sian Army. Inasmuch as I was gong to Johannesburg and would be passing through Salisbury it wouldn't hurt to talk with them. The last time I had traveled through Salisbury was in March, 1964. I expected changes. I wasn't disappointed.

Eleven years before, Meikle's Hotel was a small white-washed building with a British colonial atmosphere. Checking in this time, I found the surroundings were strictly New York modern.

After a few days, I moved to the Windsor Hotel on Baker Avenue and started contacting government offices. Six weeks later I was still at it.

The Rhodesian Army took a day and a half to say "thanks but no thanks." The British South African Police, utterly polite, doggedly kept insisting that I furnish them with a letter from the FBI. I showed them a standard form letter from my local police department giving me a clean bill of health. "No matter, old chap, you simply must have a letter from the FBI. . J. Edgar and all that, y'know." The fact that J. Edgar was dead didn't seem to faze them.

Somewhere about the end of the sixth week, a member of the Special Branch showed up at the Windsor. He asked if I would meet with his superior who wanted to talk to me. I agreed but told him I had decided to leave for Jo'burg in three days.

Special Branch, the Rhodesian version of our FBI, is nominally under the control of the British South African Police but their duties, as a result of the war, now encompassed a much wider range. Counter-espionage and the control of foreigners arriving in the country were taking a large amount of

their time.

The next afternoon his superior showed up and after discussing general topics and looking at my papers, asked if I could meet with his boss. At that rate, I should have worked my way up to a meeting with the Prime Minister within a week or so. I finally met with the third Special Branch representative and received an assignment which unequivocally demonstrated their trust in me. Because of certain qualifications, I was sent to South Africa on a special mission to a nearby black African state. My mission could not be carried out successfully, and I returned to Salisbury fully expecting further duty assignments.

An additional word here about Special Branch. They are super people and without their help and trust I would never have gotten in the Rhodesian Army.

At army headquarters one afternoon after my return I met with an Officers' Selection Board composed of a major and several colonels. I gave them a detailed resumé which they carefully read and obviously disbelieved. I learned later that their skepticism was based upon previous experiences with other Americans, mostly unpleasant. They made it clear to me that there were no mercenaries in Rhodesia. The only way anyone was going to serve Rhodesia in a military capacity was as a member of the regular army.

A direct commission in the grade of captain was offered me, which I accepted. The last questions asked me were if I would object to serving in the bush for lengthy periods of time and if I would be

willing to assume command of "unusual troops." I found out later what "unusual troops" meant.

While waiting for the army to process my papers, I began to run low on money. An officer in army headquarters wrote me a note to the paymaster for an emergency loan of $50. Imagine the look on the face of a U.S. Army finance officer if a civilian walked into his office and handed him a note requesting a loan. The Rhodesians are different. This was the first but not last time during my stay in Rhodesia that they demonstrated their basic trust in the individual.

After being sworn in, I reported to Headquarters Protection Company at Old Cranborne Barracks in Salisbury, a twenty-minute drive from the center of town. An elderly captain, formerly of the British Army, took me under his wing and helped me get "kitted out." His kindness and sense of humor made him a real friend and counter-balanced some of the "Colonel Blimp" types I was later to meet.

As a former colony of Great Britain, Rhodesia had her share of Colonel Blimps. A ubiquitous type of army officer, the Blimps were found principally within the Army High Command. Insular and narrow-minded in their thinking, hidebound in the straitjacket of tradition from years of living separated from the outside world, they were the sworn enemies of the majority of Americans and other non-British foreigners who had come to Rhodesia to help the gallant little country in her death struggle against the U.N.-assisted Marxist conquest of Africa.

The Rhodesian Army is a small organization,

based on the British Army. Uniforms, the customs of the service, close order drill, and the manual of arms, with minor modifications, are all British. Many of the officers and non-coms have served in the British Army.

At the top, the thinking is largely British from a tactical viewpoint. The "old boy" network of personalities utilized within the respective chains of command on higher levels is all-pervasive. However, this has its good points. Many times I desperately needed supplies and the "old boy" network got them to me quickly, avoiding the maze of quartermaster channels.

I was introduced to tea-time. There was tea at 10:00 a.m., tea at 3:00 p.m., and copious amounts of tea in between. Also, there was coffee and there was booze. A cold beer at lunchtime wasn't all bad!

One thing that impressed me about the Rhodesian Army in 1976 was the *esprit de corps* found in the average officers' mess. People had pride in their unit and a deep love for their country. I spent ten days or so at Cranborne Barracks, then was posted to 3 Protection Company, Mount Darwin, up north about a two-hour jeep drive to the Mozambique border.

Northeast of Salisbury, through lush orange groves, Mount Darwin has borne the brunt of the terrorist war for five years. The area is one of tobacco farms and cattle. The farmers in this part of Rhodesia had become used to the war.

For example, the first rocket of a terrorist attack utilizing RPG7s (Soviet-made bazooka-like weapons), RPDs (Soviet machine guns) and AK47s (Soviet assault rifles) hit the roof of a farmers' social club one night. The farmers swarmed out of the building with FNs (the Belgium-made standard issue in the Rhodesian Army), Uzis (submachine guns), 303s (heavy hunting rifles), .45 and 9mm pistols, and hosed the area with lead. The "Freedom Fighters" hauled ass, leaving behind several wounded and two dead.

When I arrived in Darwin I was briefed by intelligence officers as to terrorist operations in the area. Ambushes, Russian TM-46 land mines and butchering the locals were the order of the day. The mission of the 3 Protection Company was to furnish armed escorts for construction equipment, graders and bulldozers, building roads. Convoys to Mukumburu, a village near the Mozambican border, were another of 3 Company's responsibilities.

The company commander I came up to relieve temporarily, Major Tom Watkins, sat down with me and clarified what the selection board had meant by "unusual troops."

"Mike," he said, "officers assigned to protection companies are either too old to command firstline troops or else the army wants to keep an eye on them."

"What's unusual about these troops?" I asked.

"They're colored," Tom replied, smiling sympathetically. "African mothers and European fathers, or the other way around." He lit a horrible-smelling pipe. "The Europeans shun them and the Africans hate them. They're outcasts from all levels of society."

He told me the Asians, Moslems and Hindus

within the company had fine educations and did outstanding jobs as signallers and clerks, both in company headquarters and supply. The colored beat them unmercifully when they felt like it.

"Never trust these buggers," Major Watkins said. "They will run at the first shot and shoot you in the bargain if you get in the way!" As a result of a substantial increase in terrorist activities throughout the Mount Darwin area, we were losing an average of three vehicles per week to mines.

In an effort to determine the combat status of 3 Company troops, I rode in the convoy to Mukumburu from Mount Darwin on several occasions after I took over command. Generally the troops were alert but I found empty Coca-Cola bottles, tire irons, vehicle jacks and chains thrown carelessly in the back of some trucks. This crazy practice soon ceased when I pointed out what would happen to the troops riding in the rear of the vehicles if the truck hit a mine and the coke bottles started flying around like shrapnel.

A serious shortage of officers in protection companies was causing problems; there were now insufficient numbers of company commanders to keep pace with the increase in new companies being formed.

A month later when Major Watkins came back I was transferred to Llewellin Barracks, Bulawayo, to take command of 5 Protection Company in a tactical role. Five Company was to be given responsibility for guarding a vital rail link and bridge in the southeastern operational area.

During the last week of training at Llewellin, I

got two new subalterns, our equivalent of second lieutenants, both fresh from Gwelo, The School of Infantry. They looked about fourteen years old and made me feel eighty-nine.

With the time of our training rapidly running out, it was becoming evident that the colored were showing a certain amount of combat readiness that made me feel the hard work we'd expended hadn't all been wasted.

I concentrated as much as possible on combat transition shooting. Night firing and patrols, I felt, were things the colored soldiers, "goffles," would have to be proficient at above all. Their physical condition, good at the time they arrived at Llewellin, was now excellent. They were hard as nails.

Protection Company Headquarters in Salisbury was most helpful and was sending personnel down to assist my supply people in getting ready for the bush.

Two days before our scheduled departure I sat down with my two new second leftenants and went over a list of priorities. Checking them off, one by one, made me feel better although I knew perfectly well that everything that could go wrong usually did.

At any rate, I was satisfied that 5 Company was as ready as it would ever be. Now we had to find out what was waiting for us at the sharp end of this war.

CHAPTER 2

The Bridge at Ingezi

ONE WEEK PRIOR to 5 Protection Company's deployment to the operational area, I was summoned to army headquarters.

I was briefed in detail about what would be facing 5 Company when we arrived in the bush. On the surface, our mission was simple enough—we would be responsible for the security of a railroad segment between the small village of Ingezi and the railhead at Rutenga. There was also the matter of the railway bridge at Ingezi.

Army arranged a flight for me to Rutenga where I could speak with the JOC commander, Lieutenant Colonel French, and inspect the rail segment. The bridge, however, was the purview of Rhodesia Railways and I would have to speak with their representative in Bulawayo.

I flew to Rutenga, met with the JOC commander and soon realized exactly what faced me. The intelligence officer ticked off an impressive array of facts concerning the railway. I listened carefully, jotting down notes as he spoke.

He picked up a wooden pointer, turned to the map of the operational area stapled to the wall, and began. "The rail segment between Rutenga and Ingezi is eighty kilometers long." He traced the

outline of the tracks. "As you can see, the line runs through the middle of two TTL's (Tribal Trust Lands) Matibi number one on the northeast, and Belingwe on the southwest directly across the railroad." I wondered about the closeness of the two Tribal Trust Lands—I was to hear the bad news shortly.

"The bridge at Ingezi carries all traffic between South Africa and Rhodesia—petrol, ammo, supplies. If it were closed or knocked out for ten days the war effort would be in very bad shape." He continued, "The terrs know how important the railroad is—they started attacking the line in April. They've killed two railroad employees by zapping the goods train with AK and RPD fire. As a result, none of the crews will work after dark so the trains are now running only during daylight. . .obviously, we need that changed to a twenty-four-hour operation. I've got a helicopter laid on. He can fly you up to Ingezi and let you see the countryside." The briefing was finished. I followed him outside the tent and walked the fifty yards to the waiting Alouette chopper, its rotors idly turning. I pulled myself up into the seat behind the pilot and we lifted off, nose down, picking up speed and altitude. Intercepting the tracks just north of the Rutenga station we headed for Ingezi.

As we flew along, fifty feet above the rusty railway, I saw with ever-increasing concern a panorama of terrain that was an infantryman's nightmare. The railroad snaked and twisted through cuts whose embankments rose almost vertically on either side of the tracks. One gook with an RPG7 or

even an AK with tracers, and goodbye tank cars.

Further south toward Rutenga the picture was almost as bad, with open areas of 500 to 600 meters from which jutted kopjies—hills of rock. Their heavy bush provided excellent fields of fire, cover and concealment.

To complete the dismal picture, Belingwe TTL was a non-curfew area with total freedom of movement for people, vehicles and donkey carts. Directly across the tracks was Matibi TTL, a curfew area and a hot-bed of terrorist activities. The terrorists were no fools. They would zap the trains as they passed, then simply run across the tracks, cache their weapons and go to the nearest "village beer drink" to celebrate. The village beer drink is a heavily attended social institution in the Tribal Trust Lands, starting on Friday afternoon and lasting until Sunday night.

If the Rhodesian Army wanted to test my command capabilities they sure as hell had picked the right situation. A company strength of 200 to secure a bridge and 80 kilometers of rail-line would have been laughable had the situation not been as desperate as it was.

"Seen enough?" the chopper pilot yelled over the noise of rushing wind and the whap-whap-whap of rotor blades.

"Yeah—more than enough," I answered and pointed back in the direction of Rutenga. He banked the Alouette and started for home.

The door gunner, eyes moving over the ground, sat silently as the railroad swept past beneath us. As the shadow of the helicopter moved over an

occasional village there would be a sudden flurry of movement—chickens running for the safety of nearby bush, picannins jumping and pointing, a team of brown and white burros snorting, kicking, turning over the donkey cart they had been pulling.

As the chopper settled down on the runway back at Rutenga, an officer from the ops room ran out to us, bent-over to lessen the dust effect boiling up from the rotors.

"Captain, you'll have to get a move on—the pilot's got to get back to Bulawayo ASP."

I unbuckled my safety belt and jumped to the ground, following the staff officer to a waiting Cessna 182 that would take me back to Bulawayo.

"Thanks again, and my apologies to Colonel French—I'll see him when we come down."

"Not to worry—have a good trip." We shook hands and I scrambled into the Cessna.

"You're seeing something of the countryside, are you?" The Cessna pilot, a shaggy-moustached middle-aged farmer, puffed on a pipe and eyed me curiously as we flew toward Bulawayo.

"Yep, but I'm afraid the next time I go down south it won't be as comfortable a trip as this one."

The haze that was Bulawayo appeared and the pilot spoke to Approach Control, giving our destination and requesting that a vehicle meet us at municipal airport. As we taxied up to the ramp, a Landrover braked to a stop beside the terminal.

"Be seeing you, then." The pilot held open the door against the pressure of the wind from the prop.

"Cheers." Grabbing my SLR from the rear seat, I

stepped down from the cockpit and walked toward the waiting jeep.

The young white Rhodesian driver saluted. "Sir, where do you want to go?"

"The Rhodesia Railways office—d'you know where it is?"

"No, sir, but I'll find out." I followed him past the Immigration and Customs counters. A quick look in the phone book and we were on our way into town.

A quiet side street was the site of the Railways office. "I'll be up there for awhile, so you might as well go get a coffee. Be back in, say, forty-five minutes."

I left the driver and entered the main floor entrance. Directed to the second floor, I located the District Superintendent's office.

"I'm Captain Williams. May I see the superintendent?"

The secretary looked up from her typewriter, taking in my muddy boots. "Please wait a moment." She rose and walked to the door of a nearby office. "A Captain Williams to see you, sir."

"Um-yas, send him in." The voice was pleasant, British accent heavy.

"This way, Captain." She sniffed as I walked past her.

A true British civil servant, Superintendent Smythe was a dignified, conservatively dressed gentleman who greeted me with reserved warmth caused, I felt, by my sweat-soaked camouflage uniform. The office was air conditioned, the outside African sun was not.

"Please come in, Captain—um. . .?"

"Williams." I shook hands and sat down in a leather-backed armchair.

"Um. . .you're going to Ingezi, I take it." He fumbled with a pipe, tamping rough-cut tobacco into a worn bowl.

"More correctly, sir, Rutenga," I answered. "But the Ingezi bridge is part of my responsibility."

He lit a match and got his pipe going. "Yes, last month an engineer bloke was by here with a report he'd finished about the bridge. . .I think I've got it here, somewhere." He pulled open a desk drawer and brought out a thick sheaf of papers, several of which appeared to be detailed engineering drawings.

"Take a look at these if you like. I'll see about tea." He walked to the door and called his secretary.

I separated the reports from the bridge diagrams and began to familiarize myself with the Ingezi bridge.

My previous training and experience had been for the most part as an infantryman in airborne units. Any knowledge I'd acquired in the field of engineering had been very damned little. Even with this smattering of ignorance, I could see that this was no simple span holding up a set of choo-choo tracks.

The superintendent returned, followed by an African bearing a tray full of cups, saucers, milk, spoons and God knows what.

"Mr. Smythe, this doesn't appear to be just an ordinary bridge to me," I said, watching him pour tea.

"Oh, quite right, old chap—we're rather proud of that bridge—how many sugars?" He poised a spoon over a cup.

"One." I was learning patience, but ever so slowly.

"You see, that bridge is one of the most important in Rhodesia." He stirred his tea. "That structure, if destroyed, would effectively halt all rail traffic between Rhodesia and South Africa for several weeks."

I began to feel very lonely.

"What kind of security is there on the bridge at present?" I asked, bracing myself for the answer.

"I'm not quite certain. However, there're some police chaps there—you can see them when you make your inspection." He smiled. "Take all the time you need, Major, make yourself at home. . .If you'll excuse me, I have some work to do."

I turned back to the report.

Whoever the engineer major was, he knew his trade. In addition to the diagrams of the bridge, he'd outlined the vulnerable areas of the structure together with his recommendations for improving the installation against terrorist attacks. Although the diagrams were explicit enough, they didn't include any pictures or sketches of the surrounding terrain. Without those, I couldn't begin to formulate any kind of defensive plan for the bridge.

I thanked Mr. Smythe, finished my tea and left. Driving back to Llewellin, I began to appreciate the situation. Not only had I been handed the most vital rail link in Rhodesia to guard, but thrown in was a railroad bridge that could easily need a reinforced platoon to secure it adequately from possible attack.

I had a company strength of 205 at that time. The length of the rail line from Ingezi to Rutenga was some eighty km's. Fifty miles of track and a vital bridge! They had to be kidding. . .they weren't!
I remembered all too clearly the futile efforts of the German Wermacht in attempting to secure rail lines and bridges both in Russia and occupied France during WW II. They had plenty of manpower, first class troops, and still got their ass blown off by partisans.

I had a handful of colored soldiers. There was a strong possibility my career in the Rhodesian Army was going to be a limited one. Since the "goffles" or colored soldiers in the Rhodesian Army were viewed with equal amounts of suspicion and contempt by their European counterparts, I was determined to try a different method of handling them.

Previous European company commanders had approached the colored with an attitude of "do as you're told, or else!"

I decided to use Special Forces techniques of leadership. Quite simply, the most effective means of leading troops was just that—leading them.

On the Friday prior to Monday's departure date, I called the platoon leaders together and put the responsibility of preparing their respective units for deployment on their shoulders. "When you feel your people are ready for Monday's move," I said, "give them a pass and let them go." They all nodded, with wide grins.

The company had to be packed, vehicles loaded,

ammo distributed, radios checked. The tires of the trucks had to be filled with water to offset the possible effects of hitting a land mine enroute; the additional weight provided by the water tends to stabilize the vehicle in case it is overturned by the blast. I felt that the added authority I'd given my new NCO's would motivate them to work their troops even harder to prepare for the move. Blissful in my naiveté, I trotted off to the armory for a new SLR rifle to take to the bush with me.

There were two major work details in operation. One consisted of a large group engaged in filling sandbags which would subsequently be placed on the cargo compartment floor of the troop-carrying vehicles to dampen the effects of land mine explosions. The other detail was involved in filling the truck tires with water.

Before I left for my quarters I made one last check to see if they were indeed doing what they were supposed to. All was well. Our march orders called for the company to pass the IP (a control point officially designated to dispatch the unit on its way) at 0835 in the morning.

I ate an early breakfast, loaded my gear into my jeep and made sure my two new subbies or second lieutenants were ready to go.

When we all jumped down from my vehicle in front of the company headquarters, I was greeted with the most indescribable scene of confusion I'd ever seen.

Like something out of bedlam, there was a kaleidoscopic series of scenes. People were running, cursing, yelling. Several had seated themselves

with their backs against the wall to the headquarters building, rifles across their knees, calmly smoking cigarettes.

Stunned, I walked into company headquarters. Rahjput, the Indian company clerk, was yelling at two privates who were struggling with a desk.

"Where's the sergeant major?" I asked.

"Oh, sah, I do not know." Rahjput's large, spaniel-like brown eyes were wild.

I walked outside and headed for the large hangar some 200 yards away. Previously used by the Royal Air Force as a training facility for pilots during WW II, Llewellin still retained the aircraft hangars which were put to good use as barracks for infantry trainees.

Rounding the corner of an adjacent building I stopped short, gazing in total disbelief at what I saw.

A line of trucks, each bearing a chalked identification number on its side, was surrounded by a seething mass of troops. As I watched, an ant-like line of soldiers moved to and from the hangar, carrying to the waiting vehicles a mountain of decidedly unsoldierlike items.

Guitars, mandolins, bongo drums, several trumpets, countless transistor radios, and a number of record players rounded out the contraband. I walked over to a corporal who was struggling with a pack to which he had tied a guitar.

"What in hell is going on with this circus?" I asked.

Sweating, he looked up in fear and dropped the pack to the muddy ground. "Ah, sah, we're getting

loaded," he stammered.

I looked past him to the remainder of the vehicles. Similar events were occurring behind each truck. There were no NCO's visible anywhere, then I realized that they were running to and fro with their troops instead of controlling the operation as they should have been.

Grabbing a sergeant, I pointed to a group clustered around a box full of rifle ammunition. "Get those people lined up, grab one and have him start issuing 200 rounds per man." He nodded and ran to the milling troops.

Lieutenant Scrace, vainly trying to organize one group into a loading detail to get tents on a supply vehicle, was arguing with a wispy-moustached trooper.

"Get those bastards into a line, pick up those fucking tents and load them on the truck." I grabbed the trooper by the scruff of the neck. He howled and frantically started loading a tent.

"Sir, I'm sorry but I couldn't get his attention," Scrace apologized.

"Don't worry about it. Just kick ass and get them moving."

Order was not emerging from chaos, but there was a glimmering of sanity as stores were loaded, ammunition issued and the gypsy-like mob started clambering onto the vehicle.

In the midst of the turmoil a Landrover drove up, its tires squashing a ukelele that had fallen from the owner's neck seconds before.

Father Dunphy, the Catholic chaplain, climbed out of the jeep and walked over, his round face

wreathed in a benign smile.

"Greetings, Mike. I see you're getting everything in order."

I looked past him at the howling, cursing mob and groaned.

"Yes, Father, we're working at it."

"Um, fine, maybe we can have a little prayer before we start off?" Without waiting, he raised his eyes heavenward and started praying.

As his words drifted skyward, a sergeant ran up behind a private who was trying to stuff a small puppy in his pack and kicked him in the ass, shouting, "Get on, you! Fuck you!"

The chaplain prayed onward, nothing daunted by shouts, screams and curses.

The vehicles started up, I patted the chaplain on his shoulder, vaulted into my jeep and we began to move away from the loading area.

As we chugged toward the main gate, the apoplectic figure of the adjutant materialized from his office. Running alongside, he screamed, "Good God, man, who's going to clean up that bloody great mess?" pointing an accusing finger at the debris scattered over the muddy ground.

"Goddamit, do you want me to stop these idiots now?" I yelled. "If I do, and they get off these frigging vehicles we'll never get out of here."

He was wild-eyed and puffing.

"Get the bandits to do it," I said. The bandits were African prisoners who'd received their names from the red-striped jerseys they wore.

"Gah" strangled the adjutant and stumbled to a halt, shaking his fist at the procession as it rumbled

by him.

We made it past the main gate, got a snappy salute from the guard and managed 800 meters down the road toward the war before the first vehicle broke down.

The Indian clerk sitting behind me in the back of the Landrover tapped me on the shoulder. "Sah, oh sah, the Bedford has stopped! Oh yes, indeed it has stopped."

He was right; indeed it had stopped. . .and so had the remainder of the zig-zagging convoy.

One stores-vehicle, loaded to the top of the cab with kitchen items, had braked to a halt in the center of the main gate entrance.

From the interior of the Regimental Police building across from the wooden barrier used to control traffic into Llewellin came a chorus of yells and curses. The RP's inside the small wooden office had seen the lumbering truck grind to a halt, effectively blocking the traffic behind it.

To the delight of the grinning colored troops sitting atop the mounds of kitchen equipment, a bespectacled regimental policeman engaged the harrassed truck driver in a futile argument demanding that he move the Bedford forthwith.

While this was going on, a gaggle of African females, some eight or ten teen-agers, trotted barefoot past the vehicle. Their passage was heralded by a volley of whistles and obscene propositions from the colored, most of whom spoke fluent Shona. The girls rolled their eyes, giggled, stuck their right index fingers up their nostrils signifying embarrassment, and ran past the RP's. Rather than

waste further time with the crippled truck, I motioned the rest of the column around the immobile Bedford.

As the convoy moved past me, I drove back to the stalled truck. "Sergeant, how long before you can catch up?" I asked the sweating mechanic hammering away at the exposed innards of the vehicle.

He looked up, face tight with disgust, and wiped his brow with a grimy forearm. "Sir, if these buggers would take care of these bloody vehicles we wouldn't be in the midst of this balls-up!" He paused and looked at the engine. "I can catch up with you in an hour or so."

"Good show, we'll see you down the road. You've got a signaller with you?"

"Yes, sir. . .if there's any further problem we'll give you a shout."

I nodded to my driver and we drove off in pursuit of the column.

Once out on the Bulawayo-Salisbury road, the remaining vehicles picked up their intervals and for a few moments I forgot the disastrous start 5 Company had made toward the "sharp end," the part of the war where people were killing—and being killed.

We were now several hours behind schedule so I began concentrating on doing nothing but attempting to get as many of our vehicles to Fort Victoria as possible.

In spite of the mind-blowing incidents involved in the departure, I noticed the beauty of the Rhodesian countryside.

One would have to be totally insensitive not to be

impressed with the magnificence of the scenery. This was early May and winter wasn't far off; the air was crisp and the sun was a welcome warmth instead of the normal hammer-like furnace blast it generated in summer.

As the miles rolled by under the water-filled tires I cautiously began to believe we might make it without further incident.

"Sah, another TCV (troop carrying vehicle) has broken down," the radio operator said, pointing behind us. "Go back," I yelled, tapping the driver. Braking, he turned the jeep off the shoulder of the road and started back.

I waved the convoy past, noting that a few of the troops were learning the age-old art of being an infantry soldier; the first axiom is to get as much rest as possible. Some of the colored had wrapped themselves in blankets and were asleep.

The large recovery vehicle had stopped by the roadside and two mechanics from the Llewellin motorpool were busy inspecting a crippled Bedford truck.

"Sir, we'll see if we can tow him for awhile. His engine just won't take these hills."

I didn't want stragglers scattered all the way to Fort Victoria. Although this segment of road was considered to be a "Green Route" which meant there hadn't been any terr activity, that designation could change to "Red" in a hurry, particularly if a single truck loaded with supplies came limping along by itself with a handful of colored soldiers riding alone.

We slowed our pace and I watched as, one by one,

the long line of vehicles slowly began closing up behind the tow-truck and its burden.

As the convoy struggled its way up a long sloping hill another vehicle sputtered and came to a halt. There were now three vehicles down and we'd not yet completed a fourth of the distance to Fort Victoria.

It was time for a piss-call anyway. I signalled a halt, motioning the vehicles to pull off to the side of the road and give the troops a chance to stretch their legs.

A few jumped down and lit cigarettes. I ordered several of them to move off into the bush on either side of the road to provide security.

We'd initially figured about eight hours or so to complete the trip from Llwewellin to Fort Victoria but that had been predicated on passing the IP at 0830. We had long since screwed that timetable to hell-and-gone.

At this juncture, instead of attempting to revise a new ETA (Estimated Time of Arrival) at Fort Vic, I was simply concentrating on getting there—at any time. I looked at my watch and motioned the troops back on the vehicles, praying the battered trucks would start.

One by one, the tired engines coughed, spluttered and clanked back into life.

All except one.

I walked down the line of vehicles, nodding to some of the colored whose spirits hadn't been dampened by the gradual disintegration of the convoy.

"Sir, we can tow this one behind that other RL,"

suggested one of the mechanics who'd installed the first tow-bar on a crippled truck.

"O.K., let's move out." I walked back to my jeep, climbed in and looked back at the columns. From the clouds of black smoke boiling into the air it was apparent that 5 Company was once more ready to move.

We rolled forward again.

The sun was beginning to disappear behind an irregular line of hills and the temperature started to drop. The crisp air that earlier had provided a bracing coolness to sunburned faces now developed a sharp bite that made the troops burrow their faces into woolen scarves and balaclavas, a ski-mask type of wool headgear designed to cover the head and face, leaving space for the eyes, nose and mouth.

Just before darkness fell, a lone motorcyclist wearing the uniform of the British South African Police buzzed up alongside my jeep and motioned that he wanted to talk with me.

I didn't relish the idea of stopping the column again, for there was the distinct possibility that more vehicles would be unable to start after another halt.

"Pull off the road at the next lay-by." I pointed to a rest stop ahead, and waved the convoy past us.

As we halted, the motorcyclist dismounted and saluted.

"Sir, are you Captain Williams?" he asked.

"Yes, what's wrong?"

"We have an urgent message for you at our HQ."

"What is it?"

"You'll have to come with me to get it."

No matter how long I would work with the British mentality I could never fully understand precisely how it ticked. Why not write the message down, give it to the cop, let him catch up with me? If a reply was necessary, I contact my superiors at Llewellin by radio.

"Come on, Constable." He remounted his bike, kicked it to a start—(thank God at least the motorcycles worked)—and roared off with us in hot pursuit.

After a fifteen-minute drive we turned off the main road onto a dirt trail that led to the BSAP station house. The constable led me to their radio room. I nodded to the African radio operator and asked him what all the fuss was about.

"Sah, youah headquarters says you to call them." He picked up the mike. "Shall I raise them for you now?"

"Go ahead." I sat down on a nearby bench and fished my notebook and pen out of my jacket pocket.

Llewellin came back on the first call. The adjutant's voice was distorted but readable.

"Five this is Zero—I say youah Tango Charley Victor will be joining you at your destination."

Shit! As I thought another wasted trip to slow me down! The message about the Troop Carrying Vehicle could just as easily have been forwarded to the BSAP office at Shalvani and saved me this side journey.

"Is that all, sah?" the African operator looked up expectantly.

"Yes, Roger Him," I had turned and was leaving the room, heading for my jeep and the convoy already miles down the road—or at least I hoped they were.

I preferred not to think of the alternative. It was dark now. Light fades very rapidly in the Rhodesian countryside, to be replaced by a velvet blackness that comes so swiftly the eyes require a longer than usual period of adjustment.

My driver, bless his Indian soul, had topped off with petrol while I was receiving the "priority" message from the adjutant.

We caught up to the column with some two hours' drive remaining before reaching Shabani.

Two more vehicles had "packed up." There was now a total of five trucks disabled from the original thirteen we'd started with. Thanks to the ingenuity and near genius of the two mechanics, the crippled trucks were being towed behind the remaining vehicles.

It had turned brutally cold, the wind knifing through the sweat-soaked camouflage uniforms of the weary troops who huddled together in a vain attempt to avoid the steady blast of icy air whipping past the trucks.

The town of Shabani was ahead, and I decided to stop so the troops could get some hot coffee and sandwiches at the Women's Volunteer Service canteen. This system of "troopies" canteens is a nationwide institution and provides food and drinks for troops passing through towns enroute to or from various operational areas.

The ladies who staff these installations are volun-

teers, many of whom have husbands, sons or fathers serving in the Rhodesian military. This war literally touches almost every family in the country.

Bouncing along in the Landrover, I was trying to bury my nose as deep as possible in my woolen scarf.

I looked up and saw two African donkeys loom out of the darkness. One stepped in the middle of the road. There was a sudden swerve and our right front fender hit the animal full in the head. "Shit!" the driver yelled as he tried to push the radio operator off his shoulders where the impact had thrown him.

We shuddered to a stop and I counted noses to make sure no one was hospital material. Evidently the only casualty was the hapless donkey now lying motionless in the road, his mate anxiously braying her concern.

I crawled shakily from the jeep and, drawing my pistol, walked back to the motionless form, wiping moisture from my icy nose with the back of one mittened hand.

Behind me I could hear the driver's boots on the pavement as he trotted after me. His flashlight pierced the blackness and revealed the bloody head of the beast.

I stopped beside the donkey and slipped a round into the chamber of the 9 millimeter Star pistol. I'm no lover of the 9mm pistol but at that point I didn't have anything heavier.

The driver moved in front of me. "Sah, please. . . wait a moment."

"What the hell're you doing?" I asked, not wanting to go through some crazy "save the animals" scene.

"Watch, sah."

He drew back his booted foot and gave the donkey a hard kick in the ass.

There was an indignant snort and the seemingly dead beast lurched to its feet, shook its head and to the delight of his mate galloped off into the bush.

We walked back to the jeep and checked the right front fender. The headlight was smashed and the fender bent but we could continue.

So much for Rhodesian wildlife

Shabani is a sleepy little town some ninety-seven km from Fort Victoria. It sits on the southern border of the Runde TTL and serves both as a railhead for the Salisbury-Rutenga-Beitbridge railway, as well as a much-used stopover for troops enroute to Fort Victoria and points southeast.

The battered convoy had pulled to a stop just ouside the city limits, troops and trucks like tired cattle waiting to be fed and watered. My radio wasn't picking up headquarters and I wanted them at least to know where we were. The BSAP in Rhodesia may not be the army's favorite at all times, but they can always be depended on for excellent communications facilities. We went to the Shabani BSAP office.

At the charge office I'd expected a grim-faced, hard-eyed inspector. I got, instead, a nattily dressed lady of some twenty-two years. Short brown hair, brown eyes, a snub nose and a body that suddenly remined me that my life had recently

been a most celibate one indeed.

"Captain Williams, ma'am, I started to bow, then caught her stifled giggle. All right, I wouldn't try my gentlemanly approach.

"May I use your radio or land means? I want to get through to JOC Fort Vic."

She nodded and called an African constable from an adjoining room. "Joshua, take this gentleman to the telephone and raise our people at Fort Vic for him."

"Yes, madam."

I thanked her and followed him into the radio room.

Within minutes I had relayed our position and vehicle status through the Fort Vic cops to JOC Fort Vic. I wasn't naive or trusting enough to hazard giving them an ETA because at this point I didn't really know if any of 5 Company's personnel or trucks would ever show up at our next destination.

Suddenly tired and fed up with the whole absurd mess, I walked slowly back to the charge office.

My fatigue disappeared instantly at the sight of a blue skirt at mid-point up a pair of beautiful thighs. She had swiveled her chair around and was picking up a set of Landrover keys from her desk.

"Captain, may I take you to the WVS? Your troops are already there. While you were on the phone your leftenant came in and said to tell you he's got everything under control."

I tore my dirty old man's eyes away from her young legs and stammered, "Yes, thank you."

Following her out the door and watching what was happening under the seat of her tight skirt as

she walked, I realized I was definitely in love—with her mind, obviously.

Getting into the passenger side of the grey Peugeot sedan, I babbled some type of nonsense while desperately searching for a brilliant series of one-liners that would render her helpless with laughter.

All I could get out was a classic, "We hit a donkey on the way."

"Supah! What's New York like? I've always been keen on seeing it!" Her smile was dazzling. The Peugeot stopped. We were there. Shit.

"Cheers and good luck, Captain." My dream girl vanished in a puff of blue smoke and a shower of gravel from the rear tires.

I turned away from the Peugeot and started for the brightly lit WVS canteen, now filled with milling soldiers.

After a never-ending stream of coffee, tea, sandwiches, cakes, do-nuts and God knows what had gorged empty bellies, I got the troops back on the vehicles and the last leg of the trip to Fort Vic began.

The road quickly left Shabani behind and the blackness of the Rhodesian night replaced the town's brightness. Two of our sick vehicles were left behind in the safety of Shabani's BSAP motor pool. A recovery truck would bring them on the following day.

Intermittently our headlights would pick up the stark outlines of a kraal, its huts standing ghostly grey in the beam.

Not a dog, not an animal moved on either side of

the road. Outside the curfew areas of the countryside, animals wandered aimlessly often standing or lying in the road. I sincerely hoped we wouldn't engage another donkey at point-blank jeep range.

The temperature had now plummeted, turning the wind into a force that steadily drained one of energy, warmth and alertness. After numbing hours, in reality only one-and-a-half, we passed through the Mashaba township, gazing with longing at the shuttered houses.

The mass of Nyamunda Mountain's 4200-foot peak was not visible in the darkness.

Forty ass-crunching km more to Fort Vic. I looked at my watch — 11 p.m. We'd been on the road for fifteen hours. At twenty minutes past twelve I saw the figures of two regimental policemen waving us down from the roadside near the Fort Victoria city limits sign.

"Pull over," I croaked.

One of the RE's ran up, saluted and handed me a note. Written in ink, it welcomed us to Fort Vic, told me where to billet my troops and cautioned me to make sure there were no incidents between my colored soldiers of the Rhodesian African Rifles, an all-black infantry battalion in whose bivouac area we would be encamped.

Fat chance of that! My people were so cold they would be lucky to be able to crawl into their bedrolls, much less start a punch-up with the nearby Africans.

I glanced back at the note. "P.S.," it read, "Sorry, but the ladies of the local WVS waited hot soup and sandwiches on you, but finally had to close down

and go home. Cheers. Major Keighly."

I took a sip of cold water from my canteen and motioned my driver toward the waiting line of tents off the main road.

The next three days were filled with nose-counting, vehicle repair and being briefed, re-briefed and re-rebriefed.

We also got some additional European personnel. All of them were comms specialists of one type or another: a warrant officer, second class; warrant officer, first; two corporals and a Chinese lance corporal.

A miracle occurred and we received replacement vehicles for our cripples.

On a sunny morning we made the obligatory stop at the WVS canteen south of Fort Vic, finished sandwiches, coffee and tea (God, how these troops could eat!), and began the 130 km trip to Rutenga.

A second miracle occurred when not a single vehicle broke down on the final segment of the trip. The radios worked, the vehicles worked and the troops' morale was high.

Just south of the Lundi River some 35 km's above Rutenga, the terrs had ambushed a territorial force rifle company's convoy several days before. They'd been fired on from the bush bordering the main road and suffered one killed, several wounded.

I didn't need to repeat my warnings to the goffles along this stretch. They weren't reading comic books or listening to transistor radios. Within the

bouncing confines of each truck, occupants riding in the rear were lying in the prone position, each man covering a pre-assigned sector of fire.

Although I knew that the prime motivation behind this display of professionalism was fear, nonetheless I was proud of these troops.

Hated by the Africans, scorned by the Europeans, the colored lived in their own particular brand of hell wherein taking care of "number one" started as soon as they could walk.

There was a minimum of confusion on our arrival in Rutenga.

A large area across from the railway station was assigned me as our new "home." Vehicles were dispersed and equipment unloading began.

When the last piece of bulkily wrapped canvas had thudded to the ground, a sobering fact came to light. There was not one tent among the stacks of goodies littering the yard. The rolls of canvas the troops had muscled into the vehicles had been tarpaulins—not the tentage we badly needed for personnel, company headquarters and a kitchen.

Fortunately we had "rat packs," field rations allocated to each rifleman—the Rhodesian equivalent of "C" rations. These, together with primus, mountain-type stoves, gave the colored a hot meal and forestalled what could have turned into a nasty situation.

Patel, the Indian quartermaster, was set upon by a group of colored whose intents were plain! Either

the hapless, shaggy-haired quartermaster would provide some kind of shelter from the rapidly approaching night or the colored would pound him in the usual manner. He provided.

Running like terrified mice, Patel's retinue of Indian clerks, flunkies and assorted "gophers" hastily erected a series of canvas tarpaulins stretched from the cab of one truck to an adjacent vehicle. Makeshift though they were, the strips of canvas provided a shelter of sorts from the bitter cold that would come.

My only worry was the possibility that an absentminded driver would crank up a Bedford and unwittingly drive over the sleeping forms of his mates, squashing them like bugs.

Happily, this didn't occur.

The morning following our arrival, I took Lieutenant Scrace with me and journeyed up the railroad to the Ingezi Bridge.

Our means of transport was a small, lightly armored trolley. Gasoline powered, the little vehicle would hit speeds of twenty-five miles per hour. It provided rapid transport for troops and equipment from Rutenga up the eighty km of twisting track to Ingezi.

Spaced fairly evenly along the tracks were smaller villages; Sarahuru, Garare, Ngungubane, and lesser stops.

The larger of these boasted a railway stationmaster, a handful of buildings and a nearby cluster of tin huts in which lived the African employees of Rhodesia Railways.

Approaching the bridge, I could see a massive

range of hills off to the left. A single peak towered above the rest; its base contained the Buchwa mine. Copper, iron ore and manganese were plentiful in Rhodesia, and the mountain at which I was staring contained such a high percentage of minerals that radio communications were difficult, if not impossible, at times from the Ingezi area.

The trolley slowed, rounded a curve and stopped.

We were looking at the bridge.

Scrace followed me as I jumped to the ground and started walking toward the span.

"Captain, I'm going over to the Ingezi station. Just give us a tinkle when you're ready to go back." The Railways driver cranked up the trolley, gave a couple of healthy blasts on the horn and trundled across the impressive expanse of steel and concrete.

Standing on the catwalk that paralleled the tracks, I looked downsteam. From eighty feet above the muddy, reed-covered river I could see Africans bathing, washing clothes and fishing from the bank on the south side.

Several hundred meters across the stream, red clay banks rose sharply—not too sharply, however, to prevent a determined unit of infantry from scrambling up the heavily bushed face of the opposite side. Once there, they could deliver effective enfilading fire against guard details on both ends of the bridge.

From the north side of the span, an additional problem existed. Near-vertical banks, some twenty feet high on either side, looked down on the railroad as it continued on to the Ingezi station another seven hundred yards farther down the tracks.

Interdiction of any relief column sent to aid the bridge detail under attack would be all too simple. A TM-46 Soviet landmine on the rails, in coordination with a heavy volume of RPG-7 rockets and RPD light machine gun fire, and the response force would be decimated in short order if they attempted to use the single track from the station.

"Pretty impressive, sir, isn't it?" Scrace's voice brought me back to the moment.

"Too damned impressive for what we've got to work with."

I looked across the bridge. Standing together at the far side were three Africans wearing dark blue coveralls and carrying what appeared to be bolt-action rifles. With them were two Europeans dressed in civvy clothing and armed with shotguns. They waved and started walking toward us, using the catwalk Scrace and I were standing on.

"Might as well meet them half-way, Angus. Let's go." I slung the SLR over my shoulder and moved toward them.

Meeting us at about the center of the span, the two introduced themselves. Norton, the taller, was a longtime employee of the Railways. Fortyish, sandy-haired with the leathery tan of a farmer, his bulky frame towered over John Evans, his partner. Partially bald, with a hook nose and wiry, skinny arms, Evans was slightly hostile.

"Wot's the army doing here, then?" he asked, eyeing Scrace and me.

I ignored his question. "I'm Williams. This is Leftenant Scrace. Which of you is in charge of security for the bridge?"

They looked at each other and grinned.

"We bloody well take turns. It's all sorted out, y'see. We've got about five kaffirs who walk up and down."

As we were talking a stream of Africans—males, females and picannins—began to cross the bridge from the northern side. Unchallenged, they sauntered past the two blue-clad African guards who chatted away, grinning at the nannies and waving at the men, some of whom lugged suitcases, bundles and paper sacks.

I pointed at the mob. "What the hell's that?"

Norton spoke. "Not to worry, old chap. Those are workers at the mine just going home."

"Don't they have any I.D. of any kind?" I couldn't detect any effort on the part of the guards to search the bundles.

"No need of that. The guards know most of them, anyway."

"What do you mean—most of them?"

Norton's voice became irritated. "Well, you know. . um, there might be a few newcomers."

Evans looked at Scrace. "You blokes going to help us out?"

A diplomat I had to be.

"Not exactly. I've been assigned the security responsibility for the bridge, and the rail link from here to Rutenga."

Evans suddenly looked incredulous. His mouth dropped open. "Ain't you. . .a bloody Yank, then?"

"No, I'm a Texan—there's a big difference."

"Well, I ain't heard anything about this," muttered Norton.

"I'd appreciate it if you could continue here with your guard details 'til tomorrow," I said, crossing my fingers. I couldn't believe the terrs could be as obviously incompetent as they appeared.

One of the most vital bridges and rail links in Rhodesia defended by .303 bolt-action rifles and a couple of shotguns. God Almighty!

I was just getting my baptism of dealing with the bizarre nature of this war—the "K" factor. Kaffir mentality, that peculiar psychological make-up of the African mind that defies Western analysis and confounds tacticians.

"Dead right, Yank. We'll look after it for you. Now, how about a shumba?" Evans' manner changed and his offer of a beer was genuine.

"O.K., we'd like that—we'll have to make it quick, though. I want to make a few sketches before we go back to Rutenga."

Walking behind the two Rhodesians, I realized my job would demand large amounts of diplomacy as well as tactical knowledge. The river to the left of the bridge was broken by an area that was used by the Africans to ford. Scattered from one bank to the other was a series of large rocks that formed a crude pathway.

"Do the locals use that ford?" I asked Evans.

"Nah, not since the bridge was built. It's easier for them to walk the bridge. Besides, there's crocs in the river."

The trolley driver was waiting for us at the stationmaster's office.

"Be with you shortly," I told him.

Scrace and I followed Norton and his friend to a

wooden building behind the office. We managed to finish the beer and extricate ourselves in about twenty minutes which still gave me time to evaluate the terrain surrounding the bridge.

The Engineer Major's report included specific recommendations concerning defensive measures that, if adopted, would reduce the span's vulnerability to demolition efforts by the terrs. These I could implement without any difficulty.

I was damned concerned with the tactical defense of the area.

There are a number of ways to go about defending a static installation.

You can fish out your little yellow Fort Benning card that sets down, step by step, the critical points that must be covered. Finished with that, you take out your little Infantry School guide that further assists you with such niceties as "an estimate of the situation." These are mighty good aids when, as any good Rifle Company Commander can tell you, you're fighting effective, disciplined troops whose physical capabilities can be evaluated. Against the wildly unpredictable savages that comprise terrorist forces, they might not be so good.

Looking at the bridge, the stream of Africans sauntering across it and taking in the brush-covered slopes on either side of the banks, I knew my nights ahead were not going to be restful.

Crawling back into the trolley, I hoped the damned bridge would still be there when we came back tomorrow.

Bucketing along the tracks toward Rutenga, wind whipping under the floor, I truly was at a loss

to comprehend how the terrs could be so damned incompetent. Targets such as this bridge should have been taken out early in the war. As did every American fighting in Rhodesia, I thanked the good Lord every night that we weren't facing an enemy who knew what the hell he was doing and who possessed the guts and leadership, on a small unit level, to do it.

When the bright yellow lights of Rutenga loomed up in the darkness, I realized Scrace and I hadn't eaten since breakfast. Patel, I thought, you'd better have something hot besides water.

Whether it was the ever-present threat of the colored's too-eager fists or the knowledge that I could and would send him back to 3 Protection Company at Mt. Darwin, I never found out. Whatever the reason, the shaggy-haired QM produced a plate of steaming rice laced with chunks of beef and fired with Indian curry powder that put to shame any Texas chili peppers I'd ever eaten.

Scrace beamed. "Patel, you're shaping up."

My bedroll between two RL trucks had the appeal of a master suite at the George V in Paris. At four o'clock in the morning I woke up with my ears literally burning from cold so intense it made my teeth ache. The real winter was yet to come!

As the company was eating breakfast the next morning, I sat down with Lieutenants Scrace and Johnson. Both from the same officer's class at Gwelo, the School of Infantry, there wasn't any seniority between them, so I decided to rotate the post of second-in-command, or 2IC as it's termed, to give each a chance to get his feet wet. If some-

thing happened to me, one of them was going to become an instant company commander until headquarters could get a captain down to the bush.

"Angus, you're it for awhile. I'm taking Johnson with me to the bridge to set up a defensive perimeter. While I'm gone, you're to check in with the JOC here at Rutenga and start making some order out of the chaos we've got." I watched him get out a notebook and a pen. "While you're at JOC, get them to furnish you a complete overlay of the rail line from here to Ingezi." He nodded and began writing. "We also need the location of water points along the track and the availability of plate-layer's shacks to set up platoon headquarters. If you need me, you can raise me on the radio or by land line. Use the phone in the stationmaster's office and get me through Ingezi."

I finished my coffee, picked up my rifle and webbing. "You'll be O.K. Just don't be afraid to make decisions. You're going to make plenty of mistakes, but now's the time to learn."

"Sir, do you want Leftenant Johnson?" Scrace asked.

"Yeah, get him and the leader for First Platoon over here."

Scrace trotted off in the direction of the makeshift mess tent.

Troops, at this time didn't pose a problem. Supplies for the bridge certainly did.

The second-in-command for JOC Rutenga had given me top priority where my request for much-needed supplies were concerned. The effective defense of the bridge was very much on headquarters'

minds.

Thanks to the Communist-dominated U.N. and a gutless American government, poor little Rhodesia was having her problems with certain items of sorely needed military equipment. Amazingly enough, the Rhodesians managed somehow. The more I knew them, the greater my admiration for them became.

Leftenant Johnson reported that First Platoon was ready for inspection.

At nineteen, the same age as Scrace, Johnson was decidedly different. Much the bigger of the two, physically, he was also more difficult to evaluate. The way things would be going, however, I felt that any leadership potential he might possess would rapidly be tested. Muhammed, the platoon sergeant, called his unit to attention and reported all present. I told them to stand easy and quickly briefed them on what they would be doing, once at the bridge.

More than anything, at the moment I wanted bodies on the site. Buildings, wire and other supplies we would get up as soon as possible. Bayonets in the bush were my main concern now.

After my briefing, I left Johnson with the platoon and headed for the stationmaster's office across the tracks from our compound. Threading my way through a crowd of Africans standing on the platform, I entered the office. Surprisingly, the Railways official didn't dawdle and go through the seemingly obligatory tea ceremony. Instead, he got down to business and agreed to furnish a couple of cars for the platoon and its equipment. The train

was then inbound from the town of Triangle and would be arriving in Rutenga within an hour.

I found the Afrikaaners—South Africans who'd made their homes in Rhodesia—generally more inclined to get on with the business at hand than their British counterparts. Rhodesians work as hard if not harder than the Afrikaaners, but the British influence that extends to many levels of Rhodesian life tends to formalize actions. It's difficult to cut through this particular phase of habit and therein lies the problem all Americans have in dealing with many Rhodesians. The drive and initiative routinely demanded of U.S. Infantry officers in combat situations is viewed in some Rhodesian Army circles as brash and ill-advised.

Needless to say, I'd be damned before I "cooled it." My job was to kill terrs, not to be a diplomat.

As I walked back toward 5 Company's area, I noticed several adult Africans watching the activities from behind a fence on the far side of the dirt road bordering our compound. As in Korea, the problem of maintaining any degree of security in regard to troop movements, whether by rail or truck, was damned near impossible.

Leftenant Johnson was packing his kit when I stopped next to his vehicle.

"The train'll be here within the hour," I said. Get the platoon moved over to the stationmaster's side of the tracks. You can move all the heavy kit by vehicle and unload it on the platform."

"Yes, sir. He was still struggling with his kit. No matter—I'd gone through the same phase. All second lieutenants the world over were similar.

There was an air of eager anticipation among the colored and I noted a thankful absence of preoccupation with guitars, radios and comic books. Who could tell? We might just get lucky and kill something. Hopefully terrs, not each other.

Patel was supervising the loading of two vehicles—one to take the platoon's heavy equipment to the far side of the station, the other to carry empty coke bottles in crates to the JOC. These would be replaced with "coolies," as the various selections of cokes and soft drinks were called.

"Patel, while I'm gone I want you to help Leftenant Scrace. You understand?"

He looked away from the loading process and shifted the bottle of Coca-Cola to his left hand. "Ah, yes sah. . .there will be no problems." His large brown eyes rolled skyward.

I continued. "If, however, there are problems, I will move you up to the bridge, give you a weapoin and turn you into a rifleman." His eyes blinked. "That would not make ycu happy, I take it?"

"Ah, uh, no sah—I would be most unhappy."

"Very well, I'll check back from time to time to see how you're doing." I pulled a cigar from my jacket pocket, peeled off the cellophane and lit up.

"Have you had any joy from Salisbury? Are they sending down the tents we're supposed to get?" I asked, savoring the taste of the stogie.

"Yes, yes sah! Much trouble at Cranborne. . .I hear that officers are coming to inspect because of soldiers' complaints."

His intelligence system from Indian clerks in army headquarters was better than the KGB.

"What complaints?" God, all I needed was an investigation at this point.

"Ah, no sah, not against you, sah. Troops like you. Complaints because no tents." He nodded, happy to bear good news.

"When're these officers due here?"

"Several days. . .I will try to find out." Try indeed! He'd know the exact second they left army headquarters and their means of transport.

"The minute you find out, Patel, you be damned sure yo tell Leftenant Scrace to signal me at the bridge."

"Yes sah, yes sah, not to worry."

The distant sound of a train whistle ended the conversation.

I signalled the vehicles' driver to speed up the loading and started across the tracks, where the members of First Platoon were craning their necks to get a look down the rusty tracks for the approaching train.

With the whistle there was an immediate flurry of activity among the Africans standing on the platform. Nannies, all of them carrying picannins in blankets wrapped around their backs, papoose-style, began picking up a wild assortment of bags, melons, gourds, shopping bags fashioned from woven pieces of cord, and ears of "mealies," corn cobs. M'dalas or old men, baggy pants secured with pieces of rope, gnarled feet stuck into sandals, creakily shuffled forward toward the loading portion of the platform, yellowed teeth exposed in eager grins.

The train, to an African, is an adventure of formi-

dable proportions.

"Sergeant Muhammed, when the train stops, I want you to get your troops loaded as quickly as possible. Detail ten of them to off-load the stores from the RL and into the front boxcar."

I could see the stores vehicle turn off the main road and into the railway compound, dust marking its progress as the truck headed toward our platform.

Nearing the tracks, the driver, with a flourish, swung the heavy vehicle in a wide arc and neatly crushed a wildly darting chicken. A wail arose from an African picannin, his shouts drowned out by the shriek of the locomotive's whistle now only two hundred meters away.

A shunter, the brakeman for the train, guided the cars into position, pulling the first of two boxcars alongside the waiting RL.

While the bedlam that accompanied the boarding of the coaches was underway, Muhammed's people fell to with a will and the supplies destined for the bridge rapidly disappeared into the boxcar. I'd anticipated moving the troops by boxcar but was pleasantly surprised when the shunter walked up and pointed to an empty coach. "Sir, if you like, your people can ride in that one." Muhammed, hearing this, yelled at his troops and a mad scramble for the comfort of the coach seats began.

In a very few minutes all were aboard.

Satisfied we weren't missing anyone, I waved to the shunter, pulled myself up the steps and into the coach as the train lurched forward. The motion was accompanied by yells, shouts, shrieks and laughter

from the Africans, many of whom were hanging out of the windows waving frenziedly to people on the platform.

Due to the manner in which Rhodesia Railways tracks are constructed there's none of the muted "clickety-clack-clack" of U.S. railway operations. Instead, the Rhodesian passenger is soothed by a steady, soft "click-click" as the train moves along. Our car passed beneath the highway overpass at the north end of Rutenga station, workers alongside the tracks pausing to watch the train's passage. The colored chattered away, gazing out at the heavily wooded bush on either side of the tracks. Parallel with the railway was a dusty, potholed road that ran to Ingezi. It was passable to vehicles and I made a mental note to use the trains as much as possible for resupply purposes.

The combination of dirt road, heavy bush and a scarcity of troops on the ground spelled one thing—the possibility of TM-46 landmines. I didn't look foward to seeing troops and trucks blown to hell.

There are a number of stops made by the train enroute from Rutenga to Ingezi. As the engine slowed for each, an excited horde of Africans ran alongside the train, yelling to the passengers inside the coaches.

Shortly before eleven o'clock I recognized the mass of Buchwa mine's mountain.

"We're near, get your people together," I told Sergeant Muhammed. The train slowed, its speed affected by the long grade rising to the bridge. Although I'd wanted the boxcars carrying the heavy equipment to stop opposite the southern end

of the bridge, that request had been vetoed by the Rutenga stationmaster. Evidently there was a problem with getting the train started up again on the long grade leading onto the bridge proper.

The troops would simply have to muscle the heavy equipment several hundred yards onto the open area to the west side of the rail line.

"We're here, sah." Muhammed stuck his head out of the window as the coach jolted, then stopped. With the halt of the engine, the trooops started pouring off the train. Boxcar doors were opened and soldiers scrambled inside to begin throwing down tents, stoves, rat packs, ammunition, flares and bedrolls. I told Johnson to go ahead with the platoon sergeant and mark out a bivouac area.

Goggle-eyed, the Africans leaned from the windows, giggling and pointing. I was sorely tempted to unload the lot of them and press them into service as porters to help lug the equipment up the gravel-covered slope, but such a move would assuredly have had repercussions.

Contrary to popular Western thought, Africans in Rhodesia are treated much differently than their less fortunate cousins in South Africa.

Any evidence of what the courts might term "high-handed" treatment of the locals would result in a fine or worse at the hands of a "Veddy British" magistrate whose views held that the Rhodesian African was the white man's burden to be borne with grace, kindness and charity.

Gradually the imposing pile of equipment began to dwindle as troops struggled up the hill carrying

various items. Satisfied that we were clear of the train, I waved at the brakeman and started walking toward the platoon's new home.

Wheels spun, then caught. The Africans clapped in glee as the "Rutenga Express" jolted its way across the bridge, African cooks in the caboose stolidly ignoring the proceedings and riveting their eyes to their game of checkers played with bottle caps on a makeshift board.

I trudged up the slope and paused, looking at the scene below me. Axes and shovels were plied with vengeance if not skill. The general consensus was that we must have some type of shelter erected before dark.

Fortunately, from the bush line to the river bank on our side of the railroad there were several hundred meters of open terrain forming a natural field of fire.

I called Leftenant Johnson over and pointed to the bridge.

"As of now, this bridge is your responsibility. I'll get your defensive perimeter, security system, resupply, logistics and communications set up for you. Once that's done, it's your baby!" He nodded.

"Get Muhammed and have the troops start shaking down every African that sets foot on the bridge."

"Yes, sir." He turned to go.

"Tell him I don't want any tit-grabbing with those nannies, but if they're carrying picannins, make them lift those little buggers out of their blankets and check to see the women aren't carrying anything else in the sack." Johnson yelled for

Muhammed who was standing by the mess tent, the first "building" to be erected.

I watched as the platoon seregeant got the news. A big smile crossed his face and he began pointing to various riflemen, calling them over. By four-thirty in the afternoon the first of the day's stream of Africans had started across the bridge.

Their progress was short lived as four soldiers leveling SLR rifles halted them. Two of the four begain searching the surprised locals while the other two covered the Africans with steady rifle barrels.

After the initial awkwardness, the search procedures settled down and became smooth, swift and efficient. Picannins were hauled from their blanket-pouches by outraged nannies, suitcases were opened and the contents carefully sifted, paper bags emptied and any suspicious bundle unwrapped.

Young African males were frisked and situpas, identification papers, checked. Those with questionable documentation were pulled from the line of waiting Africans and made to stand to one side for delivery to the local cops.

The reaction to the sudden security crackdown wasn't long in coming.

The following morning a two-man delegation from the Buchwa mine office came jouncing across the river's fording point in high dudgeon. Rocketing up the south bank they halted the muddy Land-rover outisde the tent that housed the new command post. Dismouting, they sidestepped the sweating coloreds who were busily filling sandbags

and stacking them around the base of the tent.

"I say, what's going on heah?" snorted the bushy-moustached driver who identified himself to me as Harry Liechester.

"What do you mean?" I put down a map of the area and looked at him.

"I mean stopping my munts from using the bridge."

"Your munts are in the same category as any other African—munts, kaffirs, houts, they're all going to be searched before they set one foot on this bridge."

"Damn and blast!" he yelled, face red and eye bulging. "They've been using that bloody bridge ever since it was built."

"Mr. Liechester, they can continue to use the bridge. The only change is that they'll be searched every time they set foot on it." I crossed my arms over my chest and glanced at his companion, a young black-haired Rhodesian who was trying to stifle a smile.

"By God, we'll see about this!" Leichester fumed and turned to go.

"Also, Mr. Leichester," I added "there's a curfew now in effect—last light to first light."

He stopped. "Whadya mean?"

"I mean if any munt moves around this bridge during that period, my troops will shoot him."

The mine official, eyes wide in disbelief, leaped into the jeep and cranked the engine to roaring life. He leaned toward me and shouted, "Then they'll go back to crossing at the ford! By God, there'll be trouble—there's crocs in that bloody river,

y'know!" He reversed in a cloud of dust, spun the vehicle around and bounced off down the slope heading for the river.

"Sir, are we going to have problems with him?"

I turned to see Johnson standing behind me, eyes worried.

I picked up my map again. "I don't think so, not really. He'll call JOC Rutenga and they'll set him straight." I wiped the sweat off my face. "If I have the responsibility for this goddam bridge, I bloody well want the authority to go with it."

The lieutenant grinned and left, heading for the shell scrapes the troops were digging in the hard ground.

I sat down on an ammo box and looked around the area. Slowly, it was taking shape. The supplies I'd requested from JOC Rutenga were now coming up on the regularly scheduled train, to be unloaded and wrestled into position, once here.

Railroad ties had been furnished by Rhodesia Railways, barbed wire by JOC and from the stationmaster at Rutenga a series of powerful, hand-directed searchlights which were now being used throughout the night by troops stationed on either end of the bridge. These lights were valuable additions to the fixed spotlights mounted under the bridge supports, covering the area along either bank.

What I needed now was a bulldozer to grade the area still covered by bush behind the CP. I'd mentioned that fact to the quartermaster at JOC Rutenga, but he said my chances were slim—anything he had in that line would have to be sent

up by train. Moreover, the single bulldozer he had at Rutenga was being used every day on priority tasks.

"Sah, sah, come quick and see." Muhammed's dark face was jammed against the window of the tent. I picked up my rifle and walked outside. Picking its way across the ford and heading in our direction was a yellow bulldozer. Sitting at the controls, wearing a pair of khaki shorts and a bush hat was the young Rhodesian who'd accompanied Liechester on his last "tour" or our camp.

As the 'dozer clanked to a stop in front of my tent, the driver smiled. "Captain, I thought you might be able to use this."

"You're a good man, I can indeed." I motioned him down. "Before you start, how about a shumba?"

"I won't say no." He jumped down and stuck out his hand.

"Neville Stevenson."

I shook it. "Neville are you sure you're not putting your neck in a noose by bringing that 'dozer over here?"

"Not bloody likely," he laughed. "Liechester got a call from his boss in Bulawayo directing him to give you blokes all possible assistance. This 'dozer's here by his order." I broke up. Seeing me laugh, the troops standing within earshot joined in.

"Where's that shumba?" He picked his Uzi from the driver's seat and slung the ugly little submachine gun over a dirty shoulder.

"Follow me," I said, leading the way to the ramshackle tent that served as mess hall, recreation

center and first aid station.

While the lukewarm beer was gulped down, I showed Neville the areas we need cleared.

"It'll speed up things if you can give me some troops to help stack some of the lighter stuff into piles," he said.

"Can do." I called Johnson over and introduced the two. All afternoon the roar of the bulldozer was matched by the crackle of flames as the stacks of brush were burned.

Toward dusk, Neville shut down the 'dozer.

"If you can give me transport to and from the mine, I'll leave the 'dozer here and start tomorrow."

"No problem." I pointed to my jeep. "Rahjput will drive you and pick you up tomorrow at 0800."

The jeep started down the river bank, slowing to enter the muddy water at the ford. I watched as they started up the opposite bank, Stevenson's bush hat barely visible in the dusk.

With the absence of the jeep's engine, noise, the evening now was becoming silent. Bullfrogs bellowed from the river's edge occasionally but ceased when their cries brought no rain.

Muhammed was reaching out to fill my canteen cup when the two sentries walking along the middle of the bridge's catwalk started shouting. "Mirwah."

People sitting around the stove near the mess tent leaped to their feet, grabbing their rifles. Pop-Pop-Pop the SLR's crack was followed by single shots, orange tracers ripping down to the thick bushes at the river's edge.

"Put the light over there—There!" the nearest sentry yelled, directing the hand-held searchlight in the grasp of one Bren gunner who was guarding the southern end of the bridge.

The white finger of light swept along the dark water, then suddenly illuminated two running figures, pelting through the bush away from the span.

"Goddamit, hit 'em!" Muhammed yelled, running to the bridge, unslinging his SLR.

The two Africans zig-zagging through the bush broke to their right, followed by a hail of fire from the sentries.

"Hold your fire! Hold your fire!" I ran after Muhammed, seeing Rahjput's jeep headlights sweep up over the hill on the far bank.

The fleeing Africans skidded to a stop as Rahjput slammed on the brakes, and turned to flee again when the Indian cranked off two warning rounds that kicked up dirt at their feet.

They both froze, outlined in the glare of the headlights, their chests heaving.

Several troopers piled into the "moon buggy," a mine-protected vehicle standing next to the CP, and started for the two Africans.

"Bring them back—don't shoot them," I yelled. Reaching the river's edge, the moon buggy halted and waited while Rahjput waded across, herding the escapees ahead of him. The rear door to the moon buggy swung open and several pairs of eager hands reached out to drag the Africans into the vehicle. When they were inside, the driver turned and headed the vehicle back up the hill followed by

a beaming Rahjput, SLR balanced proudly across his lap.

A small crowd of soldiers surrounded the moon buggy as it stopped outside the command post tent.

"Let 'em out, you!" snarled Muhammed, kicking one curious colored briskly in the ass. At the thud of boot against buttock the crowd parted like the Red Sea for Moses.

"Here they come," shouted a voice from inside the moon buggy and the heavy steel door to the rear of the vehicle swung open. The first of the two Africans jumped to the ground, followed by his friend.

Their faces were sullen, brown eyes bloodshot. "Bring 'em over here!" Muhammed, who spoke fluent Shona, grabbed the nearest one and fetched him a rap behind the head with a knobby knuckled hand.

A torrent of Shona flew between the sergeant and both Africans. "They don't know anything," said the Indian.

"Did you shake 'em down?" I asked, turning to Rahjput. He sprang to attention. "Oh yes, sah—no weapons."

"What about their pockets, Muhammed?" I pointed to my own pants pocket and motioned to the taller of the two Africans. He glared at me, then suddenly pulled out his pockets. His left fist was clenched and I tapped it with the barrel of my SLR.

Silently he opened his hand. A steel measuring tape fell out of the unclenched palm.

"Tie up these two, then take 'em to the cops." Tape and all, the Africans were hustled off to the

BSAP across the bridge for interrogation.

I couldn't believe they possessed enough sophistication to use a measuring tape to evaluate the size and thickness of the bridge support—yet, there was the tape. More likely, it had been stolen from a store or construction crew's shack.

"Muhammed, tomorrow I want silhouette targets placed at the same spot on the river bank where your men spotted those houts. Are you with me?"

He waited for me to finish. "Yes, sah."

"I want every man assigned sentry duty to fire one magazine—twenty rounds." I looked around me at the dark faces. "If those buggers can't hit fifteen out of twenty, keep them at it until they do."

He bobbed his head. "Yes, sah—we'll do it!"

I was pleased with the alertness of the sentries in spotting the Africans but very disturbed about the poor shooting. There was a distinct possibility that the next time they opened up on Africans running from the bridge, they would get return fire.

I made a mental note to notify JOC Rutenga and the local fuzz about the proposed shoot for the following night.

We were making headway with the bridge security but there was a lot remaining to be done before I could literally turn over the installation to Johnson.

Stephenson was as good as his word, and the following morning the air was filled with dust, rock and branches as the bulldozer went back to work.

I detailed Johnson to make a reconnaissance of the terrain surrounding us, paying particular at-

tention to the area between our camp and the large kraal to our rear. This village was home for most of the locals who worked at the mine and quite a few who didn't.

The purpose of his scout was to pinpoint the many goat trails that led to our position. As soon as the warning was given the locals that they were not to approach our CP, I would set trip flares along possible avenues of approach.

The bastards would undoubtedly drive their frigging goats down the paths to check for flares or claymores but I was going to set up listening posts first and zap a couple—either goats or houts—before I invested highly prized trip flares in our perimeter defense.

Around noontime I raised JOC Rutenga on the radio and advised them of our intended night shoot for the colored. No problem there.

The problem came from the local fuzz who weren't happy about 7.62 rounds flying all over the local digs. I made it clear to them that angles of fire, possible ricochet zones and safety areas would be thoroughly worked out before the first round was let off.

As the afternoon wore on Muhammed's people toiled away, setting up targets in the approximate positions occupied by the two Africans the night before. I had him put out a sufficiently large group of targets so the marking process wouldn't take all night.

From the firing positions on the catwalk, I felt confident we wouldn't be putting any ricochets into either the railway station or the Buchwa mine. We

found a large bluff behind which Rahjput and his target-marking detail could hide between scoring sessions. Communications between the firers on the bridge, my CP and Rahjput were tested and worked.

At nightfall we were ready to go.

Rahjput was to make one last check of the area along the riverbank, Muhammed's people would check their sight settings, and Lieutenant Johnson's people, sitting crouched in their listening posts, would be alerted that the firing would begin at a specified time.

I stood in the darkness, gazing down from the catwalk to the river eight feet below. Rahjput was there in the bushes along the river bank making his final check.

Suddenly there was a shriek from Rahjput. Then another, followed by three shots from an SLR.

"Goddam, get that light on him! Everybody—hold your fire!" I ran to the soldier with the light, watching him sweep it over the area from where the shrieks had come.

"Shit, there he is!" Muhammed yelled, pointing at the wildly thrashing figure of my driver staggering for the safety of his jeep.

"Get him on the radio—what'd he see?"

Wheezing with fear, Rahjput's voice suddenly blasted over the receiver. "Oh my God, sah—it's horrible—a monster—the eyes. . ."

"Get that light back down where he was," I told Muhammed.

"There's the monster—it's a fucking hippo!" snorted the Indian. Angrily crashing through the

bush was the tank-like form of a mother hippo followed by a little one.

"Rahjput, you stupid twit—get back! We're going to commence firing." I waited until the jeep started up and disappeared behind the bluff.

"Go ahead, Muhammed, carry on." I waited for the first cracks from SLR's and hoped for the best. Halfway through the firing, I decided to return to the CP and check Johnson's men. Muhammed's platoon was doing well—the tracers were hitting the silhouettes with impressive regularity.

I was off the bridge and walking to the ops tent when a flare suddenly popped over the area to our rear—Johnson!

A Bren gun "tak-tak-tak'd" and I grabbed the microphone from the duty signaller's hand.

"Alpha One, this is Alpha, d'you read?"

"Roger Alpha, Alpha One. We've shot a curfew-breaker."

"Alpha One, is it an Alpha Mike Alpha or Alpha Foxtrot Alpha?" AMA was an African Male Adult, AFA an African Female Adult.

"Negative Alpha, it's a Alpha Mike Goat."

"An Alpha Mike What?"

"An Alpha Mike Goat—I spell Golf-Oscar-Alpha-Tango-Goat."

Great shooting! One hippo shot in the ass and a dead male goat.

At least we were hitting something.

Over a period of two weeks the formerly bush-covered, rock-strewn banks overlooking the bridge

had drastically changed.

Most of the African workers at Buchwa, enroute home from work, now chose to cross the river by hopping from rock to rock rather than be subjected to an intensive search each time they set foot on the bridge. Those whose common sense was greater than their peers' now chatted happily with the bridge sentries whose small talk didn't interfere one whit with the painstaking inspection of the Africans.

Romances blossomed between the younger nannies who'd discovered the not-unpleasant sensations of colored fingers checking their "chests" for hidden hand grenades or under their skirts for a "hideaway" Tokarev pistol taped to their inner thighs.

The fact that their crossings of the bridge had now trebled in volume wasn't all bad; it kept the sentries alert and busy. Efficient patrolling of any static installation soon becomes a boring task and the Ingezi bridge was no exception.

Sergeant Muhammed was now leading clearance patrols at last light and first light due to increased contacts between Security Forces and terrs in both Matibi No. 1 and Chibi TTL's. I felt the most likely type of terr attack against us would be a mortar concentration coupled with RPG7 rockets and light machine gun fire.

I took pains to hold a daily briefing of troops to let them know what was happening in the war, particularly those actions to our east-southeast.

Several mornings after the killing of the AMG, the African Male Goat, an ominous delegation of

locals headed by a bearded m'dala, an old man wearing a battered felt hat, pitched up at the enclosure of barbed wire that now ringed our CP.

"Sah, it's the headman—he's a Nganga," Muhammed informed me, a worried look on his face.

"All right, frisk 'em and bring 'em on." I was having a cup of tea at the rough wooden table built by two-by-four planks that served as pay table, mess table and operating table for the company. Trudging along behind Muhammed, the small group of Africans walked toward me. Long before the headman, or witch doctor, reached the table, his odor wafted to my nose. The tea was now forgotten! Our two camp watchdogs wrinkled their nostrils, bared their teeth and backed off.

"Captain, sah, this is Josiah Ncube, the Nganga," announced Muhammed standing well away from the old man. "What's he want?" God what a smell! I made no effort to shake hands with the apparition.

Shona flew back and forth, the witchdoctor's skinny hands waving angrily in the air.

"Sah, he says that if we kill any more goats he'll put a curse on us and poison our food." Real fear showed in the Indian's eyes.

"Tell this old shit that if his people don't keep those damned goats locked up at night like they're supposed to do, I'm going to zap all of them." I had more than enough of this bullshit—odor and all. Muhammed translated.

The Nganga's mouth flew open, spittle running from the sides. A claw-like hand darted into one baggy pants pocket and whipped out a long black

stick topped with a shock of what appeared to be black hair. He raised the whisk and, yowling, began jumping and twisting.

The colored near me scattered, dogs began a frenzied barking and the Africans standing near the filthy old man bombshelled in all directions, shirt-shirttails streaming behind them.

"You barmy old cunt!" I yelled. Grabbing my rifle, I cranked off three rounds into the ground next to the flying, shit-covered black feet.

The noise of the SLR was deafening inside the tent and the effect was cataclysmic. The Nganga, tongue lolling in terror, pissed himself, the acrid-smelling steam hosing his pants and spattering the ground as his skinny legs scissored in a wild attempt to get away from the whining bullets.

Madly racing to the barbed wire gate, he hurdled the three-foot makeshift barrier with ease, howling like a de-nutted tomcat; his loyal followers pelted along behind, one of them stopping to pick up a rock and hurl it in our direction. Muhammed sped him on his way with a snap-shot from a 9 mm Star pistol, the round kicking up dirt at the African's heel.

The chaos subsided with some of the colored laughing hysterically, while others, obviously afraid of the Nganga's threatened curse, talked amongst themselves, shaking their heads. "Sah, that old man will do bad things. He'll put a curse on us." Muhammed said, replacing the expended 9 millimeter round with a fresh one and reholstering the pistol.

"Sergeant, you don't really believe that horseshit

do you?" I snorted.

He shook his head. "Well, ah—a lot of my people do. Maybe if we gave him something to calm him down—?" His voice was pleading.

Getting along with the Africans, no less.

"All right, go ahead, but I'll be damned if I get involved with that stinking old fart." I waved Muhammed away.

Nothing more was said until three days later. Muhammed had requested permission to go to Ngungubane, a fair-sized village to the south of us straddling the rail line. I'd granted it, thinking he was going down to fetch some vegetables from the African market.

When the morning train from Rutenga slowed at the bridge, I looked up from my desk to see Muhammed jump down from a boxcar and start unloading, by count, ten goats. Tethered together by a rope, they were quickly started in our direction by the Indian.

"Captain, sah, what do you think?" he panted, as the herd trotted up.

"I think you're out of your frigging mind!" I roared. "What're these bloody goats for?"

He wiped his face. "Oh, sah, they're for the Nganga. He'll stop his curse now." Obviously proud of himself, he stood waiting for my benediction.

"All right, go ahead, but keep those animals the hell out of here."

"Not to worry, sah." Grinning, he yelled for several of the troopers to accompany him to the kraal while he handed over the goats to the

Nganga.

With the payment of the "goatmail" there were few incidents involving the villager's goats and our listening posts.

Each day brought increased supplies of badly needed items for the bridge defenses. Security was now as effective as it was going to be, short of mortars and heavy machine guns which we didn't have at the time.

I called Leftenant Johnson over to the CP tent.

"It's yours now." I watched him carefully.

"Yes, sir." No further comment, no elations. I guess I was getting old. A job of this importance would have made me, as a second lieutenant, damned eager to accomplish it with the best effort I could muster.

"Don't hesitate to give me a shout if you need me," I added, and shook his hand.

I'd packed my kit the night before and stopped for a few minutes with the troops while I waited for the southbound train.

There was no way to really dislike these people, maddening though they could be and I felt a real sense of regret in leaving them to go back to Rutenga.

"Sah, the Nganga wishes you good luck," Muhammed smiled as he picked up my bedroll to carry it to the bridge.

"Good for him—I hope he enjoys those goats." The sound of a train whistle made us cut short our goodbyes. Muhammed waved down the train and handed up my bedroll and pack as I climbed into the locomotive's cab.

. "Thank you, sah." His teeth flashed in the dark face.

"Take care of Lieutenant Johnson, Muhammed."

The train jolted forward and I caught sight of the Nganga, a herd of goats and about fifty locals standing on the bluff overlooking the tracks, waving excitedly.

CHAPTER 3

Rape, Suicide and True Love

WITH THE INGEZI Bridge security now functioning at the maximum level of efficiency we could manage, I turned my attention to the railroad.

To control my company's movements and avoid a possible accidental contact with JOC Rutenga troops in the bush, headquarters had restricted us to a buffer zone one km either side of the tracks.

Anything moving during hours of curfew in that area, which ran all the way from Rutenga to Ingezi, would be shot.

The flaw in this restriction was that in the event of a contact and follow-up which would necessitate a chase of the terrs, we would have to obtain JOC Rutenga's permission to penetrate the area in excess of our "buffer zone." I wanted a 3 km radius of action but didn't get it. No matter, Colonel French had his reasons and that was good enough for me. My goffles were the bane of his existence at times and I often wondered how he managed to keep his sense of humor.

Angus Scrace, one of my subbies, had more serious problems at hand. Highly responsible, he rode the trolley between Rutenga and Ingezi regularly to ensure that the colored were alert and doing their job.

On our third night in Rutenga, Angus dutifully mounted a trolley accompanied by five troopers and started to Ingezi. The round trip would see him back home around four in the morning—cold, hungry and sleepy.

Twenty-five km's north of Rutenga, his fatigue disappeared.

Five terrs lying prone on the west side of the railroad opened fire with AK's. It was Scrace's lucky day—they thought the trolley was a locomotive. Mistaking the large searchlight mounted on the trolley's roof for that of an engine, they fired high. Scrace returned the fire with SLRs and a Bren gun, while the trolley rattled down the track with the driver busily engaged in talking to whatever ants were crawling on the trolley floor.

After sitting down and evaluating the security problem that faced me, I realized that a major revision of the initial tactical plan for guarding the railroad would have to be made.

There was absolutely no way in which I could adequately patrol eighty kms of railway track with a force of two hunderd colored infantry soldiers. There would have to be a more effective means of providing troop mobility than letting them use their feet.

What was more effective than two feet? Four feet, naturally. I would put my people on horses. The increase in speed and the amount of terrain they could cover in a day would be tremendous. Horses it would be.

That same day I went to a local rancher, Mr. Bob Van der Sande, for some horses and tack. Bob is an

Afrikaaner and has ranched in the area some thirty years. I not only got my horses but he put me in touch with other ranchers who would contribute additional ones.

When I told the JOC Rutenga Commander what I wanted to do he apparently felt that this was ample evidence that as a Texan I was not only crazy but thought I was John Wayne as well. I pointed out that if the railroad stopped running, all of Rhodesia would be riding horses since there wouldn't be any petrol for anything. He said he'd see.

Horses have been implements of war since Xerxes and the Phoenicians, and I was convinced that by mounting the coloreds on whatever horses were available, I could do a much better job.

A second-class ride is always better than a first-class walk. I had no problem getting volunteers from the colored.

There were no formal classes in equitation. The drill was as follows: a) bring out horse, b) introduce rider to horse and get him mounted, c) point horse in desired direction and urge rider to stay on, d) pick up rider and take to medics if required.

Strangely enough, there were few casualties. The condition of one soldier who landed head-first in a thorn bush resulted in a trememdous improvement in Basic Equitation One classes.

The volunteers stayed on. I set up a firing range using whatever rough materials I could find to construct targets. The horses were introduced to SLR fire, hand grenades and Bren guns. Firing was done at the walk, the trot, and the canter.

The remainder of instruction was on-the-job

training. Patrolling started along the railway. The looks from the locals were incredulous. In addition to the tremendous increase in mobility, I received an added bonus from the horses. The Africans were scared to death of the animals. Psychological warfare, no less.

The inevitable happened. At last light, while approaching a kraal, a five-man stick was fired on from the edge of the village huts. The horses bolted, but in the direction of the incoming fire. What followed was a chaotic mass of wild-eyed bush ponies, shit-scared troops, tracers flying in all directions, chickens, goats, picannins, nannies and terrorists bouncing off each other and fading rapidly into the sunset. One tracer set eight huts on fire. The cavalry had arrived. More horses were coming in and I was faced with both logistical and administrative problems such as food and additional space for the animals.

My headquarters was at Rutenga, the southern terminus of my area of responsibility. I had spaced platoon headquarters at intervals between Rutenga and Ingezi. From a command and control standpoint, Sarahuru would be best.

Located roughly midway along the line segment, Sarahuru afforded water, unloading facilities, grazing and a house for a CP. It also afforded an African grain mill, a bus stop, a knock-shop (black brothel) with eight African whores and a village full of terrorist sympathizers. We moved to what we jokingly termed "Sarahuru-by-the-Sea." The nearest water was the Rhodesia Railways tank by the station.

At this time attacks against the railway were sporadic, but JOC Rutenga troops were having daily contacts with terrorists about 20 kms to our northeast in Matibi TTL.

On the night we completed our move to Sarahuru, a "call sign" or infantry unit from one of the Territorial Forest rifle companies opened fire on a curfew-breaker in the bush some 600 meters to our southeast. Three of the stray MAG rounds hit our command post building. The troops guarding the CP, thinking we were zapped, opened up on the village behind us, strongly affecting the structural integrity of the grain mill, the knock-shop windows, the local bus parked for the night and one sexually segregated outhouse. Aggressiveness we had!

I was employing foot patrols at night and horses by day, giving the infantry time during the day to rest, with those remaining awake watching the tracks with binoculars. I was still running the trolleys from Rutenga to Ingezi and back. This was July and bitter cold. In Rhodesia the seasons are reversed from ours in the United States and the Rhodesian Loeveltd, or cattle country, winters can be as cold as any in the Texas Panhandle although, thankfully, there is no snow. Traveling 25 mph in the trolley, wind whipping through cracks in the floor, from 7:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m. the following morning was a nightly torture for the troops. I rode it as often as possible to keep up morale, but the coloreds' reaction was basically that anyone who did it voluntarily was nuts.

Train traffic and volume was now staggering. It

wasn't unusual to see locomotives pulling as many as thirty-eight petrol cars to South Africa. Service was now on a twenty-four hour basis.

Suddenly the terrorists came alive. Two trains, both northbound from South Africa via Rutenga, passed through Sarahuru; the first made it. There was a god-awful boom and the second was derailed, tearing up 100 meters of track and strewing cars in all directions.

I arrived on the scene accompanied by a platoon of coloreds about fifteen minutes after the explosion. The site of the derailment was only about eight kms north of the CP. We determined that the terrorists had used Russian TNT which they had detonated electrically. While searching the vicinity of the sabotage incident, we found a note. Printed in ink, the childish letters stated that the Communists would destroy the railroad and all security forces.

A lot of movement flared up in a kraal on the Matibi side of the track. I put up a flare and people started running into the bush some 100 meters away from the huts. In a curfew area, no one is allowed more than fifty meters from buildings or he is fair game for security forces.

The platoon sergeant got his people into a line of skirmish and started firing at the running figures. We moved through the heavy bush toward the village, and upon reaching the line of huts, swept through the kraal. What we had just witnessed certainly was no spontaneous evacuation on the part of the Africans; the doors to the huts were locked, and cattle and goats were securely penned. We shut

down until daylight. In the meantime, two trolleys arrived with plate-layers, railroad workers whose specialty was the repair of damaged rail lines. They set to work immediately to clean up the mess, working steadily by the lights from the trolley spotlights.

Three nights later the line was blown again in the same place—more Russian TNT.

"Five Nine, this is Zero."

"Zero Five Nine, go."

"Five Nine, Charlie Tangos (Communist Terrorists) have hit the line. What is your response time?"

"Zero Five Nine, moving now, figures one zero."

This time one of my call-signs at the site had taken automatic weapons fire from the same kraal we searched during the last terrorist attack on the railway.

By the time we had arrived at the rendezvous point where we were to meet guides, it was 10:30 p.m. on the 4th of July. Horses would be brought up at first light the following morning to be used in an attempt to track down the terrorists.

In the meantime we would have to take a calculated risk. Night deployment of troops by vehicle is dangerous and gets "hairy" because the possibility of ambush is great. A more conservative tactic would have been to wait until dawn, though it would have given the Communists running time. I felt, however, they had probably decided to wait near the sabotage area to fire at any lead scouts I might send. I was not wrong.

Two soldiers acting as guides met us about 500 meters south of the attack site. I had ordered the

vehicles halted, de-bussed the troops and we hiked in. The guides from the unit that had been fired on by the terrorists pointed out the kraal. They had heard no dogs barking in the village to indicate movement away from the huts.

The Rhodesian Army discouraged field grade officers from physically leading troops; they felt this was a subbie's job. I had just been promoted to major and one of my subbie's was in Rutenga, the other at the Ingezi Bridge.

Forty sets of white teeth and eighty rolling eyeballs surrounded me.

I remembered the words of warning from Major Tom Watkins commenting on Protection Company troops. "Those buggers will run at the first round. Never turn your back on them or trust them in a contact." I was about to find out whether he was right.

I briefed my section leaders, cautioning them about wild firing and the difficulty of exercising control at night. We started off across a mealie field with the guides leading. Stalks of corn cracked underfoot reporting like 76 millimeter cannon to me; I was sure we sounded like a herd of rhino. The approach march covered about 300 meters and I could barely make out the distant outlines of a large kraal. It seemed to consist of from fifteen to twenty huts. I stopped at a fence and counted noses. All present. We went past the fence and onto muddy ground.

My feet were sopping wet and mealie stalks thudded against my SLR barrel. The five ammunition magazines in my chest webbing were heavy, each

holding twenty rounds of 7.62 millimeter rifle cartridges. As I stumbled forward over the uneven, muddy, foul-smelling ground, the straps around my neck cut painfully into my skin. I was sweating.

The skirmish line of shadowy figures, rifle barrels dimly visible, moved forward slowly. The ground underfoot sloped gently upward and I halted at a dirt trail that ran perpendicular to our line of advance.

Prior to commencing an attack, the commander of an infantry unit needs an easily recognizable terrain feature that will provide him with a demarcation line from which he can start the actual assault. In the United States Army this feature is called the Line of Departure. Rhodesians use the term Start Line. Be it Line of Departure or Start Line, as an infantryman when you cross it and head for your objective, that's when your guts start churning and your balls start retracting. Your mouth develops a brassy taste.

I passed the word along the line of shadowy figures to hold up at the trail. If we started taking fire from the village, I had absolutely no idea what the colored would do so I left the platoon sergeant Ishmael Patel with the troops and took a patrol of four men with me to scout out the nearest huts. Before we moved across the muddy field, I warned Patel not to open fire on us by mistake either while we were gong out or coming back.

Ahead of me in the kraal, nothing moved. One by one we checked the dark huts. Empty. I motioned to the patrol to head back to the waiting troops. Suddenly an AK opened up from the food huts on

the side of the hill, and dogs began barking like crazy from the rear of the kraal line. We put up flares and commenced firing. Sighting on the dark buildings, I opened fire, sending orange tracers streaking into the food huts, and yelled an order in the Bren gunner's ear to begin "traverse and search," the technique of sweeping an area with short bursts of automatic fire. Tracers hit the huts, ricocheting over the ridge line to the rear of the village and turning the blackness into a fireworks display.

Smoke, then orange flames, started from the roofs of the huts and spread with the wind. By now the entire kraal was afire. Scrambling to our feet we made the assault, using marching fire to sweep through the village. Two bodies lay near the food huts with doppies, emply shell casings, from an AK lying next to them. Charred bits of denims clung to their legs.

At first light the whap-whap-whap of rotor blades signalled the approaching helicopters of fire force, the airborne reaction force of European infantry, who would land and give chase to the fleeing terrorists.

Immediately, with the landing of the helicopters, trackers leaped to the ground and began a search for tracks, moving in large circles in an effort to pick up bootprints. They picked up spoor of eight, tracks heading from the railroad to the kraal but suddenly lost them in the rocks at the ridge line. An additional three sets of tracks led across the rail line into Belingwe TTL where the locals deliberately obliterated them by milling their cattle, the

mombies' hooves crushing all signs of terrorist boots.

We counted a total of twenty-nine huts burnt, two suspects dead and one of my people hit in the face with a piece of rock from a ricochet.

After this action on July 4, 1976 there were no further terrorist movements of any kind against the railroad until four months later, in November.

As a result of the Fourth of July "celebration" involving the terrorists in the kraal rear Garare, I decided to move the company command post to a point midway between Rutenga and Ingezi. The nearest point meeting those requirements was Sarahuru. Instead of subjecting my Landrover's wheels and suspension system, not to mention my tired joints, to the nightmare road to Sarahuru, I crawled up into the locomotive cab of the morning train leaving Rutenga for our new home.

The ride lasted about an hour, the engine chugging to a grinding stop at every siding on the way. As usual, it was a field day for the Africans.

At each stop, a steady stream of locals either scrambled on or leaped off. Chickens, dogs and goats passed back and forth through the open windows.

The engineer's Scots' face broke into a huge grin. "Here we are, Major—Sarahuru-by-the-Sea."

"What sea?" I asked.

"Right there is your nearest water," he roared with laughter, pointing at the large water tower standing near the tracks.

"Very funny, Scotty." I picked up my rifle and swung down from the cab. "See you on the way

back." It was only a few yards to the stationmaster's office but I had to buck a stream of African humanity running for the train and their ride to Ingezi.

The stationmaster, a huge Afrikaaner we all called Fat Jack, was the most helpful employee of Rhodesia Railways I met throughout the entire time I spent in the country. The nickname wasn't one of derision but affection. His personal life was not free from tragedy; he'd lost one of his sons killed in a terrorist ambush, the other son would soon die in the same way.

After chatting with him for a few minutes, I asked if he could show me around. He couldn't leave the station but gave me the keys to his jeep and showed me on the local map the existing road network, the location of the village and its stores, together with the headquarters of the civilian construction crews who were to begin construction on a hard-surfaced road to Rutenga.

"Major, we'll be glad to see you blokes up here," Jack wheezed. "Those bloody terrs will hit us soon enough, we reckon."

"Dead right, Jack. We'll see what we can do." I shook hands and stepped outside the station to the side of the tracks, looking up the line for the approaching locomotive.

Back in Rutenga, I called a briefing of the officers and platoon sergeants, explaining what I had seen at Sarahuru and drawing up a march order for the proposed move from Rutenga two days later.

The forthcoming move galvanized the colored into serious efforts to break camp. Gone were the

shouts, curses and the thuds of sergeants' sticks across sweating backs. The prospect of seeing new territory was sufficient to cause all hands to turn to, and the tents came down in quick order to be loaded onto trucks for movement to the rail yard. I'd decided to use trains rather than trucks to move the headquarters.

At 8:15 a.m. on Tuesday, July 7, 1976 we loaded the motley group of coloreds, African cooks, goats, guitars and tents aboard a northbound train and headed for our new home at Sarahuru.

The camp took shape rapidly. Nobody wanted to sleep under the stars, so the sounds of tent pegs being hammered into the ground sounded like jackhammers.

As we moved the last radio equipment into the building, a sudden burst of machine gun fire was followed by a flare that lit up the area with its yellow lights. The firing came from a Territorial Force ambush patrol who had discovered a curfew-breaker running through the bush and cut him down.

At the first sounds of the machine gun, the coloreds working on the tent dropped their hammers and grabbed rifles, dropping into prone positions near the cyclone wire fence at the rear of headquarters. Several stray rounds from the ambush party thudded into the wall of the new command post. Thinking they were being zapped, my goffles began firing, aiming at the African village to our rear.

Tracers arced into the front of the whorehouse, smashing glass and bringing howls of fear from the

occupants. The bottle store and bar got it next. A Bren gun chattered away, its rapid fire momentarily drowning out the SLRs nearby, sending round after round hammering into the front of the whitewashed building. Next to the bottle shop was the local mealie mill whose large grinding wheel served to reduce the cornstalks to fine meal. The Bren gunner traversed his fire from the bottle store to the new target. "Tak-tak-tak-tak." His tracers were dead on target and the rear of the grist mill exploded with jets of white dust flying from the mud walls.

"Cease fire, cease fire!" My yells were drowned out but I managed to fumble in my jacket pocket and pull out a whistle. An ear-shattering blast cut through the bedlam and the firing sputtered out, leaving a silence broken only by the ringing in our ears from the cracks of the rifles and Bren guns.

"Patel, where are you?" I yelled, looking around for the NCO.

"Sah, right here." He trotted up, panting for breath.

"Check to see if any of these silly buggers were hit."

"Sah." He turned and started yelling for the section leaders, asking for a count of noses. Apparently no one had been hit, although a check the next morning of the village business district revealed considerable structural alterations to all buildings save the outhouse at the end of the street.

In addition to my primary responsibility of guarding the railroad I became involved with another activity. The nearest police were fifty miles

south at Nuanets, so our presence at Sarahuru provided the only semblance of law and order in the area. The Africans began coming to me for justice about petty offenses of various kinds. I explained to them that I was a soldier, not a policeman, but my protests were ignored.

More serious at this particular time were the antics of the colored. Unpredictable, volatile and capable of absolutely anything when under the influence of alcohol and dagga, the Rhodesian form of marijuana, the goffles began terrorizing the locals.

Early one morning the gate guard reported that a delegation of Africans wanted to see me. "What about?" I asked.

"Sah, the women say they were raped last night."

"All right, bring 'em in." I started assembling paper and pens on my desk.

A tentative knock on the door followed by giggling outside in the hallway signified the arrival of the "rapees."

The door opened to admit a middle-aged African woman dressed in a faded blue European dress festooned with beads. Following close behind her were three young girls around seventeen or eighteen. It's difficult to guess the ages of African females.

I motioned the women to sit down. Two colored soldiers knocked at the open door and walked in, standing behind the women. "Patel, send in a guard and an interpreter."

"Do you speak English?" I asked the older woman.

"Little bit," came the reply followed by a burst of smothered giggles. Two of the girls nervously thrust their right index fingers up their nostrils signifying their unease.

Bit by bit the story came out. The three girls, stoutly denying they were whores, insisted they worked only at the bottle store. According to their story, after they finished their jobs for the day they had retired to their one-room "home" behind the store and were preparing for bed.

Several dogs, rummaging for scraps in the garbage heaped outside, began barking and the girls heard the sounds of horses approaching the building. The barking grew louder and the riders dismounted immediately outside the door. Fearing trouble, the girls blew out the candle that lit the room. One of the riders beat on the door with a rifle butt and called out in Shona for the girls to open the door. He said it was an army patrol and they wanted to search the house.

During the recounting of their complaint, I studied the girls. Wide-eyed and dirty, they continually glanced at the older woman for seeming approval. As they rattled on, it became apparent that there had been a considerable amount of rehearsal in the story. Virgins they weren't!

They accused the soldiers of breaking in the door and dragging them outside where they were raped. They insisted that in spite of their struggles, the soldiers had, in their words, made "violent love" to them.

"Where are the bruises you got when you were fighting off the soldiers?" I asked.

They looked at one another. The skinniest of the three rolled back her sleeve exhibiting a faint scar on the upper part of her arm. "Here," she said.

"Sah, that's bullshit," the interpreter snorted. "That scar's been there for years."

"Shut up," I told him and leaning over the desk, ordered her to point out the injury. The interpreter was right. The scar was small and certainly didn't appear to be of recent origin. None of the others had anything to say.

"All right, tell them we'll have an identification parade tomorrow morning and I'll want them here to point out the soldiers they say are responsible. Tell them to come back at the same time. Do they understand?"

Shona flew between the soldier and the women. "Yes sah, they'll be here."

"O.K., tell them that's all, they can go now." I stood up and motioned to the door.

Fingers were pulled out of nostrils and the three girls rose, following their "madam" out of the room.

The colored's eyes were angry. "Sah, those bitches are lying."

"I don't doubt it, but I'm not going to take a chance on their going to the cops and telling them I refused to listen to them. Get Patel and have him set up an ID parade tomorrow morning."

"Sah," He saluted and left the room.

I didn't for one minute believe the girls' story, but that there had been some screwing going on was in no doubt. My feeling was that there had been a violent argument about payment after my

troopers had mounted the girls.

Nonetheless, regulations required an identification parade be held as soon as possible in order that the "victims" of the alleged rape be afforded an opportunity to identify their violators.

I couldn't foresee the tragedy that was to follow. After breakfast the following morning, the troops began lining up in formation, preparing for the girls to walk down the ranks and, if possible, pick out their attackers.

A truck bearing the three complainants and their madam bounced into view, skirting the fence at the rear of the compound and heading for the main entrance. Mine weren't the only eyes watching the progress of the vehicle. Private Ayub, a young colored trooper barely eighteen, was among the group of soldiers moving into position at the makeshift parade ground.

As the truck stopped at the main gate to discharge the women, Ayub suddenly sprinted for the tent where his squad of horsemen were quartered. Ducking into the interior he knelt and picked up his Uzi submachine gun, shoving a fully loaded magazine into the ugly little weapon.

A dull click indicated that the magazine, holding twenty-five blunt-nosed cartridges, was locked into position. Ayub moved the fire selector control from SAFE to AUTO, pulled back the bolt and cocked the weapon. Inexplicably, he leaned over and placing the muzzle of the weapon under his right cheekbone pressed the trigger with his thumb.

I had started down the back steps of the command post when the three sharp cracks echoed

from the tent. My first thoughts were that Ayub had decided to shoot his way out of the compound and escape; reacting to that, I pulled my pistol and ran in the direction of the tent, thinking I might get a clear shot at the trooper as he tried to scale the fence.

My efforts weren't required. Private Ayub, the top of his skull blown away and brain matter splattering the tent roof, was beyond any further problems either from me or the African girl.

The two medics who had taken their places in the rear ranks of the formation responded quickly to the shots. They ducked into the mess tent, grabbed their first aid kits and raced for the horsemen's quarters. They reached the scene at the same time I did. There was nothing anyone could do.

In the end of this bad dream, the girls picked out two troopers from the formation, identifying them as their attackers. Ayub's body, zipped up in a sleeping bag, was placed in the truck; his friends of the night before crawled into the rear and steadied the blood-stained bundle with their feet as the vehicle pulled away, heading for Nuanet's police station. Two African constables who had arrived moments before in response to my radio message, sat impassively beside them.

The next morning my day started with an African woman clutching a baby in her arms whose tiny head was the size of a swollen melon. "What's wrong with that picannin?" I asked Patel.

"Sah, she says she wants to file a complaint against her boyfriend."

"I'm listening."

"Sah, the woman says her husband has four wives. She is number three." He paused for breath. "Her husband's brother came to the beer drink and told her he wanted her for his woman."

"And?"

"Well, then when she said no, the boyfriend said, 'I'll show you how much I love you,' and picked up the picannin and beat its head on the floor."

"Does she want her boyfriend charged for beating the baby's head on the ground?"

Patel looked at the woman who, in keeping with Shona modesty, had averted her eyes and was staring at the floor. She shook her head, "No, sah, she said not to worry about baby, she's worried that her husband might think she's been screwing the brother."

"Tell her to take the picannin to the medic's tent, get him fixed up, then show her out." I lit a cigar. "Patel, see that she understands I can't do anything about skull bashing, only rapes and murders."

He nodded and chattered away, translating. She looked up from the floor and answered. "Sah, she says if her husband kills his brother for bothering her can she come back?"

"Get her out of here!"

I wondered how long it would take me before I began to think like an African. Lunacy week didn't end with those two incidents, however.

Another colored unit moved into Sarahuru. Headquartered at Cranborne Barracks, Salisbury, they were a Composite Transportation Company whose mission was to provide drivers and vehicles for the transport of supplies. They also were to

furnish armed guards to escort the road construction workers building the new highway from Sarahuru to Rutenga.

I'd sensed trouble with these people when I'd first seen them at Rutenga. Unfortunately for them, they'd had no officer commanding, only a corporal, and without proper leadership or discipline they were like troops the world over—they got into mischief.

This time the CTC had a young European officer with them. A subbie who was the epitome of the correct British Army lieutenant—immaculate in dress, correct in behavior. I often wondered why he'd been assigned to ride herd on this pack of hoodlums.

Initially, the CTC troops didn't give me any trouble; they kept to themselves, occupying an area near the station-master's office. The problem with them began at five one morning when I was awakened by shots and frenzied yells, followed by the sound of Patel's boots pounding down the hallway.

He beat on my door, yelling, "Sah, it's the CTC, they're having a punch-up."

"Is that leftenant down there with them?" I asked.

"Yes, sah, I think so, sah!"

"All right, Patel, don't worry about it—if he can't handle it, he'll probably send a runner up."

"Yes, sah." His boots retreated down the hall and I turned over, trying to get back to sleep, knowing it would be a fruitless effort.

More yelling and shots. The boots pounding down the hallway again were Patel's. "Sah, sah,

come quick!"

I got up, grabbed my pistol and went outside. Next to our CP was an identical frame house surrounded by a picket fence. Leaning with his back against it was the leftenant. Standing in front of him was a short muscular colored soldier who was flailing away at the young officer's head with one dangling handcuff, its mate firmly locked around his thick wrist. Each time he took a swing, he yelled, "I'll kill you."

I watched this scene for about ten seconds, waiting for the leftenant to do something. Finally convinced he wasn't about to take action of any kind, I walked down to the pair, pushed the officer out of the way and cracked the colored soldier over the head with the barrel of my pistol.

The damned weapon jumped out of my hand, landing on the other side of the fence in the garden. I leaned over, picked up the weapon and continued thumping. On the third whack the trooper went down and out.

I got the free handcuff securely fastened to his left wrist and motioned two colored soldiers to pick him up and carry him away to the small tin shack I used for a temporary jail until I could send the occupants down to Rutenga for trial.

The young officer was still standing dazedly against the fence.

"Why didn't you do something, Leftenant?"

He shook his head wearily. "If you hadn't interfered, sah, I was beginning to reason with that chap."

"Reason with him?" I yelled. "For fuck's sake,

one more swing and he'd have split your skull open. You had a pistol, why didn't you shoot him?"

His dark eyes blinked in disbelief. "Oh my no, sah, one doesn't do a thing like that with one's own troops."

I walked away, leaving him standing against the fence.

"Doc" West, one of the medics, bathed the king-sized knots now adorning the recalcitrant colored trooper's head and was wrapping a gauze bandage around the battered skull.

"Ah, sah, he's good as new," the medic smiled as I walked up.

"God, I hope not," I replied, looking down at the prisoner who was sitting cross-legged on the ground. He looked up and glared but said nothing.

"Patel!" I waved him over from the mess tent where he'd buried his nose in a cup of tea.

"Sah?"

"When you get this bugger ready, put him in a vehicle and cart him off to JOC Rutenga." I turned to the prisoner, "What's your name, soldier?"

"Dixson."

"O.K., Dixson, you're now under arrest. I'm charging you with resisting arrest with violence. That's mutiny. And attempted assault on a superior officer. Also a mutinous act. Do you understand?"

He spat at my feet. "Yeah."

"My little beauty," I snapped, "if you ever again pull something like that on me I will blow off your thick fucking head."

We got him on his feet, hoisted him aboard a truck and jounced off down the potholed road to

JOC Rutenga.

Colonel French, the JOC Commander, listened to Corporal Dixon's sad tale, particularly the portion wherein the corporal stated I had been very brutal, cruel, inhuman, and possibly unfriendly. Further, I had beaten the colored over the head smartly with my pistol.

The JOC Commander, unimpressed by Dixson's complaints, promptly locked him up.

Colonel French invited me to stay for lunch, but I begged off, saying, with good reason, I'd best be getting back to Sarahuru before something else happened. Knowing the colored better than I, he agreed and waved me on my way.

The trip back to the company was uneventful until we rounded a curve some fifteen miles from tSarahuru. Dead in the middle of the road coming toward us was a road grader. Costing $200,000 each, equipped with thirteen gears and requiring the skills of a highly trained driver, these machines are invaluable to the Rhodesian construction industry. Instead of the assigned driver, one of my loyal troops, SLR slung rakishly around his neck, was sitting behind the controls of the yellow-painted monster as it chugged slowly down the road.

"Stop here," I told my driver and jumped to the ground. I held up an imperious hand. Unable to find the brakes on the grader, the trooper obligingly drove it into a nearby ditch.

"Where the fuck do you think you're going?" I demanded. He looked at me bleary-eyed from beer and dagga, and mumbled dreamily, "Home to

Bulawayo," and passed out, banging his head on the instrument panel.

"Get him in the truck," I muttered.

As we drove on to Sarahuru, I shuddered to think of the reaction of the construction boss when he heard the story surrounding the grader's disappearance.

It was clear that with the temporary lull in terrorist activity in our area I would have to develop some kind of program to keep the goffles busy and out of mischief. The most promising plan was one already conceived by the Rhodesian Government called "Hearts and Minds." It was an effort on the part of the government to aid the bush African by providing medical care, albeit on a rudimentary level, and assistance with protecting the locals from terrorist attacks on their kraals.

Each day I would mount a patrol, taking a medic with me, carrying whatever medicines he could spare at the time, and ride through the various kraals within the Sarahuru area. We would treat women, children and old men for simple illnesses. The most prevalent were coughs, colds and flu that would respond quickly to antibiotics.

The patrols, in addition to building good will among the Africans toward us, also produced intelligence information as to suspected terrorist movements around the area. Like the great majority of Africans living in TTLs all over Rhodesia, these people were scared of the terrorists discovering their friendship with us. They well knew that the penalty for collaborating with us was a terrorist bullet in the back of the head. If we could win over

the tribesmen it would mean they would withdraw their support for the Communists and deny them food, clothing and intelligence concerning Security Force strength in the TTL.

When we returned earlier than usual from one of our "Hearts and Minds" patrols, I noticed a long line of nannies waiting outside the entrance to the first aid tent that served as our hospital.

Dismounting, I walked toward the group noting that the majority were young. Some, however, were not so young, and were obviously looking after the picannins of the girls who were inside the tent.

Satisfied that they were evidently being cared for and not wanting to interrupt the medics at work, I passed by the line and entered the command post.

I had a considerable amount of administrative work to complete so I sent an European sergeant out with the daily patrol, warning him to keep his eyes peeled. Word had drifted back from some of the villagers that the terrorists were disturbed at the success of our "Hearts and Minds" efforts and were going to have a go at the next patrol we sent out.

On the morning of the third day, I'd finished all my reports and paperwork that had piled up during my absence, and decided to take a tea break. Walking to the back door, I glanced over at the medics' tent. The daily line of nannies had now grown to eighteen; it was time to inspect the hospital and find out the reason for the ever-increasing numbers of patients.

The hospital was the domain of three Indians;

Corporal Singh who was the "doctor," and his two assistants. Within a Protection Company, the Indians stick very closely together indeed. There is a strong sense of mutual support and ethnic solidarity. However, the true reason for this closeness is the "Daniel and Lions" lifestyle in which they exist.

The coloreds dislike them. Beatings and shakedowns are commonplace, for the Indians usually have more money on them than their tormentors. It is a simple matter of either paying or taking a pounding.

Better educated than the colored, the Indians get the administrative jobs in the company. They avoid going into the bush as rifleman more from fear of the goffles than of the terrorists.

As I walked to the entrance, the nannies sitting in the waiting line averted their eyes, gazing at the ground. This wasn't unusual since most African women are taught from early childhood not to talk directly to European men but to look at the ground when questioned.

As I pulled back the canvas flap and entered the tent, I couldn't find the "doctor." Voices, however, were coming from the opposite side of an army blanket suspended from a rope. I pushed aside this partition and stuck my head into the "operating room."

A wooden door apparently stolen from a house had been placed across two sawhorses to form a table of sorts. Several blankets had been carefully folded to cover the rough wooden surfaces and provide a soft, comfortable place to lie. A chubby

young African nanny was happily stretched out on the table, her feet apart and fat black thighs spread.

Standing between them was the "doctor," Corporal Singh, who held a copy of Grey's *Anatomy* in his left hand while thrusting the rubber-gloved fingers of his right vigorously up the girl's vagina.

Looking on with undisguised interest were his two assistants standing on either side of the table.

"Doc, what the hell are you doing?"

His head jerked up and the textbook dropped to the ground. "Ah, sah, we - um, we're examining this girl for respiratory disease." The nanny giggled and the two helpers nodded in agreement.

"It's my understanding that respiratory diseases are usually limited to the chest and throat, doctor." I grabbed the girl's arm and pulled her to a sitting position. "Not to the vaginal tract." He hurriedly withdrew his finger and started to press it into her mouth, ostensibly to check her tonsils.

"That's enough, corporal. Tell this girl to go outside and send everybody home except those who are really sick."

One of the assistants followed the nanny outside and I could hear excited voices babbling in Shona. The tone of disappointment evident in the girl's comments seemed to indicate that they'd looked forward to their examination.

"O.K. Doc, as of now there'll be no more pelvic exams, are you with me?"

"Oh, yes sah."

"Instead, you're to go back to treating only legitimate cases. I want you back on the horse patrol starting tomorrow."

"Yes, sah." His bony face was crestfallen. He hated and feared the horses.

The terrorists had now pulled back to the Mbizi area some forty kms south of Rutenga.

As a result, the locals began to wander around at night, eager to enjoy the freedom that came from the Communist absence.

My patrols would shoot the strollers for breaking curfew. The killings were damaging the good relations we'd built up with the medical treatment patrols.

In an effort to minimize the shootings, I cautioned patrol leaders to exercise judgment, if possible taking into custody those curfew breakers whom they thought to be drunk, crazy or simply lost. Later, I would deeply regret making that statement.

To avoid the boredom of patrolling the same areas indefinitely, I had instituted a system of rotating units which gave individual platoon members some incentive to remain alert on entering a new area. This alertness was manifested by sending back to the command post a never-ending stream of drunk, crazy or lost Africans who were crammed into the little green trolley and sent to us for screening.

I didn't have the facilities necessary for handling the prisoners so they were loaded into trucks and carted off to Rutenga.

The cops at JOC Rutenga were interested initially but with the ever-increasing flood of drunk, in-

sane, giggling Africans unloaded at their headquarters, they got on the radio and requested we cease and desist forthwith. No more Africans unless they were bonafide terrorist suspects.

I was now faced with the prospect of shooting the Africans as curfew breakers or turning them loose to be picked up the following night and start the cycle all over again.

A stop-gap measure was achieved by trucking them to a nearby Catholic mission where the harassed sisters fed and clothed them, then turning them loose to return home.

Mercifully, at this point I was given ten days R&R. After forty days in the bush a short leave of ten days is given troops in order that they might have a break from the strains of insurgency war. Called Rest and Recuperation, the ten days more aptly should have been termed Rape and Restitution.

I reported to the Commanding Officer, Protection Companies, Lieutenant Colonel Reginald Nobles on my arrival in Salisbury. There I was told to report to Selous Scouts at Inkomo Barracks for an interview.

This was a welcome surprise. I'd attempted on several occasions to obtain a transfer either to the Special Air Service Squadron or Selous Scouts. It was, to me, a waste of valuable experience in counterinsurgency warfare to keep me with the goffles where my previous Special Forces training never came into play. But I'd learned from contacts in army headquarters that it was generally accepted there by senior officers that I was a CIA agent sent

to Rhodesia with the mission of penetrating the highly classified Selous Scouts or SAS. Given that kind of thinking, my chances were slim of ever doing anything that would effectively employ previous combat experience.

I could have saved the petrol used in driving out to Selous Scouts Headquarters.

Then Major, now Lieutenant Colonel Ron Reid-Daley, the commanding officer of the unit met with me for fifteen minutes or so. Highly suspicious of Americans, obviously jealous of United States Army Special Forces, he made it plain that there was no place in his organization for me. I could understand his reasoning but was truly disappointed; Selous Scouts are a highly trained, most effective unit and I would have been proud to serve with them.

I shook hands, saluted and left for Salisbury, now more convinced than ever that I would spend the rest of my time in the Rhodesian Army chasing goffles up hill and down dale.

As the fellow said, "Once you get past the first bite, crow isn't all that bad." I prepared myself to do just that. I'd take my ten days of R&R, do the town and go back down to Sarahuru and earn my pay.

On my return, Sarahuru was quiet, even dull. The detachment of troops guarding the Ingezi Bridge was not.

At 10:30 on the night following my return from R&R the radioman received a transmission from the bridge detail. "Sir, the terrs are zapping the bridge."

I walked into the radio room and listened to the voice crackling through the speaker. "One-Six this is Sunray. We need help, the Charlie Tangos are hitting us. Out." As expected, the radio transmission from Sergeant Fraser at Ingezi ceased. Never reliable, the signals we received from Fraser were affected by the nearby Buchwa mine, so heavy was the mineral content of the nearby mountain.

"Stay on the set and see if you can raise him. Tell him we're on the way." I used the other set to advise JOC Rutenga of what was happening and told them I would brief them more thoroughly when I got to the scene.

I called Sergeant White, the duty NCO, and told him to pick five men and meet me at the trolley in front of the stationmaster's office. The trolley driver, an employee of Rhodesia Railways, would be on standby and immediately available. For some idiotic reason, the Railway wouldn't allow a soldier to operate the little machine and required us to use one of their drivers.

Carrying my SLR and webbing, I ran down the hill to the station. Sergeant White and his people were already standing next to the car waiting to load. "Check your radio with the CP."

"Sah, I've checked it already—it's all right."

"O.K., load up and let's go." The colored got in, distributed themselves along the benches and the trolley rattled off toward Ingezi, its bright searchlight flicking from side to side, searching the roadway and heavy bushes on either side of the track for movement that would mean ambush—or worse, an attempt to blow up the track again.

A half mile from the bridge I could see occasional tracers flying back and forth from opposite sides of the tracks. The fact that both sets of tracers were orange and none of them green signified the "ATTACK."

The colored at the bridge had apparently gotten smashed and decided to have a go at each other.

"See if you can raise the call-sign at the bridge," I told the signaller crouching beside me.

He started transmitting and got an immediate reply. "Tell those idiots to cease fire."

"Sah, they say O.K."

The firing from the bridge stopped. It did not cease from the east side of the tracks but kept banging away, tracers hitting and ricocheting off the sides of the bridge and arcing into the black night.

"Tell Sunray to put a flare up over the area where fire is coming from."

"Roger, sah."

Not one but three Icarus flares popped up, trailing sparks as the little white parachutes opened. The bushes were suddenly bathed in yellowish-white light, and the firing stopped.

We waited for about five minutes, then started the trolley and drove slowly to the "battlefield." I ordered the car stopped, dismounted the troops and placed them in a defensive perimeter where they would be capable of taking under fire any would-be attacker. Satisfied, I walked toward a group of soldiers who were standing next to the bridge.

They stopped speaking among themselves as I approached. "Where's Sergeant Fraser?" I asked,

looking from one to the other trying to distinguish faces in the darkness. "Here, sah." A figure detached itself from the rear of the group and walked forward.

"Fraser, for fuck's sake what's going on here?"

"Sah, I came back from checking the guards and sat down," he turned and pointed to a stack of sandbags in front of the radio room. "Over there."

"Go on."

"Dickson, the cook, brought me a cup of tea and he sat down on another sandbag right across from me. Dickson, come here, man." The cook sidled over to stand next to us.

"When we started to drink our tea, the first round hit the side of the wall right between our heads." Dickson nodded. "Yes, sah, that's right!"

"Then what?" I could guess the answer.

"Sah, I yelled, 'stand to',—and we started firing back across the tracks where the tracers were coming from."

I shook my head in disbelief. "You dumb shit, couldn't you see the tracers were orange instead of green?"

"Yes, sah, but they kept on shooting. We thought maybe the terrs had got some FN's and our ammo."

I couldn't fault him for that. It had happened before. Occasionally terrorists had managed to steal an FN and ammunition from a farmer, then used it against security forces.

"Who was commanding the patrol that started all this shit?" I asked.

"Me, sah," a meek voice spoke up from the front rank of the group. McNeil. I should have known.

Brawler, drunk, a constant troublemaker, the bull-shouldered colored had been the ringleader in most of the escapades involving the malcontents within the company.

"Go ahead, I'm listening. . .it had better be good!"

There was a muffled snicker from the center of the small group of soldiers.

"Nothing's funny, you wankers," I roared. Immediate silence.

"Sah, we walked our part of the track and when we got back, I decided to clear our camp." McNeil paused.

"How did you propose to do that?"

"Well, sah. . .by reconnaissance fire," he said proudly.

"You mean you fired into your own camp?" I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

"Sah, I thought maybe the terrs might have moved in while we were gone."

"Did it ever occur to you that some of that fire might ricochet into the bridge area?" I felt a stong urge to strangle him.

"Um, well sah, I didn't think so." He spat on the ground and shifted his feet nervously.

"Don't bother with the rest, you cunt." I turned to Fraser. "Sergeant, find something for this twit to do for the next two weeks. Work his ass off until his brains start functioning."

"Yes, sah." The sergeant's teeth shone in a smile that boded no good for the hapless McNeil. I summoned the trolley driver and we started back to Sarahuru.

Luckily no one had been hit during the wild exchange of fire but the story of the crazy incident reached JOC Rutenga Headquarters and another black mark was chalked up to the "galloping goffles," as we were now called.

Part II

From the Deep Bush to Limbo

CHAPTER 1

Umtali

THE TIME AT Sarahuru had passed so quickly that my authorization for R&R came as a welcome surprise. I really didn't worry too much about leaving the company for ten days, because there had been no appreciable terrorist activity in our area since the Fourth of July attack on the kraal. I secured a driver, two troopers to ride as armed escorts in the rear of the Landrover, and we were off.

In keeping with the goffles' ability to eat incredible amounts of food, our progress to Salisbury and Protection Companies Headquarters was marked by the customary regular stops along the six-hour trip. These were made at WVS canteens where sandwiches, cakes, tea and coffee kept up the coloreds' strength.

My driver pulled up outside the entrance to headquarters and I climbed stiffly down from the jeep. "Come back and pick me up in ten minutes," I said, and walked up the wooden steps into the building.

Major Ted Cutter, the commanding officer waved me into a chair and called out for tea.

"Mike, I know you want to get away from Sarahuru for awhile and I don't blame you. After that punch-up on July 4 the terrs will lay low for awhile."

I didn't say anything, but felt sure I wasn't going to be transferred out of Protection Companies, no matter what!

"I want you to go down to Umtali and take over 6 Company. Only for awhile. . .the present company commander has to go into the hospital for surgery." He offered me a small sandwich from a nearby tray. "You'll like Umtali—it's a good town—great people."

"What's 6 Company doing?" I asked, glancing up at the map on the wall behind his desk.

He turned in his chair and pointed to a helter-skelter series of colored paper circles extending north and south from Umtali along the Rhodesian border with Mozambique.

"That's what they're doing—scattered from hell to breakfast all over the bloody landscape." I put down the sandwich, got up and walked over to the map. Cutter followed my gaze and laughed. "Where you're looking is Mount Selinda. That platoon's dug in facing Frelimo troops at Espungabera. They get revved about three or four times a week. Whenever the Freddies feel like it." He lit a cigarette. "You won't be bored with this job, Mike. It'll be a damned sight better than sitting on your bum at Sarahuru."

"O.K., Ted, when do I go?"

"Take your R&R now and I'll get a signal off to the CP at Feruka."

"What's Feruka? I thought the headquarters was at Umtali—?"

"Feruka's an oil refinery twelve miles outside town. First-class living. It beats Sarahuru, believe

me." He stood up and shook hands. "Have a break—get laid, relax."

"Don't worry—after Rutenga, anything will look good." I picked up my cap and walked to the door. "See you in ten days."

My ten days R&R went in the usual pattern followed by most troops out of the bush and into civilization. . .drinking, screwing and enjoying frequent hot baths in an old-fashioned tub. A far cry from the bush.

I woke up one morning, looked at the date on the Rhodesia Herald newspaper I was reading and realized it was all over. It was time to go back to work.

Major Cutter wasn't in but had left a note for me. I was to meet him at Feruka and continue on to Chipinga and Mount Selinda with him to inspect troops and get acquainted.

I wasn't the only one to suffer from the largesse of ten days' high living.

"Moncreif, where have you been?" I snarled at the bleary-eyed appartition that was my driver.

"Sorry, sah," he mumbled, one hand shakily bracing himself against the side of the jeep.

"What's wrong with you, man?"

He rolled his eyes. "Apologies, sah. Fucked out, sah." I sighed and settled down for the ride to Umtali.

The scenery between Salisbury and Umtali is different than the route leading to Rutenga. R&R forgotten, I watched as the dark outlines of mountains grew in the distance. The climb to the plateau overlooking Umtali and the Mozambique border

was much quicker than the careful descent around horseshoe turns that took us down to the valley floor and the outskirts of the little town.

Moncrief had made the trip before and threaded his way through traffic, turning off on the side road that led to the Feruka oil refinery and 6 Protection Company Headquarters.

The road dead-ended at Feruka.

When sanctions went into effect against Rhodesia, among the most critical activities to be affected were British Petroleum's refineries. Caught with thousands upon thousands of barrels of oil in storage tanks, BP's directors had to sit tight.

Feruka refinery was one of the refineries immobilized. A smartly uniformed African guard opened the large gate and let us in.

"Here we are, sah." Moncrief got out, picked up my bedroll from the rear of the Landrover and walked down several concrete steps to the headquarters entrance.

"Major Williams? Sergeant Major Haddad." A skinny, handle-bar-moustached Indian saluted and stuck out his hand.

"Where's Major Cutter?" I glanced into the ops room, noting the neatness of situation maps, charts and several radio sets.

"This way, sah. . .Major Cutter's gone to Chipinga." I followed him inside the ops room. He traced the road to Chipinga on the map. "Sah, I think it's too late to start down there now."

"Okay, Haddad, show me around—I'll start for Chipinga tomorrow morning."

Facilities at the refinery were luxurious when

compared with those at Sarahuru. The troops had a huge dayroom with TV, an immaculate kitchen, hot showers and only a twelve-mile ride into town.

The sergeant major's thorough briefing underscored what I had already gathered. Six Protection Company was scattered for 250 miles along the border.

"Sah, we've also got a problem with morale—company commanders come and go every forty-five days." He tugged at the bushy moustache. "The men feel like nobody gives a damn about them."

"All right, I'll see what I can do."

After a steak dinner, I set up my cot in a tent outside the building. At one o'clock in the morning an explosion of sounds woke me—fighting, cursing and the crash of furniture.

I got up, buckled on my pistol and ran to the dayroom.

Scattered from one end of the room to the doorway was a carnage of overturned chairs, tables and glassware, much of it broken. Lying in one corner were the bodies of two colored, bloodied and semi-conscious.

A beer bottle hummed past my head and smashed against the wall behind me.

There was a sudden pause in the chaos, a silence as the two drunken troopers responsible for the mess stared glassy-eyed in my direction.

"I will kill the next one of you that throws a bottle at me!" I announced, looking from one to the other and unbuckling the flap on my holster. I thought for one crazy second that the taller of the two was going to try for his SLR that was leaning

against the table to his right. He glanced at the rifle, then at me. Slowly he came to an unsteady position of attention.

"Uh. . .uh, we're sorry, sah. Just back from Ruda—R&R."

"Pick up this shit in the morning when you're sober. Secure your weapons and go to bed. If I come in here again one of you will go to the morgue, the other to jail."

There were no more sounds of any kind.

When I came in for breakfast the room was clean, the bodies removed and the bloodstains washed away.

My departure for Chipinga was watched by a large number of subdued faces, among which were the brawlers of the day-room battle. They were neatly dressed and save for bruises on nose and mouth looked quite presentable. As I drove past them toward the gate their heels clicked and their hands snapped up in salutes.

"How long does it normally take to visit all the call signs?" I asked Moncrief as we drove steadily southward to Chipinga. "Oh, sah, at least one week." He smiled. "That is unless we get blown up by a mine. . .then longer." He laughed.

It was a bad time to stop at Chipinga.

A funeral for Trooper Castleman, a Grey's Scout, had just finished and people were leaving the Dutch Reform Church for the Chipinga Hotel. Castleman had been shot in the head during a contact with terrorists on the Mozambique border.

Finishing with our last stop at Mount Selinda the next day, I realized that Moncrief hadn't been kidding when he'd said it took a week to visit every unit of 6 Company.

I'd seen Ted Cutter at the wake following the funeral and he'd suggested I go up to Ruda in the Honde Valley on my return to Feruka. I felt like asking for my personal chopper.

Three Brigade Headquarters was in the old Cecil Hotel, downtown Umtali. A request from the operations officer resulted in my rousting the jeep-weary Moncrief out of bed in the early hours to drive me there. He was too tired to talk, and sat like a robot behind the Landrover's wheel as he stopped at the entrance to the building.

"Get yourself some coffee inside," I said. "I'll send a runner for you when I'm ready." He nodded, half asleep.

I checked my SLR and pistol with the MP at the desk and went in search of Captain MacLane.

"Mike, I'm glad to see you." A sturdy, broad-shouldered parachutist, his previous service with Special Air Service equipped him very well to handle operations for 3 Brigade.

"When people say that, I'm always suspicious." I sat down and listened.

"You've got to get me more troops at Ruda—now!" His smile faded and his eyes, behind glasses, were serious.

"How many?" I knew we didn't have an unlimited amount at Feruka.

"Thirty?" He took off his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose between a thumb and forefinger.

"I'll try. When do you want 'em?" I knew the answer.

"Today—take them up with you."

I got up to leave. "Don't take too long up there," MacLane said, putting on his glasses. "The brigade commander wants to have a chat with you when you get back—something important."

Moncrief wasn't hard to find when I walked out of headquarters. He was fast asleep in the jeep, the first rays of the sun deepening the dark shadows under his eyes.

"Let's go. . .breakfast is waiting!"

Sergeant Major Haddad was not overly pleased with Captain MacLane's request for thirty of our people to go with me to Ruda.

"Sah, if you take that many with you, we'll have no reserve to commit." His shaggy black moustache twitched like the whiskers on a mouse.

"You're absolutely correct, Sergeant Major—" I agreed. He beamed. "—Tactically, that is." He stopped beaming. "With a 250-mile front, where in hell would thirty men make any difference?" I spat on the ground and rubbed it with my boot.

"Not to worry." I continued, trying to sound cheerful. "Those thirty will make a lot of difference for the JOC commander."

Breakfast over, Haddad began rounding up the required number of troops. Cursing, grumbling, they finally assembled at the side of a battered RL truck with their gear.

I climbed into the cab of the lead vehicle, a newer version of the RL behind us, and we were on our way.

The Honde Valley, north of Umtali, was so full of terrs at that time we called it "little Mozambique."

Six Company had a platoon headquarters set up at a dirt airstrip on the valley floor. This was Ruda. Our two-truck convoy stopped at an intersection with a side road leading off to the right. A large white sign board proclaimed HONDE VALLEY — SCENIC ROUTE, a large black arrow pointing toward the innocent-looking side road.

We started down.

If the descent into Umtali from Salisbury was picturesque, what we were seeing now was unforgettable. The hard-surfaced road gave way to dirt. Erosion had washed away the banks on the right side and the passage of the truck started a series of minor avalanches—rocks, dirt and large chunks of earth crumbled away, falling out into two thousand feet of space to the valley floor.

"Sergeant, what's your name?" I yelled at the driver.

He didn't take his eyes off the insane road. "Smith, sah." His brown face was covered with a fine sheen of sweat and the camouflage shirt he was wearing was soaked in perspiration under the arms. The day was cold.

"Thank you. If this fucking truck goes over the side at least we won't be total strangers before we hit the bottom." He didn't smile.

I suddenly smelled an acrid metalic odor. "Brake bands?" Smith nodded and shifted down into a lower gear.

I looked behind us. Approaching the turn we had just exited was the RL truck, its brakes sending tendrils of blue smoke around the tires.

"Have we ever lost a vehicle on this run?" I

asked.

"Last week. They made it to the bottom O.K. but couldn't make the turn. Four dead."

The road suddenly flattened out. We bounced across a wooden bridge that drunkenly spanned a dirty stream, then, picking up speed we roared past a bottle store and a cluster of huts.

Ahead on the right was a fair-sized dirt airstrip. On the far side were a number of tents around which were sandbags piled one atop another. Shell scrapes, the Rhodesian version of foxholes, were visible at the outer perimeter.

"Home sweet home," Smith muttered turning off the road and jouncing across the hard-packed clay of the runway.

Whistles and catcalls from several colored standing near the mess tent greeted the newcomers.

"Major, sir, the JOC commander would like to see you right away." I looked down from the cab at the man who addressed me. A slight, balding European, his face was white against the background of black and brown skins around him.

"I'll drive you, sah." Smith engaged the clutch and we moved across the runway to a cluster of buildings near the road.

The sergeant pointed. "In that door, sah."

"I won't be long," I said. Smith unfolded a newspaper and began to read.

The command post for Honde Valley was a comfortable though aging farmhouse with dirty concrete floors and grimy walls. Lieutenant Colonel Peter Brown, the JOC commander, wasted no time in asking if I'd brought an additional thirty troops

with me.

"Yes, sir." My answer was evidently the one he wanted to hear; it got me an invitation to lunch.

"Are you going with the convoy to Katiyo?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. I want to check my people there at the tea estate office." The office in question was the Tanganda Tea Company headquarters which was being guarded by troops from 6 Company.

"Watch for mines on that road—we've lost some vehicles this last week."

Colonel Brown grinned and glanced toward the door. "Here's another Yank. Do you know each other?"

It was Robin Moore, dirty and red-eyed. He leaned his FN against the wall and slumped into an empty chair.

"Robin, after Viet Nam haven't you had enough?" I asked.

"Haven't you?" he countered and we both laughed.

"Don't you think we're a little long in the tooth for this kind of thing?" I poured myself another cup of tea.

"Hell, as long as you can lift a rifle, that's all you need." And come to think of it, Robin was right.

I finished my tea, said my goodbyes and walked out to the waiting truck. I looked in the back to make sure my bedroll was there; we would have to spend the night at Katiyo. When the sun went down in Honde Valley, nothing moved on the road except terrs. We joined the convoy—a mixture of military trucks, civilian cars, an African bus and a

huge Pantechnikon tractor-trailer towing a tanker truck full of gasoline.

"Give that tanker a wide berth, Sergeant," I told Smith. "If he hits a mine or picks up an RPG from the bush, we'll all be fried."

"What's the problem with the tea estates?" I asked as we bounced along the road, starting to climb toward the green mountains ahead.

"The terrs are trying to run off the houts—all the labor force. If they can do that, there won't be any more tea industry."

"How're they doing?"

He laughed grimly. "Two days ago the terrs massacred one hundred and thirty-seven men, women and kids."

At dusk we pulled into the yard of the estate headquarters. A double security fence ringed the compound and an electrified section underscored the danger the staff faced from terrs only five km's away to the east—Mozambique.

I met and spoke with the members of the platoon assigned to guard Katiyo. No problems of any consequence. At first light the following morning Smith was warming up the truck's engine and getting ready to start back to Ruda and Umtali.

The ride back down the mountain to Ruda was made in silence. Our eyes were on the road looking for telltale signs of newly turned dirt. Three days before, a civilian vehicle leaving the convoy had hit a mine with its right front tire—two occupants killed.

"Sah, I'll make a quick stop at Ruda to pick up some people who have to go back to Cranborne."

Smith said.

"What's wrong with them?" I asked.

He shook his head. "One's got the clap, the other's crazy."

With our two new passengers, we started back up the torturous climb to the Umtali road. The view going up was no more comforting than it had been coming down yesterday.

It was a tired group that stepped down from the truck at 3 Brigade headquarters.

"Major Williams to see the brigade commander," I told the burly MP at the desk just inside the door to headquarters.

"One moment, sah." He relayed my request by phone and thirty seconds later a small figure in camos walked up to the desk.

"Follow me, please," she purred. And I did. Watching what her lovely round little ass did to the tightly stretched material of her pants reminded me of two monkeys in a flour sack fighting over a football. Blonde pigtails danced and she turned to face me as she stopped in front of a door bearing the sign—COMMANDER.

"Right in there, Major." As she walked away, her shirt front was doing what her trousers had been doing—small coconuts, no less.

"Get in here, Michael!" Brigadier Derry MacIntyre had evidently heard the conversation.

"Morning, sir." I snapped a bastardized version of a British salute, noting the pain in the brigadier's eyes at the spectacle.

"Can your horses undertake a recon for me?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. When and where?"

"Come on with me." He rose and walked to the war room where several officers were gathered around a series of aerial photographs.

"See how much of this area can be covered by mounted patrols. You'll note the terrain is, um... somewhat rugged." His lips twitched in a frosty smile.

CHAPTER 2

Can Horses Climb?

THE BRIGADIER'S STATEMENT about the terrain being "somewhat rugged" was accurate, to say the least!

As I looked at the aerial photos it was clear that a major portion of this patrol would be made by walking and leading the horses. There would be many segments of terrain that the horses could climb, carrying their riders. But on the trip back down they would have to be led as they slid and skiddled with hindquarters bunched under them acting as brakes to check their downward speed, their riders scampering ahead, taking care not to be run down by flying hooves.

"Have you any questions, Major?" the brigadier asked, looking sharply at me.

No questions, sir, except for quartermaster supplies I might need."

"Anything you require, you'll get." He nodded and walked from the room.

I headed for the telephone and got a call through to the stationmaster's office at Sarahuru.

"Jack, this is Mike Williams. Can you get Sergeant Major Richardson on the blower?"

There was a pause of several minutes, then the sergeant major's clipped British voice came over

the phone. "S'arn't Major Richardson here."

"Bring the horses and get up here ASP!" I told Richardson. "I've laid everything on from this end. Rhodesia Railways will pick you up at Sarahuru and unload everybody at Umtali."

I mentally crossed my fingers. Given the occasional screwup, Richardson might find himself stepping off the boxcar at the South African border.

Three days later the cavalry showed up. I went to the railway station and watched as the horses were unloaded from a boxcar. There were other watchers equally interested—several hard-faced Africans viewed the proceedings with concern. By nightfall, the terrs in Mozambique would know horses were now in the area.

Rhodesia had its security problems. We couldn't blindfold every African.

"As soon as they've stretched their legs, take 'em to the fairgrounds," I said. "I'll meet you there." Richardson was saddling the animals as I drove off.

To my knowledge, Rhodesia is the only Western country that employs horses in a combat role. It isn't necessary to be a von Clauswitz to realize that the use of horses to transport troops in extremely rough terrain provides a commander with a tremendous advantage over his foot-slogging infantry counterpart.

Cavalry arrive at their objective rested and ready to fight, while infantry, moving on foot, have already used up large amouts of energy just getting there—in many cases so bushed they are functioning on adrenaline alone.

"Sah, the regimental quartermaster left word

you are to pick up your supplies this morning." The middle-aged white-thatched Richardson sat perched on a bale of hay contentedly puffing on his pipe.

"I looked at my watch and said, "I'm due at brigade. Can you pick them up for me after the horses have been seen to?" He nodded and got up.

"Horses have been fed and watered, sah." He glanced down the row of stalls appreciatively. The fairgrounds were well equipped to handle horses.

"Did your people bring Uzis?" I asked.

"Yes, sah," he replied.

"Okay, have six of them carry Uzis, the rest SLR's. Have everybody turn in early tonight—we'll leave before first light tomorrow. I want to be well through town before daylight." I checked my pants pocket to be sure I had my notebook.

"By the way, sah. . .the troops appreciate this chance."

I walked to my Landrover and climbed in. "Sergeant Major, by the time this little recon is over, they might have a different viewpoint." I returned his salute, backed the jeep and turned down the bumpy road to the fairgrounds main gate.

A spirited game of volleyball was going on—the artillerymen, clad in shorts and camouflage "T"-shirts ending the day with the army's favorite outdoor sport. At the appearance of the horses, the game suddenly stopped. The young gunners watched, pop-eyed, as we dismounted. I walked over to a young leftenant who was standing on the sidelines.

"Has brigade signalled you about us?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. We got a message this morning that you chaps would be pitching up sometime this evening."

"I need a place to picket the horses. The troops can bed down anywhere as long as they're out of your way." I glanced around the area noting the widely dispersed vehicles and scattered tents.

"No problem, sir. Over there. The leftenant pointed to a thick clump of trees in which was parked a dusty, battered truck, its camouflaged paint sunbaked and peeling.

"Stand-to is first and last light. . .password is Red-Charles."

He looked quizzically at Bossikopf, my big stallion. "Sir, if we have to fire, what will the horses do? Have they spent any time around artillery before?"

I looked at the guns, their long barrels pointing toward Frelimo positions.

"In answer to your question, Lieutenant, the horses will do precisely what you think they are going to do, and no, they haven't spent any time around artillery before." I lit a cigar and glanced at Bossikopf who was looking at the guns. "Furthermore, when you fire they will spend about one-half a second before they vacate the premises."

He watched while Richardson led the horses into the trees and then invited me over to the bunker where he broke out a cold Lion ale.

Among our horses was a ten-year-old buckskin gelding named, appropriately, Fruitcake. A gift from a Salisbury riding school, Fruitcake had quite a "combat" record. In my first encounter with him,

I had enlisted the aid of a Grey's Scouts farrier to shoe Fruitcake before we took him to Sarahuru. It took us three houts to put four shoes on the crazy bastard. During the melee, I was kicked, the farrier bitten, two African stableboys kicked, and one African stableboy hospitalized with a ruptured kidney as a result of Fruitcake's final parting shot with his two new rear shoes. In Sarahuru, Fruitcake announced his arrival by running head-on into a thorn bush, putting his rider in the hospital.

I fervently hoped that, with the first burst of RPD machine gun fire I was certain we were going to get on this patrol, Fruitcake would become the first casualty.

A word here to the horse lovers among us. In my lifetime, horses have bitten and kicked me, stamped upon my feet, and on occasion struck me in the face with the tops of their rockhard heads. They can and will do things no self-respecting mule would think of doing.

Gracefully cantering around a horseshow ring on a Sunday is one thing; trying to control a fear-crazed horse while under automatic fire is quite another. I don't believe in mistreating animals. I do believe in utilizing horses to their fullest military capability.

"Sergeant Major, when you're finished picketing the rest of the horses, find a separate place for Fruitcake away from the mares so we don't have any problems with him." I said.

"Dead right, sah." Richardson walked over to an area some distance away from the one occupied by the majority of the animals. He looked around and

finally decided on a small clearing in which he had tethered Bossikopf.

"This should do it, sah," he said, and went back to fetch the gelding.

The horses hooves echoed on the back streets of sleeping Umtali. It was 3:00 a.m. Stars overhead in the black sky cast a faint light, making the animals spooky. By five o'clock, with the first dull streaks of red spreading over the mountains to the east, we were well out of Umtali and climbing through scattered bush. The horses picked up the pace as the ground sloped upwards. Saddle leather creaked, water bottles thudded occasionally against saddle bags, and the snorts from the now-sweating animals grew more frequent as the climb wore on.

"Dismount and take ten!" I ordered.

There was good cover where we stood. Trees and bush shielded us from Frelimo observation posts below us. I could make out small green-clad figures far below lounging near a mortar position, the long barrel of the 122 millimeter Russian mortar pointing ominously towards Umtali.

The troops sat quietly, gazing down at Mozambique. This would be the first action for them since the attack on July 4.th

"Mount up." With the increasing altitude the air had now turned cool and I looked at my watch, noting the amount of daylight remaining to us. Movement with horses in mountainous terrain after dark is madness.

At dusk we trotted across level ground into an

artillery position. Heavily camouflaged and carefully dug in, its guns were trained on Frelimo troops in Mozambique.

Fruitcake was duly picketed to a sturdy trunk of a small dead tree. Sergeant Major Richardson and I unrolled our sleeping bags and tried to get some sleep, fully realizing that come tomorrow things could get very unpleasant indeed.

At 0400 all hell broke loose. Bossikopf bit and kicked Fruitcake, who reacted by rearing and pulling the stump out of the ground. Whirling he ran several steps to escape the stallion's teeth. The log trailing from the picket rope jabbed him suddenly in the ass. The stampede was on. The two little mares started whinnying in fear at the apparition pounding down the road past them. Bossikopf, thinking Fruitcake was trying to mount his harem, started putting dents in the door of a vehicle parked behind him.

Outside the artillery perimeter there were trip flares and anti-personnel mines. As Richardson and I staggered out of our sleeping bags, Fruitcake's log set off a flare. The gelding turned and came galloping back up the road into camp. Richardson grabbed the picket rope when the log wedged itself between two trees, halting the wild dash.

Needless to say, the camp was in a stand-to condition as a result of the chaos. The MAG gunner saved the day by exercising rare fire discipline in not hosing the sector Fruitcake's flare had illuminated.

At first light, under the baleful glares of the artillery-men, a sheepish formation of horse cavalry

trotted out of the camp. We felt we'd have a better chance with Frelimo than with the bleary-eyed survivors of "Fruitcake's Last Charge."

I trotted Bossikopf past the lieutenant who looked up and said, "Sir, if you're coming back this way could you give us a miss and keep going?" Bossikopf answered this plea with an ignominious fart that thundered loudly in the morning calm.

I booted him into a canter.

There was no doubt in my mind that when we finished this crazy mission and managed to complete our return trip there would be no beer, no hot food, nothing but stony-eyed silence.

As we rode away from the artillery position I ordered riders to take up posts at the head and flanks of the column to provide us with essential security.

We were moving into an area used by the terrorists to infiltrate Rhodesia from their bases in neighboring Mozambique, and the chances of contact with them were now great. As the column began climbing through increasingly heavy bush it became necessary for riders to dismount and lead the horses as they picked their way carefully over a network of tree roots growing across their path.

Sergeant Khalid, commander of the security group, was riding pointman. He contacted me on the radio, his voice husky and low-pitched. "Alamo One, this is Alamo Three. D'you read?"

I answered, motioning for the column behind me to halt. "Alamo Three - Alamo One, got you fives—go."

"Alamo One, I have voices approximately five

zero meters to my front. Stand by."

I waited, expecting to hear automatic weapons fire at any time. Five minutes passed but the only sound was that of the wind blowing through the tree branches.

Fifteen more minutes dragged by. "Alamo One, Three, we have negative contact except spoor. Are you closing up with us at this time?"

"Roger D that - moving now - out."

Starting forward again, I headed the column in the direction of Khalid's group, noting the indentations made in the soft earth by shoes of his horses.

The stocky Indian was waiting for us and knelt to show me the spoor he had found. The tracks were those of terrorist boot soles, their distinctive patterns visible in the dirt. Unfortunately, the terrain became rock-studded a few meters further on and the tracks faded, broken by roots and small stones. They were leading in a northeasterly direction toward our objective.

Leaving the animals with a detail of three men, I continued on foot with Khalid, Sergeant Major Richardson and four other troopers.

As we struggled on, I thought back to my return from Korea and my assignment to the 77th Special Forces Group, Airborne, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. On temporary duty status, I'd been sent to the Mountain and Cold Weather Training Command at Fort Carson, Colorado, where they intended to make a mountain climber out of me. It was at Fort Carson where I discovered that climbing mountains scared the hell out of me and I grew to hate

that exercise heartily.

Pausing at the base of the mountain in front of me, I looked up, then up some more. Unlike the rocky crags in Colorado, this hill-mass wouldn't require special climbing equipment as exotic as pitons, carabiners and nylon ropes. But the surface glowering down on us was lethal in a different way—short, springy grass coated with wet mist would make climbing slow, difficult and as slippery as an ice pack.

I glanced over at Richardson. He was studying the mountain, his white hair and lined face clear indicators that he had no business whatsoever being where he was, much less attempting to climb the mass of earth, grass and rock that towered over us.

"Sah, I'd like to go with you if I may."

I had anticipated Richardson's request and had decided to deny it. Suddenly I realized that in only five years I would be his age and fate could easily put me in the same position.

"S'arnt Major, you're over twenty-one. You know damned well if you can't keep up we'll have to leave you and pick you up on the way down."

"Sah." His clipped white moustache twitched and a brief smile creased his face.

"Khalid, take the point." I sent the burly sergeant scrambling up the slope ahead of us, his thick legs pushing him upwards with ease. We waited to give Khalid and his two troopers time to establish a good lead. I didn't relish the prospect of watching Russian-made hand grenades bouncing down the slope at us. Our three scouts would, I hoped, pre-

vent such a surprise.

We started climbing.

Initially, the slope was fairly easy to negotiate but as we continued upward and began a long diagonal traverse across the mountain's face the steepness increased. Our steps shortened. Breathing became more difficult. The long, easy traverses I'd originally planned on using to assault the mountain now became shorter, more difficult. Soon it became impossible to climb without using both hands.

Fortunately, it was still early in the morning and the African sun hadn't really started to get hot. As we kept climbing I lost sight of Richardson. I wasn't unduly alarmed and felt he would catch up with us at the first five-minute break we were going to take.

"Alamo One—this is Three." Khalid's radio.

"Alamo Three, One. Go." I stopped climbing and waited. "I'm about five hundred feet above and to your right. Over." I looked up and could make out Khalid's figure partially hidden behind a large boulder.

"Roger, Three, this is One, I have you visual."

"One, Three. I have figures five Charlie Tangos visual below me, moving east. Over."

I began climbing again, figuring that if we could get to the vantage point the Indian sergeant was occupying there might be a chance to get a clear shot at the terrs. Richardson was still nowhere to be seen, but I couldn't stop at that point and look for him. When we finally reached Khalid we had been climbing hand over hand. The grass which

had previously helped us in the ascent had now become slippery with mist, making it extremely difficult to maintain any type of balance whatsoever.

I was thankful for one thing; before we had started this mission, I'd managed to secure some submachine guns to replace the heavy SLR rifles we normally carried. It was certainly much easier to climb with a small automatic weapon slung around your neck than being forced to cope with the weight of an unwieldy long-barreled rifle pulling you backwards.

Khalid dropped to a knee and pointed downward. Walking in single file, just entering the trees far below us, were five terrorists. The rays of the sun glinted off the AK barrel of the last one of the group. They were out of submachine gun range now and over the border into Mozambique. The Rhodesian government, contrary to the hysterical outcries of the United Nations and its handwringing members, is very strict about violating the borders of hostile states. In this case, the Marxist state headed by Samora Machel.

When justified, Rhodesia does exercise its right under international law, to hot pursuit, but will not countenance either indiscriminate or provocative firing into Zambia, Mozambique or Botswana. Woe betide the combat commander whose men fire into any of these three countries in an effort to knock down a fleeing terrorist.

I didn't bother trying to call for artillery fire. I knew what the answer would be. We watched the blue-denim-clad figures disappear and I rose on

one knee in preparation to leave. Next to my left foot were several stubbed-out cigarette butts—Russian. The terrs had been here before us.

The luck that had been with us at Sarahuru still held. If the Communists had remained in this position during our climb they could have really given us a bad time.

I heard a noise to my rear and turned. It was Richardson, bathed in sweat and mud from head to toe. He gave me a weak grin. When asked what had held him up, he answered that he'd started to pass out while climbing but had managed to tie himself to a stunted tree trunk to avoid falling. He was lucky; a fall from this height would have killed him.

As a student at the ski school in Camp Hale, Colorado I had an instructor—a Norwegian, "Pop" Sorenson—whose favorite admonition to us was, "In the mountains, you go as slow as you can... then you go a little bit slower." He would have been proud of me had he watched my descent of this particular mountain. I set a pace back down that was slow enough to allow the ants to pass us.

Nearing the bottom I began to be concerned about the time factor. The sun would be setting soon and I wanted to be well on my way back to the artillery position before dark. I radioed the gunners and told them we were starting back. I asked for a guide to meet us outside the area of trip flares and anti-personnel mines. We didn't need to end our little ride by stepping on any of those.

After the previous night's fiasco involving Fruitcake and his log, I wouldn't have been surprised

had the artillery lieutenant met us at the CP entrance and requested that we keep on going. Happily, we were welcomed and treated to a hot meal instead.

The next morning we started back to Umtali. Everyone rode along in silence, enjoying the feeling of relief that comes from completing a difficult and dangerous job. We reached the outskirts of the town and to avoid the possibility of the horses fertilizing the streets in the downtown area, I halted, dismounted and handed Bossikopf's reins to Sergeant Major Richardson.

He looked at me and said, "Sah, do you mind if I make a comment?"

"No, Richardson, certainly not. What is it?"

He looked all of sixty then, his face mud-caked from a mixture of perspiration and dirt, his eyes red-rimmed and sunken back in his head. "You know what the blokes in headquarters call us, don't you?"

I looked at him wearily. "No."

"They call us mad Mike and the galloping goffles." He wiped his nose with the back of a wrinkled, sunburnt hand, sniffled, then continued, "With all due respect, sah, I'm convinced you're as barmy as a loon."

I nodded. "You're probably right, Richardson."

He grinned and tugged at his camouflage cap. "However, sah, since we do follow you that makes us bonkers as well, wouldn't you say?"

This was a white-haired grandfather who was doing the job of a twenty-year-old—doing it well and damned proud of it.

I watched the goffles ride off and thought to myself there were far worse ways in this world to make a living than what I was doing here in Rhodesia.

Brigadier General Derry MacIntyre was waiting for me at his 3rd Brigade headquarters with news. First, the good. He was pleased with the capabilities of the horses on the reconnaissance. Next, the bad. He was sending me to the new Sub-JOC at Rusape about an hour and a half's drive from Umtali on the Salisbury highway.

Established only a few months earlier, the new installation was responsible for a very large operational area. Its present commander, an army major named Pierson, also had the additional job of commanding a rifle company quartered at Umtali, making it necessary for him to travel back and forth between the two towns—too much for one man to handle alone.

Brigadier MacIntyre wanted me to act as Deputy JOC Commander and relieve Pierson of some of his workload. I didn't look forward to sitting behind a desk, but I was a soldier and taking orders was part of my job.

"Sir, what disposition do you want made of the horses and troops I have here?" I was prepared for him to tell me to send them back to Sarahuru.

"Take them with you. The JOC can use them." He shook hands and dismissed me. I saluted and left his office, walking downstairs to the operations officer to get filled in on what I could expect at Rusape.

Based upon the briefing I'd received from the

operations Officer at 3rd Brigade headquarters, I had no illusions as to the type of situation I would be stepping into at Rusape. The BSAP headquarters there was an installation of many years' standing; the "fuzz" were running the war their own way and the army's presence wasn't a welcome one. The cops attempted through such niceties as cocktail parties, afternoon teas and dinners to give the appearance of welcoming the troops, but the duplication of effort and the insistence on the part of the police to handle the JOC meetings left no doubt in anyone's mind that the cops were firmly in control.

This situation would change when the army took over the responsibility for running the war. At least I thought so.

CHAPTER 3

Welcome to Rusape

"YOU'RE GOING FOR another train ride." I looked at Richardson as we sat on hay bales scattered in front of an empty stall at the fairgrounds.

He took a long pull from the bottle of ale he was drinking, and wiped his mouth with the back of a gnarled hand. "You mean back to Sarahuru, sah?" His tone was disbelieving, his voice angry. "Sah, we did a bloody good job—"

"Cool down Sergeant major, we're going to Rusape." His face brightened. "The brigadier's sending me up there tomorrow to be deputy JOC commander. He said I could take the troops and horses."

At this last news, several colored got up from hay bales and walked hesitantly over. Sergeant Khalid grinned. "Sah, does that mean we're not going back to Sarahuru?"

I handed him a cold bottle of beer. "That's right—no Sarahuru!" The impromptu party that followed left everyone with aching heads the next morning.

Richardson would move the unit by train again. The 93 km's from Umtali to Rusape would be a much easier trip than the journey from Rutenga had been.

Taking a driver and two troopers as "shotguns" for security, I set out for Rusape. The route was considered Green which meant the terrs weren't zapping traffic, but that could change in five minutes. Riding along, enjoying the sunshine, I reviewed what the operations officer at brigade had told me about Rusape.

"This is a small, prosperous TTL," he'd said. "Also it's probably one of the most subverted in Rhodesia." I felt that was damning the place with faint praise—hell, they're all subverted!"

"You'll get a local briefing when you get there," he added.

The terrain around Rusape was farmland and the Weya TTL bordered a number of highly successful tobacco and cattle operations. From my viewpoint, I was more interested in the terrain—long, rolling pastures, plenty of water, scattered bush and excellent grazing for the horses. This would be a distinct improvement over Matibi TTL near Sarahuru.

It took us about an hour and a half to make the drive to Rusape. The Sub-JOC was located behind the main BSAP headquarter's block which housed the Criminal Investigation Division, the Charge Office, Records Section and the cops' private army, the Support Unit.

Turning right off the main Salisbury road, I drove past the Rusape post office on my left, the two-story police building, and then a small wooden sign lettered JOC. This would be my new home.

I parked the jeep next to a large mess tent, got out and walked down a long, covered veranda, passing offices on my left that were filled with cops

in uniform, cops in civvies, cops in a wild mixture of both. In my army camouflage I felt like a KKK member at a Martin Luther King rally.

I stopped in front of a large office bearing the sign OPS ROOM—NO ADMITTANCE; pushing the door open, I stepped in. A young, pot-bellied lieutenant wearing a Signal Corps stable belt, the Rhodesian Army's semidress cloth belt and identifying buckle proclaiming his technical training, glared at me fiercely.

I said nothing to the fat one, and walked over to the wall-sized situation map. Covered with a clear plastic cover the series of map sheets were joined together to provide an overall picture of the entire zone of responsibility assigned to Sub-JOC Rusape.

Small, brightly colored circular pieces of paper were glued to the maps, each a symbol marking the war's convulsions for that particular day. By the minute, the hour, the week, these tiny pieces of paper formed a graphic picture of death. Ambushes, village attacks, cordons and search. Death by rifle, machinegun, pistol, grenade. Death by stabbing, hacking, strangling, beheading. Death by burning, landmine, stoning and occasionally by spear.

I was sometimes numbed by the sheer variety of ways in which my profession was practiced.

"Did you wish to see someone?" I noted the absence of the customary "sir" on the part of the pot-gutted lieutenant.

"I'm Major Williams, the new deputy commander." I felt as if I were second-in-command of the Bobsey Twin's farm. "Where's Major Pierson?"

"He's in Umtali." No handshake. Still no "sir." No nothing.

Later, I would straighten out this rude, arrogant little prick. "Where're my quarters, Lieutenant?"

"Across the road in a civilian house." He turned and walked into a back room housing the communications section.

It took but ten minutes to drive to the officers' quarters, unload my kit and claim a cot for myself. The remainder of the day was for seeing the sights of downtown Rusape.

As in all small farming towns in Rhodesia, Rusape's social center was the hotel bar. True to its colonial past, there was a long veranda adjacent to the dining room. Several African waiters attired in white mess jackets and red fezzes scurried to and fro between the hotel bar and the guests on the porch, balancing drink-filled trays on white-gloved hands.

I was hungry, not thirsty. The best beef curry I'd ever eaten was dished up and served over a gleaming white tablecloth. The cost was sixty Rhodesian cents—about one U.S. dollar.

The bar was filling with the local "fuzz" and their girlfriends. It was clear that the cops, as a result of their homesteader status, had gobbled up all the available maidens.

I drank a beer and went home.

After an early breakfast served by a sullen African messboy, I borrowed a map sheet of the local area and set out in the jeep. Three km's east of town was the local airstrip utilized by a Police Reserve Air Wing. Several hundred meters behind JOC

Headquarters, to the north, was the Rusape Hospital. In addition to the European section there was also a large wing for African patients.

My logistics problem—finding a bivouac for the troops and quarters for the horses—was quickly solved through the help of a local rancher who agreed to let me use one of his paddocks for the animals and an abandoned ranch house for the men.

Housekeeping chores out of the way, I contacted the local office of Rhodesian Railways and found out that Richardson, horses and goffles were due in on the 2:00 p.m. train from Umtali.

My impressions of the Rusape railroad station were far different than those I'd experienced on seeing Rutenga for the first time. Only ninety minutes drive from Salisbury, there was no feeling here of the loneliness of the bush one received from the dusty, cinder-stained office in the Lowveldt. As the train stopped at the platform, Africans alighting from the coaches seemed to be better dressed and more sophisticated than their bush cousins. They were also more hostile; the sullen looks I got were much different from the smiles and giggles of locals at Sarahuru.

"Evening, sah." Richardson's white head popped out of the cattle car. Around his shoulder several brown faces appeared, white teeth showing in big grins.

I shook hands. "Any trouble with the horses?"

"None, sah, except the fact we could've ridden here faster than this bloody train runs."

"O.K., you've got about an hour's ride from here

along the main road to the farm. There's plenty of graze and water, and the troops've got a house to live in." I showed him on a map the location of the farmhouse and nearby pastures.

"Fine, sah—what about rations?"

"I've got them in the jeep. I'll see you there."

The rancher had turned on the electricity. The dirty, cobwebbed bulbs cast a dim yellow light in the high-ceilings, bare-walled rooms of the ancient farmhouse.

I unloaded the boxes of rations next to a pot-bellied stove.

It was getting dusk when the sound of hooves on the dirt road leading to the house set off a din of barking from dogs nearby. Never one to push horses needlessly, Richardson had ridden at a walk from the train station.

After making certain they had plenty of food and water, I told the sergeant major and the troops I would see them early the following morning when I picked up Richardson to accompany me to a briefing at JOC Rusape.

The meeting at the JOC was concerned primarily with police matters and beyond a nod in my direction from one of the cops, the army got the shortest of shrifts. Major Pierson wasn't due back for several days so I told the sergeant major to use the time in getting saddlery, horses and troops ready for the bush.

Several of the goffles hadn't received R&R in months, so the ten days of rest would be time well spent. Looking at the ever-increasing numbers of red dots on the situation map, I felt it would be a

long time before the colored would have a chance to take any leave, once we were committed again to the bush.

For some reason, I'd developed a dry, hacking cough that started at any time of day or night and was becoming more and more annoying.

"Sir, why don't you go over to the hospital? There's a lady doctor there who'll take care of you," Richardson said.

The medic at JOC headquarters relied on the nearby facility for help; his own collection of pills were for simple ailments.

I walked the hundred yards to the European Wing of the hospital, opened the screen door and entered. It was quiet, cool and devoid of the muted noises that are part and parcel of most such operations.

A door opened in one of the rooms at the end of the hall and the wizened figure of a nurse emerged. She looked nearsightedly at me for a second, then hurried over, her rubber-soled shoes squeaking on the dark, wooden floors.

"D'ye have an appointment?" Her voice had a nasal, British inflection.

"No, sister, I just need some cough medicine."

She shook her head angrily. "No, there'll be none of that." I didn't know what the hell she was talking about. "You'll have to see the doctor—come on, let's get you on the records." She grabbed my arm with a skinny gnarled hand and began pulling me after her toward an office off the main corridor.

"Sit down here—doctor's coming." She shoved me into a battered chair and started firing ques-

tions at me. "Name, rank, date of birth, married, single, ever had V.D., been crazy?" She queried.

"Look, sister, all I want is some bloody cough syrup."

"Just be quiet." She scratched her leg and kept writing in a large, ruled folder.

"Ah, here we are! Thank you, sister, you can go." A huge bulk loomed in the doorway. A reincarnation of Brunnhilde, the woman doctor was a good six feet tall, well over two hundred pounds, with greying brown hair coiled in braids and a pair of incongruous tiny pince-nez glasses hanging from a black ribbon on her massive breasts.

"I'm Doctor Steigelmeyer," she boomed. "Vat's the matter mit you?"

Without waiting for my reply, she said, "Ach, never mind, take off your clothes und lie down on that table. I'll take your pulse." I started coughing, and unbuttoning my camouflage shirt. "Ja, that's right—everything but your underwear."

"Doctor, I just have a cough—" I began.

"Never mind, up on the table." Her hand, the size of a small ham, grabbed me by the elbow and hoisted me up on the examining table. God, she probably extracted teeth with her thumb and forefinger!

For the next four minutes, she thumped, probed, squeezed, pinched and pulled. Sitting me up on the edge of the table, my legs dangling over the side, she jammed her hand into the pocket of her white smock and pulled out a small rubbertipped hammer. "Also," she grunted, and moving with surprising speed rapped me sharply on my right kneecap.

"Goddamit!" I yelped. My leg jerked upward, a sharp lancing pain bit into my knee and the rubber-headed hammer recoiled like a striking cobra.

"Wunderbar!" she exclaimed. "Der reflexes are good."

"Doctor, all I have is this cough—." She grabbed my left arm and strapped a black nylon band around the upper part, preparing to take my blood pressure.

One hour and forty-five munutes later, clutching my cough medicine, I staggered out the door of the hospital.

Limping along, favoring my knee that was still smarting from the reflex hammer wielded by the doctor, I heard the clatter and whup-whup of helicopters approaching from the south. They came into view, swinging in a wide circle—three of them. As I watched, they swept low over the rooftops and headed for the helipad in front of the hospital's African wing. That meant wounded men coming in.

"Hey, Major — want a ride?" A Landrover had pulled up next to me unnoticed for the noise of the choppers. I turned and saw Lieutenant John Martin, an RIC (Rhodesian Intelligence Corps) Officer, at the wheel.

"Yeah, let's get over to the medics and see what's happening." I crawled into the jeep. "Any of our people involved?"

He shifted gears and sped toward the helipad where the first of the choppers had already landed and was discharging its load of bleeding, battered Africans. White-clad sisters, their uniforms rapidly staining from the blood-soaked victims' hands, car-

ried limp bodies from the helicopter.

"None of our blokes in this group," said Martin, wheeling the jeep into a parking space near the hospital entrance. "Terrs ambushed a bus full of houts—shot hell out of it, apparently. We just got word over the radio!" He jumped out of the vehicle and started for the group of nurses, some crying as they viewed several children carried away on stretchers.

"We'll have reporters in with this lot."

"Yeah, the terrs will say Selous Scouts shot up the bus."

It wouldn't be the first instance where Joshua Nkomo or Robert Mugabe, the two murdering bastards heading the terrorist Patriotic Front, would blame Rhodesian security forces for brutal killings carried out by cowardly thugs from their own units.

No one in his right mind would give any credibility to the idea that Rhodesian forces would shoot helpless Africans riding a bus. Incredibly, however, the international press took seriously the lies of Nkomo who blamed the murders of missionaries on the Rhodesian Army. This, in the face of eyewitness testimony by one of the surviving priests that the murderers were members of Mugabe's ZANU-Zimbawe African National Union, and had bragged about it before opening fire on the helpless priests and nuns.

This time I hoped the reporters, who would soon arrive, could get a firsthand account from one of the survivors. "Nothing we can do here, John. Give me a ride back to the JOC." We took a last look at

the pitiful remains of a middle-aged woman, shot through the head, and started back to the operations room.

Major John Pierson, the army representative to the JOC, had returned from Umtali and was speaking with the BSAP Superintendant when Lieutenant Martin and I walked into the ops room.

Stocky, bull-chested and thoroughly competent, Pierson was well-liked by everyone. A member of the Rhodesian free-fall parachute team, he had traveled widely and competed in several international events over the years. He had an inexhaustible supply of jokes, some of which he told in an outrageous Texas accent. Life around John Pierson wasn't dull. After a brief introduction we got down to the problems at hand.

John pointed to a series of red arrows drawn on the situation map in grease pencil. "Mike, these indicate infiltration routes the terrs are using to cross over into our area."

"They're trying to bypass us and continue on toward Salisbury." The tactics were straight out of Chairman Mao's Little Red Book on guerrilla warfare. However, in this case these bastards weren't guerrillas, only illiterate, murdering scum whose primary targets were women and children, not Rhodesian security forces.

"Sir, the horses can do a good job interdicting the infiltration and resupply routes—there's not a hout alive who can outrun us."

"Dead right, we'll give you a shot at it."

The following morning, Lieutenant John Martin

and I were on our way to Macheke to talk with the local police inspector about operating in his area, Weya TTL.

A forty-minute drive got us to police headquarters, Macheke. Like Rusape, Macheke is a small farming community situated on the Salisbury-Umtali highway. The town serves as a supply center for the farmers and ranchers whose homes border the Tribal Trust Land to their east.

A gravel road leads off the highway, circling around through a grove of trees to the small building, neat and business-like, housing the police. Martin parked the truck next to the grey-painted Landrover bearing the black letters POLICE, and we stepped down from the cab, stretching for a moment. Behind the building was a heavily fenced area surrounding a series of white-washed huts. Three glowering Africans squatted next to the wire, their eyes fixed on us.

"Suspects." Martin returned their glares and walked to the headquarters entrance. I followed him inside. An immaculately uniformed African constable greeted us from behind a scarred desk.

"Is the member-in-charge about?" I asked.

"Sah, please wait. I'll get him." He walked across the hallway and knocked on the inspector's door.

"Send them in, Constable." The African motioned for us to come over.

The member-in-charge was a wiry, lean policeman—thirtyish, his face looked vaguely familiar. "Dave Robbins," he said with a smile. "I checked your FN for you at Kariba, a while back." I remembered. My ex-wife and daughter had visited me

several months earlier and I'd driven them to Lake Kariba in the north of Rhodesia on the Zambian border. Dave Robbins had been the duty officer at the Kariba police station when I'd checked my weapon in for safekeeping.

He turned to a small map behind his desk. "The terrs in this area are a cheeky bunch of buggers." His finger tapped a spot on the lower portion of the area indicating a large hill mass. "Last week the bastards actually held a fire power demonstration for the locals, showing off their new AK's and RPD's."

"Have they tried anything with your people?"

"Not yet. They're staying away from us and concentrating on the locals—mostly to impress them." We selected terrain features as boundaries to separate my troops from the police patrols in the area and ensure there would be no accidental fire fights between them.

"Weya is a small TTL but it's completely subverted. They're a nasty bunch in there, so watch yourself," Robbins warned.

"Anything else I should know about personalities in the Weya?"

"Well, there's Saint Benedict's Mission." He lit a cigarette. "In the last year, more than 350 terr recruits have passed through that bloody place on their way to Mozambique."

"Who runs it?" I leaned over to get a better look at the map.

"Father Aloan—we've gotten some weird tales about that bugger. Seems he's getting it on with the students. . .boys and girls both."

"Can't you do anything about his recruiting?"

"Not unless we can prove it and catch him—the bastard's too smart. He freely admits that some of his students take off and join the terrs but he claims he can't stop them."

I smiled. "Any other upstanding citizens in the Weya?"

"Yes, the munt that runs the butcher shop about three km's north of the mission—he's a terr collaborator—receives the cattle the locals rustle from the ranchers, butchers them and gives the meat to the terrs."

"The same thing—no proof?"

"We've got him a couple of times but no witnesses will testify." He shook his head in disgust.

"Thanks, Inspector," I shook hands and turned to John Martin. "What's the name of the farmer who's going to let us use his house?"

"Van Aard." Robbins got up and accompanied us to the door. "They're good people."

"I'll check in with you later, Inspector."

CHAPTER 4

Weya TTL and a Murderous Priest

A FEW MILES east of Macheke is the road to Weya. It intersects with the main highway and runs a bumpy, twisting thirty miles through the bush to the European farmland bordering the TTL. One travels over black-top the first few kilometers, then the red, hard-packed dirt takes over and civilization falls away.

Martin stopped the truck at the edge of the black-top. We both fumbled for shoulder harness and seat belts, strapping ourselves in. I took two dirty wads of cotton from my shirt-pocket and shoved them in my ears; I could effectively protect my eardrums if we hit a land mine on the dusty road; the rest of me would have to take its chances.

John shifted gears and we started off.

Topping a rise ahead of us came a battered blue Volkswagon driven by a farmer's wife and crammed with kids who waved madly as they drove past. I always felt foolish when faced with examples like this of the fatalistic courage of the farmers. They live daily with the ever-present danger of terrorist attacks, land mines and mindless savagery. I wished I had their courage.

"If she hits a mine with those kids in that VW there won't be anything left to pick up," I told

Martin.

We passed large kraals on either sides of the road. The Africans working around the huts stopped what they were doing and watched us, their faces sullen, eyes flat and expressionless.

"Very friendly people," John muttered.

"Yeah, especially the picannins." I watched as three little boys, five or six years old, picked up rocks and hurled them gleefully at the sides of the truck.

"You little bastards!" Martin slammed on brakes and the vehicle skidded to a stop, wreathed in dust that covered us both in a heavy white veil. The Africans scattered, racing around the rear of a nearby hut.

"Forget it, let's go." I shifted the weight of my rifle, resting the butt on my thigh and watching the bush at the side of the kraal. We started again, noting there were no locals visible along the road.

An hour and a half later, Martin stopped at a sign pointing off to the left. "Royal Visit Ranch" it read.

"Here we are." The drive to the ranch house passed neatly trimmed hedges and carefully planted shade trees. As the truck neared the house, several large dogs bounded up, barking and running alongside.

"Stop it! Kom!" A portly middle-aged Afrikaaner shouted to the dogs who ran back to him, wagging their tails proudly. He pointed to an open space by a tree for us to park. "Step down, welcome."

"Mr. Van Aard, this is Major Williams. He'll be moving into the area shortly."

While we were talking, several other members of

the family gathered around. Van Aard's two sons, strapping six-footers, pumped our hands and greeted us like long-lost brothers. "Ach, man, we're glad to see you!" they grinned. The reason for the unexpected warmth soon became apparent.

"Last month, the munts led some terrs into the farm. They climbed over the security fence and started shooting at the house." Van Aard's face hardened at the memory. "One bastard climbed a tree outside my wife's bedroom and fired into her window with an AK." He spat on the ground in disgust. "All the rounds hit the walls and ceilings—tore hell out of the room."

"How about your wife?" I asked. He laughed and shook his head. "Not to worry! She was shooting from the kitchen window."

Van Aard agreed to let us use his eldest son's farmhouse. He said it would be an excellent command post. A security fence surrounding the house, barns and cookhouse was topped off with several large searchlights. There was a dam some three hundred meters from the house from which we could provide water for the horses. I wanted to take a quick look at the farm before we had to leave—Martin was scheduled for an assignment late that evening and our time was running out.

The description of the farmhouse was accurate. Five km's north east from Van Aard's place, the house was large, solid and imposing. It was set back from the road on a hill that overlooked a wide area of the surrounding countryside. Martin and I stood in the back yard and looked southwest toward the river that was the boundary between

the farmers and Weya TTL.

Towering above us several hundred meters away was a large kopjie which would serve as an excellent observation post from which we could maintain surveillance on the movements of the locals in the TTL.

Van Aard had stressed the fact that in addition to the growing terrorist threat, incidents of cattle rustling by the Africans were growing by leaps and bounds. Egged on by the terrorists who served as armed escorts, the locals would cross the river at night, rustle as many head of cattle as they could and drive them back into Weya—straight to the butcher shop of Jonas Mbeke, the terrorist sympathizer.

Clearly our arrival would be welcomed by the farmers.

"O.K., John, let's head for home." I wanted to be clear of the Weya before dark. We'd said our goodbyes to the Van Aards earlier, so there would be no need to stop by on the return trip.

Shadows were lengthening as the truck bounced along the dirt road back toward the highway.

The countryside was lush and green, cattle grazed in fields along the road and the Africans' kraals were alive with goats and chickens. The Weya area was far more prosperous than the bleak stretches of rock in Matibi Two TTL near Sarahuru. Martin drove like a maniac on the way back and I couldn't decide which I feared more—a terrorist ambush or his driving.

The distance between Rusape and the farmhouse at Weya was a good two day's ride on the horses.

There was no problem in making it except one of security. At the first sight of the horses heading toward Weya, the bush telegraph would alert the terrs and every hout in the countryside. Horse-carrying vehicles, or HCV's as they were called, were available from Major Tony Stephen's mounted infantry unit but at that time his people were all engaged in follow-up operations against the terrorists and couldn't spare any vehicles to help us. We would simply have to come up with something on our own.

Again, the Afrikaaners came to our aid. A farmer walked into JOC headquarters and gave me his personal check for $100.00. He said he'd heard from Van Aard that we needed help in moving the horses and wanted to assist us in any way he could; we could use the money as we saw fit as long as we "zapped those buggers."

The money was a godsend. We had access to plenty of vehicles with which to carry troops but there wasn't a truck to be had that we could use as a horse transporter. My friend Dave Robbins, the member-in-charge at Macheke BSAP, told me that a chap who ran a garage near the station had a vehicle he regularly used to haul cattle in. Would that do?

Richardson and I hopped into my jeep and drove to the garage. A careful inspection by the sergeant major revealed a perfectly suitable truck in which we could transport the horses. The Afrikaaner's check passed to the grease-stained hands of the young garage owner.

"Cheers, Major—my wife and kids will appreciate this," he said.

I could easily have requisitioned the cattle truck under the provisions of the Billeting Act, a law permitting the army to requisition civilian equipment at a fair price; but the look on the Afrikaaner's face when he gave me the check would have made it an insult to have refused his offer and requisitioned the vehicle.

"My pleasure. Can you pick up the horses the day after tomorrow?" I asked.

"Dead right, just tell me where and when."

"Carver's farm, just outside Rusape—this side, 10:00 a.m."

"I know it. Will the horses be in the stables at the back of the main house?" Richardson nodded.

I had an afterthought and turned to Elkinds, the mechanic.

"Who's going to drive us?"

"One of my boys."

"No sweat. Just make sure he doesn't know where he's going until you start him off," I cautioned.

"I see what you mean."

Richardson broke in, "Sah, I'll bring Greene here and he can stick with the driver the whole time until we've off-loaded at the ranch." Trooper Greene, or Green-Pea as he was called, was the most dependable of the colored.

The remainder of the day and until noon of the next, radios, supplies and ammunition were drawn, checked and packed. Richardson had the horses caught and saddled, then moved them to

Carver's farm a few miles outside Rusape.

I was sitting at the mess table on the veranda of the officer's quarters sipping a cup of tea. John Pierson was in the middle of one of his Texan jokes when suddenly I felt as if I had swallowed a large ice cube that had settled in the pit of my stomach.

It was fear, but totally unlike the usual surge of adrenalin that floods the system when you know you'll be in a situation that could result in getting your head blown off. This fear stayed. . .didn't abate, didn't go away. . .the ice cube feeling was with me and meant one thing.

I was going to get shot.

Premonitions, pre-cognitive experiences, hunches—everyone has had them at one time or another.

I'd never had one as strong as this.

To overcome the feeling, I busied myself with reading situation reports from the adjacent operational areas, getting an idea of movement patterns of terrorists toward the Weya. I spent several hours with John Martin, absorbing every scrap of information about terr sympathizers in my area that he possessed.

When I loaded my personal gear into the back of the Landrover, I was as ready as I would ever be. At ten minutes past ten the following morning, the cattle truck driven by an African with Green-Pea sitting beside him drew up to the stables at Carver's farm. The horses were loaded quickly, and followed by the Bedford truck carrying the troops, we headed in the direction of Royal Visit Ranch. There was no way I could shake the "ice cubes" so I

said the hell with it and went ahead with my job.

The interval between the two trucks lengthened to allow the dust from the leading vehicle to settle and permit the driver of the second to see where he was going. Well aware of the nature and attitude of the locals, the goffles were alert. They covered either side of the road with rifles ready as the Bedford rattled along, gravel flying from beneath its wheels, dust boiling up between the rear of the cab and the cargo area. The dark faces of the colored rapidly took on a vaudeville appearance as the yellow-white dust caked them completely.

The African driver of the horse vehicle, now fully realizing where he was, put on a dazzling display of driving skill. Chickens, goats and Africans scattered to either side of the road as the careening, roaring vehicle whipped around the curves. The branches from overhanging trees raked the top of the cab, spraying leaves and small twigs over the heads of the startled horses who, angered by the unwanted annoyance, began kicking and biting, struggling to keep their footing on the heaving floor of the truck.

There was no way short of shooting out the tires that I could halt the mad ride. Mercifully, the little African store that marked the turn-off for our ranch loomed into view at the top of a slight rise.

Exercising judgment, for once, the horse vehicle slowed, braked and jounced its way up the road to the security fence gate outside our new home.

As the truck stopped, Green-Pea jumped down and unlatched the gate, stepping aside to let the African driver roll into the front yard near the to-

bacco shed. The goffles' vehicle pulled up next to the front porch and discharged the troops.

"Corporal, take five men and sweep the area around the barn and cookhouse," I said. Muhammed, get your kitchen detail to start unloading. Grey, start unloading the horses."

I waved Richardson over to the house, "See if the phone works."

The chaos slowly subsided and a semblance of order was restored. The telephone inside the house would be my link with the Van Aards, and to a certain extent with the outside world.

Lesser problems I also had; with their usual wild-eyed enthusiasm the goffles pitched in to clean up the interior of the ranch house. Unfortunately, they poured scalding hot water on the linoleum covering the floor which resulted in the entire section of material curling up like a rolled newspaper.

Once we had the horses unloaded, I took a walk around the interior of the security fence and assigned firing positions and fields of fire for the night guard detail.

The African driver of the now-empty horse vehicle waved a frantic goodbye and roared out of the yard, barely missing the sides of the gate as he hurtled past. God help any locals walking on the road!

I called Richardson over and handed him my binoculars. "Check out the base of that kopjie—it looks to me like there's a trail leading to the river."

He studied the area for several seconds. "Yes, sah, it looks like it forks—one branch goes toward

the river, the other behind the kopjie." He handed back the binos.

"D'you want a listening post there after dark?" he asked.

"Yep—get a radio and a three-man detail out there. I don't want any terr reception committee paying us a visit tonight."

The segeant major grinned and walked off toward the house.

Although the house electricity was working, I had blankets tacked up over all windows and gave strict orders that only the ancient kerosene lanterns we'd found in the kitchen would be used as a source of light.

At dusk, Richardson opened the rear gate in the security fence and let out a five-man patrol. They were accompanied by the listening post detail whom they would guide to their concealed position at the base of the kopjie.

The patrol would then move on, searching the surrounding area for curfew breakers or terrorists, both of which they would shoot if contact were made.

The only noises we heard during the night were those of the horses. Unused to their new surroundings and spooky as usual, they had intermittent periods of kicking, biting and snorting. Of terrorists there was no sign.

The next morning I climbed the large kopjie to the rear of our CP together with several of the troopers. When we reached the top I could see clearly the river that formed the boundary between Weya and the nearby farming community.

As we started back down, a trail of dust on the dirt road marked the arrival of Mr. Van Aard's truck, and I watched him turn into the ranch house front yard. He was standing by the side of the battered, grey Toyota waiting for me as I walked up to him, wiping sweat off my forehead with the back of my forearm.

"Ach, good morning, Major," He smiled, sticking out a rough, calloused hand.

"Cheers, Mr. Van Aard." I pumped the gnarled fingers.

"Major, I want to drive down to the river and check some of the wire on my new fence—" He looked over at several of my troops who were sitting on the command post veranda cleaning their rifles. "Could you lend me some troops to come with me?"

"No problem—I'll come with you." I pointed to three of the colored and ordered them into the truck.

Richarson walked from inside the house and noting the activity, picked up his rifle and asked if he could go along.

"Better stay here and mind the store, this time," I told him, and crawled into the truck with the troopers and Van Aard.

We started down the road leading to the Royal Visit Ranch, then abruptly turned off, bouncing along what appeared to be a goat trail leading into a thickly wooded area on the banks of a small stream. Van Aard parked the truck and we all dismounted, walking in single file toward the river. The farmer was in front, I was behind him, the

troopers bringing up the rear.

As the Afrikaaner stepped over a log two Africans moved suddenly into the path from heavy bush. I almost shot both but stopped when they threw their hands in the air, eyes wide with fear. Motioning for the two men to advance, Van Aard spoke to them in Shona. They told him that they had heard the army was moving into the area.

"Tell them both that the curfew will now be enforced," I said. He translated that, looking to me for further words. "If they or any others from Weya move across the river at night, we will kill them. This cattle-stealing will stop or my troops will go into the TTL." The Afrikaaner finished this last, watching the two men closely as he spoke.

They nodded their heads and trotted down the trail to a shallow part of the river, forded it and disappeared into the bush on the opposite side.

Walking back along the river bank I noticed several picannins fishing on the opposite side. I waved at them and got a murderous stare in return. Neither one moved nor acknowledged in any way my attempt at being friendly. This was unusual because in the great majority of cases, picannins are friendly to soldiers. They know full well that big smiles will get them sweets or food of some type.

As long as we were in the Weya, either on patrol, searching kraals or simply watering horses, at no time did I ever see friendliness on the part of the herd boys or children.

I spent several days getting the Company CP in good working order; establishing comms with the

JOC at Rusape by going through a radio relay some forty-five miles to our south, which worked very well. The farmhouse had a television antenna that we used to increase our transmitting capabilities. It also served as a flagpole for my garrison-size Texas State flag which flew proudly every day.

The troops were very happy to be living high off the hog. The farmhouse was very large and we had more than ample room to store weapons, explosives and ammo. After careful consideration I decided to move the ammo and explosives outside where we dug a deep, well-constructed ammo pit. When this necessary task had been completed I slept a lot easier.

I wasn't as worried about incoming mortar rounds from the terrs as I was with the very real prospect of my brave, loyal troops getting high on dagga and staging an "OK corral" shoot-out with the possibility of a stray round hitting a stack of 60 mil mortar bombs.

Our first assigned patrol was a sweep through a kraal about a mile to our east. As we approached the village I noticed that the children playing in the sandy creek-bed near the village ran back into the complex. The nannies carrying water from a borehole several hundred meters in the nearby bush quickly followed them. I didn't like the looks of this and, dismounting, told two of the colored to get the head man and bring him to me.

They came back in about ten minutes with a middle-aged African who proved to be the head man and local school teacher as well. Although very correct in his behavior and speech towards

me, the headman was distinctly unfriendly.

I showed him a pamphlet which consisted of pictures portraying terrorist equipment—AK rifles, RPD light machine guns, RPG rocket launchers, TM-46 land mines, hand grenades and various articles of communist -camouflaged uniforms. I pointed out to him that if he or any of his people could direct us to where we might find weapons and equipment like those shown in the pamphlet, the Rhodesian government would give them a great deal of money. He shook his head and said no one knew anything about weapons or equipment like that.

As he turned to walk away I happened to glance into an adjacent hut. The door was open and a picannin of about ten years suddenly turned and ran back into the gloom of the smelly, thatched-roof building.

I motioned to Sergeant Khalid and we walked over to it. Kicking the half-closed door open, Khalid covering me, I grabbed the boy's arm pulling him out into the sunshine.

In his right hand he had a wooden replica of an AK, curved magazine and all. I looked at the wooden rifle, and then at the head man who shook his head and walked away from me. I shouted after him that we would be back to this kraal later.

Throughout the various Tribal Trust lands in Rhodesia there are dips where both European and African cattle are treated to prevent tick fever that is prevalent and often fatal. These dips are constructed of concrete with protective rails of wood or pipe on either side to keep the cattle from running away during the dipping process.

Secure in the knowledge that dipping is normally carried out on a regular schedule, the terrs ambush the dips frequently, killing the African attendants, running off the cattle and destroying the facility.

Unless this tactic could be overcome, there was a real chance the CTs would destroy the cattle industry in Rhodesia, depriving the country of a much-needed source of beef and seriously crippling the already strained economy.

A message from Macheke police warned us that five tribesmen accompanied by three armed CTs would attempt to steal cattle from an adjacent paddock that night.

Mounting up, we turned back toward the command post, horses picking up the pace and smelling home, food and water. On the road I noticed practically no Africans moving about.

"Sergeant Khalid, stop that picannin and ask him where all the people are." I reined in and waited for him to question a skinny herd boy trotting after several mombies. The picannin, eyes fixed on the horses, was hesitant at first, then began to speak. He pointed to the kraal, then shook his head. Khalid waved the boy on, then cantered back to where I was waiting.

"Sir, he says everyone's back in the kraal. They're afraid we're going to kill everyone in the village."

I laughed. "Where did they get that crazy idea?"

"He said that the terrs told the houts the army had come to kill everybody."

I noticed that when the sergeant had tried to give

the boy some candy, the picannin only shook his head and ran off into the bush. It was easy to see how the terrorist psychological warfare was working—there is a saying that the African follows the bloodiest assegai or spear. That simply means that compassion and kindness will never in the African's mind supplant brute force and power.

We waited until sundown, then leading the horses outside the security fence we mounted and moved quietly in the direction of the dip. Based on the amount of Africans I had seen the preceding day I felt sure that we would have good luck that night. There was no moon and only a few stars were out. It was fortunate I had taken a compass bearing that day because there was a large clump of trees completely obscuring the dip from view.

Nearing the dip we dismounted and I left the horses in the care of a trooper. We moved into an ambush position. Very slowly we walked the last 300 meters, taking up firing positions that covered the best possible routes of approach into the dip area. About two o'clock in the morning Sergeant Khalid crouching next to me pulled on a piece of string I had tied to the little finger of my left hand. One jerk meant alert, two jerks meant terrs visual. When I turned my head to look at him he pointed in the direction of a clearing northeast of the dip. It was very dark and I could see nothing. Then I heard the faint sound of boots crunching underbrush.

There was one, then two sounds of movement. These stopped and there was silence. I waited, then approximately five minutes later we heard it again. We could now make out a vague outline consisting

of three shadows. I scanned to the side of the figures trying to pick up a more definite form but they had stopped once more.

I decided that we would wait them out; ten minutes passed and they still hadn't moved. I wasn't about to break ambush security and move toward them; you never know at night whether you're coming upon a terr or a local wandering in the bush in search of cattle or food.

I pulled twice on the alarm string, the message now passing to each individual in the ambush like ripples in a pond. I thought this would be the only chance we would have of nailing the rustlers, as I was sure that if we waited any longer they would run at the first sound they heard out of us. The African's sence of smell and hearing at night is twice as effective as that of any European.

I aimed along the piece of white string stretched over the top of the SLR from front site to rear—this was an effective aid used to increase night time accuracy. My point of aim was an area five feet in front of the dark figures. I hoped to get a ricochet into the knees or lower body of the nearest one.

I squeezed off one round, the tracer flashing into the ground and richoeting up, disappearing into the trees. My first shot was followed by a volley from the troopers to my left. There was a yell and a thrashing of bush.

I put up a flare and in its light we could see the scrub shaking as someone ran through it. I waited until the flare went out and moved forward with my people. We got to the point where the figures had been standing—nothing. As usual, you always

wonder how anyone can get through a sudden hail of fire at night, but it happens. This wasn't the first time.

There were two dead cattle lying sprawled in the bush.

With first light not long in coming, we would wait to see if we could pick up spoor, or better yet, find bodies. I searched the target area and found what appeared to be splashes of blood; whether animal or human we couldn't tell.

Protection companies didn't have a tracking capability at that time and the lack of trained personnel able to follow spoor hampered us greatly. My unit was lucky; we had one individual with previous experience in tracking. When first light came we began to search the beaten zone, doing 360s, making a wide circle in an effort to pick up tracks.

We found further bloodstains and what appeared to be spoor of two to four people. They had bombshelled, each going in a different direction. Their attempt at cattle rustling had decidedly been a shock to them.

Chasing cattle rustlers was not my idea of fighting terrorists but if they could cause the European farmers and ranchers to leave their land it would prove to the local tribesmen that the Communists had, indeed, the bloodiest assegai of all.

At the company headquarters I telephoned Mr. Van Aard and informed him of what we had found. He said that he had something to tell me but didn't want to discuss it over the telephone. Farmers were very loathe to use the line for anything except

casual conversation. The reason behind this was the fact that St. Benedict's Catholic Mission had a switchboard operator who would tap in and eavesdrop on conversations between European farmers. This information in turn was passed on, the police believed, to terrorists.

I told the farmer that I'd drive over to his house and we could thrash out what problems existed in short order. I picked up a driver, two guards and set out in the Landrover for the short drive to Royal Visit.

As the pack of barking dogs announced our arrival, I noted that Van Aard's normally jovial face was serious, his lips tight in suppressed rage. "Take a seat, Major," he said, motioning to a kitchen chair against the rough, whitewashed wall of the cookhouse.

"What's the problem?" I asked placing my SLR on the table near me.

"Ach, man, about noon I was going to check my new paddock fencing, down by the river." He clenched a hamsized fist. "Lovemore, my cookboy, came up and told me—'Baas, don't go, they're terrs down at the paddock!'"

"Where's Lovemore now?" I asked, looking around for the African.

"Gone to the fields with Johannes, my eldest son."

I nodded. "Go on."

"Well, when he said that, I asked him how many terrs there were. All he could say was—many, many." He laughed. "You know how these kaffirs can lie."

"Maybe not this time, Mr. Van Aard." I warned. "If he'd wanted to do you harm, he simply wouldn't have said anything—let you go, then zap! That's the end of it."

Van Aard thought for a minute, then agreed.

"Well, Major, the real reason I called you was to ask if you will send someone down there with me and see if those buggers are still there."

I used the telephone in Van Aard's house to call Richardson. His voice came over the wire, answering on the third ring. "Major Williams here. Sergeant Major, bring five people with you and meet me at Royal Visit." I turned to the Afrikaaner, who was checking the rounds in his Browning 9 millimeter pistol. "Sir, as soon as Richardson gets here, we'll check out the terrs."

"Ia, gut—I want a shot at those bastards." Van Aard lumbered off down the hall to get his rifle. A few minutes passed and I waited in the garden for the arrival of Richardson and his troops.

Richardson's vehicle arrived in fifteen minutes, the goffles riding in the back sporting wide grins at the prospect of getting a shot at something. "You've been holding down the fort for awhile" I said to Richardson. "Go ahead and take the troops on this one—I'll be at the CP if you need some help. Give us a shout on the set." As I walked toward my jeep, Richardson's face creased with a smile.

"Sah, we'll be just fine." He pulled out behind the farmer's little truck and they headed for the river.

Richardson de-bussed his colored at a point short of the terr's suspected ambush site. He sent a ma-

neuver element of four troopers several hundred meters downstream to see if they could work their way up the far side of the river. As usual, the bush telegraph had apparently beaten us.

Wiggling, squirming and slapping mosquitoes, the scouts finally arrived at the place Van Aard's would-be assassins were supposedly lying in wait. They found no sign of the terrs—only footprints leading to the river and the TTL.

At least the CTs knew that for a change they had opposition. It was evident to me, however, that if we ever stopped at one place for any length of time during our patrols in the Weya we would have our hands full. My only means of avoiding an ambush that could decimate my small force was to utilize the mobility of the horses to their fullest. I planned patrols that would operate at intervals of from three to five days, sweeping in a crisscross pattern over all of Weya TTL. I hadn't forgotten the Macheke police unit operating to the south of us and we would stay well to the north of the river assigned as our boundary with the cops.

As we swept through kraal after kraal, searching huts, checking Africans for papers and looking for any spoor we might find, it was certain that the word had been passed from village to village marking our advance. There was no way of avoiding this. The pattern of village construction in the Weya is such that kraals are interconnecting by a series of trails, and regardless of the direction in which one travels there is always the presence of a few scattered huts blocking the advance to the larger village.

In addition, there were the ever-present kopjies used as OP's. The Africans living in Weya who owned herds of cattle used them to help terrorists. Herd boys acted as lookouts to warn of approaching horse soldiers and were quick to mill the herds and obliterate any terrorist tracks. There was no way I knew of to avoid these tactics.

During the rest periods between patrols the colored would amuse themselves by fishing in a nearby dam—a distinct improvement over shooting one another as they had in Sarahuru. Our security system consisted of a three-man stick with a radio manning the kopjies to the rear of the house, watching the activities of the locals in the TTL.

This observation post was of paramount importance in providing an early warning of a CT attack against us and I stressed to the sergeants that under no circumstances was that OP to be left unmanned. We changed the OP location from time to time because the locals certainly knew there were troops on the hill.

I had to make a trip into Rusape for a conference and, while there, planned to pick up our ration of beer.

When I returned, the company headquarters didn't appear any different. As I drove through the security fence gate and stopped in front of the farm house everything seemed in order. I got out of the vehicle and walked up the steps into the radio room. Sitting at the radio table, with a massive black eye and a bloody nose, was Sergeant Khalid.

"What the hell happened to you?" I roared. I knew it was useless to ask who had done it. The

Mafia isn't the only organization with a code of silence—the colored have it as well.

"Sergeant," I went on uneasily, "when was the last time you had a radio check with the OP detail?"

He shook his head, holding a bloody hand to his nose. "Sir, there's nobody up there."

I couldn't believe my ears. "Where are those little fuckers?" I yelled. Evidently the corporal in charge of the detail had decided he would rather fish than sit up on a kopjie with a pair of binoculars.

The blistering heat was his excuse not to take his people back up the hill. His reply to the sergeant's order was to simply pound hell out of the NCO, then take his troops, radio and all, to the dam where they were now lounging in the sunshine blissfully fishing.

I was torn between two desires: first, to shoot the sergeant, second to shoot the corporal. Since I could obviously do neither, I decided to take a much less lethal course of action. Carrying my FN, I went outside on the porch. From the veranda to the dam where my five horse soldiers were sunning themselves is roughly a hundred meters.

I sighted the FN on the edge of the pond about ten feet to the right of the corporal, and cut loose. The first two rounds hit and ricocheted across the water. Simultaneously with the strike of the rounds there were sudden feverish activity among the colored. The corporal leaped straight up in the air. His three companions jumped up and ran in circles. Nobody thought to grap their weapons.

They all looked wildly around, trying to locate

the source of the fire. I yelled and motioned them to come up. When they got within hearing distance I shouted, "If by the time I count ten you gentlemen are not at a dead-run heading for that kopjie, I'm going to start shooting and I'm not going to shoot at the lake."

They didn't need any further urging. I had reached the count of five when they sprinted past me heading for their assigned place of duty. That was the last disciplinary problem I had while we were at Weya.

Two days later it was time to start patrolling again. The police had warned me about the activities within St. Benedict's Mission. Over 350 terrorist recruits had been obtained from among the African students attending the mission school. All had gone voluntarily. I wanted to examine the interior of the Mission and the outbuildings which were a part of the complex. Most of all I wanted to meet the priest and have a penetrating talk with him.

Starting shortly after daybreak, riding steadily over rough terrain we reached high ground overlooking St. Benedict's.

"Let the horses blow a minute," I said. I dismounted and crawled to a thick clump of bushes, carrying binoculars.

My previous experience with the Catholic Mission system in Rhodesia had not been a pleasant one. Bishop Donald Lamont, formerly the Archbishop of Umtali, had been arrested and charged with violating sections of the Law and Order Maintenance Act concerning aiding and abetting terrorists. He made no attempt to deny that he had per-

sonally assisted CTs and encouraged others to do the same. He was subsequently banished from Rhodesia as a prohibited immigrant, returning to his native Ireland. In spite of Lamont's fate there were a large number of his followers still in the country, carrying out plans of action designed to assist terrorists.

I didn't notice anything unusual about the activities within the St. Benedict's mission complex. The usual number of African nuns dressed in robes strolled back and forth between the chapel block and an area which I was later to discover was a classroom.

Moving back to the horses I told Khalid to take a maneuver element down the reverse slope of the hill and check out the far side of the church. When he was satisfied the area was clear, he would contact me on the radio and I would move the remainder of the patrol down the slope and into the compound. The appearance of the horses caused no small amount of excitement among the Africans. I stopped a nun and asked where the priest was. Open-mouthed she pointed wordlessly toward a red brick building next to the chapel.

Kneeing Bossikopf into a trot, I rode over to the rectory, dismounted and knocked on the door. It became apparent by looking around at the buildings that St. Benedict's was, in fact, a large Catholic mission. It had its own light-generating plant, a small clinic, buildings that were used for classrooms, a chapel and several dining halls.

As I stood waiting for the priest to open the door, several young African nuns passed me. The looks I

received certainly weren't filled with unlimited amounts of Christian love. I'd seen that look in other eyes—terr suspects in Belingwe and Matibi One TTL, and it had nothing to do with Christian fellowship.

The troops had dismounted and were scrutinizing the Africans within the compound. As I was about to knock a second time, the door opened. A slight sandy-haired bespectacled man in civilian clothes stood looking at me. Behind him a young attractive African girl wearing a nun's habit was rising from a chair. He nodded coolly to me, turned to her and said, "Thank you, Sister Rose Marie, I will see you later in the afternoon."

She glanced at me, lowered her eyes and walked past into the hot sunlight. What the inspector in Macheke had told me about Father Aloan's suspected proclivities toward his charges, boys and girls, suddenly seemed valid.

"Father, I'm Major Williams," I introduced myself to the priest and he motioned me to take a chair. We chatted for a few minutes and I explained to him that I wanted to familiarize myself with the church. As the commander of the only army unit in the area I was interested in the safety of the mission. He didn't seem to be at all perturbed, and from his manner the last thing in the world he appeared worried about was being attacked by terrs.

"Major, would y'care for a spot of breakfast?" The accent was pure Belfast. It was then only about 8:30 a.m. so I told him it would be fine, but he would have to feed my troops as well.

"No bother a'tall, sor," the good father smiled, and rising, opened the door to the veranda motioning me to follow him to the cafeteria.

As we walked along, he pointed out various buildings. We stopped in front of a large wooden signpost on which was painted a schematic diagram of the mission. I noticed there were a number of very large buildings which previously had been used as classrooms but were now empty, the area next to them overgrown with heavy bush. Long unpainted, their windows broken, they stood apart from their well-kept neighbors. I thought later on I would pay them a visit.

The sight of an army major in camouflaged uniform, carrying an FN, walking beside the priest upset the Africans considerably. As we stepped into the dining room I noticed a young African woman staring fixedly at my guide. He glanced at her and almost imperceptibly shook his head. She turned her back, picked up her broom and continued sweeping.

"Major, make yourself at home," Father Aloan said, pulling out a chair for me. Before us was a long table covered with good quality linen and expensive silverware. The priest asked me what I would like for breakfast. "Ham and eggs would be super, Father, but I'm afraid that's asking for the moon," I replied.

He called the cook and told him to fix me whatever I wanted. As the clatter of kitchen sounds began, hot coffee was served and I slipped the 9 millimeter Star pistol out of my holster and held it on my lap, hiding the weapon with the tablecloth.

Whatever idea his African friends might have about trying anything foolish would be a mistake.

I deliberately brought up the subject of the 350 young students from his mission school who had traveled to Mozambique during the preceding year to join Robert Mugabe's ZANU forces. To my amazement he freely admitted that he had no way of stopping them. I asked him if he had submitted the names of those whom he personally knew to the police. He simply shook his head and changed the conversation.

Breakfast finished, I reholstered the pistol and got up from the table. We walked out of the mess hall toward the priest's office. By now he was questioning me. How long would I be in the area? Where was my headquarters? How many troopers did I have with me? What kind of weapons did they have? How many horses did I have? How far could we ride in a day? Did the horses require any special food or could they live off the land? What areas did I think I was going to search.?

Glancing down at my binocular case slung over my shoulder, he asked what type of binos I had. I took them out and showed them to him.

"Fancy that now, sir, he exclaimed. "I've got a better pair than those Zeiss Ikon 8x50s." I thought it rather unusual that a Catholic priest would have Zeiss binos unless he were a birdwatcher.

Aloan, apparently sensing my feelings, pointed up to a belfry which I estimated to be about fifty feet in height. He said he used to climb up in the tower from time to time and use his binoculars to look at what was going on in the TTL. Given the

quality of the Zeiss glasses, he would have no problem whatsoever in monitoring our movements when we left St. Benedict's shortly to start a patrol in the Weya.

It was now about 10:30 a.m. The troops had been fed, horses watered, and I was anxious to get underway. I thanked the priest and he gave me a farewell gift, a tot of Bushmill's Irish whiskey. Politics aside for the moment, no right-thinking Celt would turn down that beautiful golden nectar. Whether or not I would later deal with the priest on a more professional basis I didn't know, but to let that whiskey go to waste would have been a mortal sin.

I mounted up the troops and we moved out. Turning right at the main gate of St. Benedict's, we headed up the road leading into the TTL. As we rode out of the mission I was conscious of work stopping and many sets of eyes watching our progress. About 3 km's from St. Benedict's we passed a butcher shop. It was the end of the trail for stolen cattle driven here by rustlers. The owner was a terr collaborator, well known to the Macheke police.

One valuable advantage in commanding colored troops was the fact that most of them speak Shona or Matabele with varying degrees of fluency. I decided to use a little psychological warfare of our own, so I stopped the troops near an African store then rode a few paces further with Sergeant Khalid.

"When you go into the bottle store for cokes, let the locals hear you talking about the route we're going to take." He nodded, grinned and turned back to the store.

We dismounted, put out security and walked inside. My troopers stocked up on cokes and cigarettes. As I glanced through the window at the butcher shop across the road Khalid and several others chattered away in Shona, discussing the route we were going to take, and speculating on the time it would take the large number of troops following us to catch up.

I had no intention of following the direction Khalid had indicated to the Africans. But I wanted the word to get back to the CT's whom I hoped would set up an ambush to intercept us. My own ambush would be emplaced on the faint trail running between St. Benedict's and a nearby clinic.

We finished our cokes, walked outside and crawled up on the horses, falling into a column formation as we left the store. As we moved away I noticed the butcher come trotting out to see what was going on. He took one look, whirled and walked rapidly behind the shop down to a small kraal. The bush telegraph was about to start.

We continued for another forty-five minutes moving at a fast walk and closing on a good-sized kopjie approximately a half mile to our front. Looking backover my shoulder I could see the belfry of St. Benedict's Mission. I wanted to put the kopjie between us and St. Benedict's so the priest, undoubtedly watching us through his favorite binoculars, could not see us make a 120-degree change in direction to our ambush site.

"Khalid, canter the horses," I ordered. I wanted to make up the time we had lost during breakfast.

When we finally reached the large kopjie and

circled to the northern side of it, I noticed a familiar scene—a total absence of movement in the large village near the hill. By now curfew time was approaching and there should have been relatively large groups of Africans moving around the area. The cops had pointed out during a briefing that Weya inhabitants came and went as they pleased, ignoring curfew rules.

I couldn't quite believe that the appearance of horses and troops would cause them to change their habits so quickly. Since our arrival their attitude towards the army was one of utter contempt, and the fact that the terrs had subverted the TTL completely indicated to me that they were not about to sit in their kraals just because one patrol had suddenly appeared.

It was now starting to get dusk and we could smell the smoke from several fires within the group of huts to our front.

A corporal riding behind me pulled up alongside and said, "Sir, I think I see movement on that ridge behind the kraal." His eyes were far better than mine, because I couldn't pick anything out, and yet when I got my binos focused on the area sure enough I could see the head of a picannin. As I watched, he turned and started running for the bush.

We were now entering thick bush which would effectively screen us from any further observation. The ridge line was formed by several loosely connected small hills. They ran toward a large mountain near the trail from St. Benedict's to the clinic—our ambush site.

Unfortunately for us, we had a full moon which didn't take long in coming up. It was now 7:30 p.m. and we were not too far from our objective area. After an all-day ride over rough terrain the horses were tired. We had now entered an area of comparatively large stones and thick underbrush. The troops were in good shape but I was feeling bushed. In times like these I knew that the old soldiers' home, Jack Daniels and a rocking chair weren't far away.

We passed through a clearing, crossed it and started into the bush on the far side. The ground at this point sloped downward sharply, ending in a small stream. I decided that it was a good time to take a break and water the horses. The terrain features had now become highly visible from the light of the moon, bright enough to read a magazine by. When I swung down from Bossikopf and led him to the water, he was acting feisty. I thought it possibly the result of the extended trip, as he didn't particularly care to be ridden as hard as I had pushed him that day.

I didn't pay a great deal of attention to his jumpiness, thinking that after I had watered him he would settle down. While the stallion was drinking I noticed that the other horses were also acting up; ears twitching back and forth, nostrils widening for scent, and generally behaving as if they were not happy with the area we were in. In retrospect I wish I had 'listened' to what they were trying to tell me.

Motioning Sergeant Khalid to get them mounted, I adjusted the radio so the straps wouldn't bite

into my shoulders. I took the lead with a corporal riding immediately behind me. Once again in a single file formation we started up the hill. As we passed a thick clump of underbrush to our right I swung the column about 90 degrees to the left, starting a long traverse across the face of the slope to avoid being silhouetted.

Suddenly shots cracked from the rear less than fifty yards away. There was a burst of automatic fire from an AK followed by a long tak-tak from an RPD light machine gun. From the first orange flashes and green tracers it was no more than five seconds before the corporal riding behind me was hit in the arm and Bossikopf took a grazing round to the side of the head. I pushed hard with my right foot to steady myself but there was no stirrup. It had been shot away.

I came off to my right and landed hard. The stallion and the rest of the horses bolted, scattering troops like hailstones all over the place. Off to my right one of the troopers started returning fire, his tracers hitting the side of the ravine and ricocheting into a kraal to the rear of a heavily wooded area.

I finally got untangled and started firing. Flashes from three other AK's indicated the presence of additional terrorists. I found myself lying in the middle of a plowed field but unfortunately there were no mealie stalks for cover.

There is no more naked feeling in the world than that of lying belly down in an open field bathed in bright moonlight with five terrs fifty yards away energetically trying to blow your brains out. I

could see some movement off to my left, and snapped off several rounds in that direction. Evidently the two terrs who were latecomers to the fire fight had decided to bug out. From the sounds of dogs barking, it appeared the CT's were running to the kraal directly across the open field from us and to my left.

The RPD fire stopped abruptly and I looked to my right where I could see a clump of rocks. Several of my troopers were lying behind them, using the cover to fire into the ambush point. Shooting now was sporadic, and from the sounds of the dogs barking the two terrs were now about halfway through the kraal. I had no idea whether or not the RPD gunner had moved along with them, but we couldn't lie there all night to find out.

I yelled at the corporal behind the rocks to put up a flare. It streaked upwards, opening with a sharp pop. With the sudden glare of light the troops opened again on the ambush point. The problem with the flare was that it was going to illuminate us to a certain extent, but that was a minor consideration because the moon was so goddam bright that a little extra candlepower from the flare wasn't going to make a lot of difference.

Drifting down, trailing sparks, the flare outlined a couple of figures running for the kraal. Tracers arced out after them. One went down before he got to a hut, the other managed to reach a heavy patch of bush at the rear of the kraal.

"Khalid, get them on their feet," I yelled. Instantly they were up and running across the plowed field. When we reached the first row of huts, one of

the coloreds threw an incendiary grenade into the first building. A loud thump and the fire started, flames crackling from the thatched roof. Sprinting through the line of dark buildings, I yelled at Khalid to keep moving. We swept through the kraal, kicking open the doors of the huts. If anything moved it was zapped.

The huts' occupants had fled. Theirs was a planned departure, not a spontaneous evacuation. These people knew there was going to be an ambush and they obviously didn't want to be around.

When we broke out of the last line of huts, the fire from the flank ceased. "Sir, we're all here," panted Khalid, his face smoke-blackened.

"OK, let's move up on that ridge," I said.

We gained the high ground overlooking the kraal and I decided to pound the village a little bit more for good measure. I felt we should show the locals our displeasure at the kind of welcome we had received. We methodically raked the buildings with automatic weapon fire, burning the entire village.

"Sergeant, check the troops' ammo status," I ordered. I wanted to be damned sure we weren't running too low. We were still in pretty good shape as far as the remaining ammo went—but low on grenades. First light was only two hours away. Our position on high ground was sound and I didn't feel that we were going to be in need of any further grenades unless the terrorists decided to do something very unusual and try an assault on our position—something unheard of in this area.

I had finally established radio contact with the

JOC at Rusape and informed them of the fire fight. They asked if I wanted fire force at first light. I told them no, that since the number of terrs involved was only an estimated five, I didn't feel it was worthwhile spending money and time to bring in helicopters to hunt down the three survivors, particularly over rocky terrain that made tracking difficult.

We settled down to wait until first light came. I wondered how far the horses had traveled since the last time I had seen them heading away from the fire fight at a dead run.

During the initial firing one of our people had dropped his SLR. At daybreak we were lucky and found the weapon no more than ten yards from where he had dismounted. We searched for doppies, empty shell cases, and found a large quantity. I stood at the terrorist ambush site and couldn't for the life of me understand how five people with automatic weapons could have missed men on horseback at a range of 50 meters. Eternally grateful for the K-factor, I hoped it would continue in force as long as I was in the Rhodesian Army and serving in the bush. Hopefully the terrs' marksmanship, or lack thereof, would remain the same for a long time.

There was nothing left to do. The burnt-out kraal, empty cartridge cases and crumpled bodies of two terrs totaled up the work. We started the walk back to St. Benedict's Mission.

I knew that the only way we were going to find the horses was to get a light aircraft to fly a reconnaissance over the area. I really didn't have a great

deal of hope that we would get the animals back and I felt sure that the locals would be dining shortly on butchered horsemeat.

The walk back to St. Benedict's was a long hot one. The radio operator who had been hit in the arm was lucky. The wound had grazed the fleshy part of his tricep, causing little damage. I found that after the adrenalin had worn off we were all very tired and I began to feel a pain in my right side whenever I took a deep breath.

Before leaving I had searched the field very carefully trying to find anything I might have fallen on, but it appeared whatever damage I had done to myself had come from landing on an FN magazine. I hoped it was just a bruise. I would get around to the medics in a couple of days.

By the time we got back to St. Benedict's it was about ten o'clock in the morning. Very few people were up and around as I sat down on the porch in front of the priest's office. I sent one of the troops to the telephone switchboard requesting Sergeant Major Richardson back at our CP to come pick us up.

After about an hour and a half Richardson arrived, goggle-eyed. He said that the people at the Royal Visit Ranch had heard the fire fight very clearly. He was sure we had all been wasted and didn't expect to see any of us alive. Still no priest, and the door to his office remained closed.

Finally as we were about ready to leave, Richardson pointed out the priest who was walking slowly toward us. When the cleric saw me his eyes had all the appearance of a man who had seen a

ghost. "Good morning, Father, how are you?" I asked cheerfully.

He mumbled something about being all right and then asked me if I would like some coffee. I accepted. Perhaps I would find out why he, of all people, hadn't mentioned the sound of firing. Royal Visit Ranch and the surrounding farms were 10 km's from the site of the ambush. If they could hear the firing, the priest who was only 4 km's away from the ambush was obviously aware of what happened.

A young African nun brought our coffee. I was determined to wait out the priest; would he at any time say anything about the shooting of the preceding night? He made no mention of the firing, but his face was pale and he clearly wanted me out of there.

"Father, that coffee was super—thank you."

"Not a'tall, Major. . .it's the only Christian thing t'do. God's holy word, you know." He smiled, his weak blue eyes cold behind steel-rimmed spectacles. I got up from my chair and walked out of his office, closing the door behind me.

On a sudden impulse I turned and walked slowly down the veranda to the switchboard office. I looked inside. Seated behind the board was a young African girl wearing a mini-skirt and sporting a beehive hairdo. She gave me a wide-eyed, half-fearful look.

"Were you soldiers the ones doing all the shooting last night?" she asked, biting her lip nervously.

"Yes, where were you when that was going on?" I said, leaning against the wall.

"Oh, I had my studies to do. I was in the Father's office." She pointed down the corridor.

"Where was Father Aloan?" I asked.

"Oh, he was right there with me. . .reading his Scripture. He's such a holy man." She smiled proudly, white teeth shining. She crossed her legs, the short skirt shooting halfway up ebony thighs. Holy man indeed.

Richardson had brought his own car, a small battered blue van. We managed to pile everyone in it and start on our way back to the CP. Bouncing along the rutted dirt road I noticed that I couldn't find a comfortable position in which to sit and every time I moved there was a feeling that something was grating or clicking together in my side.

I briefed Richardson on last night's action and he in turn explained the aftermath of the ambush.

"At first light, sah, I drove over to the mission. I was hoping to get some word on what had happened to you. About six-thirty it was I banged on Father Aloan's door. Oh, he opened up right away, I can tell you."

"Did he have one of the young nuns in there with him, instructing her on the morning vespers?" I asked wryly.

"Couldn't tell you, Major. He just poked his nose around the door, holding it open a crack. When he saw me he started to shake and stutter, he couldn't talk he was so upset."

"Why didn't you push the door open?"

"He slammed it shut in my face, Major. I don't believe it was young nuns he had in there. Now that I hear what happened I reckon the good Father was

hiding the terrs that ran from you after the ambush."

"Yes, I agree. Why else would he be so afraid to see you? I wish we could catch the blasphemous old bastard hiding terrs. One more Communist sympathizer for the government to deport."

Rattling into the farmyard we arrived at the CP and unloaded Richardson's blue van. I went into the radio room and got a signal off to JOC Rusape requesting a police reserve aircraft as soon as one was available to assist us in hunting for our horses.

The JOC commander's voice came over the set and asked me what my intentions were during the period we would be hunting for the mounts. I told him we would continue to operate in the area as infantry and promised that I would submit a written report of the contact, and a detailed statement concerning the activities of the priest.

This conversation was encoded, as most of our radio traffic was monitored by Soviet radio intercept stations in Mozambique.

I broke out a bottle of rum and passed it around. I felt that they had certainly earned a drink, or more than one. I wanted to use the next day for care and cleaning of equipment and to reorganize the troop to operate as infantry. Headquarters at Salisbury smiled on us and we received three more replacements who arrived by truck from Rusape.

Sergeant Major Richardson was acting as if he had an acute case of the red-ass. After a certain amount of hemming and hawing he approached me and asked for a transfer. When I wanted to know why he wanted to get out he said he felt he wasn't

being utilized. This was an obvious reference to the fact that I had left him behind during the patrol that had ended in the subsequent ambush. I decided to let him cool down some and told him I'd consider it.

White head bobbing, cursing under his breath, he wandered off toward the horses muttering to himself. I was thankful he hadn't been with us in the ambush. Had he been killed I would have had to face his wife, a very fine lady, telling her that I had gotten her husband's snow-cropped head blown off, a damned likely event had he been there. At his age he just couldn't move fast in a tight spot. The next day he was back in proper form and I never heard any further remarks about a transfer.

CHAPTER 5

A Beer Drink, Bus Search, and Broken Ribs

THE ROAD THAT ran from Macheke into the European farmland continued northward to Mtoko which was near the Mozambique border. Regularly scheduled African buses used this road, carrying passengers to Salisbury. Some of the passengers were terrs. There was no doubt in my mind that the use of African buses to transport terrorists through Weya TTL was a commonplace occurrence. Naturally St. Benedict's Mission was one of the bus stops on the road to Salisbury; most convenient.

I contacted the JOC Commander and requested his permission to start searching buses in an effort to halt this activity. I received his OK, checked in with the cops at Macheke and requested the names of suspected terrorist recruits or sympathizers from the local area.

When I briefed the colored they were delighted at a chance to break the monotony of searching for the horses. They much preferred the mission of searching African buses, although for the life of me I couldn't understand why. If anyone has ever climbed into an African bus in the middle of a Rhodesian summer at two o'clock in the afternoon he will know what I am talking about. The bus searches would have been much easier had gas

masks been an integral part of the equipment we carried.

The first bus search almost turned out to be my last. In order to try and maintain a certain amount of security I borrowed a pick-up truck belonging to Mr. Van Aard, piled six troops in it and took off up the Mtoko road.

We passed an African beer hall on our left, behind which was a fairly large kraal. This was Saturday and the weekly African beer drink was just getting underway. Africans brew their own beer and the finished product will blow the skull off a brass-balled monkey. Their beer drink begins on Friday afternoon and runs non-stop until Monday morning. The survivors manage to walk, crawl, or hobble back to their huts and are in no shape to do anything for about a day.

The beer drinks are of interest to security forces because the terrs infiltrate them. Dressed in civilian clothes they get intelligence information on the security forces. Also they get drunk and then screw the brains out of whatever nannie is within easy reach, be they sixteen or sixty.

I chose a spot about two miles up the road from the beer hall, unloaded the troops and set up a roadblock to stop the bus. We had been there about ten minutes when we heard the approach of a vehicle. The roadblock was set up at a sharp curve in the road that served to obscure the troops.

When the driver saw a soldier standing in the road he jammed on the brakes and came to a stop. We got him out of the vehicle and told all passengers to dismount. They came tumbling off the

bus—men, women and kids, laughing, shouting and sweating. We put them in separate columns, men on one side, nannies and picannins on the other. It was stifling hot and everyone was soaked with sweat. While two of my troops were checking situpas, standard form of identification carried by all Africans except women and children, I sent two more soldiers scrambling to the top of the bus to search the luggage. No luck. With the exception of a cage of hostile chickens they didn't find anything suspicious.

I motioned them all back on the bus and spoke to the driver. There is one hard and fast rule in obtaining information from Africans: Get them out of sight and earshot of other Africans before interrogating them. Africans fear the terrorists far more than they do the Rhodesian Security Forces, because the army simply does not commit atrocities such as cutting men's noses, lips and ears off and making their wives fry and eat them, or hacking their heads off with axes, which are standard terrorist operating procedures.

Every African carries in his mind the knowledge of these outrages. Even if he wants to help, he can't appear to say anything in the presence of other Africans because the bush telegraph gets back to the terrs very quickly.

When I had taken the driver into the bush and out of sight of the passengers, he told me that he wanted to help, that he had a friend working with him who knew several of the local terrs in Mtoko. He agreed to get word to me via the driver of an earlier bus preceding his, in the event that terrs

were aboard as sympathizers. I told him how much I appreciated this, gave him a cigar and got him back on his bus to the accompaniment of a swift kick in the ass and a hard slap on the head for the passengers' benefit.

As the bus started up, we climbed into our truck and drove back down the road to the beer hall, by this time overflowing with happy patrons.

Drunk Africans were singing, dancing and in general having a great time playing grab-ass. When the coloreds dismounted from the truck the festivities stopped. I told Sergeant Khalid to go into the beer hall, march all the Africans out, line them up in two files, check their IDs and search them.

I told them to make the search of the females as cursory as possible. When a corporal asked me what cursory meant I told him not to grab any tits or jam his fingers up an orifice to check for hidden contraband.

He thought that was funny as hell and in keeping with my orders, searched the first nanny. She tipped the scales at a neat 200 pounds. With a cavalier-like pat on her massive ass, he passed her through the line.

While this was going on I walked around the side of the beer hall. Behind me were two of my troopers, one a slight 18-year old named Green. His name was Paul, so naturally he was known as Green Pea.

Green Pea was 5'5", weighed about 120 pounds soaking wet, and had a helluva time getting through basic training with Five Protection Company. The pre-qualification grenade test which con-

sisted of throwing a practice grenade over a 20-foot high chicken wire fence almost failed him. It took him two days of practice and probably fifty practice throws to get the grenade over the fence. Since that time grenade throwing posed no problems for him. I stood for a moment, glancing around the area.

There were several huts to my right. Doors closed, they were set apart from their neighbors whose entrances were wide open. I turned to Green Pea.

"Take a look in those huts, there might be. . ."

"Look out!" the colored's yell came seconds after the slamming of the beer hall's back door. Three teen-aged males burst from the building and raced past me, running like deer.

I'd slung my SLR over my shoulder as we moved toward the huts, replacing it with a 9 mm pistol held loosely in my right hand.

"Mir-ha!" Green Pea shouted at the Africans. They didn't stop at his command but continued running. I threw down on the last one in the group, his sweaty back looming over the pistol sights. As I squeezed the trigger, the Africans plunged into a thick clump of bushes immediately to my front.

Pow! My right eardrum rang with Green Pea's first shot.

"Back here!" he yelled. There was a pounding of boots and three troopers ran up. They began firing into the bushes, the rounds clipping leaves and twigs from the underbush.

I ran to the scrub and began kicking bushes to

one side, expecting to find three dead houts.

I found nothing.

The reason we didn't hit the three suspects was obvious; as you stepped into the bushes there was an immediate drop of some eight feet which led to the riverbed below.

Green Pea pointed and yelled, "There go those fuckers now." Sure enough, the three were running for the riverbed, looking back over their shoulders as the colored burst from the bushes after them. Running with the three boys were two teenage girls. I went down to a kneeling position and started firing double tap. The fourth round I squeezed off caused me to feel a sudden sharp pain in my side. I was wearing a combat jacket with pouches sewn in to hold SLR magazines. From the recoil, I thought for a minute that I had gotten a magazine jammed up against my side, but when I looked down there was nothing pressing against me. The pain wasn't coming from the outside.

The African leading the group went down and rolled over. Rising slowly to my feet I could see Green Pea and the two troopers running across the field after the wounded terr suspect. They were still about 100 meters from him when he rolled into the heavy bush at the river and disappeared.

I arrived at the front of the beer hall in time to see three European farmers accompanied by a young lieutenant in camo uniform hop out of a Datsun truck, FN's ready.

"What the bloody hell's going on here?" demanded the eldest, a stocky, partially-bald man with a deeply tanned face.

"Suspects, we flushed them from the beer hall." I answered, nodding to the lieutanant.

"We heard the shooting and came straightaway," the young officer added.

"Thanks, we need someone that knows the area at the river bed." I looked from one to the other of the group.

"Sorry, Major, we were rude. . .I'm Roger Fletcher, this is James Kleinman and the leftenant's my son Mark."

"I need one of you to show my sergeant the area and point out any locals you don't know. . .okay?" I said.

"Dead right, Major—glad to help." Fletcher turned to sergeant Khalid and pointed to the kraal, visible some 300 meters across the fields.

"We'd better drive along the creek bed and check the kraal you see there." Khalid agreed and climbed into Fletcher's truck. I followed them, turning off on a rutted tail leading down to the creek bank.

"Two of you drop off here as a stop group." I braked to a halt and the colored jumped out, trotting toward thick bush at the roadside.

"Over here, Major!" Fletcher called to me as I turned into a small trail entering the kraal proper. As I dismounted and walked toward him, I noticed that Khalid had already spread the troopers out into a skirmish line ready to search the woods.

A tall, dignified African man dressed in a white shirt and dark trousers stepped out of a nearby hut, introduced himself as a schoolteacher and asked if he could help me. Schoolteachers in the bush are

really in a cruel predicament.

Schools are a prime target for terrorists for they provide a ready source of boys and girls between the ages of twelve and sixteen. The students are abducted and taken to Mozambique or Botswana where they are forced to join the so-called Freedom Fighters. The girls serve as concubines and quickly contract VD which they spread throughout terrorist camps. It is not infrequent to find fifty percent of the CT's operating in a section to have VD of one kind or another.

Schools are also targeted because some of the teachers are loyal to the Rhodesian Government and teach students the truth about the Communist murderers and rapists that attempt to pass themselves off as liberators. On the other hand there are far too many teachers actively cooperating with the terrs, giving them intelligence information, providing them with recruits and frequently allowing the terrs to use schools at night as base camps.

There was no way I could tell how this gentleman stood. To my question about any strangers entering the kraal in the last half hour he said there had been none.

"Can I be of help?" he asked.

"If you see or hear anything connected with wounded locals, send a picannin to tell me," I replied and left. There would, most likely, be no picannin.

As we were walking toward the creek bed one of the troopers next to me yelled and pointed at three African girls who were just emerging from a path near the bushes. "That first one in the red dress,

that's the one!" he shouted. The girl took one look and turned to run.

The trooper raised his weapon, flipping off the safety and aiming. "Hold it, don't shoot!" I shouted.

She was about twelve years old and although legally we could have taken her out, I didn't need any twelve-year-old corpses that day. I motioned him to run her down and started to follow when a sharp pain shot through my ribs. I stopped and waited for my trooper to catch the girl, which he managed to do by firing a warning shot that kicked up dirt in front of her, The other two girls had long since disappeared.

He brought her back, kicking, squirming and howling. It was obvious we were going to get nothing from her except noise. "Put her in the truck and stay with her," I commanded.

I waited for about thirty minutes and finally saw Green Pea and two others emerging from the bushes. They shook their heads and shrugged when they got near me. They had found blood spoor but no body. The bush was so thick it was impossible for them to go further into it. This was not an unusual situation; repeatedly teenagers and small children can wriggle their way into a thicket of bush so heavy that it's impossible for an adult to follow them. A feeling of futility came over me. What was the point of all this search and chase?

I decided to take the girl back and turn her over to the cops and call it a day. When I crawled up in the truck I knew that I was going to have to go to the hospital or put away about a half bottle of rum

as an anesthetic. The booze sounded much better than the hospital, but I knew the liquor wasn't going to diagnose what was the matter with me.

I turned the command of the troop over to Sergeant Major Richardson and continued on in the vehicle to drop the girl with the cops, then proceed to the hospital in Rusape.

CHAPTER 6

Bulawayo, Tjoloto, and A Cornfield Birth

AT THE RUSAPE hospital Frau Doktor Steigelmayer took one look at my ribs and ordered me back to Andrew Fleming Hospital in Salisbury. It was an order I was happy to obey.

Sergeant Major Richardson drove me to the casualty entrance and waved goodbye. I hobbled over to the receiving desk and signed in under the curious gaze of a pleasant-faced, brown-haired nurse.

"What seems to be the matter?" she asked.

"I've got a bruised rib, I guess."

"Come over here." She led me to an examining room and pulled the curtain closed. "Now, Major, please remove your shirt, there's a good chap."

"Are you going to take my blood pressure?" I asked, thinking of Frau Doktor.

She looked at me sharply. "No, is it irregular?"

I managed a sickly grin. "Well, um. . .no, it's fine."

"Ach!" I jumped as her cool fingers pressed on the bluish-green bruise on my rib-cage.

"Is it a bad bruise?" I tried to look under my arm to see what she was doing.

"The bruise is fine. It's your ribs. . .three of them are broken." She motioned for me to sit on the examining table. Broken? What in hell do I do now,

I wondered.

"We used to strap them, but modern medicine says to let them heal naturally." The nurse looked up as two lovelies pulled aside the curtain and eased into the room. Luscious, young, both carrying great breastworks. They arranged themselves by my side.

I had a flash of inspiration.

"Well, I'd like to be strapped, please. . .I'm on leave and going to the States." My gaze was on the smaller of the two beauties.

"Very well, Major." She turned to my chosen one and said, "Fetch some tape, sister."

When sister returned she was carrying several rolls of adhesive tape. She handed these to the middle-aged nurse.

"Nurse, will I be ah-um, restricted in my love life?" I glanced hopefully at my little Lolita.

"Really, Major, a man of your age asking such a question!" she sniffed. The girls giggled.

I resigned myself to the taping process and when it was completed the nurses bade me goodbye and I crawled slowly into Richardson's waiting van.

His eyes twinkled. "Everything all right, sah?"

"Just drive me to Reserve Holding Unit headquarters," I muttered.

The cheek of that nurse. . .a man of my age!

My call on Colonel Nobles, commander of RHU and Protection Companies, was short.

He informed me that on my return from the States I would be going back to the Weya with additional troops and extra horses. I was pleased with the news—I had a score to settle with Father

Aloan and St. Benedict's Mission.

My leave in the U.S. went by so fast I didn't have a chance to really unwind and I was still tired when I walked off the South African Airways jet back in Salisbury three weeks later.

My feelings of fatigue were replaced with outrage, however, when a friend notified me of what army had in store.

There was to be no return to Weya—no troops, no horses. Instead, I was being posted to Llewellin Barracks to train recruits.

To add to this piece of unwelcome news, was his statement that there were those at army headquarters who considered me AWOL while in the States—they had turned Rhodesia upside down looking for me. This situation I could straighten out rapidly; Headquarters, Protection Companies, at Cranborne, with true goffle incompetence, had blithely ignored telling army that I was on leave.

Escaping the monotony of Llewellin, however, was going to be much more difficult than explaining a missing leave signal.

The future looked bleak indeed. When I reported to army headquarters the following morning I was ready to chew nails. The British accents that assaulted my ears at the miniature Pentagon did nothing to alter the situation.

I spoke with an officer in the Adjutant General's section and showed him a copy of my leave orders. He nodded and seemed mollified. His mood changed when I told him that I was a combat soldier and had not come 7,000 miles to Rhodesia to teach young men which was their left foot and

which was their right. He threw me out.

Walking down the hallway I passed Adjutant General Colonel Terry Hopkin's office and feeling that I had literally nothing to lose, asked if I could speak to him. He is a highly intelligent, most understanding soldier. He listened to my tale of woe and chided me by saying, "Mike, you will ruin your image by not cheerfully accepting your assignment." I resisted telling him that my image was the last thing I was interested in at that time.

He did say, however, that if I would see one basic training company through its four-and-one-half-month cycle he would relent and let me go back to the bush. That was certainly better than indefinite banishment to Llewelin so I thanked him, saluted, and left before he could change his mind.

After a five-hour drive I pulled up at the gates to the Depot, Rhodesia Regiment, returned the sentry's salute and drove over to the Officer's Club.

Inside the building was a bar filled with people who were assigned to the various training companies. Another American, Captain Jess Hickman, welcomed me. Apparently the basis for his welcome was "misery loves company." Several others, also permanent guests of Llewellin, gathered around to shake hands. My hostility began to subside a little with copious amounts of Lion ale and an occasional snort of vodka. I was assigned a room in BOQ, Bachelor Officers Quarters, and after unpacking, lay down to get what sleep I could before facing the world the next morning.

Following breakfast I reported to the Commanding Officer, Llewellin Barracks, who was most cor-

dial and gave me the standard treatment about how important my job was; that I was trusted with the cream of Rhodesian youth, etc., etc. Everything he said was true, but in any army the least desirable job for an officer or a non-commissioned officer is that of teaching Basic Training Courses to new recruits. You can, if you wish, look at it from the viewpoint that "somebody has to do it." Whatever the viewpoint, I was determined to do my best and get back to killing gooks as fast as possible.

As the C.O. finished his welcoming address, I stood up and told him that Colonel Hopkins had faithfully promised me that I would stay for only one training cycle at the depot. Although he said nothing, his expression convinced me that he thought I was a total idiot to believe this. I left his office and walked over to Bravo company where I met the acting company commander. He took me in tow, giving me the grand tour.

"Sir, this is company headquarters." The lieutenant stepped aside to let me enter the freshly painted building housing B Company.

I glanced around. Over his office door, instead of the usual sign bearing the words "Officer Commanding" there was a hodgepodge of small wooden signboards—one atop the another. From top to bottom they read. . .OFFICER, 2 I/C, TRAINING OFFICER. They were moved in short order.

Throughout the time I was in the Rhodesian Army I discovered that if I carried out my duties in the same manner as I had in the U.S. Army, it resulted in tremendous amounts of bruised egos, flattened toes and occasionally flaring nostrils on

the part of certain people.

One thing that caught my eye was that the average Rhodesian recruit who reported to Llewellin Barracks for his four-and-one-half-month stay was in far better physical condition than his U.S. counterpart.

During my leave in the States I had purchased a hand gun which I brought back with me. No ordinary popgun, it was a .44 Magnum, a far cry from the Star 9 millimeter, the army's standard issue. I wanted something to put somene down — and keep them down.

After four months as a training officer my B Company was ready for the last portions of its course. As a final test of the unit's efficiency, we would go to the bush and spend ten days on actual counter-insurgency operations.

The area selected for us was Tjolotjo TTL. The scene of a recent tribal chieftain's murder by terrorists, Tjolotjo had become an increasingly active area for CT's. The murder of a tribal chief is considered a sacrilegious crime by the Africans. Any chief is seen by them as the living embodiment of departed spririts. By killing Chief Gambo, the terrs had apparently decided to pull out all stops and really terrorize the natives.

I flew to the BSAP headquarters at Tjolotjo. After the usual briefing with Special Branch people concerning terrorist activities, I selected bivouac areas for my company.

One thing remained before returning to Llewellin. I had to find a C.P. for First Platoon—they would be B company's first unit to enter the bush.

A forty-five minute drive got me to a ramshackle ranch bordering the TTL. It was afternoon when the Landrover braked to a halt at a wooden gate facing the road.

"Sir, there's nobody here." Sergeant Medford, the driver looked carefully at the weatherbeaten house.

"You're wrong—look there!" I pointed to a woman shuffling slowly toward us. With straggly grey hair, sunken eyes, she appeared to be in her late sixties. She was colored.

"Hello." Her words came haltingly. "Come in. . . Joshua will fix tea." She turned to a tiny, wizened African walking fearfully behind her. Completely bald, his head sported a few wisps of white hair.

"Barmy as loons—both of them," Medford smiled.

"Sorry madam, we don't have time." I spoke quickly to her, inquiring about her African labor force. She had none—they'd all run away.

"I'm here alone—except for Joshua." She smiled, revealing yellowed snags for teeth. "My father was a good friend of Cecil Rhodes. . .I was born here."

I now understood. Rhodesia, in the early days, was as South Africa is now, a segregated Society. Any European who went to bed with an African woman was an immediate social outcast.

Restricted to this ranch by her mixed parentage, the woman had lived here all her life. A series of dirty, yellowed snapshots of her father and mother were all the memories she retained.

"Thank you for the offer of tea, madam." I gave Joshua several cigars. He grinned, bobbed his head

and crammed one into his mouth, happily chewing away. Bits of wet tobacco and tiny rivulets of saliva mixed together in a brown stream that trickled down his wrinkled chin.

"Let's go, Sergeant." I wanted to be completely off the dirt road before dusk—and ambush time.

The cops were hospitable and put us up for the night, after standing drinks all round at the club.

Our return trip to Bulawayo the next morning was subdued.

Brigade Headquarters arranged for the same light aircraft that had flown me down initially to Tjolotjo, to carry my platoon leaders on a reconnaissance over the TTL to acquaint them with the relative size and topography of the ground over which they would soon be walking. It would also impress upon them the difficulty that faced us in attempting to advance through a line of kraals that were linked, one with the other, by a series of scattered huts.

With a smoothness and comparative lack of confusion that surprised me, Bravo Company, including the ever popular kitchen truck, were soon set up in an open field behind the cop shop at Tjolotjo township.

That evening, as was custom, all B company officers and NCO's were invited to the police club for a get-together. From all appearances, it was a success.

The next few days were spent in getting the various platoons into position in the TTL. Phase lines, a series of easily recognizable terrain features running north and south, were selected. These were

essential to the control of a platoon's speed of movement and the prevention of an accidental fire fight between units.

It didn't require a lot of searching before B Company found the terrs.

An ambush detail from the second platoon was lying in wait across from an African store. At ten o'clock that night they saw light in the store and someone with a flashlight on the porch, shining it into the bushes. Unable to fire because the Africans weren't fifty yards away from the building, a requirement for shooting curfew breakers, the troops had to wait. The lights went out—all was quiet.

At daybreak the storekeeper came running from the store shouting he had been robbed. The corporal in command of the ambush detail ran to the store. It was a scene of utter shambles. The terrs had ransacked the shelves, stealing canned goods, clothing and shoes. As they were leaving, one of the group of eight had dropped a sack of flour. Bursting, it covered the floor and preserved the bootprints of the CTs as they raced out of the back door.

I received the signal from the radio shack about the incident and ran to the cops. "John, did you know about the store robbery?" I stood in the doorway to the inspector's office.

"Hell no—what's happened?" Inspector Waverly put down a sheaf of reports he was reading.

"The goddam gondongas have hit the store near this school." I put my finger on the map coordinate showing the store at a crossroads several hundred meters from an African school.

"I'll have my people from SB meet you there."

He hurried from the room.

Tall, skinny Medford, formerly an RLI sergeant, had anticipated me and was sitting outside the cops' office in my Landrover with a radio operator, my rifle and webbing, and a roll of maps. "Ready, sir." He grinned.

"What—no biltong?" I asked, jumping into the seat. Silently, he handed me a fistful of the dried meat—in Texas we call it "jerky."

We were off, showering the driveway with a hail of small stones. Tearing along the winding road, I glanced behind us and saw a second boiling cloud of reddish dust.

Medford threw a quick look over his shoulder and laughed. "It's the fucking cops—they'll have to haul ass to catch us!" He jammed his foot down and the jeep rocketed ahead. The police Landrover faded in the distance, and finally disappeared from sight.

The scene around the store was one of total chaos. Africans of every size and shape were milling around the porch.

Corporal Ian McCreary, the ambush detail NCO, was kneeling at the back door studying the tracks left by the fleeing terrs. He stood up as Medford and I hurried over.

"Morning, sir." His eyes were bloodshot and a stubble of beard, caked with dust, frosted his bony face.

"Mac, do you have enough spoor to work with?" I asked.

"Yes, sir, we're ready to go." He turned and yelled to a stocky, thick-legged recruit standing

near a group of Africans. "Move those munts out of there!" The rifleman began herding the Africans away from the area in an effort to keep them from destroying any CT tracks.

We watched as the mob started shambling down the road toward the school some 200 meters away.

McCreary looked intently at a well-dressed young African walking rapidly down the road, angling away from the crowd and heading for the bush.

"Jackson! Stop that hout!" he yelled. The African, hearing the shout, broke into a run. The startled rifleman looked back to McCreary, then to the running youth. "Ee-wah, you fucker!" he shouted, pumping a round into the chamber of his FN. At the metallic clang of the bolt shooting forward, the would-be escapee skidded to a halt.

Jackson, now joined by two other soldiers, sprinted over to where the African was standing.

"Bring him over here!" McCreary yelled, starting toward them.

Hustled along by the three troopers, the youth stumbled to a halt before us. He stood silently, his shirt wet with the perspiration of fear, tie askew.

"What're you—some kind of a cunt?" McCreary demanded, shaking the African. "You're lucky you weren't shot—trying to run like that."

"Search him, Mac," I told the corporal.

Quick hands went through the pockets of the suit. "Look at this." McCreary handed me two letters. Postmarked London, England, written in childishly scrawled English they outlined the interest of the London-based chapter of ZAPU, Zimbabwe African

People's Union, in the success of the young agent's mission.

Together with the damning letters there was a grimy, green cardboard-backed address book listing the names and addresses of members living in Tjolotjo and Botswana. Printed alongside the names of two Africans were the words—COMMISSAR and SECRETARY.

"Turn this munt over to the SB. . .they're just pulling up," McCreary told the three troopers guarding the suspect. "Here! Give them these letters and that address book." I handed the papers to Jackson who stuffed them into his pocket, grabbed the African by the scruff of the neck and frog-marched him to the SB Landrover parked by the store.

The members of the ambush detail were very upset about having let fifteen terrs slip through their fingers. I consoled them by saying that had they opened fire without being certain of the target identity, they could have easily put down a half dozen locals legally standing on the porch of the store, completely within their rights within the fifty-meter boundary imposed by the curfew regulation.

The trackers leading the follow-up detail were making good time over fairly open terrain with only scattered bush. Unfortunately the terrs had a good headstart; when the spoor neared a kraal, the troops found that the locals had milled their cattle, obliterating the terrorist tracks.

In an attempt to head off the terrs, I managed to secure a Police Reserve Air Wing Cessna and had

the pilot overfly the most logical escape routes into Botswana. No luck. The terrs were long gone.

Two nights later B Company's fortunes changed. Four hundred meters from a village the members of an ambush detail lay motionless in the thick grass. At one o'clock in the morning three figures moved toward them in an extended line formation, some ten yards apart. The ambush detail waited until the figures approached to within twenty meters, then challenged the Africans. In a curfew area at night, challenging people is a very dangerous practice. More than likely the response will be a burst of AK fire, but my troops were doggedly following the rules.

At the sound of the warning to halt, the three figures started to run. The MAG gunner opened fire, the machine gun's rounds triggering the ambush. FN rifles joined in. All three figures dropped—didn't move.

With the first rays of the sun, the search of the area started. Wearily moving through the bush, watching for any movement, the members of the ambush discovered three dead Africans. Two were obviously dead from gut wounds, one appeared to be miraculously unmarked.

After careful examination of the "body" the corporal commanding the search group was unable to find any sign of bullet holes. He straightened up and was about to call the medic over to help him when suddenly the "corpse" opened its eyes, displayed a flash of white teeth and said, "Baas, you ain't going to shoot anymore, are you?"

Undaunted by the startling "resurrection" the

corporal jerked the African to his feet, shook him and asked, "What the fuck are you doing walking across a field during curfew?" When he got no answer, he shook him again, saying, "Why did you run?"

The African told him a story that has now become all too common throughout operational areas in Rhodesia. He and his two friends had gone to the hut of the local African National Council Secretary. The tribesman, in addition to being involved in the African national Council, was also a spy for the terrs operating in the area. He knew the security forces had moved into that particular section of Tjolotjo TTL but he didn't know exactly where the ambush site had been set.

The three unlucky Africans spent two weeks working for the secretary, helping him bring in his corn crop and doing odd jobs round the hut in exchange for food and a place to sleep. On the last night, after finishing their work the ANC official suddenly told them that he didn't want them staying at his hut any longer; they would have to leave immediately.

Terrified at this statement the three protested, saying Rhodesian Army units were in the area and any movement at night by Africans would be challenged. It would be certain death to move away from the protective security of the hut and into the bush. Their "host" told them not to worry—he had seen soldiers near the dam which was some 1000 meters to his south. This was a lie because he hadn't seen any troops in that vicinity—nor did he have any idea of the actual location of B Company

units. No amount of arguing would help the three ill-fated Africans. Finally the ANC spy physically threw them out and sent them on their way. When they were challenged by the ambush detail, they panicked and started to run.

Two of the group were cut down with the first burst of machine gun fire; the third, scared witless at what he saw, promptly fainted. He lay unconscious throughout the night until the corporal turned him over at daylight.

Arriving at the scene, I was met by the corporal. "They're over here, sir." He led the way through the bush to a large tree. Lying crumpled under it like heaps of ragged clothing were the two dead men. Sitting a few feet away, his eyes glassy with shock, was the survivor.

The members of the ambush detail were sitting near the road, apart from the remainder of the platoon. They were dirty, soaked in sweat, their faces wearing the tight, pinched look of older men. I walked over to them and explained in a low voice that the blame was not theirs; they were soldiers and had simply carried out orders.

The two dead Africans could just have well been terrs and the challenge the troops had issued could have resulted in a burst of AK fire instead of the pathetic deaths of the tribesmen.

We picked up the two bodies and put them in the platoon's Bedford truck for removal to the police station. There, a formal identification by relatives would be made and a statement from the corporal in charge of the ambush detail would be taken by the cops—if they felt one was necessary under the

circumstances.

I returned to the police station before the arrival of the truck carrying the bodies. Word of the shooting had spread like wildfire at the CP and a sizable crowd of off-duty trainees had gathered, waiting for the vehicle.

When the Bedford with its grisly cargo rolled to a stop at the side of the headquarters building there was a sudden hush of fearful expectancy. The recruits on the ground and those in the back of the truck stood motionless, each waiting for the other to act. It was their first never-to-be forgotten look at the face of death.

I crawled up into the rear of the truck and grabbed the nearest corpse by the shoulders, the woolly black head lolling against my boots. I yelled at a red-headed recruit standing across from me, bracing himself against the sides of the vehicle. "Pick up his feet, goddamit! MOVE!" He jumped as though jabbed with a hot iron.

Together, at the unspoken count of three, we tossed the dead man to the dusty ground. The impact forced the intestines farther out of the stomach wound. Previously purple, sausage-shaped and encased in a transparent covering of bluish-white skin, they were now covered and spotted with an ever-growing swarm of large, black flies.

The second body, a smaller man, landed near the first. In addition to his stomach wound, the inside of his left elbow had been ripped open by a 7.62 bullet, its force tearing apart the flesh and leaving a gaping, triangular-shaped wound that exposed tendons and the startlingly white bone.

There was an eerie sameness to the faces of the two dead, as if in catching together at the exact instant the tremendous jolting impact of the bullets, they were somehow stamped with the face of eternity.

To impress the locals and perhaps prevent any more teen-agers from leaving Tjolotjo to join the terrs, we decided to stage a firepower demonstration.

I found a large area that was big enough to hold a live fire exercise. We would employ rifle, machine-gun, 60 and 81 mm mortars. . .all using live ammunition. I wanted an air strike also, but was turned down at the last minute.

I left the arrangements for transport of the Africans to Rocky Stone, the Acting District Commissioner. He did a tremendous job and on the day we were to start there were an estimated 500 Africans sitting, standing and squatting together, waiting expectantly for what they didn't as yet know.

As I walked out of the mob, Rocky Stone, acting District Commissioner, stood beside me.
I began to speak, Rocky interpreting my words into fluent Shona.

"I speak to the mothers among you. Raise your arms." A sea of black hands rose." If you love your children, you will keep them from the lies of the terrorists." Rocky translated furiously, sweat running down his chubby face. "Do not let them go to Mozambique." I glanced at one woman surrounded by children. Her eyes were wide, mouth open.

"We do not wish to kill your children. We want them to stay home, to go to school, to become

educated." Looks were exchanged among the crowd. . ."Ahhh!" A loud gasp of approval came from the women.

"As you know there are many African soldiers fighting alongside us. They feel as we do." Rocky spewed forth my words, thick arms waving, bush hat slipping over one eye. He pushed it up and kept going. "I now speak to those children among you who are thirteen years and older."

Self-conscious giggles and furtive looks greeted this last. "I want you all to stand." Slowly, goaded by their mothers' pushes, a large number of boys and a few girls stood.

"What you are now going to see is what will happen to you if you join the Communists and come back here as terrorists."

Before the Africans started arriving, I had placed a section of two MAGs on a kopjie to our right. On the left I had set up two 60 mm and two 81 mm mortars. I raised my hand, gave the signal to open fire. Pandemonium!

At the first ear-splitting cracks of the machine guns all the youngsters standing dove into the crowd. The traces ripping out to the target area were unseen by the vast majority of the Africans who were howling at the tops of their lungs and burying their faces in their arms. When the mortars started firing, the unfamiliar THUMP brought several black faces up, eyes wide.

More heads were raised. Rocky seized the opportunity to give his own spiel. "The soldiers will rise as ghosts from the ground!" he yelled.

Right on cue, the sergeant in command of the

assault detail gave a blast on his whistle and the riflemen, who had been lying hidden in the mealie stalks before the crowd, dramatically rose. This was too much! Half of the crowd broke and ran, streaming for the bushes at the rear of the area.

"Don't worry, they'll be back," Stone assured me.

He was right. As the marching line of troops began assault fire, the Africans crept back. The attack ended and we herded the chattering crowd to the objective area. Oohs and ahs interspersed with moans was the crowd's reaction to the damage done by the fire power.

None of the targets we'd set up had escaped destruction. Not only had our fire power demonstration been a success from a psychological standpoint, it had also accelerated the birth rate. In the middle of the deafening sounds of mortars, machine guns and rifles, a nanny, evidently spurred on by the noise and excitement, promptly gave birth. I don't know what she finally named her offspring, but I suggested "Fire-power" which would have been appropriate. And as I climbed into my jeep to drive back to company headquarters a crowd of African women were gathering around to admire the newborn baby.

Back at Tjolotjo my driver, Sergeant Medford, pulled up in front of the tent that served as my quarters and cut the engine.

"Sir, will you need me any more today?" he asked.

I started to tell him no when I saw the company sergeant major walking hurriedly in our direction

waving a small piece of paper.

"Wait a sec. . .let's see what this latest flap's all about." I swung down from the jeep and met the NCO. . .

"Look's like you've done it, sir." He grinned, handing me the flimsy piece of paper.

"Done what?" I asked, glancing down at the typewritten words. The message answered my question.

"Major L. H. Williams, 781076, B Coy, DRR is trfd to Grey's Scouts with effect this date. Will report NLT 3 Jul '77. To retain actg rank of Major. Assume 21C."

I had been transfered to Grey's Scouts to assume the post of second-in-command. To report not later than 3 July. . .that was two days from now.

"Sir, are you chuffed about that?" the sergeant major asked. Was I happy? I had mixed feelings. . .I realized that my time here hadn't really been all that bad.

The drive back to Llewellin was an anticlimax. The company had proved it could take care of itself in the bush. Although they'd missed the eight terrs, it hadn't been an act of negligence. Some of the troops knew what it felt like to kill a man. . .they had certainly changed. . .more blood had soaked into the red dirt of Tjolotjo. . .the colored woman whose father had known Cecil Rhodes, along with her ancient houseboy, Joshua, had been slaughtered by terrs the night before we left. They had cut off her breasts and riddled her with AK rounds.

On my last day at the depot, I packed my things, officially cleared the post and drove through the

main gate for the last time. In retrospect I guess I had done what few people thought I would be able to do—escape Llewellin and go back to the bush.

Part III

Grey's Scouts

CHAPTER 1

Grey's Scouts

THE WAR WAS being stepped up daily by the CT's who sensed that with the increasing amount of pressure being placed on the Prime Minister by the West, their efforts would succeed. They were helped along by the misguided governments of the United States and Great Britain.

Incredibly the two Western powers were actively backing the murdering scum commanded by Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo in a lunatic bid to overthrow the Rhodesian Government. This type of madness I've never been able to understand. As an American, it became increasingly difficult for me to explain to Rhodesians what my country was trying to do.

The day after my arrival in Salisbury my new boss, Major Anthony P. (Tony) Stephens, called and invited me out to his house in Borrowdale. It was fitting that Tony, now Rhodesia's cavalry commander, should live in the horsy community where the race track is located.

As I approached Tony's home I said a quick prayer of thanks, in my own style, to Brigadier, now Major General, Derry MacIntyre. He had recently been promoted and sent from Umtali to Army Headquarters in Salisbury. My letter from the

depths of Llewellin to Derry, apologizing for the utter chaos my goffles had caused and asking him to try and get me out into the bush again had paid off. The first thing he had done in his new high post was to get me back into combat.

Tony, the usual wide grin on his face, greeted me and over some civilized drinks we sat down to discuss what my duties would be with Grey's Scouts. We both agreed that in order to prevent one of us from having to sit behind a desk full-time that we could take turns, giving each of us a chance to get into the bush and lead troops.

I had been to Nkomo barracks a couple of times in the past to beg some equipment or horse feed from Tony; this time, however, was different. I sensed, as did every new Two I/C anywhere in the army, that my arrival at the Grey's was less than an auspicious occasion. It was a matter of proving myself all over again. Most of the headquarters personnel I met at Nkomo had been with Grey's Scouts since their early days and I instinctively felt that my "welcome" would be a tentative one, at best. After all, I was a newcomer.

I didn't have long to worry about my status—Tony had lined up a light aircraft for us and we were quickly away from Nkomo and on our way to the bush. He wanted to make a flying inspection tour of all the troops.

On our return leg of the trip we stopped at Manama Mission where, earlier, the terrorists had herded priests and nuns into the nearby bush and shot them in cold blood, leaving their bodies lying in a ditch by a dirt road. ZANU's leader, Robert Muga-

be, is the individual Andrew Young says is a practicing Catholic and who "would never hurt anyone." His thugs were responsible for the murders.

The troop in the Manama Mission area had not had a good run of luck, for the terrs had pulled out of Manama and moved across the border into Botswana where they had a base camp housing some 200 CT's. This base camp, like many others in Mozambique, Botswana and Zambia, was visible from inside Rhodesia. We wanted to ride across into Botswana, flatten the camp and scatter the self-styled "freedom fighters," but couldn't get permission from higher headquarters to do so. This frustrating situation continued as long as I was in Rhodesia. Repeatedly, troops would request permission to cross into the so-called "front line states" in order to attack terrorist base camps, but were usually refused.

The troop commander of One Troop, Lieutenant Dick Cahill, was long overdue for R&R and Tony thought this would be a good opportunity for me to join the troop, assume temporary command and give the lieutenant a chance for a much-needed rest.

I was flown from Salisbury to Rusape where I was to be delivered, on the final leg of my journey, by Air Force fixed wing courier.

"Are you Major Williams?" A round-faced, blond pilot wearing grey air force coveralls was waiting as I stepped down from the Cessna 182.

"That's right." I thought I detected an American accent.

"I'm Roger Bowers." He shook hands.

"You're another Yank?" I asked as we headed for the mess tent at the side of the runway.

"Yes, I'm from California," he said, helping me with my bedroll.

"Were you in 'Nam?" The question really wasn't necessary—it wasn't any of my business.

"Yes, I flew choppers." That was an understatement. Bowers had a tremendous amount of combat time in Viet Nam.

After coffee, we walked over to his aircraft and loaded my gear into it. It was a Trog, a high wing Fairchild used for a dozen different roles.

"This is a ground-loving mother, so hang on!" Roger warned, and we taxied down the grass airstrip. After a magneto check we were off. As we flew toward Inyanga he mentioned that he was very much concerned with landing at the mountain airfield because of the prospect of getting out again.

The strip was located at a comparatively high elevation and the aircraft we were in was not noted for its short take-off capabilities. Our landing was uneventful and watched by some of the troopers from One Troop who were there securing the airstrip. After I'd climbed down and walked to the edge of the runway, we watched Roger rev up for take off and wondered if he were going to make it, or whether we would be picking him out of the trees at the far end.

Standing on the brakes, he held the plane until max power was reached, then started rolling. He cleared the trees at the far end of the strip with about a foot to spare and wobbled on his way back toward Rusape.

The horsemen who had come down as escorts studied me very carefully. I heard later that word of the Fourth of July raid at Sarahuru had spread rapidly. We walked up the dirt road leading from the airstrip to the CP. The wind at this time of year in Inyanga starts blowing during late afternoon and continues throughout the night. It grows progressively colder and causes people to seek the warmth of the deepest part of their sleeping bags. By the time we reached the CP the wind was blowing in gusts and most of the people at the headquarters were huddled around the fire trying to keep warm.

The trees in that part of Rhodesia are tall pines and the surrounding terrain looks a great deal like that of Yosemite National Park—truly a beautiful part of the mountains.

Lieutenant Dick Cahill was in the CP tent talking on the radio with JOC Inyanga. I had come at an opportune time as there was to be a briefing at Inyanga the following morning. Intelligence and air reconnaissance had picked up the presence of two large terrorist groups infiltrating from Mozambique and it was decided that Grey's Scouts would have the opportunity of tracking down this bunch of scum.

After the evening meal there was a brief time to meet the people at the CP. Cahill called a corporal in charge of the farrier, or blacksmith section, and asked him to find me a horse for the coming operation. I detected a knowing look that passed between the two and I thought that I was going to get the biggest "hammerhead" to be found among One

Troop's mounts. I was right; the animal that was led out for my inspection was named Beguta. Beguta and I were not to come to grips one with the other until two days later when the operation began.

Early the following morning the troop commander and I took a Landrover and drove down the steeply winding road to JOC Inyanga headquarters. There we reported to the commander, Lieutenant Colonel Peter Brown.

"Gentlemen, you're familiar with the infiltration routes the CT's are using." He indicated a series of red arrows drawn on the situation map in grease pencil. "The blues (Air Force) have spotted six base camps along these routes, the terrs are using them as way stations to rest up." Brown's weatherbeaten face hardened. "I want the Grey's to sweep these bloody camps, clear suspects out of the kraals nearby, and shoot any of these buggers that try to run."

Colonel Peter Brown has the reputation of being the toughest field commander in Rhodesia on terrorists. Intelligent, resourceful, he is a good boss.

"Sir, there's one problem we've got." Dick Cahill walked over to the map. "At the rear of this first base camp is a cliff. There are plenty of caves in that bugger, and the terrs could hide in them and give us hell."

"Dick, I'm aware of that—I've got 3.5s (rocket launchers) available in case that happens." He fixed the lieutenant with a flinty stare. "It's up to you chaps to make sure those CT's never make it to the caves."

"What about air?" I asked.

"We've got fire force standing by and two fixed wings to patrol out front," Brown replied. "See you two here first thing tomorrow. . .Cheers." The meeting was finished.

Cahill and I started back up the mountain. In our absence the troops, alerted by Dick's radio signal, had started minor preparations for the move. Like all good combat soldiers, they had organized their packing to a minimum, carrying only those items absolutely necessary for the mission.

As the sun went down it became bitterly cold; the wind increasing in velocity and lashing the branches of the pine trees under which we had encamped. The horses had been brought up from a nearby paddock by the African grooms close to the camp and picketed for ease of saddling the following morning. I'd unrolled my sleeping bag next to the medics' tent, thinking this would be a good place to shield myself from the wind. The tent did provide a shelter from the cold gusts but my nearness to the horses gave Beguta a target.

Somewhere around 0400 hours I was suddenly awakened by a resounding kick. Had it not been for the heavy padding in the mountain sleeping bag, I would have had a couple of broken ribs to start the day off with. Apparently the war between Beguta and me had begun.

Eating before a combat operation is a matter of individual concern. Many people can finish off a hearty breakfast as if they were going to walk to the nearest commuter train to ride to work. In my case I have found that coffee and toast are about all I can handle. I guess my "butterflies" are probably

more active than the average.

Cahill wanted me to stay with the command element where he could keep an eye on me, and since this was his troop that's where I would be. After breakfast things started speeding up; horses were loaded, vehicles were cranked and engines warmed up prior to the move down the side of the mountain. Looking at the horses, the first-class equipment and the vehicles, I couldn't help thinking of what I could have done in the Rutenga area with equipment such as this.

The troop had secured a new ambulance from somewhere and the driver asked me if I would like to ride down the mountain with him. I thought for a minute and then decided that if this was to be my only ride in the ambulance that day it would be fine. I told him that I trusted I would never have to see him on a professional basis.

Jouncing along the dusty roads, scattering goats and giggling picannins, we wound down the mountain like a long, dark green snake.

When we got to the assembly area, the morning had started to warm up. It looked like it was going to be a beautiful day, clear and cool. As each truck stopped off the roadside, the horses were quickly unloaded and led away by their riders. In the distance I could see a patchwork of mealie fields, green cornstalks chest-high, thatched-roof African huts and the beginnings of the kopjie that led to the terrs' base camp. We could see absolutely no movement of any kind, either in our immediate area or in the villages at the base of the kopjie. If the terrs were there they certainly were getting an eyeful of

us by now.

A liaison officer from the Territorial Force Rifle Company drove up, dismounted from his Landrover and walked over to where the lieutenant and I were standing. "Morning, gentlemen. . .we'll be in position shortly. I'll give you a shout when we're ready." He glanced at the mountain. "Should be interesting," he smiled.

Cahill pointed on the map to the approach route he'd planned to take. "Any of you blokes got any questions about what you're supposed to do?"

They shook their heads.

"All right, let's mount up."

A trooper touched me on the sleeve and said, "Sir, here's your mount." I turned and there was Beguta, all seventeen hands of him. He was as black as the ace of spades, with a hammerhead and Roman nose; he snorted and looked at me. I felt there was a similarity between his look and the one that Daniel had received entering the lion's den.

All the soldiers were watching me expectantly and I thought "what the hell!" I took my FN in my left hand, holding the sling between my thumb and forefinger and put it across his neck. I got my left foot in the stirrup and swung up on him. Handling an FN rifle and a handful of reins on any horse keeps you busy, but performing this act with Beguta is something else.

Lieutenant Cahill checked his radio with all call signs and we started moving out. Due to the terrain, we were moving in a wedge formation with flankers out on either side. Everything was suddenly very quiet. The only sounds we could hear

were the horses' hooves muffled by the sand. We had initially requested permission to put mortar fire of the base camp first on the list, but this was denied. Had we received it, we would have killed five terrs that were being fed about the time we started our approach march.

There was an abandoned hut off to my right and I moved Beguta over to it so I could check it out. It was empty and gave no sign of occupants.

A hundred meters ahead of us, three Africans burst from the bush, hands over their heads. All three were teen-agers, likely suspects. Running towards us, faces wet with sweat, their eyes never left our FN's. Cahill motioned them to the rear, where they would be met by intelligence officers for interrogation.

Sharply to our front the ground's slope rose sharply, forming the base of the mountain on whose peak we expected to find the terrorist base camp. Dusty grass gave way to scrubby underbrush and a series of hand constructed stone fences, some waist-high. I could make out the members of the point detail several hundred meters to our front, as they approached the first kraal and started searching the huts. Several Africans popped out of a hut, hands over their heads and were searched by two troopers who motioned for them to start toward us. Trotting down the slope, the locals would be added to the other detainees at the interrogation point.

As I watched the group approaching at a run, I wondered how many piccanins were now doing the same thing, only running toward the base camp to

warn the terrs of our presence. We would soon find out.

We started moving again, Beguta stepped along smartly, tossing his head and trying to hit me in the face with the top of his skull.

The point detail was now replaced with an equal number of troopers from the rear of our formation. They cantered by, leather working, water bottles thudding against their sides, sweeping through and around the village to provide perimeter security for the advancing column as we started up the side of the mountain. We now were forced to ride over increasingly rocky ground, the horses stumbling and sending small avalanches of rocks tumbling down the slope to our rear.

If the terrs were in the base camp, this would be a good time for them to open up on us with mortars, RPD's and AK's.

There was no way we could approach quietly now. The rustle of bushes, clang of horseshoes on rock and the intermittant snorts of the horses as they lunged upward were deafening. At least so it seemed to me.

The heavy underbrush started to thin out and I could make out the beginnings of a faint trail zig-zagging toward the top of the mountain. We moved off to the left and right of the trail, beginning the ascent.

Beguta suddenly decided he had had enough of staying with the rest of the horses that were climbing in a staggered line of skirmishers. Grabbing a mouthful of bit, he scrambled up ahead of the line of lathered mounts.

Although the slope was now steep enough to slow the advance of even the strongest horse, Beguta went up the mountain like a squirrel up a tree.

"For fuck's sake, hold up," yelled the lieutenant as the gelding roared past him. Useless words; I had slung my FN over my right shoulder and pulled the .44 Magnum from my holster. If I was going to get shot at, I damned sure didn't want to screw around with a long-barrelled rifle in this type bush.

Snorting, grunting, sweating and farting, the gelding carried me to the top of the mountain, bursting into the clearing where the huts of the terrorist base camp stood. There were five of them, hastily erected and crudely camouflaged with pieces of branches. I fully expected to be met with a hail of AK fire full in the face.

Still no sign of any terrs.

The sides of the mountain were so steep that the terrs had no need to fear an approaching enemy. Moreover, the last one hundred meters from the huts was covered with shale, rocks and small stones. To attempt a silent approach over this terrain would have been suicide; the resultant noise would alert the entire camp. The remainder of the call sign caught up with me and we searched the huts.

Whatever terrs had been in the camp were now hotfooting it towards Mozambique. We stopped, dismounted, loosened girths and let the horses blow before we started down. There were still four more camps to search and the sun was getting up toward noon.

Going back down the other side of the mountain proved to be a helluva lot harder than going up! It was impossible to ride the horses down, so each man had to lead his mount, the trooper carefully picking a path that would accommodate both the horse and him. Rumps tucked under them, forelegs scrambling to find purchase in the shale, each mount started down, their riders cursing, stumbling, trying to stay clear in the event of a sudden tumble that would put a horse squarely on top of them.

I didn't look behind me, because I could hear Beguta's snorts and knew if I took my eyes off the ground in front of me, it would result in my falling. I didn't like the prospect of one of those pie-plate-size hooves landing on my skull.

When we got to the bottom of the kopjie, we mounted up and turned north in the direction of the second base camp. The bush began to thin out and we started moving more rapidly, the troops spreading out and advancing by alternate bounds.

A small kraal consisting of only six huts shielded the next terr camp from our line of march. Several thin columns of blue smoke rose from the kraal. Cahill's radio broke the silence.

"Alpha. . .Bravo One." The voice was high-pitched.

"Bravo One, Alpha. . .got you five's," Cahill replied.

"Alpha, we've got five cooking fires still hot," the patrol leader reported from his position several hundred meters away.

"Bravo One, any spoor?" Cahill was studying the

scene through binoculars.

"Affirmative. . .figures six Charlie Tangos."

Cahill looked at me and nodded. "Let's check them out."

We moved toward the distant huts, first trotting, then cantering, dust boiling up underfoot to cake the horses nostrils and necks.

Reining up before a silent group of Africans standing guiltily by several large cooking pots, we sat for several moments and studied the scene.

Bubbling away in the large, black-painted pots was enough food for twenty people. There were only six Africans facing us. "How many people live in this kraal?" Cahill asked, using one of our African troopers as an interpreter.

The oldest of the group, a man of fifty or so, licked his lips and looked past Cahill toward the heavy bush to our rear. He said nothing. The African trooper, Thomas, kneed his horse forward and repeated the question in Shona.

The villager, eyes wide at the closeness of the horse, stammered an answer.

"Sah, he say twelve man."

"Bullshit!" Cahill snorted. "Where are they, then?"

Thomas translated and turned back to the troop commander with the answer. "He say they all gone—left yesterday." There was a sheen of sweat on the villager's face and his eyes were muddy with fear.

"He's lying—if they left yesterday they wouldn't be cooking now and wasting their food." Cahill called headquarters over the radio. "Zero—Alpha

One."

There was a moment's pause, then the reply, a high-pitched voice, cracked by static. . . "Alpha One this is Zero, send."

"Zero, we've got spoor of figures six at kraal number two, do you copy?" He waited.

"Roger, send," came from Zero.

"There are figures six locals who've been feeding." I watched Cahill, waiting for him to give the order to burn the kraal to the ground and turn the "feeders" over to the cops waiting below on the road.

"Aren't you going to burn?" I asked when nothing was said. He glanced at me then turned back to the radio.

"Zero. . .Alpha One — permission to burn and take feeders into custody?"

The response from headquarters was immediate this time. "Negative, Alpha One—do not, repeat do not burn or apprehend. Continue search, over."

I shook my head in disgust and spat in the dirt. "Unless you stop these fuckers from feeding the terrs there's no way we're going to win this!"

Cahill shrugged, sent a "Roger" back to headquarters and motioned the patrol forward, leaving behind a smirking group of Africans grinning at their success.

You have to ride on patrol with the Greys to fully appreciate the tremendous mobility the horses furnish. In many instances terrs are successful in outdistancing infantry units, but there's no way any terr is going to outrun an element from Grey's Scouts.

The day wore on, the sun got hotter and we continued searching. All we got for our pains were lathered horses, sweaty brows and sore asses. No matter! Our presence was causing the CT's to run, keeping them moving and possibly making them break to a new base camp we could locate. This was truly a cat and mouse affair.

We searched the remaining base camps and, with the exception of scattered items of clothing, found no signs of CT's.

As I dismounted and handed the reins to a trooper, I realized that I missed the goffles and wondered if I'd made the correct decision in coming to the Greys. At least the terrs in the southeastern operational area where the galloping goffles and I had operated, would fight before they ran.

Cahill conducted a quick debriefing of the troops at the assembly area, then loaded horses and troops on waiting vehicles and started back up the mountain to the CP.

It was growing dark by the time we arrived and with the setting sun came the drop in temperature, increasing wind and bitter cold. In addition to the fatigue of animals and men, there was a sense of frustration.

Although normally the ratio of kills to dry runs was high, this war did produce a certain amount of impatience on the part of combat troops. We would have preferred going into Zambia, Mozambique and Botswana, knocking the hell out of the raggedy-assed, self-styled "freedom fighters," and totally destroying every damned base camp in existence.

The troop commander and I were having a cup of tea when the duty signaller stuck his head out of the CP tent and yelled, "Sir, JOC wants to talk to you." The message we received from the JOC commander stated that we were to report back to his HQ the following morning.

Walking back to the fire, shoulders hunched against the gusts of cold wind, we speculated on the purpose of the briefing. It seemed highly unlikely there were any further base camps in the area and we hoped it would be something that would give us a chance to get our hands on some CT's.

Cahill stopped at the fire. "See you in the morning, Major Mike, I'm going to put my head down." I watched him disappear into the darkness.

The fire died out and I could hear the "prowlers," troopers assigned perimeter security details, checking their radios. With this cold, they wouldn't have any trouble keeping awake.

Unzipping my sleeping bag, I decided to leave my boots on. A damned good thing I did. Two bright green flares arched high in the air about 500 meters to our southeast in the general direction of the airstrip. Their light illuminated the entire camp as the wind blew them toward us.

Before the order "Stand To" was given, troopers were struggling out of sleeping bags and bed rolls, running to their fire pits. The pucker factor was high and I expected incoming mortars to blast our asses off within minutes. Because of the thick woods between us and the airstrip, it was difficult to make a range estimate.

"Zero this is Five, over."

"Roger Five, Zero go." I was glad the radio worked. Miracle! Radios in all armies work when they feel like it.

"Zero, we've had figures two green flares approximately 500 meters southeast of our position." I put the directions in code, so the terrs monitoring our transmissions couldn't use them as an aid in adjusting mortar fire.

"Request permission to put mortars on that area." A few seconds later I wished that I had fired first and told JOC about it afterwards.

"Negative, do not fire. We don't want the trees to burn."

Shit, what a way to fight a war. "Keep us informed, over."

I stood looking at the radio, feeling like an idiot. "Roger, out." Cahill stood at the side of the tent watching me. "No mortars. We'll have to send out a patrol," he said.

I rounded up six men, took a radio and moved out, warning the prowlers that we would contact them when we started back in.

"Don't zap us," our radio man said anxiously as we passed the last prowler. It was absolutely pitch black with little or no illumination from the stars. We stumbled along, carefully placing our boots to avoid branches and potholes formed by cattle tracks. Two hours later we returned. No contact, no sound except for the wind whipping treetops. I had the troops stand down and we spent a restless night.

I felt the CT flares were meant as an "all clear" signal, fired by a scout element who preceded a

larger group enroute from Mozambique into Rhodesia.

Another patrol was dispatched the next morning to the air strip to check for spoor. Tracks of approximately six were found but soon lost due to rocky ground.

"JOC wants to see us both. Colonel Brown just signalled a minute ago," I told Cahill and we walked over to his jeep. We wheeled out to the road, heading once again down the mountain. Regardless of what Colonel Brown wanted, Cahill's R&R would start today, giving him a well-earned ten-day break.

We reached JOC Inyanga and the briefing was short and to the point. Colonel Brown pointed to the situation map. "I want you to move from your present position to Rusape. A stay-behind element will start a cross-country sweep in your direction to see if they can flush any Charlie Tangos." He looked at the sergeant major I'd brought with me.

"Who'll be in command of the recon group?"

The NCP pointed to himself.

O.K., Sergeant Major, you'll contact Major Williams when you're ready to move out. By that time he should have stop groups in place."

"Sir, what about aircraft?" I wanted some 'eyes in the sky'.

"We'll see what we can do, but no promises." Colonel Brown pointed to a TTL to the west of Weya. "The CTs in this area are cheeky. They've ambushed two Intaf patrols, fired on the camp housing the District Commissioner and planted mines along the road between the camp and town."

When I heard the name Rusape I had hoped to get another crack at St. Benedict's Mission and Weya, still intending to even the score with Father Aloan, but Colonel Brown dashed that plan.

"I don't want anything done to the Mission near the Intaf Camp. Army has given me a direct order and I know you won't put me in the shit, Mike." He smiled but there was no doubt in anyone's mind that he meant exactly what he said.

"We won't let you down, sir," I replied and stood up from the bench next to the map board.

"Any questions?"

"No, sir." We saluted and left. Dick Cahill's R&R started when we walked out of the building and I saw him off to Umtali. As he started to drive away, I yelled for him to leave me one of his Labrador retrievers, but he shook his head and said they both had R&R coming, and wouldn't appreciate being left behind.

As we started the Landrover, I told the sergeant major to raise our CP on the radio and have them begin loading vehicles for the move.

The camp was partially struck when I drove up and the sergeant major hopped out, taking charge of the loading. He would command the convoy while I preceded it to Rusape and reported in to the Sub-JOC Commander.

It's not a long drive from Inyanga to Rusape. The road is first class and I made good time, arriving a little before teatime.

There were the same faces at Rusape that I had known from my previous tour there with the "Goffle Cavalry." Needless to say, there weren't

any brass bands out to meet us. Obviously the prospect of having more horse soldiers in the area didn't fill them with joy! This still was basically a cop-oriented JOC, with the police providing the bulk of troops and exercising strong control over operations that were mounted from that command post. We were lucky and managed to obtain a bivouac area on a local ranch some fifteen km's to the south of Rusape. Plenty of water, graze and paddocks for the horses, a good area for vehicle turn around, ready access to a hard surface road and an airstrip made this an excellent company CP.

We were out of the mountains now and away from the bitter cold. All in all, I felt it was a change for the better.

Technically, I would be under the control of Sub-JOC Rusape since we would be operating in their zone of responsibilities. Colonel Peter Brown, at JOC Inyanga, would issue my actual orders, however, and that made me feel a lot better. I knew the cops hadn't forgotten my last visit to Weya with the goffles. Rusape would act only as a radio relay station.

We had a day's rest before I had to start to work. This war is like fighting ten rounds; you have to pace yourself or it's possible to really punch yourself out early in the match.

The commander at Rusape briefed me the following morning. We were to execute a search and destroy mission in an area surrounding the Intaf Camp at Danda TTL, about six hours drive northwest of Rusape. A light aircraft had been assigned and would be on station overhead when he moved

out from the Intaf Camp.

The terrain over which we would operate was good horse country—open, rolling hills with scattered bush. There were a few large kopjies that I knew would be used as observation posts by the terrs, giving them a 360° view of the countryside. Once again we were faced with the prospect of traveling over dirt roads in a TTL.

Throughout all Rhodesian TTL's, Soviet TM-46 land mines are the standard weapon used by terrorists against Rhodesian security forces. Although very effective, they are nonetheless vulnerable to anti-mine operations by army engineers. The biggest break we had was our old friend, the ever-present "K" factor. In one instance involving this phenomenon, there was the planting of a TM-36 by three so-called "freedom fighters."

After carefully digging a hole in a dirt road leading into the TTL, the terrs gingerly placed the mine into position. They covered it with earth, then suddenly realized they had forgotten to tamp down the covering soil. Joining hands, they began jumping up and down on the mound of earth, heavy boots packing the soil over the detonator.

The resulting explosion blew all three into the top branches of a nearby baobab tree. Patrols found their remains the next day.

We arrived at the Intaf Camp late in the afternoon, unloaded the horses, dispersed the vehicles, and got comfortable for the night.

I spoke with the T/F Rifle Company Commander who had his command post set up inside the Intaf administration block. He was pulling out the following day and moving to a different area. His patrols had come up empty-handed, but they had found some spoor and it was evident that the locals were hiding the CT's as usual, because tracks led to nearby kraals.

One of the Intaf officers discussed the area between our camp and the objective. Using a pencil, he drew a line on my map, indicating a road that would be suitable for the horse-carrying vehicles and would get us to the assembly area I'd selected.

That evening after the dinner meal, I briefed the call-sign commanders. After covering the important tactical points, I warned them about the Catholic mission in the area, and repeated what Colonel Peter Brown had told me.

"Men, under no circumstances are we to enter the mission grounds or have any contact with that priest."

"Sir, what are we going to do if we cut spoor that leads into the mission?" I looked at the corporal asking the question and shook my head.

"If we do find spoor, I'll get on the blower back to JOC Inyanga, and from there it's up to them to make a decision." The looks that passed among the troopers reflected my own feelings. What a fucked-up way to fight a war!

It is common knowledge among all combat troops in the Rhodesian Army who risk their lives in the bush daily, that the bulk of the Catholic missions are not only sympathetic to the CT's, but are feeding, harboring and assisting them.

The next morning at 0730, we were ready to go, our vehicles lined up on the road waiting for the

arrival of our spotter aircraft. He was supposed to be on station overhead at 0745.

At 0900, there was still no sign of any aircraft. I figured the hell with it, and gave the signal to move out. About ten km's down the road, the plane caught up with us. An impeccable Oxonian voice came over the radio assuring us that everything was well since he was there. I was immediately overwhelmed. "Good show, pip-pip!"

Any resemblance between a road the internal affairs official had drawn on my map and the goat trail we were now crashing and banging over was purely coincidental. I stopped the vehicles, unloaded horses and troops and mounted up. Scouts and flankers out, we started toward the objective that was marked by a large kopjie to the west. The terrain was rolling and broken, scarred by an occasional donga, or deep gulley. Scrub and underbrush dotted the open fields. Mombies, African cattle, scattered at the sight of the horses.

"Alpha, this is Mike." The 60mm mortar crew was calling.

"Roger, Mike, read you fives." I pulled up for a moment, so I could listen to his transmission.

"Alpha, we're in position." They were to use the thick bush on the forward slope of the kopjie; the objective was a kraal on the south side of a dry stream bed some 300 meters from the hill.

While we were approaching the riverbed with the assault group, three call signs forming stop groups had detached from the main body, moving through heavy bush to take up blocking positions to stop CTs who would attempt to run at the ap-

pearance of the horses.

"Alpha, this is Bravo." The Oxford accent again. I looked up and finally spotted him flying in circles overhead. Unfortunately, he was at an altitude of about 5,000 feet; this put him well out of small-arms range in case some gook with an AK wanted to try his luck, but made him useless to me.

"O.K., Bravo, got you fives loud and clear. What's your problem?"

"I say, old chap, there are figures five locals running to the west."

"Roger, how about you dropping down and indicating their direction to Blue One," I asked, hoping he would help that call sign get after the terrs.

"Negative, Alpha, we'll stay up here and direct the operation. Out." Great, now we had the air force running the show. Shit and two makes four! Worse was yet to come!

The British Empire flew on, in graceful circles a mile in the sky.

"Sergeant Olivier, dismount here," I ordered, pointing to an area of thick bush. We got off and tied the animals. The riverbed was visible fifty yards ahead.

"Mike, this is Alpha, commence firing," I called over the radio. "Over."

"Roger, Alpha, on the way." A few seconds later there was a hollow thump from the kopjie and we hit the prone, burying our noses in the sand, waiting for the incoming round. Ka-blam! A shower of dirt mixed with roof-thatching sailed into view at the far side of the kraal.

The second round was short. Was it ever!

Twenty-five yards in front of where we were talking to the ants, a shower of sand, rocks and branches exploded. Shards of metal whirred past our heads. Goddamn!

"Hello, Mike, Bravo heah. . .good shooting, old chap, drop figgahs two fiyev," the pilot radioed to the mortar crew.

I grabbed the mike. "Negative, negative! Disregard!" I was panting, bracing myself for the next round. Reducing the range by twenty-five yards would drop the rounds on us.

"Mike, this is Alpha. . .If you drop two five, the next one will be in our hip pocket."

"Mike, Bravo heah. . .I say again, drop two fiyev."

"Bravo, this is Alpha," I shouted into the radio. "Get off the fucking air."

"I say, you chaps, you simply must watch your radio procedure," the pilot chided me.

I ignored him. "Mike, this is Alpha. . .do not, repeat, do not take any further fire direction from anyone but me!"

"Roger D, Alpha, understand. Next round, add five zero."

I was half-laughing, half-pissing, sweat soaking my face. We'd damned near bought the farm from our own people, thanks to the air force.

The next three rounds in succession blew hell out of the kraal. With smoke from a last HE round drifting in a dirty grey cloud toward us, we got up, checked the bush on the opposite river bank and started across the sand. Halfway there, the trooper at the left of the skirmish line cut loose with a Z-42

rifle grenade. We watched it arc over the bushes and explode against the side of the nearest hut.

There was a flurry of movement in the scrub and Sergeant Olivier started firing his Uzi. I went down and lined up on the bushes, squeezing off double-taps, aiming at about knee height.

In the midst of the fourth mortar round, three big crazy-ass roosters with a harem of four hens madly sauntered right through the hail of 7.62 rounds, contentedly pecking at corn husks lying on the sand.

We jumped up, then ran through the line of huts. In two of them we threw incendiary grenades that contained pieces of terr clothing. Cooking fires were still burning, food in the pots. Same story. The terrs had bugged out before we arrived.

We found spoor of eight on the far side of the kraal. They'd bombshelled, as usual.

The intrepid aviator had flown off, apparently back to Rusape.

"Sir, d'you want to follow-up on this spoor?"

Sergeant Olivier pointed to the tracks leading towards the next suspected base camp.

"Hell, yes, let's see if we can catch those buggers." I didn't feel as confident as I sounded.

By the time we could mount up, start tracking and close on the next kraal, the locals would have received the CT, fed him, driven their mombies over all tracks, obliterating them, and the terr would be in a neighboring kraal shacking up with one of the nannies.

Nonetheless we started off.

As I expected, that's precisely what happened.

We followed the spoor to a large kraal, where the tracks disappeared in a welter of mombie hoofprints.

Olivier started questioning the village headman in a mixture of French-accented English and Shona. "What ees it you are, some kind of a cunt?" he began.

The village headman knew nothing about any terrs. He knew nothing about any tracks, in spite of my showing them to him. In short, he knew nothing.

In a pig's ass, he didn't!

CHAPTER 2

Matabeles and a D.C.'s Private Army

AT THE COMMAND post of Internal Affairs at Danda TTL Tony Stephens radioed me, saying that something of extreme importance was at hand—so important that he was sending a fixed wing aircraft to pick me up.

He was waiting at Charles Prince Airport, the center for light aviation operations in Salisbury, and wasted no time in driving us to Grey's headquarters at Inkomo where he led me into the ops room, closed the door behind us and walked over to the wall-sized sit map.

"Right here!" he triumphantly announced, stabbing a point on the acetate with his forefinger.

"Right there what?" I asked, wondering if he was beginning to fray at the edges from too much strain.

"Squadron headquarters, you twit. . .what else?" he snorted. "Army's given us the go-ahead to form a complete squadron out of all the troops. They'll be called in and sent to Lupane."

Well, I'll be damned! He'd actually pulled it off.

"You're not going to be very popular with the JOC commanders when they get the order to send the troops in their areas back to Lupane. They won't be happy about losing those bodies."

"Can't be helped," he said airily and lit a cigarette. I took a closer look at the area Tony had indicated on the map. There was a small square a few km's off the Bulawayo-Victoria Falls road bearing the black letters LUPANE. The TTL to its north bore the same name.

"Have you got kit with you for a couple of days?"

I looked wearily at him, knowing what was coming next. "Yep. . .I presume we're going down there now?" I asked.

"Dead right, my dear chap—we are indeed." He smiled and led the way to the Landrover. We piled into it and roared out of the gate. As we drove along the highway, back to Charles Prince, he explained. "Mike, we'll first go to brigade at Bulawayo, have a talk with the JOC Commander, then pop over to Lupane for a chat with the fuzz."

He swerved to miss a twelve-foot-long green mamba that was wriggling madly across the road, desperately seeking the safety of the bush on the far side. "Bloody snakes. . .always mucking about!"

Tony reached the side road leading to Charles Prince, braked and skidded onto the bumpy, dirt stretch. Ahead I could see the small, white-painted building housing the control tower. There was a neat line of hangars. A few light aircraft, mostly Cessnas and Pipers, were parked on the tarmac.

We left the jeep behind one of the hangars and walked out to the gas pumps where a yellow Cessna 210 was waiting.

Tony introduced us. "Mike, this is Joe Brown, one of our troopers." I shook hands with the pilot, a lanky, blond farmer who did his periodic call-ups

with Grey's Scouts. His airplane was a godsend to us. Getting a ride on air force equipment wasn't all that difficult but it still took some arranging. The 210 really made a difference.

"A pleasure, Mike." Joe grinned and held the door open for Tony and me. We crawled into the cabin. In a few minutes we were airborne, heading for Bulawayo.

"Mike," Tony called over the engine noise, "within the next few days the troops should be completely settled in at Lupane. There's a possibility that number one troop could be at the railhead tomorrow."

"How far from the CP is the railhead?" I asked.

Tony shook his head. "Not to worry. . .it's only a few km's."

I remembered the situation at Sarahuru. If you're using horses, the importance of having unloading facilities at hand is not to be overlooked. The animals can walk, but if heavy equipment is to be transported on their backs the pace is slowed because it's necessary to adjust the speed of the column to that of the pack horses.

Beneath us the beauty of Rhodesia's farming land stretched out to the horizon. Thousands upon thousands of acres provided some of the best cattle ranching area in the world.

The strides made by a handful of white settlers since 1895 were incredible. In a land of 7.5 million blacks, 250,000 whites had built a showplace for all of Africa to envy.

Now, with the help of the U.S. and England, the Soviet-trained terrorists of Joshua Nkomo and

Robert Mugabe were pouring into Rhodesia like ants. Crossing from Zambia and Mozambique they were intent on destroying everything that had taken years to build. Thanks to the treachery and cowardice of the Carter Administration, Soviet puppets were running wild in Africa.

Under the active encouragement of the pro-Marxist Andrew Young, ZAPU-ZANU thugs were butchering hundreds of defenseless women and children. Missionaries, priests and nuns were also dying, riddled with bullets from Russian-made weapons.

Joe touched down at the Bulawayo Municipal Airport and taxied the Cessna to a hangar that serviced light aircraft. A staff car from Brady Barracks was waiting and we transferred our kit to the trunk.

Traffic on the main road was light and it was a short time later when the driver turned into the entrance to One Brigade headquarters. Clearing with the security guard at the wooden barrier, we followed the winding drive to the headquarters parking area.

"Joe, we'll meet you at the WVS Canteen in about a half-hour." Tony pointed to a wooden building near the main entrance.

"Dead right." The pilot grinned and started walking in that direction, eagerly following the mincing steps of a round-assed little RWS, Rhodesian army lady soldier. The Rhodesian Womens' Services provided women for secretarial and various other administrative jobs throughout the army. They were damned helpful and generally provided

a welcome change to the all-male surroundings.

"Major Stephens and Major Williams," Tony announced our arrival to the clerk seated behind a wire-mesh cage guarding the entrance to the building.

"Please go in, gentlemen." The soldier pressed a buzzer allowing us to pass through the door and proceed down a hallway to the briefing room, our boot heels thudding on polished wood floors. We entered a large room bright with fluorescent light.

Standing near the doorway, I glanced around me. The many situation maps covering the walls of the room reminded me that the profession of arms is truly an international one. Except for differences in terminology this could have been a War Room in army headquarters anywhere in the world.

"Pardon me, would you gentlemen care for tea?" Large blue eyes, a snub nose sprayed with freckles, full red lips and a truly staggering pair of boobs straining against a thin blouse brought Tony and me to life.

"Tea would be super." Tony's eyes and mine followed her as she undulated into the next room. How the hell could you keep an eye on the war with that around?

In icy tones, the brigade commander brought us out of "teatville" and back to reality. "If you're finished, can we get down to business?"

"Um, oh, good morning, sir." We both stood to attention, Tony beginning an introduction.

The commander cut him short. "I know Williams from Llewelin Barracks." His tone stopped further pleasantries. "Come over here." He walked across

the room to a large map of Western Rhodesia. His finger tapped a familiar spot off the Bulawayo-Victoria Falls road. "I want your people to move into this area and begin operations as soon as possible."

The letters on the map spelled LUPANE—above them a huge area outlined in black as a Tribal Trust Land also bore the same name—LUPANE TTL.

"Initially, you'll be operating alone but it's possible I'll put you in control of JOC Wankie." The commander, straightening his blouse, nodded imperiously. "Get your briefing at the RIC."

So Rhodesian Intelligence Corps was next. We were dismissed. "Thank you, sir." We both saluted as his immaculately clad back disappeared into his office.

We got a glance at the booby-baby again as her mammaries, preceded by a tray full of tea, cups and tiny sandwiches, hove into view.

She stopped and turned the full wattage of her blue eyes on us. "Where would you gentlemen like it?"

Tony gave a strangled snort. I gritted my teeth. Eyelashes batt-batted. "I mean, um, the tea?"

I had dizzying visions of snapping at her crotch like an anteater in heat. "Um, we'd like it on the table," Tony said, choking back a giggle.

As she leaned over to put down the tray, the front of the blouse opened a bit, revealing the creamy cleavage to a pair of beauties the size of small cantaloupes.

"Thank you." I bowed, fighting down an urge to

pinch. "Are you a native of Bulawayo?" I smiled, hoping she would ignore the sweaty camouflage and look upon me as a kindly though horny father figure.

"Um, ah yes," the white teeth flashed. "My husband and I grew up here," she replied demurely.

Husband? My luck was incredible. The way it was going I couldn't get laid in a cathouse. "Thank you for the tea," I mumbled as Tony led me off.

Outside in the sunshine I turned to Tony. "I thought we'd gotten away from this bullshit of being parcelled out under some JOC. You know as well as I do what's going to happen if we go back to that." I stopped, wiped the sweat off my face and continued. "It's a cinch some JOC commander will split up the squadron and send each troop to a different rifle company."

"Possible, but I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"The brigade commander wants to keep the squadron under his control and send it wherever he thinks there's a good chance of making a really big kill!"

This line of reasoning might not have been totally accurate but it did raise my hopes.

Like any other specialized unit, we had big problems with area commanders. Common sense dictates that unless a commander thoroughly understands the capabilities and limitations of an attached unit, he should get a thorough briefing from the unit commander before the outfit was committed.

Unfortunately, this was rarely the case. Human

nature being what it is, it was a rare commander who would admit his ignorance. Doubly so, in our case, because of the horses. As a result, the proper use of cavalry was a mystery. In the past, whenever a Grey's Scout troop had been sent to a rifle company the first order received was to "get off those bloody horses and move out on foot." We'd already experienced this phenomenon on a number of occasions, therefore the fear that our operating as a squadron would be short-lived was based on fact.

"How about that little tea girl?" smirked my leader.

"Yes, how about her? More correctly, what about her. . .she's very married." I was glum.

"That may be, but I have it on very good authority that her little hubby is operating a patrol boat on Lake Kariba, which, if I may point out, is a long, long way from here!" Tony patted me on the shoulder.

Hmmmm. . .the war was looking up.

We stopped in front of an adjacent building bearing the sign RIC. Rhodesian Intelligence Corps is a highly effective organization. It furnishes much-needed information about activities of ZAPU-ZANU forces facing Rhodesian units in the field. Without this information, the combat unit commander is playing Blind-Man's Bluff with a murderous, savage enemy.

We were met by the local representative, a white-haired NCO. "Gentlemen, take a pew." He pushed two chairs in front of a map, picked up a wooden pointer and, without further ado, began.

"Lupane TTL bordering the road that connects

Bulawayo with Victoria Falls is one of the largest trust lands in Rhodesia. It's over one hundred and eighty kilometers wide and ninety deep. It's also the site of the massacre of Alan Wilson's mounted patrol by the Matabeles. That was on the Shangani River in 1897."

His delivery was almost professional. He continued. "As you probably know, the Matabeles are descendants of Zulus and form the only true warrior tribe found in Rhodesia. They're considerably outnumbered by the Mashona, the second of the two largest tribes." He smiled. "Your unit operating in the Lupane will be history repeating itself—the original Grey's Scouts rode and fought over this same terrain eighty years ago."

While we listened to him, I thought. . .I'd never fought Matabeles before. The terrs in Matibi One had been Mashonas—a rag-tag, bob-tailed group almost totally without discipline of any kind.

For the next twenty-five minutes, the sergeant methodically covered terrorist personalities, tactics, weapons, supply routes, sympathizers and methods used to enter Lupane TTL.

"Any further questions, gentlemen?" he asked, replacing his pointer on the table.

"No, thank you very much, Sergeant." Tony stood up and we shook hands with the RIC chap.

As we turned to leave, he added, "Sir, I think you'll find that the terrs in Lupane will be much different that those around, say, Inyanga." He paused to light a cigarette. "These bastards follow Chairman Mao's little Red Book. . .they try and make friends with the locals, pay for anything they

take, and as of yet haven't beaten or shot anyone."

Strange actions indeed, I thought.

The day was still young enough to give us time to fly to Lupane and talk with the cops. Our driver was sitting in the staff car reading a newspaper. He glanced up and quickly got out, opening the door for us. "Back to the airstrip, sir?" he asked.

"Right, let's roll."

The Cessna had been fueled by the service personnel and Joe filed a flight plan from their telephone. We were off for Lupane.

The day had grown steadily hotter and updrafts from the plowed fields caused the aircraft to bounce around like a cork in a whirlpool. Markedly different from the rolling plains of the midlands, the terrain beneath us proclaimed we were entering the ancestral lands of the Matabele.

Rough, broken areas merged into vast forested expanses, devoid of any movement. Looking down on the unending green cover, it was easy to see why the CT's were interested in using this area. The narrow ribbon of asphalt cutting through the forest was vulnerable to vehicle ambush at any point. Escape by the attackers would be easy in any direction.

Joe punched me on the arm, pointing ahead. "There's Lupane and the cop shop."

I could make out a cluster of wooden buildings and an airstrip that appeared to have been hacked out of the surrounding bush. A dirt trail linked it with a side road.

Tony leaned over and asked, "Can you raise them on the blower?"

"I'll try but if we can't, I'll buzz them and somebody'll come down to pick us up." Joe picked up the mike and tried several times but received no answer.

"Let's get their attention." He dropped the left wing and rolled out of a steep turn on a heading that took us directly over the building complex. With a roar, the Cessna shot past the headquarters. Several heads popped out of a window and a flurry of activity erupted. Two figures ran out of the doorway, and headed for a dark green Landrover parked near a gas pump.

A voice suddenly burst over the cabin loudspeaker. "Aircraft calling Lupane. . .say again your call sign." Joe laughed and replied. "Roger, Lupane—X-ray Yoke Papa. Request transport from your strip—over."

"X-ray Yoke Papa this is Delta Charlie—we'll fetch you, old chap." The voice was syrupy but with an undertone of command.

"Who the hell's that?" I turned to Tony.

"It's the bloody D.C." came his amazed reply.

The air strip was three kilometers north of the police station. Running east-west it was completely surrounded by heavy bush except for an open area of approximately one hundred meters on the east side. Joe flew over it several times, all three of us in the cabin checking the area around the dusty, rough strip very carefully.

It wasn't unheard of for the terrs to conceal themselves in heavy bush at the side of an isolated airstrip, wait for an itinerant light aircraft to roll to a stop, then riddle plane and occupants with AK fire.

"Okay, it looks all right." Joe said and lined rip on his final approach. He put us on the ground gently, clouds of dust blowing behind us in the blistering heat.

We braked to a stop and crawled out of the hot cabin. As usually occurs, the appearance of an aircraft is matched by the materialization of picannins popping out of the nearby bush like gnomes. They lined the fence at the edge of the runway, giggling, chattering and pointing at the visitors who bridged the gap between their jungle life and the space age.

Tony wiped a bare forearm across his sweating face. "God, it's going to be a scorcher."

"Worse than the low veldt at Rutenga," I agreed.

We could hear the sound of a vehicle, then the cops' Landrover careened around the curve of the road at the runway's end. At the sight of the jeep, the picannins scattered, laughing and waving.

The Landrover skidded to a halt next to the Cessna and the young constable sitting next to the driver hopped to the ground.

"Sah, P.C. Eddins, Lupane," he ripped off a textbook British salute, matching it with an infectious grin.

Smooth-faced and pink-cheeked, Eddins' appearance didn't fool me. I'd been in the bush long enough to know that youthful faces have no bearing on the individual's ability to shoot. Some of the deadliest shots in Rhodesia are fifteen-year-old farm boys who are more merciless than the toughest soldier.

"Sir, the member-in-charge wants me to fetch

you straight-away." Eddins hurried us off to the waiting jeep. Noticing Joe's gaze toward Africans lining the fence rail, the constable indicated his driver. "He'll look out for the aircraft while we're gone.

The driver dismounted, picked up his FN and walked toward the aircraft, motioning for the Africans to move along.

In ones, twos and threes the gaping crowd trotted off, casting giggling glances back over their shoulders at the Cessna and its police guard.

Leaving the airstrip we turned right and drove past a large military-appearing complex. Surrounded by a high wire fence the compound appeared to be a barracks area of some kind.

"I didn't know you had army troops here," I said.

"No, that's the local D.C.'s bailiwick," grinned Eddins. "He's got his own bloody private army." The constable shook his head. "He's into everything that happens here."

I noted at least forty smartly dressed African troops wearing the khaki battle dress and red hatband of Internal Affairs. They were doing close order drill with what appeared to be brand new HKS rifles. "With that kind of manpower available, what are we doing here?" I asked.

"Don't ask me. . .he's got a helluva lot more troops than we have," snorted Eddins.

We passed several African stores on our right and soon braked to a stop in front of the Lupane BSAP station.

Police stations in "hot" operational areas, and this one was no exception, are heavily sandbagged

to stop mortar or sniper rounds.

"The member-in-charge is this way, sir." Eddins led us up the steps and into a hot, airless office. Several African constables were seated at a desk writing reports and I nodded to them as we passed. These poor buggers are really between the proverbial rock and a hard place; if the terrs were successful in overrunning Rhodesia, the future of the blacks in the BSAP would be grim. They would be the first group to go to the nearest wall and be shot.

Their loyalties to the Smith government, however, were unquestioned and they were very proud of their role in Rhodesia's fight against Communism. Looking at the nearest middle-aged constable I suddenly remembered the bloated bullet-riddled corpse of another black policeman, lying in the back of a police Landrover parked at Tjoloto BSAP headquarters.

Surprised at his home by two armed terrs, the constable, who'd retired from the police earlier, could have remained silent when asked for identification. Instead, he ordered the two teen-aged CT's to hand over their weapons. Both youths emptied their weapons into the unarmed man's chest. Uncommon bravery is a common occurrence in the Rhodesian bush. I have never met braver people anywhere in my life.

"Sir, this is Inspector Hawkins," Eddins indicated a stocky balding man in his late thirties.

"I'm Mike Williams—Tony Stephens you already know, I believe." I motioned to my boss.

"Right. Please take a pew. . .care for some tea?"

Hawkins asked. I'd finally gotten used to the unusual habit of drinking steaming tea when the bush temperature was 120 degrees.

We pulled up some chairs and sat down. Facing us was a map of the Lupane area. Scattered around on its surface was a series of small red pins giving it the look of a minor case of measles.

"Gentlemen, as you can see, almost all the incidents have either been store robberies, bus robberies or the murders of local headmen."

Hawkins walked around his desk. "The basis for the bus robberies is obvious, the money is used to repay the locals for whatever food the terrs take from them." He indicated an area to the northwest. "Here we've had several murders—all in an effort to force the locals into furnishing the terrs with information about our movements."

"Still no beatings or rapes?" I asked.

Hawkins shrugged. "None whatsoever."

"Our informants say that the CT's are telling the locals that security forces are afraid to come into their area." The member-in-charge grinned as he made the statement.

There was a short burst of laughter from everyone, then Hawkins' face became serious. "I know it sounds silly to you, but the fact of the matter is that the terrs have gotten the locals convinced that this really is the truth."

Tony leaned back in his chair and lit a cigarette. "Have the CT's taken a whack at any of your patrols?"

"No, that's the problem. If we could make contact with the CT's and kill a couple, this type of

propaganda could be stopped immediately." The inspector mopped his face with a handkerchief, his voice angry.

"They're taking no chances on losing any of their people. I'm damned glad to see that you're going to be here with us. Maybe we can knock the arrogance out of these bastards." Hawkins put down the pointer and sat down at the small table.

"Tony, I need to fly a reconnaissance over the entire area. . .Do we have time before we have to start back to Inkomo?" I asked, looking at my watch.

"No problem as long as we get back to Bulawayo before dark. I don't think Joe's in that much of a hurry."

"Thanks again, Inspector. We'll look forward to seeing you shortly." I started for the door but stopped. There was a map of Lupane lying on the table and I asked if I could borrow it for the aerial reconnaissance. Hawkins offered the sheet. "Only a pleasure, Mike. Take it with you."

Horses have special requirements that must be met before they can be committed to an operational area—water and fodder are vital. Generally they can graze off the land as we go. There is one consideration that seriously affects their operation: the presence of tsetse flies. To ignore this little insect is to court disaster. Men and horses can and do operate in tsetse fly country but they do so at one helluva risk. Since the tsetse fly fence ran along the northern boundary of our assigned area, I hoped we wouldn't be forced by tactical consideration to cross it.

We said our goodbyes and walked outside to the waiting Landrover. Inspector Hawkins followed us and I turned to him as I started to climb into the vehicle. "What's the story on the local DC?"

"You'll find out all about that when you get settled in. He runs everything in this area. The last army chaps that were here really had their hands full with him."

I nodded, thinking about the platoon of smartly dressed African district assistants with their new rifles.

Eddins cranked up the jeep and wheeled us back onto the road. Driving past the DC's "castle" I noted that the parade ground was still filled with his private bodyguards still working diligently away on perfecting their manual of arms.

Strange goings-on, what with terrs running wild in the bush.

Eddins and the other constable stood by the fence as Joe taxied down the strip and turned into the wind for takeoff.

As usual, the crowd of eager Africans—picannins, nannies and old folks came trotting from the bush to watch us leave the ground.

Jolting along the runway in a cloud of dust, sticks, rocks and goat shit, Joe picked up takeoff speed, hauled back on the controls and started climb-out.

"Joe, can you fly the boundaries of our area?" I asked as we gained altitude. I gave him the map and using a pencil traced the outlines of the area we'd be responsible for. It was a godawful big one for a handful of horse soldiers. Since Rutenga, I

was used to that type of military phenomenon so I prepared for the worst.

I decided to fly east, then intercepting our boundary line, turn north to the Shanghai River, scene of Allan Wilson's death. Following the power line west towards Victoria Falls we'd turn south to intercept the Bulawayo road, using the Gwai river as a guide.

Even with all the fresh air vents in the cockpit, it was stifling and the outside air was bumpy as hell, causing Joe hard work with the controls.

The ground below wasn't as forbidding as I'd anticipated. There was plenty of water in both water holes, or pans, and a surprising amount still visible in the Shangani river.

African mombies, native cattle, were much in evidence. That usually meant graze was available; where they fed, so could our horses.

The numbers of kraals were few, but those that were visible had been constructed in neat, orderly fashion. In addition to his fighting capabilities, the Matabele is a clean, proud individual, far different from his Shona counterpart.

Where the villages of the Mashonas were built in a haphazard manner, those I was now looking at were as carefully laid out as if by surveyors. I turned to Stephens and asked him if there was anything more he wanted to see before we began the trip back to Inkomo.

"No, I've seen all I need to. When you come back down in a couple of days, I'll have the CP all set up and the troops sorted out."

Joe looked inquiringly at me. "Let's go home," I

said, and he banked the Cessna, heading back toward Bulawayo.

CHAPTER 3

A Russian Land Mine

JOE STOPPED AT Bulawayo on the return trip to Inkomo and refueled.

This was a strange war indeed. An hour-and-a-half flight and you were back in civilization—cars, buses, restaurants, and smartly dressed women.

This anomaly was a facet of the war in Rhodesia I could never completely adjust myself to. There was simply too much "culture shock" to assimilate.

The flight back to Salisbury was glass-smooth and I watched the shadows lengthen along the fields below. It was dusk as we approached Charles Prince, the airport beacon flashing in the gloom. The radio chattered away with the sounds of British-accented voices giving traffic clearances to incoming and outbound flights.

Listening to air traffic controllers quickly reminded one of the fact that Rhodesia was for many years a British colony. Whoever said that Rhodesia is more British than Britain certainly knew what he was talking about.

Joe landed and let us off at the petrol pumps. "Thanks and cheers. . .see you shortly."

He was already taxiing out for takeoff when Tony and I started walking back to the jeep.

I spent all the following day getting my personal

gear ready to go to Lupane. As usual, I had mixed emotions about going back to the bush. Anyone who has ever been shot at as an infantryman knows what I mean. There is an exhilaration in combat that is not evident in any other life experience. Perhaps it stems from the realization that you can survive in spite of the chaos, confusion and noise. Each time you do come out it leaves you with a tremendous desire to stay away from it, but this is soon replaced with an equally intense feeling of wanting to try it again.

Maybe someday, someone will be able to put on paper a description of what the feelings are truly like. One elderly colonel came as near as anyone, insofar as isolating the proper mental "gears."

He said, "Take two days to get worked up to it and when you come out, take two days to wind down before you talk to civilized people." His theory worked pretty well for me.

By late afternoon I had finished all my paperwork and had checked with the adjutant and quartermaster to see if they had anything that needed to be taken to Lupane. There wasn't any room in the jeep to carry the quartermaster supplies but I could take Sergeant Olivier, a former French paratrooper, with me. He had ridden on combat patrols with me before at Inyanga and was a highly professional and competent soldier. I was proud to serve with him and wished that all the rest of the NCO's in the unit could match his performance of duty.

Together with Olivier was Corporal Wandell, an ex-Marine from Chicago. Another good soldier,

Wandell was gung-ho and spent a good deal of time attempting, usually without success, to instill Marine Corps esprit in the other members of the unit.

While on R&R, I'd managed to come up with some new .44 magnum ammo that had cost an arm and a leg but now gave me a reserve supply.

There were times when a handgun was far more effective than an FN; clearing huts was one such situation. Trying to maneuver with the long-barrelled FN rifle inside a hut isn't very feasible; a .44 magnum leaves no room for argument. When that hunk of lead hits someone, they go down and they stay down.

We rattled out of the gates of Inkomo feeling like kids let out of school early.

The drive from Salisbury to Lupane is a long one. You can do it in a day by pushing, and this is what army wants done. My view was that I would far rather be fresh, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed for the run from Bulawayo to Lupane through "Indian country" than to travel through ambush areas so damned fuzzy and fatigued that you're half asleep as you get hit.

With that philosophy in mind, we stopped in Bulawayo for the night, ready to get a fresh start the following morning.

In the weird war of Rhodesia, I spent the night at the Bulawayo Holiday Inn, scene of many platoon parties thrown by Bravo Company troops during their last days at Llewellin. I wondered how many of those youngsters were still with us.

Sergeant Olivier and Wandell picked me up the

next morning and we started the run to Lupane through the outskirts of Bulawayo, on to the Victoria Falls road. Several miles outside the town we passed the first of several police roadblocks manned by both regular BSAP personnel and police reservists.

This method of traffic control is damned good and effectively hampers the terr practice of attempting to infiltrate recruits into the operational areas by using civilian vehicles. Woe to the African vehicle that attempts to turn and run from a roadblock.

We were waved past and I stopped the jeep several hundred meters up the road to see if I could raise squadron headquarters at Lupane on the radio.

It seemed strange to be using a call sign for a squadron. This was the first time the Greys had operated as an integral unit; in the past it had always been as a series of small, separate troops assigned to the various jobs.

"Alpha, this is One, do you read?" When Wandell got no immediate response he moved the aerial to a different location.

Evidently the change worked, because the second attempt brought a response from Lupane ... "Roger One, this is Alpha, send."

"Tell them our ETA and say we'll give them radio checks on the half hour."

He relayed the message, got a "Roger" and we started off.

Granted, there was always the possibility of the radio screwing up, but at least with this system we

could maintain some type of time frame enroute. If they didn't hear from us at all and our ETA had long since elapsed, they'd send scouts out to find us. It took only about three-and-a-half hours to drive it.

We all checked weapons. . .round chambered, safeties on. Traffic began to thin out and soon we were the only vehicle on the road. Thirty minutes passed and Wandell, using a buggy whip antennae raised Lupane, faint but readable.

Time passed and we started through the stretch of road that was bordered on either side by heavy forest. The trees and underbrush provided countless places for ambush sites but nothing happened; so far, so good.

Another hour passed and I motioned Sergeant Olivier to pull over for a piss call. There was a dirt side-road ahead that looked O.K.

We stopped, got out and swept the area, checking the bush.

"Sir, there's spoor here." Olivier pointed to tracks in the clay of the road, crossing from one side to the other. The tracks were old but had the distinctive cross-hatched sole pattern of Mozambican boots.

Dumb-assed terrs. All they would have had to do was simply walk on the tarred surface of the main road then slip back to the opposite side of the dirt road. Voila, no tracks.

I thought about the Soviet and Cuban instructors trying to make soldiers out of these animals. Good luck, hah!

"O.K., let's mount up," I said. We crawled back

in the Landrover and started toward Lupane.

It was coming on to noon and I hoped they'd hold chow for us, or "scoff," as the Rhodesians called it.

Up ahead was another police roadblock, this time with an African bus pulled up alongside the road, wheels resting on the grass. Standing in two lines were the passengers, men on one side, nannies and picannins on the other.

The two principal buslines operating in the TTL's were SHU-SHINE and DeLuxe; of the two; SHU-SHINE carried the brunt of the CT's robbery program against African buses.

Sergeant Olivier slowed the jeep, threading our way through a milling mob of onlookers. Bush Africans love any type of occurrence and need little excuse to form a crowd of rubbernecks. A police reservist carrying an FN waved us on with a grin.

"Need a gas mask for that bus?" Wandell asked.

"Dead right on that, mate," the reservist answered. Searching the interior of an African bus in the heat of summer calls for either a strong stomach or a total lack of smell.

We dodged the remainder of the crowd and accelerated towards Lupane. Still in forest country, we knew the possibility of ambush hadn't yet disappeared.

Now an occasional African semi-truck and trailer roared past. The terrs had recently discovered that these monsters carrying thousands of gallons of petrol or diesel fuel were sitting ducks for RPG-7 rockets. Rarely did one day pass without a Pantechnicon, as the Rhodesians call them, being ambushed by CT's.

A road sign flashed by—Lupane. We turned off the main road and drove up a hill, passing a petrol station and an African store. I could see the horses drinking from an improved water trough. A paddock had been constructed from wire rolls that gave us plenty of room for the animals.

A dirt road led into the area occupied by the command post. Some command post!

I sat in the jeep and stared.

A huge, white-washed Rhodesian farmhouse was surrounded by sandbags, soldiers, vehicles, horses, goats and gnats. A group of off-duty troopers sat under a canvas tarp that had been gerry-rigged to form a shelter.

Nowhere could I see any type of security—there were no sentries, machine gun positions, mortar emplacements or claymores. To add to the chaos, on either side of the "command post" were other similar houses. I had a flash of *deja vu* and thought for a moment of Sarahuru.

"You two see what I see?" I asked the other two occupants of the jeep. They both nodded.

"Get my gear in the house and let's go to work."

I walked towards the back door to the command post. The troopers, none of whom I knew, glanced at me curiously but made no effort to rise from their table. Spit-and-polish in the bush is far down on my list of priorities; military courtesy and discipline is at the top. I stopped in front of the group.

"Gentlemen, I'm the Squadron Commander . . . my name is Williams. Get up!" They scrambled to their feet, expressions of anger blushing young faces.

"I respect you. I ride and fight right alongside you." I paused. "I demand the same respect. Do we understand one another?"

Their anger was replaced by sheepish looks. They nodded.

The back door to the house opened to a long hallway running straight through to the veranda. On either side of the hallway were large rooms—a kitchen, bathroom with ancient claw-footed tub, bedrooms in which bedrolls wre thrown, and at the front of the building an operations and radio center had been set up. The room opposite this was apparently the commanding officer's mess hall. A table and several chairs had been placed in the center.

"Morning, sir!" A young subaltern emerged from the radio room. His face was familiar and I realized it was the Regimental Signals Officer, Lieutenant Lawton.

"Lawton, where's the 2 I/C?" I asked, anxious to see my second-in-command and straighten out the chaos I'd just seen. The youngster smiled, eyes full of pride. "Sir, I'm it!"

God Almighty! First the goffles and now this! Maybe I was getting too old, bush-happy, or had lost my sense of humor.

A squadron of horse cavalry, no 2 I/C, no sergeant-major, a command post that looked like something out of "Gone With The Wind", a defensive perimeter with all the interlocking fires of a skating rink—what next?

"Sah, would you like some tea?"

A seven-foot African wearing a huge smile, a "T" shirt with a hot rod decal, filthy shorts and display-

ing the biggest feet I'd ever seen, towered over me with a teacup.

I gave up. "Hell, yes."

After the tea, I settled down with Lieutenant Lawton and studied the situation map. Whether looking at Lupane on a map or from a Cessna there was one indisputable fact—it was one damned big chunk of real estate.

Before mounting up and charging off into the sunset à la John Wayne and the Seventh Cavalry, I needed some information—such as, a) where the hell the terrs were, b) how many, c) what kind of armament, and d) what the attitude of the locals towards the CT's was like.

The last question would be the easiest to answer.

"Lawton, get me the fuzz radio and see if the inspector can meet me with the Special Branch rep at his office or wherever . . . I need to talk to him."

In a few seconds the cops came back on the radio, saying that the member-in-charge and the SB agent would be at our CP shortly.

While I waited for them, I wanted to check the farrier's tent and the paddock layout.

Horses are our means of transport. If they're not properly cared for, we're afoot—it's as simple as that.

The farrier had done a super job as usual. There was only one item that concerned me; the horses were allowed to roam free in the paddock at night. This put them next to the hard-surface road running parallel to the fence at the bottom of the pasture.

"Sergeant, please bring the horses back up the

hill before last light. We'll keep them up here next to the house." The best fields of fire I had were at the front and back of the house. I didn't want the terrs to infiltrate the paddock, using the horses as cover until they could get a clear shot at the house, scattering the animals with automatic weapons fire. With the horses picketed next to the house, we had a nice field of fire to the road and a stream bed behind it.

Sergeant Greyling, a superb mortarman, had dug mortar emplacements and positioned 60mm tubes to give us a better zone over likely avenues of approach across the stream. He'd also set up concentrations to cover the same situation to our rear. This together with machine gun positions covering additional areas made me breathe easier.

The terrs are pitifully poor tacticians but one can surprise you occasionally. I didn't plan on being surprised. Thank God we weren't fighting anyone who knew what the hell they were doing!

I watched while a detail of troopers were digging in like beavers, building a mortar-proof fire pit.

We weren't the only ones who had mortars. "Sir, the fuzz are here," Lawton called from the porch. I thanked the farrier and walked back up the hill to the CP.

Inside the ops room was Inspector Hawkins and a skinny blond-haired civilian wearing a camouflage shirt and carrying a Uzi.

"Mike, this is Warren Fox, the SB bloke for this area."

"Cheers, sir . . . happy to meet you."

Fox looked about as old as Lieutenant Lawton,

the signals officer—a tired fifteen, but I'd stopped being concerned with that.

Fox was shrewd, tough and completely capable. We sat down and looked at the map for some answers.

"Sir, the terrs in Lupane are determined to avoid contact with you." Fox lit a cigarette. "They're concentrating on gaining the locals' respect. Hell, they're wearing starched and pressed camos."

"O.K., what's the chance of finding out where they're going to hold their next political indoctrination meeting for the locals?" I asked.

"We're going to finish our defensive works and then start showing the flag."

I looked at Hawkins. "Have the Africans ever seen horse soldiers before?"

"Not to my knowledge," he answered, "but remember, you're working here with Matabeles. These niggers aren't afraid of anything except bad spirits."

We'd see how they reacted to horses. But I believed Hawkins. His knowledge of these people was far better than mine.

"Righto, sir, I'll make a recco and see what we can turn up." Fox shook hands and both cops left.

It was getting late and I wanted to check on the sentry system before dark. Sergeant Olivier had set up a prowler system of sentries that gave us good security and radio communication with each sentry. I was satisfied and felt we would now give a good account of ourselves in the event we got thumped.

Lawton had worked out a deal with the cops to

allow our people shower privileges at the police club about a mile up the road toward the airstrip. Off-duty troops would load up on a truck and drive up for a bath, have a couple of beers then return.

Sergeant Major Richardson had followed me to Grey's Scouts after I'd convinced Tony Stephens of Richardson's abilities as a saddle-maker. I'd just sat down at the mess table when the white-haired non-com banged on the door.

"Sir, terrs."

The two words broke up the evening meal—in a hurry.

"Where and how many?" I asked, shoving back my chair.

"Three dressed in camo down by the African store. We were coming back from the showers when I saw them run into the back door. I couldn't see for sure what kind of weapons."

O.K., Sergeant Major, get me eight men and a radio."

"May I go, sir?" Richardson made it a statement, not a request.

"Yes, but get those people cracking!" I picked up my FN and webbing while Lawton ran for a radio. When the young lieutenant entered the room with the small backpack radio I asked him if there were other security force troops in the area.

One thing we didn't need was an accidental shoot-out with our own troops.

In any war, that wasn't an uncommon occurrence but in this one, the presence of African troops belonging to the Rhodesian African Rifles could cause just such a situation, particularly at night. A

black face in a camouflage uniform could bring a quick response from a patrol unless they knew in advance that friendly African troops were in the vicinity.

"Negative, sir. This squadron's the only army unit around here. Can't be the D.C.'s people, because they don't wear camo, and besides they know damned well this is a curfew area."

I put the radio in a comfortable position on my shoulders, checked my FN and .44 magnum; ready to go.

Outside the house it was pitch black.

No moon, no stars, not even a firefly to break the blackness. Camouflage cream had already been rubbed on hands and faces and the occasional gleam of teeth was the only sign of definition to dark faces.

"Single file, stick to the trees. If we're fired on don't wait for my command to return fire. No auto fire, only aimed single shots. And find some cover if possible." I tapped Richardson on the shoulder.

"Sergeant Major, come up front with me and point out the store you saw these niggers at."

"Sah," he answered.

I led off, walking slowly at first until my eyes became adjusted to the dark. Across the road and into the dark outlines of the trees we moved. The forest floor was covered with dead leaves that muffled our movements, and I relaxed a little.

Terrs in a store only a quarter of a mile from our CP was a little difficult to swallow, but it wouldn't be the first time these idiots had pulled something completely crazy.

The week before we arrived at Lupane, three CT's robbed an African store some twenty kilometers to the northeast. After getting only three dollars from the terrified storekeeper they decided they were hungry and ordered Cokes and cookies, paying the bill with the three dollars they'd just finished snatching from the store owner's hand.

There were no lights showing in any of the shops scattered along the roadside. Far ahead on the left-hand side I could make out the dull glow of a fire.

Another ten minutes would put us there and I pulled Richardson over to me.

"Is that the store?" I whispered.

He nodded, "It's the one, but there was no fire when we passed."

"O.K., pass the word, the fire's next to the building the gadongas are in." I could hear the sergeant major alert the column.

While we were waiting, I had a nose count to make certain I had everybody.

"Alright, sir . . . we can go now." Richardson was back and we started again.

As I drew nearer to the fire I could see that the trees on our side of the road had started to thin out. I couldn't believe the terrs would have built a fire, but it would be crazy to take a chance with these people.

Altering the direction of march, I angled off a bit to the right. This would give us a little better cover.

As we drew opposite the fire, someone in the column stumbled over a branch and hit a tree trunk with his rifle. There was a sharp clang and a figure sprang up from the fireside.

"Halt, who goes there?" a voice shouted.

I had hit the ground and was squeezing the FN's trigger linking up on the figure's knees to knock him down.

Two other figures detached themselves from the shadows to the rear of the building near the fire.

"Hold your fire!" I yelled and stood up. I couldn't believe my eyes.

The three camo-clad figures were goffles.

I exploded. "What in the hell're you doing in the middle of a curfew area and why a goddam fire?"

"Who're you?" the soldier muttered, now uncertain.

"I'm Major Williams, Grey's Scouts. Where do you people belong?"

"Uh-well, sir, w-we're from the road camp."

Christ, the road camp was five miles up the Vic Falls road.

"Great! Now tell me what you're doing here!"

"We came over after some nannies." The speaker, a corporal, glanced at the other two for assistance.

"The hell with the nannies. Get your asses back to the road camp where you belong." I glanced at my watch. "It's now 1900 hours. Don't leave here until 1930 to give me time to get back and warn my sentries you're coming through. Do you understand?"

"Yes sir, I don't want to get shot, that's for sure." The two other colored nodded in agreement.

"Let's go." I motioned Richardson to start back.

I couldn't believe those troops. They'd never know how close they'd come to getting zapped.

We made good time on the trip back to the

squadron and I warned the prowlers that three colored soldiers would be along in about an hour. I dismissed the members of the patrol and walked back into the house, hoping there'd be some food left.

Lawton had saved some hot beef curry and a cold beer for me. "What happened?" he asked as I dropped my webbing and FN on my bunk.

When I told him about the colored troops, he shook his head. I glanced at my watch. It was 1915 hours; the goffles wouldn't be along until about 1945, so I could enjoy my meal and a half-hour's rest before it was time to check their arrival. The curry was great.

"TAK-TAK-TAK-TAK." "BLAM."

"AK!" somebody yelled. The sounds were followed by running feet as people raced for their fire pits.

Lawton and I hit the floor under the table at the same time and I crawled over to my bunk, grabbed my FN and webbing. The subaltern had succeeded in knocking over the candle, so our source of light was extinguished. Rolling off the porch, I ran to the fire control pit we'd dug. In it was a gunner for the twin Brens mounted to fire down the hill.

I tried the radio but got nothing. "Hold your fire 'til we get the prowler out of there. Johnson, are you clear?" I yelled.

Another burst of fire was followed by a shout. "O.K., sir, carry on." The voice came from my right flank.

"Watch my tracer." I started firing double-tap, working from left to right, the reddish sparks mark-

ing the ricochets off the hard surface of the road to our front.

The Bren guns opened fire, raking the area I'd indicated with my FN.

"Zero, this is Alpha. Mike One commence firing."

A few seconds pause. Then the deep hollow thuds of the 60 millimeter mortars pumping out rounds. More yelling from the road.

"KA-BLAM-KA-BLAM-KA-BLAM." The mortar rounds were hitting the far side of the road along the stream bed.

I had a malfunction on the FN and laid it against the side of the fire pit. After the first round the .44 felt comfortable, like an old friend.

A foot-long tongue of flame caused the Bren gunner to duck. "Blimey, sir, that's a bloody cannon!" he yelled.

"Alpha Zero—put up some flares!" I wanted to see what we had.

"Cease firing—cease firing!" The order was relayed around the perimeter.

A figure scrambled into the pit, panting.

"Sir, it's me—Johnson." The sentry was mud-caked and filthy.

"What the hell's going on?" I asked, watching the first of three flares sputter over the beaten zone.

"I was walking near the road when I heard feet running and saw six figures heading into the bush."

The flares drifted down, bathing the area near the road in yellow light.

"What happened?"

"I threw a grenade and opened fire with my Uzi."

I began to sweat. "Are you sure there were six

figures?"

"Yes sir, no doubt." His voice was calm and certain.

"Alpha-Zero, get a detail to search the area of the contact."

"Roger, D."

I couldn't understand the additional three figures, if in fact the goffles had been suicidal enough to disobey my orders and make a break past our positions.

The consensus was that we'd heard an AK along with the grenade. No mistaking that sound.

"Zero, this is Alpha—search detail has found two down—one goffle, head wound. One nanny, body wound—both bad."

"O.K., Alpha—any others?"

"Stand by, One." I waited while the signaller contacted the detail at the road.

"Zero, Alpha. Three others hiding in a culvert."

Roger, Alpha. Get them up here and contact the Mission hospital. Let them know you've got casualties coming. Out."

I had Olivier secure all positions and make a nose count. Evidently none of our troops were missing but I wasn't looking forward to inspecting the large water trough or water trailer the following morning. If those two installations weren't riddled it would be a miracle.

When I crawled out of the command bunker and walked up the hill to the ops room I felt that I'd solved the mystery of the additional people who'd been running into the bushes with the colored. The corporal had told me the reason his group had

come over to our area was to pick up nannies; and the fact that one of the wounded was an African female indicatd the the goffles had done exactly what they'd planned.

Unfortunately, the nannies had caused the sentry to open fire. He'd been warned of three people, not six, and was expecting their arrival much later.

I didn't blame him one bit. As for challenging people at night in a curfew area when they're running, there was one dead machine gunner in southeastern operational area who'd made that same mistake and gotten an AK burst in the face for his trouble.

"Sir, it's the fuzz on the agric-alert." Lawton handed me the handset.

"Roger, Zero here, go." I said.

"Good evening, Zero, Bailiff here. Is everything under control?"

"Affirmative. We've had a problem with some goffles and we're sending them to the Mission hospital. I'll fill you in tomorrow morning. Good night."

"Cheers." The conversation ended.

The sentry who'd fired on the running colored was also a medic. When the ambulance left the CP to drive down to the scene of the shooting, he'd grabbed his first aid kit and jumped in the back.

His voice now came over the radio. "Zero, we've got an African female shot through the body. The round went in under her right armpit and exited under the left." He paused, then continued, "Evidently some internal bleeding, over."

"Roger that, what's the status on the corporal?"

"Not good. One round through the head at the base of the skull, left side. He's got a fair-sized hole in his head."

"O.K. Get them to the mission hospital. Alpha Sierra Papa out."

The mission hospital was the nearest medical facility this side of Bulawayo that could handle any kind of surgery.

I walked from the radio room back into my quarters and started filling out a report.

A trooper was banging on the door. "Sir, here's one of the goffles.

"Bring him in." I pushed over a chair. The soldier was in a state of semi-shock, eyes glassy, hands trembling, lips dry.

"What happened? Why didn't you people do as I told you?" I handed him a cigarette. He shook his head and pushed it away.

"Johnny, uh, Corporal Maynard, said we should take the nannies and make a run for it. He was afraid you wouldn't let the nannies through."

"When did you leave the store?"

He was shaking. "Uh—right after your patrol left—we started through the woods then we began to run down the road."

"Lawton, get this man some food and a bunk. I'll get a statement in the morning."

When the signals officer and the colored left, I thought of the corporal. His last words to me had been, "Don't worry, sir, we're staying here—I don't want to get shot."

I went to bed and tried to sleep.

The following morning, Inspector Hawkins came

by for the daily JOC meeting and I filled him in on the incident.

"Mike, we aren't involved unless those people die," he said, sipping a cup of coffee.

"My headquarters will be crawling the walls, though," I replied.

"Hell, they shouldn't have left the store until they were supposed to." His reasoning was right but I didn't feel any better about the shooting.

"We've got more problems that that, my boy." Hawkins ran a big hand over his bald head. "The terrs have robbed a farmhouse some twenty km's from here. They hit it last night, beat up the African caretaker and ran off with clothes and shoes."

"Lieutenant Lawton, get me Sergeant Oliver," I yelled down the hall for my 21/C.

"Right, sir."

Hawkins had pointed to a spot on the map earlier that day to our west-southwest, about six km's off the main Vic Falls road.

"Sir, Sergeant Oliver." Lawton stood aside and motioned for the Frenchman to come into the room. The Sergeant was neat and freshly shaven; his French army paratroop training hadn't left him.

"Olivier, this place was hit last night. Get your people rolling and see if you can pick up spoor. If you find anything good, I'll get you fire force from Wankie."

"Yes, sir." He saluted and left, taking a map sheet of the area with him.

"Get me JOC Wankie." I excused myself for a minute, while the inspector looked at the map.

"Roger, Zero, go ahead." Wankies's transmission was blurred, but readable.

"I've got a call sign enroute to the site of last night's problem, are you with me?"

"Roger, go."

"If they come up with anything, can we get Foxtrot-Foxtrot?"

"Affirmative—keep us in the picture, out."

Fire Force would save us a lot of hard riding as the helicopter can easily outdistance our horses.

"Inspector, excuse me." A constable from the police detachment stood impatiently at the door.

"Yes, Michael, what is it?" Hawkins turned from the map board.

"Sir, we've got a PATU stick in the area of that farm and a couple of them are Africans in camo's."

At that, both the Inspector and I looked at each other.

"Do you have comms with them?" Hawkins asked.

"We're trying but can't raise them."

Damn! All I needed was a second accidental shoot-out between my troops and a police anti-terrorist unit, and my days in Rhodesia would be numbered.

Unless troops moving in the bush are warned of the presence of other friendly units in the area, particularly black ones, a repetition of last night's tragedy was possible.

"Michael, jump into the rhino and see if you can pick them up on the road. Take some men with you."

"Right, sir." The youngster left, heading for an

armored personnel carrier parked outside.

"Has he got a radio?" I asked.

"Yes, but you'd better set him up on your frequency so we can net with him from here." Hawkins turned to the signalman standing by the radio. "Can you give him your call sign?"

"Go ahead, I've got the radio here," I sat down in front of the command set.

In a minute or so Michael's voice cracked over our set.

"Roger, Copper One, got you fives, how me?"

"Zero-Copper one-fives, set."

Another Landrover drove up outside.

"Good God, it's the DC." Hawkins looked like a goosed rhino.

"Morning, all," a tubby, flushed-face chap of forty-five or so bustled into the room.

The dreaded DC.

I'd been warned about the problems that my predecessor, a TF Captain, had experienced with the District Commissioner and I was determined to avoid the same difficulties.

"My name is Woodleigh." He smiled at me, extending an immaculate hand.

"Cheers, I'm Mike Williams. I believe you already know Inspector Hawkins?"

Um, yes. Well, what's going on, chaps?" He grabbed my chair and sat down in front of the sitmap, gazing at it with the eye of a field marshal.

Hawkins looked at the ceiling.

"We've had a problem last night, and one this morning," I began. I explained in detail the incident of last night and the terr activity that this

morning's patrol was following up.

"Splendid. . .splendid! Shall we have some tea?" He clapped his hands, looking around for a waiter. From his manner, I fully expected to see Gunga Din pop into the room.

Instead of Din, we got Lovemore, the seven-foot African cookboy.

In fluent Shona the DC ordered tea and sandwiches, urging a bemused Lovemore to hurry.

Olivier's voice came over the set. "Zero, this is Five Alpha."

"Roger, Five Alpha, Zero-go."

"Zero, we have spoor of five to eight Charlie Tangos." He paused. "We are following them to the north."

I picked up the microphone, "Five Alpha, what's the age of the tracks?"

"Wait one."

I looked at Hawkins. The DC was still gazing at the map.

"Zero, they are fresh."

I looked at the map. North of their position was a large kraal complex, If the terrs succeeded in reaching it, the troops with Olivier were going to have a hard time. It would result in a hut-to-hut search.

I contacted JOC Wankie again, explained the situation to them and was pleasantly surprised to learn that there was a helicopter only twenty km's from our troops' last reported position.

Wankie confirmed that the chopper would make a fly-over to see if he could spot the terrs.

"Zero, this ees Five Alpha, do you read?" Olivier's voice sounded strange.

"Affirmative, go."

"Zero, the Victor Echo Hotel that the fuzz sent here has hit a Lima Mike near us." Land mine!

Hawkins jumped up from his chair, eyes wide.

"Five Alpha, Zero—how many casualties?" I looked at the inspector.

"There is one dead, four wounded. Can you get a casevac?"

"Roger, Five Alpha, is the dead an Alpha Mike Alpha? (African Male Adult) Over."

"Negative, negative! He is an Echo Mike Alpha." Michael, the young constable who'd left only thirty minutes before. Hawkins walked out of the room and onto the porch, his back to me. Even the DC sat mute.

The silence in the room was broken by the static of the radio. A fly buzzed around the sugar bowl.

"See if you can raise the casevack blokes." It was Lawton, scribbling out a written message for relay to the medical evacuation helicopter to pick up the wounded.

Michael's body would be evacuated by one of our vehicles. He wasn't in a hurry anymore. We learned from Olivier later that Michael had used the normal dirt road into the farm. His vehicle's left front wheel had hit a boosted Soviet TM-47 land mine. The practice of "boosting," or laying one mine on top of another to double the blast effect, was now becoming less of a rarity with the terrs. The resulting explosion had blown the vehicle off the road and a shard of metal had knifed its way through the floorboard of the cab, carving Michael's left cheek and temple off as neatly as a surgeon's bone saw.

His eye was found on the roof of the cab.

So much for a nineteen-year-old life. He could, wherever he was, thank Andrew Young and Jimmy Carter for their encouragement of the Patriotic Front to continue their attempts to destroy Rhodesia.

Sergeant Olivier's call sign had lost the spoor just before the terrs had reached comparative safety in the kraal. A group of tribesmen had quickly rounded up a herd of mombies, African cattle, and with the aid of herdboys milled the cows, trampling out all vestiges of tracks.

Same song, different verse.

"Zero, this is Five Alpha. Do you want us to sweep the kraal?"

"Affirmative, but save time and check the area to the west that has trails to the river."

I asked Hawkins if there was anything we could do. This time it was one of his people, the next time it could well be one of ours.

"No, thanks awfully anyway, Mike." The cop's eyes were red.

Before last light, Olivier was enroute back to Lupane. There was one additional item, however. A twenty-five-year-old terr dressed in shorts and takkies, or tennis shoes, had tried to make a break for it when the troops approached the kraal. One of our people shot him in the back of the head with an FN.

"Zero, Five Alpha. We are bringing the terr's body in." Olivier's French accent was grim with satisfaction.

When his trucks rolled into the parking area to the rear of the CP, I learned that he had initially

planned to take the same route Michael had used. At the last minute, the Frenchman decided to use a short cut, and turned off the fatal dirt road that contained the two land mines.

Olivier was alive. Michael was dead.

Luck?

I used a flashlight to check the terr's body, lying on its face in the rear of one of the trucks. No need to roll him over. The FN round had entered the back of the skull and carried away the top half of the forehead.

One less to butcher women and children. I glanced at Hawkins who was standing next to me looking at the dead terr.

"He could have been the one who laid those two Lima mines." I said.

"Whether he did or not, he won't be killing any more of our people. I'll have the paper work for you tomorrow, Mike. Have the chaps drop him by the station. Cheers."

The inspector walked slowly toward his jeep.

CHAPTER 4

Bus Robberies and Bare Feet

TWO DAYS AFTER that bloody introduction to the Lupane brand of terrorists, two Africans ran into the CP shaking and babbling about a robbery.

They were the driver and conductor of a Shu-Shine bus that ran through the Lupane TTL and on to Bulawayo.

An African constable with them finally got the driver to talk coherently. According to his account, the CTs had brazenly stepped out into the middle of the road and pointed AK's and an RPD light machine gun at the bus at it bounced along the road toward them.

Once the bus had stopped, two of the terrs climbed aboard. One stuck the muzzle of his Kalashnikov rifle in the driver's right ear while the second CT walked down the aisle demanding to see the passengers' I.D. papers.

If there had been any security force personnel on the vehicle, the terrs would have blasted them on the spot.

Bus robberies were police problems, not ours. In this case, however, it was different; Hawkins had only a handful of people.

"How long ago did this happen?" I asked the constable.

"He says only about thirty minutes ago." The bush African's sense of time is governed by the sun's position and the relative change that occurs as he walks from one place to another.

"Ask him exactly where it took place." I wasn't about to pin him down on the sitmap but I did have an area map I'd borrowed from the fuzz. The driver peered at the map then poked a dirty finger at a spot named Nikala School.

"All right, tell him he's going back with us to identify these niggers if we can catch up with them."

When the constable translated my last sentence, the driver's eyes bugged out like two hard-boiled eggs and he began to shake his head violently.

"Horseshit! Tell him we'll disguise him so no one will know who he is," I yelled at one of the troopers standing next to us.

"Get him a balaclava and put it on him. Have one of the cookboys change clothes and dress him up."

The hapless driver was quickly jammed into a woolen balaclava face mask worn by the troops in winter to protect their faces from icy winds. It covered the head and face, leaving a square opening for nose, eyes and part of the mouth. It was impossible to recognize whoever was inside.

"Get sergeant Grimes and Olivier." I wanted to give Grimes' people a chance, as they were in the bush for their first time out. Moreover, I wanted Olivier to keep an eye on them and see how they stacked up.

Both NCO's arrived and I briefed them.

"Whatever happens, make sure you don't leave

that driver in the school area. His life won't be worth a plugged nickel if you do," I said.

They both nodded and left to brief their troops. I really didn't have too high hopes for this one, as the terrs were probably sitting in the nearest kraal drinking chibuku, native beer.

However, we might get lucky this time! Within ten minutes the HCVs were rolling with their loads of horses, and bouncing along behind were the troops.

Slumped down in the cab of sergeant Olivier's truck was the bus driver, only the top of his green-clad head showing as the Frenchman roared out of the dispersal area and onto the road leading northward to the school. For the first of countless times in Lupane, I was to experience the frustration of bizarre communications conditions.

There were no high mountains, no rugged kopjies or hills—nothing but flat, rolling terrain that should have provided good to excellent radio communications between the HQ and the troops in the bush.

No such luck!

The trucks hadn't been gone ten minutes down the road when the radio contacts we had with them suddenly went out as if someone had thrown a switch.

Lawton called repeatedly trying to raise them.

Nothing.

I said, "Take a set with you to the airstrip and see if you can raise them." I felt that the airfield might be a good forward radio center—it was on the highest ground around us, but that wasn't saying a

whole helluva lot!

"We'll try, sir, but atmospheric conditions here are very bad," he complained.

Rummaging around through radios, antennaes, microphones, handsets and batteries, he and several prontos, or signallers grabbed various items and trotted to a waiting jeep.

The duty radio man looked up from his set. "Sir, shall I keep trying?"

"No, just stand by. If Olivier's having problems, he's probably too busy to try and raise us. Frankly, I think he's not going to try until they're at the school."

I sat down and lit a cigar.

When you've taken all necessary steps to get things rolling, it's like the saying in the Foreign Legion. . ."Un homme fait son possible." A man does his possible.

When you do that, there ain't nothing left to do.

About twenty minutes after Lawton and his crew had left for the airstrip, his voice came over our set. He'd taken the biggest antennae he'd been able to find. From the airstrip he was loud and clear. After "Rogering" him we ceased any transmission and listened to him trying to raise the troops.

It's strange what a psychological lift comes from being able to talk with your people. The chatter isn't necessary. The knowledge that you can yell for help if you really need it, and have someone hear you, makes a lot of difference to a handful of soldiers moving through the bush in "Indian country."

I didn't like the waiting.

Three hours had passed and I decided to hell with it. "Tell Lawton to stay with the CP. I'm going to see if I can raise Grimes."

I took an off-duty signaller with me, got into my jeep and started out the parking area.

"Wandell, come on as shotgun." I motioned him to hop in the back and we were off.

Every five minutes I would try to raise HQ as we motored up the road in the direction Olivier and Grimes had gone. After the initial response, there wasn't one frigging reply from anybody.

I couldn't believe it! We weren't eight km's down the road.

The radio in my Landrover was working perfectly—fresh batteries new handset, new buggy whip antennae—yet, nothing. This was going to be one damned interesting assignment.

Suddenly a voice that sure as hell wasn't Grimes or Olivier's boomed out of the set.

"Contact-contact." I could hear a background of FN and AK fire "TAK-TAK-TAK-TAK" in the mike. The person transmitting was Fox, the SB officer. He was shooting at terrs all right and from his coordinates, they were at the same school Olivier was heading for.

I tried to raise Fox but no dice. Before he'd left the CP after our last talk, Lawton had given him one of our radios as a back-up set to augment the police radio he carried his Landrover.

He was getting through to us all right, but a helluva lot of good it was doing him now. "Call sign calling Zero—this ees Five Alpha—we are on the way—we are on the way, Olivier."

"Roger, Five Alpha—got you Five's—come on, we've got two niggers in the school." Fox's voice was panting. Again we heard firing in the background with the addition of a muffled "boom." Someone had fired a Zulu, rifle grenade.

"O.K., we can go back." Turning the jeep around, I started back to the command post.

Between Fox, Olivier, Grimes and the troopers, the two terrs caught in the school were possibly the two unhappiest gadongas in Mugabe's army.

I wondered what the bus driver was doing.

Late that evening the troops returned. Fox, the SB rep, beat them back. He stepped from the jeep and wiped a torn bleeding forearm across his face that was filthy and covered with a mixture of sweat, mud and bramble scratches.

"I've got a perscription for you—follow me." I led him to the mess hall and poured him a brandy.

He sat down on my footlocker and ruefully inspected a jagged tear in the knee of his trousers.

"You look like you've been trying to rape a porcupine," I remarked.

"Too bloody right!" He swallowed the brandy.

"You'll never believe it," he paused, "but those crazy niggers were standing right in the middle of the schoolyard when we drove around the corner."

When the terrs saw the jeep they cut loose with a burst from their AK's and started running for the schoolhouse.

Fox and the two Rhodesian Intelligence Corps soldiers with him dove out of the jeep and started skirmishing forward, running and crawling through thorn bushes.

The boom I'd heard was a rifle grenade all right, but it was a Czechoslovak one fired by the terrs.

"Anybody hit?"

"No, those two niggers went through the school building like gazelles," Fox laughed.

Running, not fighting, seemed to be the order of the day for the CT's.

"When did Olivier and Grimes get there?" I asked.

"They passed us heading after the terrs but the bloody godongas pulled a fast one." He lit a cigarette and yawned. "They grabbed a couple of locals, pulled off their boots, made the locals put them on and ran them down the road to leave spoor. The CT's then ran off into the bush barefooted." He shook his head in disgust. "Shit, those bastards are smart."

"Yeah, and they won't fight," I added.

"That's what I mean," Fox quipped.

Olivier's trucks pulled into the area, tailgates banking down as the troops dismounted. The horse vehicles came next, their loads kicking and snorting.

The Frenchman walked in. Tagging along behind him was the bus driver sweating like a pig and giving off the same smell.

"Christ, Olivier, get that nigger out of here," Fox yelled, holding his nose.

"Yes, sir."

Yanking the balaclava off, he pointed toward the kitchen where a wide-eyed cookboy was waiting for his clothes.

"Those bastards are still running."

"Good, they'll run into the PATU stop groups north of the school," Fox added.

I told Olivier and Grimes to get some sleep. "At first light we'll go up and see if we can find them."

Tomorrow the chase would start again. The quick thinking displayed by the CT's in forcing the locals to wear their boots meant that our problems had just begun.

CHAPTER 5

A Murdered Cock and a Fair-haired Boy

THE FEAR THAT our newly won Squadron organization wouldn't last long was given credence one morning.

Lt. Lawton stuck he head in the kitchen doorway. "Sir, JOC Wankie wants you to meet their 2I/C halfway between here and their CP."

I put down the cup of tea and followed Lawton down the hallway to the ops room. The duty signaller handed me the microphone. "Zero, this is Zero Five."

"Roger, Zero Five, can you see me at the Romeo? Victor previously indicated in figures four-five?"

I looked at the map and noticed that a red checkmark had been placed at the Gwai River Hotel. We could make it but I'd have to do some moving.

"Affirmative, Zero, see you in figures four-five, out."

"Lawton, take over here. . ." I sent a runner for my jeep driver and told him to notify Corporal Wandell and Sergeant Olivier to report to my vehicle immediately.

"What about the mini-JOC meeting here this morning?" the signals officer asked.

"You'll run it O.K. Just don't get in a hassle with the DC."

Lately the District Commissioner and Lawton had been at each other's throats during the daily meetings held in the ops room. The DC's antagonism wasn't entirely unjustified; Lawton looked about sixteen and the DC was a man in his early forties.

Due to the shrewd moves on the part of the Salisbury-based Catholic Peace and Justice Commission, word had been sent out to the various missions throughout the country that Africans were to be told that wherever they saw soldiers on horseback, they were to report their movements to the priests and nuns. The purpose of this was to link the presence of Grey's Scouts to any area where allegations of brutality by security forces against tribesmen were reported. Simple, but very effective.

A) Horse soldiers were seen in a specific area, B) a tribesman was allegedly beaten by security forces, ergo C) Grey's Scouts were involved.

The more effective we became, the greater the volume of trumped-up complaints from the Catholics.

Bishop Donald Lamont of Umtali publicily admitted urging his nuns and priests to support, shelter and feed terrorists in the various Catholic missions throughout the eastern highlands of Rhodesia.

This type of treachery was still being carried out long after the pro-Communist cleric had been deported from Rhodesia and sent back to Ireland. To their credit, many brave men and women manning isolated Catholic missions throughout the operational areas didn't follow the bishop's orders. In countless instances these dedicated Catholics were beaten, tortured and hacked to death by the very "freedom fighters" Bishop Lamont eulogized. The incongruity of the entire lunatic situation was that a Catholic bishop, ostensibly representing a church and religion vehemently opposing atheism, was doing all in his power to assist the Communist murderers.

Marxism, of all political doctrines, is the most atheistic.

"Stand on it, we're going to be late," I told Wandell as Olivier jumped in the back seat of the Landrover.

The road between Lupane and the Gwai River Hotel is the Bulawayo-Vic Falls tourist route. It is damned well maintained and we drove flat-out, arriving at the rustic tree-shaded inn a couple of minutes later than the agreed time.

We could have saved ourselves the worry. As Wandell braked to a stop near the sidewalk leading to the hotel's entrance I could see that ours was the only military vehicle in sight. Locking the jeep, we walked up the path to the veranda.

Inside, a few customers were drinking coffee and reading the Bulawayo Durpaper. African waiters wearing red fez headgear and white mess jackets stood idly by, waving away an occasional fly that buzzed near the tables.

I motioned the two NCO's to a nearby table. "Let's have some coffee."

While we were waiting, I went into the bar and asked the owner of the hotel if he had a room that

could be used for a private conference. He showed me through a hallway and into an adjoining dining area safely away from the front of the restaurant.

"Major, this is the best we've got," he said, looking around.

"Are the waiters likely to pass this room by using the hallway?" I didn't want some terr informant dressed in a white mess jacket crouched down outside the door listening to us discuss any proposed tactical moves.

"No, Major, there's no reason for any of the staff to be out here. . .you'll have complete privacy."

I thanked him and we walked back down the hall to the restaurant.

During my inspection of the meeting room, the 2 I/C of JOC Wankie arrived.

A beefy, heavy-set chap in his late thirties, he had several other staff officers with him. "Ah, Major Williams. I'm Thorndike, this is Captain Stedman, Lieutenant Brimhall and Major Cairns." His manner was friendly enough, but there was a sufficient aura of staff officer snobbery there to let me know I was considered an expendable rook on the chessboard of terrorist war.

I didn't bother to attempt linking the names with their owners' faces. With the apparent exception of Cairns, they were strictly "paper" soldiers and it was highly improbable that I would be seeing any of them again.

I didn't stay in headquarters and they wouldn't be riding horses in the bush with us; to each his own. After a fair amount of asinine bullshit that had no relevance to the war, we finally got down to

business.

Thorndike inspected the private dining room and gave it his O.K. When we walked into it, I motioned Olivier and Wandell to follow me. Their presence caused a momentary chill in the air, but I ignored it and sat down in a nearby wicker chair, pulling out my notebook and pen.

Thorndike looked at the map of Lupane that had been unrolled and tacked to the wall facing us. "Right. Now, what we propose to do is to cut down your area of responsibility, Mike."

The idea suited me; the area previously assigned was big enough for a U.S. Infantry Corps at best.

"Um, there's been quite a flap about your people not responding to all the bus robberies going on," the chubby major remarked, licking his lips.

I lit a cigar and replied, "The JOC Tangent C.O. told me I was not to bugger around with robberies. He said those were the responsibilities of the fuzz." The other officers looked expectantly at Thorndike. They reminded me of alter boys.

"Um, well yes." He didn't pursue the point but I'd already seen some of the daily sitreps cranked out by JOC Wankie headquarters. They were short, to the point and weren't putting any halos on Grey's Scouts. They all said basically the same thing—location by grid reference, date-time group and particulars. They always ended with two words, NO RESPONSE.

There were two factors not covered in the report; one, that robberies were a police responsibility and, two, I'd been given a direct order by Colonel Brawley, JOC tangent commander not to get

bogged down with robberies of buses, stores or whatever.

Seeing that I wasn't going to defend our failure to chase bus thieves, he went on. "Major Cairnes, the Company Commander for Charlie Company is your nearest call sign for help if you need it."

Cairnes wore a filthy sweat-stained camouflage T-shirt, khaki shorts and boondockers with sweat socks. He was the only other combat commander in the room. I liked him.

He grinned. "Mike, I don't expect we can be much help to you. We can't move through the bush as fast as your horses."

"Not to worry. If we can help you, let us know." Once the bullshit was over, the change in tactical plan was explained.

As I had feared, JOC Wankie wanted to put us under their control and have me send a troop to one of the rifle companies as a reserve element. This hadn't worked at all well in the past and it didn't appear that any change would transpire with the present plan.

Infantry company commanders—and I had been one—have their hands full with their own troops; assigning them a troop of horse cavalry made their jobs that much more difficult.

If they would use the attached horses in an intelligent fashion it wouldn't be a waste of manpower. In the previous incidents involving Grey's Scouts attached to rifle companies, the normal practice had been to dismount the troopers, picket the horses and use our people as infantry. I was hopeful that this could be avoided if possible.

"Mike, the JOC Commander would like to meet you tomorrow at the CP. I'll give you a shout what time." The meeting was evidently finished.

Corporal Wandell finished copying the revised boundaries to our new area of responsibility from Thorndike's map.

One thing that apparently had been overlooked was the fact that a large piece of terrain had been taken away from cavalry, whose strongpoint was speed and mobility in the bush, and given to infantry whose rate of march was much slower in the bush than ours, and whose flank and rear security capabilities were far less effective than ours.

Hell, maybe JOC knew something I didn't. Another case of the PBI—poor bloody infantry—getting the shit end of the stick.

We shook hands all around and they hastened to their vehicles.

The ride back to Lupane was more leisurely than the one up to the Gwai. The leisure-feeling evaporated quickly when we rolled into the yard behind the CP.

Hawkins and one of his constables were standing by the kitchen entrance.

"What now?" I asked, walking up to them.

"Not good news, I'm afraid," the policeman muttered.

I motioned them to follow me to the ops room. Wandell and Olivier trailed us into the room and unrolled the newly-revised portion of the map that outlined our new operational boundaries.

Hawkins looked at the changes with interest, momentarily diverted from his news. "Who's going

to be responsible now for the old area?" he questioned. "There aren't any other security forces n this area except for one T/F rifle company north of the Shangani."

"There they are." I pointed to their location on the sitmap.

"But hell's fire, they're infanteers! They can't walk as fast as your people can ride." he exploded.

He was incredulous. "You mean that they've pulled a horse cavalry unit out of an area and turned it over to an infantry company to patrol on foot?"

"Hawk, my boy"—I clapped him on his shoulder—"you and I don't see the big picture." He wiped his face with a big hand.

"O.K., Sherlock, what's the good news for a change?"

"The good news is that the goffle and the nanny you shot were both driven into Bulawayo last night." Here we go again, I thought.

"What's their condition?" I asked, knowing the answer.

"Both critical. He's unconscious, she's bleeding internally."

Super, now for the bad news.

"We just got a report that one of your patrols shot a chicken."

"They shot a what?" I was afraid I was coming unglued—maybe my hearing was failing me.

"There's this old schoolmaster outside with one of my constables. According to him, one of your patrols searched a kraal and shot a chicken that belonged to him." Hawkins grinned and I felt the

urge to strangle him.

"The schoolmaster wants reparation and he also wants the guilty parties punished."

"Send him in." I sat down and looked at Wandell who was easing out of the room, his face red with the effort of smothering hysterical laughter.

The door opened and a dignified, white-haired African slowly hobbled in and stood before me.

The African constable saluted. "Sah, this is Mr. Ncube."

"Good morning, Major, I trust I am not disturbing your schedule." I blinked. The tones and accent were pure Oxonian.

"I studied under a highly educated professor, ergo my fluency in your language."

"Uh, please sit down Mr. Ncube." I pulled out a chair for the old man.

Slowly, with care, he eased his skinny frame into the wooden seat.

His eyes were filmed and rheumy but his mental faculties seemed amazingly keen.

"Major, some of your soldiers came on their horses to my kraal." He paused and wiped a thin, wrinkled hand across his nose. "Then they shot my chicken."

He stopped and fixed me with an accusing stare. "That cock was a prize chicken and is well worth the sum of five dollars." He folded his arms across a sunken chest.

You old pirate, I thought. In the middle of the Lupane TTL there wasn't a chicken worth two dollars, much less five!

"Mr. Mcube, I'll have to consult with the police

about this. Just a moment." I rose from the table and motioned for the constable to step outside on the veranda.

Closing the door behind me, I asked the African in a low voice how much was the chicken really worth.

"Sah," he answered with a flash of white teeth, "the cock is worth maybe two dollars fifty."

"O.K., thank you, constable," I opened the door and walked back into the room.

"Mr. Ncube, the matter is settled. I am authorized to pay you two dollars for your chicken."

He pounded a bony fist on the table. "Outrageous! I shall complain to the Prime Minister!"

"Two dollars and fifty cents. The extra is my own money, sir." He hesitated. I had him, the old skinflint.

"Very well, Major, but I want the soldier punished."

"Can you identify the guilty ones?" I looked closely at the sunken brown eyes.

"Certainly I can—I shall never forget them!" he shouted.

"Very well, just a moment. . .By the way, Mr. Ncube, how far from you were the soldiers?"

"Near enough."

The door to the room was five feet from where we were sitting.

"Constable, come here, please," I called the policeman from the veranda. I motioned him near me, and whispered in his ear. "Walk to the doorway and hold up one finger when I tell you."

"Yes, sah."

He walked to the door and turned, facing us.

"Now," I ordered. One black hand rose majestically in the air and the index finger pointed.

"Mr. Ncube, can you see the constable?"

"Certainly," the answer was one of outraged innocence.

"How many fingers is he holding up?"

"All five, naturally."

I nodded to the African policeman and he walked back into the room.

"Mr. Ncube, you are as blind as a bat," I watched his brow wrinkle with rage. "The constable held up only one finger."

"I'll punish the soldier, you can be sure of it." The old man got up creakily, lips tight with rage.

"I'm sending you along with the constable and he will prepare a receipt for your signature closing any further complaints about the chicken."

"White devil!" shouted Mr. Ncube.

I bowed from the waist. "Goodbye, Mr. Ncube and thank you."

Fat men are rarely jolly and old men are not always lovable.

"Sergeant Olivier, get me the stick-leader of the patrol that shot that goddam rooster!" I yelled. After explaining in profane detail what would happen to the next person that shot a chicken I dismissed the lance corporal whose finger had fired the fatal shot.

Ten minutes later, Mr. Ncube reappeared with the African constable who proudly carried a sheaf of typed copies in his hand.

"Sah, your papers." He saluted and held out the

releases that absolved Grey's Scouts from further damages in the chicken shooting of a thoroughbred rooster of noble lineage.

I signed all copies and handed Mr. Ncube his two dollars and fifty cents.

He grabbed the money and marched out without a word or backward glance.

Honor avenged. What next?

CHAPTER 6

No Elephant Shooting

AT 1400 HOURS the following day, I reported to the office of the JOC Wankie commander.

Major John Appleby sat at a long table in the war room reading the sitrep of the preceding day.

"Morning, sir, Mike Williams." I saluted and waited for him to look up; as he did I recognized him from a meeting at Llewellin Barrack's last year.

Appleby was one of the army's "fair-haired boys." He'd recently returned from South Africa where he'd completed a course at the Staff College, SADF, Pretoria. I made no snap evaluations of him—I'd wait and see. After some idle chatter about Llewellin, we got down to business.

"Here are the principal terr entry routes from Zambia into our area." He walked to the wall map and traced several meandering red lines with a pointer. "The CTs enter here and exit into Botswana." His hand moved the wooden pointer down across the northern Botswana border. "As you're well aware, under no circumstances are your patrols to fire into Botswana—we don't want any international incidents, do we?"

I had heard this same briefing at other JOC's, only the pattern previously described by intelli-

gence officers showed a comparable series of routes starting from Zambia. Those trails were used by ZANU terrs, members of Robert Mugabe's ZANLA forces. These CT's were Joshua Nkomo's people.

"So far, the terrs are using this type of infiltration as training missions apparently to improve their recruits' morale," he continued. "The blocking forces we have available are in these locations —" He indicated symbols for units deployed along segments of the Zambesi river's southern bank. "Mike, can you use horses in these areas?"

I'd been expecting the question as a prelude to breaking up the squadron again and farming out the various troops as had been done in the past.

"Sir, I don't know the terrain at all," I said, looking at the map. "If you can give me a day, I'd like to make a recon before I commit myself."

I'd expected a refusal, but instead received a nod of encouragement and a go-ahead.

"Finish your recon tomorrow and get back with me the day after," he replied, and the meeting was over.

I walked back to the jeep and told Wandell to proceed on to Vic Falls. He displayed a wide grin and swung the Landrover in a fast circle to get back on the asphalt road heading to the main highway.

"Why so happy, Corporal?" I asked.

"Sir, Vic Falls is full of tourists this time of year —half of them are females!"

"I hate to spoil your dreams but our mission in the Vic Falls area will be to kill CT's, not screw women tourists."

He shook his head. "Sir, why can't we do both?"

Hope eternal keeps us all going. I began giving his thought serious consideration. It took us about an hour and a half to complete the drive to Vic Falls. When we arrived, I stopped at the nearest BSAP office and inquired as to the quickest way to the mortar platoon HQ.

A black constable showed me the direction, walking out on the porch and pointing down the road.

Tea-time was evidently again with us, judging by the large number of people sitting under a canvas near the CP building.

I dismounted from the jeep and walked straight to the captain sitting at the head of the table.

"Are you bringing horses up here?" he asked before any introductions were made.

"That depends on the JOC commander's decision." I glanced around the group; nothing but friendly faces.

"Come on, Major, I'll show you what's going on," he put down his teacup and walked to the company ops room.

The picture of the CT's activities was much clearer here.

"As JOC probably told you, the terrs aren't trying to hit us. They're moving all their recruits across the river through open areas on our lines, then running over to Botswana."

"Are your people killing any of them?"

"Oh, a few occasionally hit, so far. There really aren't that many coming across." He pointed to the areas that showed the most activity. "I thought you might like to take a look from the air. We laid on an aircraft for you at the civilian side of the airport."

"Thanks, it'll be too late to start back to Lupane when we get down. Can you fix me and my troops up for the night?"

"No problem—you can all stay at the Azambezi Lodge. They give SF blokes a cut rate."

The air reconnaissance took an hour and showed the problem facing us. The area below us was a virtual desert; although there were trees, there were no visible signs of water.

A few half-wet pans were scattered over the terrain, but the only water evident was obtainable at a series of bed boreholes or wells.

There was plenty of game below us; giraffe, zebra, wildebeest and sable. There were large herds of jumbo, meandering along with total disdain for their animal companions. The elephant really is the king of beasts. We flew low over one area that had a road linking it with the highway running westward from Vic Falls to Kazengula, a border post with Zambia. There was a huge water hole several hundred meters away from small hunting lodges built back into the bush. Best of all, there was a long, flat vlei or plain that appeared to be suitable for an emergency landing strip.

"How does that vlei look?" I yelled over the noise of the engine.

"D'you mean can I land on it?" replied the pilot.

"Yes. Can we use it as an emergency strip?"

He nodded assent.

"O.K., let's go back."

On the return trip, he flew along the southern bank of the Zambezi, pointing out CT training camps on the Zambian side of the river.

Although we had raided CT base camps in Mozambique regularly over the past several years, no such corresponding strikes had been launched into Zambian territory.

I wondered why, inasmuch as Zambia had declared war against Rhodesia earlier the preceding year. Dr. Kaunda's comic opera army was about the same caliber as Idi Amin's suicide squads.

It was 5:30 p.m. when we landed back at Vic Falls.

I realized that the terrain in which the Wankie JOC commander was interested could be easily traversed by horses. The lack of water was going to be a major problem.

"That hunting camp we saw belongs to a professional hunter. I think his name is Van Kloop," observed the pilot, as we were climbing down from the Piper Comanche.

"Do you think we'll have any problem with him about using that area?"

"Shouldn't be. One of his vehicles hit a land mine last week along that dirt trail we saw running east from the water hole." He stretched and lit a cigarette. "Hell, he might be happy to see your troops."

We shook hands and Wandell headed the jeep down the twisting road to the Azambezi Lodge. When we arrived at the posh tourist hotel, I went to the phone and tried to contact Van Kloop, the Afrikaaner who owned the safari lodge.

Everyone I'd spoken with had assured me that the South African would have no complaints about Grey's Scouts using the lodge. Several minutes after I'd given up trying to reach the hunter, a call

from the local Special Branch office came through the hotel switchboard. I answered the phone and a male voice informed me that although Van Kloop couldn't be contacted, there wouldn't be the slightest problem in the use of the cabins. With the amount of friendly advice I'd received, I decided to go ahead with the move and bring 2 Troop up from Lupane.

The luxurious suite at the Azambezi cost eight dollars! I thought of the countless tourists over the years who'd paid sixty-five bucks for this same room. At those prices, of course, the terrorist floor shows we now experienced hadn't been thrown in for free.

The CT's 122 millimeter mortars firing from inside Zambia had landed in the suburbs of Vic Falls occasionally over the last several weeks. Although little damage had resulted, the explosions had given the battered tourist industry a further kick in the ass it didn't need.

A five course meal that evening made us all realize what we had been missing and I didn't look forward to going back to Lupane.

I left a call with the desk for 5:30 the next morning and instructed the girl at the switchboard to ring Olivier and Wandell's room, at the same hour.

Tomorrow would be a very long day indeed. Four hours of hard driving the next morning put us back at Lupane and I called a meeting of all troop commanders. Although only 2 Troop would be deployed to Vic Falls, I wanted the other commanders to be informed, as there was a strong possibility that additional troops would be required if the CT's

really stepped up their infiltration.

After the briefing, I contacted JOC Wankie and gave them the grid coordinates of the hunting lodge and our estimated time of departure. The preparations to move were now apparent, with horses being loaded and troopers gathering up personal kits.

I felt the chance to get in contact with the terrs would lift morale; listening to some of the comments by 2 Troop's personnel, it seemed I was right.

Because of the proximity of Vic Falls to Zambia I'd decided to move the troop by night, arriving at the dirt road leading into the new CP at first light. I sure as hell didn't want a procession of troops and horses rattling through Vic Falls to the accompaniment of tourists' camera shutters clicking andbian informants running for the river bank.

At 2100 hours, the convoy of horse and troop-carrying vehicles was lined up on the road, pointing in the direction of Vic Falls. Thanks to a three quarter moon, there was enough light to move the column without the glare of headlights. The drivers were told not to use lights enroute unless absolutely required.

Radio checks completed, we started moving. The night was cool and silent, save for the sounds of engines and tires.

The black sky was ablaze with more stars than I'd ever seen anywhere. The hours dragged by and I dozed a bit. Suddenly the Landrover bucked, jolted and stopped.

"What the hell's happening?" I looked at the

driver. He shrugged and kept pumping the accelerator pedal. We wasted to a stop off the road.

"Zero to Two Alpha—close up and halt." The radio warned the column following us of what was happening.

"Sir, some stupid bastard's put diesel in the fuel tank," the driver announced after an inspection of the vehicle and motioned me to sniff the cap to the jeep's gas tank. He was right—a strong, oily odor confirmed his suspicions.

"We'll have to drain the goddam tank," he snarled.

"Sir, can I help?" It was trooper Mike Harris, a tall pleasant chap of nineteen. He was one of the few who'd volunteer for anything without being called upon.

The weary driver pointed under the Landrover's rear wheel. "We've got to drain the tank."

"Not to worry." Harris dropped to the road and wriggled back under the rear of the vehicle.

There came a series of thumps and bangs followed by a stream of diesel fuel that splashed over Harris as he succeeded in pulling the plug on the fuel tank.

"Sir, it'll take a few minutes to drain, then we can fill up with petrol and we're on our way." I checked my watch. We'd run late by an hour, at least. No real problem, as long as we could get to the crossroads by first light. I picked up the radio and spoke into the mike.

"Alpha Two, this is Zero—confirm you have perimeter security in place," I waited, the tele-handset cool against my ear.

"Affirmative, Zero—they're in place," came the reply.

"Roger, that. . .we'll let you know when to move out." I replaced the radio. The tank finally gurgled empty and Harris crawled back under the vehicle to close the plug.

"O.K., fill it and let's move out." Eager hands held a five gallon can of petrol over the gas tank filter pipe, sloshing fuel into the tank.

Sputtering and shuddering, the Landrover was pushed down the road until the engine could ingest petrol again.

"Tell the column to move." I handed the radio to Wandell. Mike Harris, drenched in diesel fuel, grinned and trotted back to his truck.

We were moving again, a trip that would cost a life within three days' time.

At 0500 the next morning, we turned off the main road and started through the bush to the safari camp. A large herd of jumbos watched us from a nearby clump of trees. There was plenty of room for vehicle dispersion and cover from the trees.

In a very short time the troop HQ was ready for operation—radio checked, perimenter security established and horses being saddled. I unrolled a map and spread it out on the ground, kneeling beside it.

I looked up at the patrol leader, waiting for his orders.

"Sergeant, make sure the patrol members don't cross over into Botswana during this recon, O.K.?"

I'd been warned by JOC that we weren't to cause an international incident. What a frigging war!

Don't hurt anyone's feelings! The route the patrol was to take would carry them near the Botswana border and enable the trackers to check for fresh terrorist spoor. "Right, sir, we'll be careful," he said.

As the patrol trotted off, I noticed a civilian Landrover bumping its way toward us. In it were two figures, both wearing bush hats and safari jackets.

It pulled up next to me and both occupants got out.

There was no mistaking the driver. An obvious Afrikaaner, at least six feet six and weighing two hundred and fifty pounds, his beefy red face was twisted in anger.

"Hey, man, what you're doing here?" he bellowed, walking over to me.

"Mr. Van Kloop?" I was fighting to hold my temper.

The other occupant of the jeep was busy clicking away with a 35 mm camera.

"Yah, I'm Van Kloop. Why your troops on my property?" he wheezed.

I explained that everyone had assured me that my unit would be welcome to stop anywhere on the vlei.

"Nah, this is my property, you must leave or you'll scare the game."

I looked at the sonofabitch.

"You can go to my other place. . .yah, plenty of water, good borehold, stables for the horses," he continued, little pig's eyes gleaming.

"Where's the other place?" I asked wearily.

"Here, just follow this trail," he pointed out a broken black line on the map. "You move soon, O.K.?"

I turned my back on him. "Yeah, soon."

The "photographer" walked over.

"I'm from Cleveland, Ohio. . .that's in America, you know!" he proudly informed me.

"No shit, I thought it was in Uganda," I answered.

"You're an American? Golly, you've really got it made! You get to camp out and everything—I had to pay five thousand for this trip," he moaned. I walked away.

There was a trip of some twenty-five km's to the new camp. I'd learned long ago that maps in Rhodesia are among the world's worst.

If you can cross-country navigate with the useless frigging things, you could thread a needle with a goat's ass. I called troop commander Sergeant Jones over and told him what Van Kloop had demanded.

"I'll get a vehicle and we'll go now—there won't be too much light left before we get back!" Wandell rode shotgun in the back, the sergeant driving. I navigated.

It was a damned good thing I had a compass. The map was twenty years old or thereabouts. I stopped trying to check the road and we stuck to contour intervals. They helped some.

Bouncing around a bend in the "road," the sergeant jammed on the brakes. As the cloud of greyish dust around us cleared, we sat in silence and looked at Van Kloop's "camp."

Several brick buildings were disintegrating, their doors and windows long destroyed. The stables were roofless and the wooden poles used to separate the corral were broken and dry.

The three of us jumped to the ground and walked warily in the direction of the borehole. It had long since dried up. There wasn't a drop of water, nor was there a pump of any kind.

We looked at one another.

On the way back to the truck we found terr boot tracks that looked to be a week or so old. No one said a word as the sergeant cranked up and we started back to the troop HQ. It was nearing dusk when we drove into camp.

"Sir, Van Kloop stopped back and wanted to know when we were clearing out," the duty signaller said.

"If that sonofabitch comes back again, tell him to contact JOC Wankie. I take my orders from them," I snorted and began unrolling my sleeping bag.

Night fell rapidly and I lay still listening to lion, elephant and hyena. We were scaring the game? I hoped the terrs would capture Van Kloop and turn him into a eunuch.

At daybreak I got up, pissed, shaved and gulped down hot tea.

"Let's go, Sergeant. We can grab a bite in Vic Falls." We crawled aboard my vehicle and headed for the F/F company CP in town.

When I told my tale of woe to the rifle company commander, he hit the ceiling. "That stupid fucker —I hope he hits a land mine again," he snapped.

Calming down a bit, he made a call to the pilot

who'd flown me on the recon when we first came up from Lupane.

He smiled as he finished the conversation. "Major, we've got you a good place," he said. "The pilot's got a rancher friend who'll be happy to let yo use his place." He turned to the wall map. "This is about fifty km's southwest of here and straddles the terr escape route. The pilot'll fly you down for a look in ten minutes."

I shook his hand.

The pilot, Jim Munroe, was waiting for us at the airstrip.

"Sorry about that bastard Van Kloop. We're going to make his life miserable from now on, the dirty cunt."

The flight to the ranch house was a short one. He followed the Vic Falls—Wankie route, then turned westward flying over a dirt road leading into the thick bush.

"That road's O.K. for your vehicles, Major."

Ahead we could see a cluster of buildings sitting on top of a kopjie, the hill affording an excellent view in all directions.

Jim laid the right wing of the Comanche down and we roared over the rooftops at thirty feet. Two km's to the south was a large dam full of water surrounded by lush grass.

As we headed back over the buildings, I could see several large stables and a corral.

To the west of the white-washed ranch was a large kraal from which a running horde of Africans paused to get a look at the aircraft.

"Seen enough?" Jim shouted.

"Super, let's go back," I took one last look at the ranch and glanced at Sergeant Jones. "Good enough?" I asked. "Top drawer!" he said, satisified.

We had to pick our way through a swarm of sightseeing light aircraft hauling tourists for a look at the Falls. War or no war, the tourist industry charges ahead. I thanked Munroe and told him to convey our sincere thanks to the rancher.

"Hell, he's happy you're here. . .the terrs had already sent word they were going to zap him and burn down the ranch."

I drove the Landrover back to the T/F headquarters. There was one of our vehicles sitting by the kitchen. The driver had come in for supplies and I could send Sergeant Jones back with him.

"When can you move?" I asked the bushy-headed Non-Com.

"We'll start first thing tomorrow," he replied, and started for the supply truck.

I stopped by a sandwich shop for a cup of coffee, then began the trip back to Lupane. Since we had used up more time than I'd anticipated at the airport, I decided to bypass JOC Wankie and continue on to my CP.

I let Wandell drive and tried to catch a nap. It was senseless to try; the wind whipping by the windshield felt like it was coming direct from a blast furnace.

By the time we drove up the hill to the Squadron HQ my eyes felt like they'd been sprayed with chili pepper.

Lawton trotted up to the jeep. "Sir, you're supposed to go into Bulawayo and see the nanny and

the colored corporal."

"Why should I do that?" Hell, I wasn't a doctor.

"JOC thinks it would be a nice gesture on your part," the lieutenant added.

"Shit. All right. . .where's the chaplain?"

Chaplain Ron Smith, a T/F clergyman on a forty-five day call-up, had arrived in my absence by plane from Bulawayo. I knew of his arrival but had more important things on my mind than prayer meetings.

"I'm here, Major," he said, walking up behind me.

"Hello, Padre." I shook hands. "I'd appreciate if it you'd come with me tomorrow to see the two casualties."

"Be happy to," he exclaimed, rubbing his hands together. He was a small, grey-haired man, middle forties, with rimless glasses and a professional manner.

"Thanks, Padre. Let's get off early because I've got 2 Troop moving into position southwest of Vic Falls and I want to make sure they're O.K."

Dinner that night was good, my favorite beef curry with hot sauce. Cold Lion ale washed it down handily and I sat on the porch smoking a cigar, listening to the horses move around the paddock. They were quiet except for an occasional thud and squeal that followed a kick. I savored the sounds, even the smells, because I felt it all would be changing—why, I didn't know, maybe a premonition. The way the war was going we would be up to our asses in terrorists before too much longer. The Rhodesian government, doggedly trying its best

under impossible circumstances was still depending on the United States to help it.

I had long since given up trying to convince the Rhodesians that the Carter administration was as treacherous as the Russians. No one believed me. They were going to have to find out the hard way that Jimmy Carter and Andrew Young wanted to see their brave little country in the hands of the Marxist Patriotic Front. I finished my cigar, crawled into my sleeping bag and slept like the dead until morning.

With the chaplain sitting primly in back, the driver and I in the front, we left for Bulawayo right after breakfast. Mercifully, he was quiet throughout the trip and it passed quickly.

Our first stop was the large African hospital outside town.

Parking the Landrover, we walked to the Information desk and the padre asked about the nanny's condition. The African nurse on duty looked at us with undisguised hostility.

"She's still in serious condition from the bullet," the nurse muttered, looking back at the register lying on the desk before her.

"Can we see her?" I asked.

"No, she's only allowed family visitors," she said, turning the register's pages.

"The hell with it—come on, padre." I turned and walked to the door.

The next stop was Bulawayo General Hospital where Lance Corporal Maynard was a patient.

Our reception wasn't much better there. Although we were treated well enough by the recep-

tionist, a pretty little brunette, our arrival at the ward on the third floor wasn't a welcome one.

A colored nurse emerged from a room at the entrance to the ward.

"I'm here to see Corporal Maynard. I'm Major Williams, Grey's Scouts. This is Chaplain Smith." She ignored the introductions.

"Did you shoot him?" she asked, looking at me with solemn eyes. "No, my troops did," I answered.

"When will it stop?" she complained.

This could go on all morning. "Where is Maynard?"

"He's in there." She indicated the room she'd just left.

I walked into the room.

There were three nurses standing around the bed; on it, in a fetal position, was Maynard. His head swathed in blood-stained bandages, the young soldier was comatose.

I looked questioningly at one of the nurses who was bathing his face with a sponge. She shook her head. The chaplain standing beside me said nothing. There was no way that I could tell the youngster how badly I felt—that he wouldn't be here, crumpled in bed, had he simply obeyed my order to remain at the African store for an hour instead of recklessly running down the road only fifteen minutes after we'd left.

"Thank you, sister, I'm sorry," I said and left the room.

We drove to Brady Barracks.

"Padre, I've got to check in at JOC before we start back. Do you want to go in with me? I'll only be a

minute." I stepped out of the jeep in front of JOC tangent headquarters.

"No, I'll take the jeep and get petrol—see you in ten minutes outside the HQ block." He climed over to the driver's side and drove off toward the motor pool.

I went first to the map supply room. I needed extra sheets of the area around Vic Falls. The African clerk pulled out the desired pages and wrote out a receipt for them which I signed.

From the map room I walked over to the JOC war room where I hoped to see the colonel. I was concerned about the moves made by JOC Wankie; they were clearly intended to put us under their control and break up the organizational integrity of the squadron.

My luck was bad. He was in a meeting and wouldn't be out for an hour. I looked at my watch. If I waited for him I couldn't get back to Lupane that night.

The padre was waiting outside in the jeep, reading his Bible.

"Cheers, padre, we can go now. . .d'you want to drive?"

He perked up. "Fine, yes, I'd like that."

Bucking, jerking and coughing, the helpless Landrover lurched forward under the padre's enthusiastic driving. His prayers must have worked because we managed to get clear of Bulawayo without flattening any of the madly darting African pedestrians who leaped out of our path.

Outside the city, the clergyman settled down and we hurtled on towards Lupane. He insisted on driving the entire way, so I made no effort to spell him. As he pulled up into the yard, I noticed a group of troopers standing quietly around the radio room. Their faces were strained.

I got out of the jeep and walked toward them. Corporal Wandell stood up from his seat on the sandbag parapet.

"Two Troop had a contact and Mike Harris was killed." His voice was hoarse. I walked inside the radio room and sat down beside the signaller. He took out a dirty, crumpled handkerchief and blew his nose, then spoke.

"Sir, he and three others found fresh spoor near a water hole and were about to signal the troop CP when the terrs started shooting." I looked at him in silence.

"Harris was hit in the chest with the first burst and died a few minutes later." The soldier cleared his throat.

There wasn't anything I could say.

"Sir, you would have been proud of our blokes. . . right after Mike went down, the rest of the call sign drove off the terrs and chased them all the way to the river. There were twenty of the bastards."

Mike Harris and Van Kloop. . .opposite ends to the see-saw that was the Rhodesian war.

Another funeral I would have to attend. I had lost count of the others. Until we really started hammering Zambia and Mozambique we would lose more Mike Harris' in the war.

I went into my quarters, picked up a pen and paper to start a letter to Harris' next of kin.

CHAPTER 7

A Kick in the Head and a Pulitzer Nomination

AS DO MANY other international cities, Salisbury has its Embassy Row. Belgravia is a stately older section of the city, housing the South African Embassy, military attaches' residence and other imposing houses.

At number 2 Ross Avenue is the "unofficial U.S. Embassy," an expensive double-storied brick owned by Robin Moore, author of *The Green Berets, French Connection I and II,* and *The Happy Hooker.* More than any other American, Robin Moore has given of his time, money and influence to help Rhodesia. His house on Ross Avenue was a "little bit of the States" for the Americans serving in the Rhodesian Army.

On Saturdays and Sundays there was usually a barbecue with hamburgers, french fries and cold beer. In addition to the Americans who dropped in for a snack, there were also itinerant journalists. J. Ross Baughman was one of these. Using the name of his top boss at Associated Press, Horst Fass, a longtime friend from Robin's Viet Nam days, Baughman ingratiated himself with the "embassy" personnel.

On the Saturday afternoon I dropped by Ross Avenue, Baughman was standing by the small bar

next to the swimming pool.

Robin introduced the newspaperman. "Mike, this is Ross Baughman. He's a newsman," Robin added in a warning tone.

Baughman enthusiastically pumped my hand. "An honor, Major, I'd really like to go on patrol with you."

I drained my beer glass and set it down on the bar. "I don't have any authority to take you anywhere," I said. "Newsmen here have to go through proper channels—Army PRO and ComOps."

I said goodby to Robin and left.

For some reason, I didn't like Baughman. Maybe it was his scraggly moustache. But what the hell, he wasn't my problem, I told myself.

How little I knew!

I saw Baughman again about three weeks later at the "embassy" Saturday afternoon party. He came up to me, a triumphant grin on his face, to say he had been cleared by Army PRO to go out on a patrol with Grey's Scouts and asked when could he join us. This was the first I had heard of any such clearance.

"I've got to have something in writing before I can take anyone out with me," I replied distantly.

"Major Stannard, the Army PRO, is on leave," Baughman said. "I'll get my clearance and bring it to you."

I gave a hopeless look at Corporal Ed Wandell, a tall Yank ex-Marine from Pittsburgh and one of my best NCOs. Then I turned back to Baughman. "I'll get Ed Wandell to take you over to Captain Mike Blackman's house. He's the assistant PRO. What-

ever he says I'll comply with until we can sort things out when Major Stannard gets back from leave."

Baughman was disappointed but agreed, and pushed off to talk to some of the other Americans who might be able to give him a news story. When he was out of earshot I turned to Wandell. "You take the guy up to Blackman's but be sure to tell the captain that I don't want Baughman coming out with us. Ask him to stall the bugger any way he can. He's bad news all the way. Some of Robin's embassy people are getting a report on him for us."

Corporal Wandell agreed to carry out the mission and I sought out Robin to get more information. He took me into the private office and we discussed the situation.

"Well," Robin began, "you remember the party I took you to a few nights ago at that pretty South African girl's apartment?"

I smiled ruefully. I remembered. I was perhaps extra cordial to our hostess when Major Stannard, about to go on leave and taking her with him—which I didn't know—had an attack of jealousy. He told me pointedly that this was his girl.

"What about her?" I asked Robin.

"The good major is very upset at the thought of her going back to South Africa, which she tells him she'll have to do if she can't get some sort of journalist job here. He suggested that the embassy hire her, which we would have done had we not just hired a local researcher."

"So?" I prodded.

"She is hoping to get a job at AP with the help of

Ross Baughman. Naturally Stannard is promoting it."

"That answers a lot of questions," I replied thoughtfully. "I think I'm going to be in for trouble."

And I was unfortunately all too correct. Captain Blackman managed to stall off Baughman until Stannard and the South African girl returned from leave but that was the best he could do for me.

I had almost forgotten J. Ross Baughman when one morning Major Tony Stephens and I were discussing a crucial operation at Grey's Scouts' headquarters, Inkomo Barracks, the switchboard operator rang my extention.

"Sir, it's Major Richard Stannard, the PRO from Army. He says it's urgent."

The Army Public Relations Officer calling me could mean only one thing—some VIP or "visiting fireman" wanted to get a good look at Inkomo. I wanted to get back to the squadron, not spend another day here squiring some idiots around showing them piles of horseshit.

"Okay, put him through." Grudgingly I picked up a pen and a piece of paper.

I didn't realize that this phone call would start me on the road that would carry me out of the Rhodesian Army.

"Mike, this is Richard Stannard."

"O.K., Slick, what can I do for you?"

"J. Ross Baughman has been approved by Army and ComOps. I want you to take him to Lupane and show him around."

"Dick, that guy's bad news. I've been warned by

some people close to Intelligence to watch out for him."

"Don't worry. He's been cleared and HQ is happy with him. You're to pick him up at the Rhodesia Herald Building at 11:30. Cheers." The phone clicked off.

At 11:30 Corporal Ed Wandell, my driver, and I pulled up across from the Rhodesia Herald building. I spotted Baughman talking with a young African who was fastooned with cameras. Seeing the vehicle with soldiers in camouflage uniforms, the African rolled the whites of his eyes and trotted away toward the Herald's offices. I sensed trouble, a compromise in the making. The only blacks who run from uniforms are those who know they're guilty of anti-government activity. And here was Baughman, right in with one of them.

"You're right on time," Baughman quipped as I motioned him into the rear of the Landrover.

"Your kit is in the back," I said. As we drove through the city, I told Baughman that I wouldn't detach any of my people to wet-nurse him while he was with us. If army wanted him to take combat footage, he'd damn well have to pull his own weight. That included riding a horse, though I couldn't see his spindly little shanks on a 5'5"frame keeping up with a call sign at a canter. Maybe he would wiggle his moustache and go airborne.

We stopped in Bulawayo to spend the night. There was still a three-and-a-half hour ride the next morning to Lupane.

The Landrover dropped me off at the Holiday Inn.

"Give our guest V.I.P. treatment, Corporal. Get him drunk, get him laid, whatever. I don't want army on my ass." I glanced at Baughman sitting in the back of the vehicle. "And for God's sake, don't let him blow his foot off with that Uzi."

"Don't worry, sir. He'll be fucked out, come tomorrow."

Wandell laughed, shifted gears, and screeched off.

The next morning a bleary-eyed Baughman, Fu Manchu moustache at half-mast, hound-dawg eyes peering through thick glasses, stared glassily at me as I climbed into the Landrover.

"He's puked twice on the way over," smiled Wandell.

"Marvelous." I settled down for the ride to Lupane.

Forty clicks or so out of Bulawayo we hit a cop roadblock. After we'd passed it, I turned to Baughman and yelled, "From here on it's terr country." I tapped his Uzi. "If we get zapped, don't shoot me through the back of this cab."

Baughman shook his head, staring wearily at the bush on either side of the road. Much of the trip he dozed but occasionally he waxed talkative. Among other things, he told me he was involved with the plans of black nationalist leader Rev. Ndabaningi Sithole to form a coalition of black leaders to negotiate with Premier Ian Smith to form a new government which would lead to early majority rule. Whatever I may have thought of the plan, I was a professional soldier and, as such, anxious not to get involved in politics or with people involved in

politics.

When we pulled up to the CP, I took Wandell aside. "Stick with this little fart and don't let him out of your sight. Show him anything he wants to see, but don't let him out of your sight. Show him anything he wants to see, but don't let him in the ops room or around the sit map."

"Roger, sir." The corporal trotted after Baughman who was headed for the horses that were milling around in a paddock next to the house.

Number 3 Troop was at Sipepa, some sixty km's to the southeast of us. Lieutenant Graham Baillie was the 19-year-old troop commander. I had taken him on patrol and helped him get his feet wet on the Botswana border near Myadumbudzi. Tough, confident, he was popular with his troops and never shirked a fight. I called him over to the side of the mess tent.

"Graham, I'm sending Baughman with you. Army and ComOps have both Okay'ed him but I don't like it. I think he'll screw us if he can. Don't risk anybody by letting them wet-nurse him," I went on. "If he can't keep up on patrol make him wait back at your CP."

"Dead right, I'll take care of him. Not to worry, sir."

After briefing Baughman and explaining where he was going, I told him to follow Baillie, who was walking out to his Landrover. I had other things more important then Baughman to worry about. There was a rash of bus robberies in the Lupane TTL. Normally this would be the responsibility of the cops but unfortunately the poor buggers had

damned little manpower to work with, so the monkey was on my back. Since I had no intention of running all over Lupane TTL looking for bus robbers I decided to post some of my troopers on the busses in an effort to kill the terrs who were pulling the hold-ups.

I'm glad we had some successes. I quickly found out that I was too damned old to ride on top of a goddamn African bus carrying a shotgun and trying to find some crazy kaffir playing Jesse James.

Two weeks after he'd gone to Sipepa with Lieutenant Baillie, our friend Baughman pitched up at our CP. With him was a bemused Sergeant Middleton.

"How did it go, Sergeant?" I asked.

He gave me a wide grin. "Well, sir, Mr. Baughman got into the spirit of things, you might say."

"What does that mean?" I asked wearily.

"Well, we captured a terrorist suspect, a schoolteacher named Mpofu Ncube."

"I know the name. The cops have him high on their list."

"Yes, sir. We restrained him, tied him up on the ground so he wouldn't get away until we finished searching the area. Baughman kicked him in the head a couple of good ones."

I frowned. Abusing suspects was something all commanders tried to keep their troops from doing. Middleton indicated there was more to the story. I didn't want to hear it but decided I'd better. "Anything else, Sergeant?"

"Yes, sir. Next thing Baughman did was he grabbed a Lion's ale bottle from a trooper who

hadn't quite finished it and poured the rest of the ale out and then took a cigarette lighter and put the flame to the bottom of the bottle. When it was hot enough to burn he stuck it into the hout's chest. That really started Ncube to screaming."

I held my head a few moments. Ginger-peachy! That's all I needed.

The next morning at 0230 I led an assault group out of our CP heading for a base camp across the Shangani River. We had a terr prisoner who'd been a member of an eighteen-man-strong gang that was presently occupying the camp. Baughman wanted to go along.

"Major, I want some real combat footage," he chortled. Shades of Matthew Brady!

"O.K., stay with me." I crawled up in the cab of the HCV at the head of the six-truck convoy.

"Let's go" I told the driver. "Watch your speed going down the long grade before we reach the river." I glanced back at the dark line of vehicles, their only light an occasional glint of faint moonlight on a rifle barrel. The driver swung the heavy truck out on the dirt road that led to the river.

Forty-five minutes later I pointed to a clearing on the right side of the road. "Pull in there. We'll unload the horses." Five troopers jumped down from the truck and moved into the woods to provide security while we unloaded troops and animals.

Sound carries a helluva way at night and I winced at the snorts of the horses, the thuds of steel shoes against wooden ramps and an occasional whinny. Christ, at this rate Joshua Nkomo would

be awake in Lusaka.

We mounted up, Baughman on a bay gelding named Honcho and I on a frisky little mare called Pinky.

"Put Baughman in front of me," I told a trooper, pointing to the catpured terr who would lead us to his friends' base camp. The terr, a wiry sixteen-year-old, was brusquely hoisted aboard a horse.

"What about his hands?" the trooper asked.

"Keep them tied—he's not going to need them," I ordered.

Satisfied that we were ready, I led off. Stretched out behind me in the darkness was the line of horse soldiers.

Muffled by the soft sand on the road side, the hooves made little noise. We were starting down a hill leading to the dry riverbed when the terr suddenly dug his heels into the flanks of his mount and rocketed away, the gelding cantering, then galloping.

"Stop that son-of-a-bitch!" I couldn't yell but husked at a trooper on my right. Kneeing Pinky who snorted indignantly, I headed after the fleeing terr. I pulled a .44 Magnum pistol from my belt holster, throwing down on the rapidly disappearing African.

"Shoot him—shoot him!" It was that fucking Baughman, tearing alongside me.

"You dumb ass. . .d'you want me to wake every CT in ten miles?" I panted. The magnum would be a last resort.

Another horseman darted past me. It was Moyo, an African district assistant we'd borrowed from

the local D.C. as a tracker. Outriding all of us, he drew abreast of the escapee, grabbed his reins and jerked the CT's horse to a plunging, rearing halt. What a great beginning!

I rode up alongside the terr, jammed the muzzle of the magnum in his right ear. "Moyo, tell him if he tries again, I'll blow his fucking head off." Moyo grinned and translated.

The terr's eyes rolled and he nodded his head very carefully, the thick black pistol muzzle glued to his ear.

"He understands, sah."

With Moyo leading, the column reached the base of a heavily wooded hill at 4:30 a.m. Several hundred yards to our left were scattered huts. There were no signs of movement near them.

"Sah, he say the hill. That the place, on top," Moyo whispered, pointing to the dark mass of bush at the top.

"O.K., Wandell, set up your mortars and let's get on with it." I turned to Baughman. "After I finish checking the assault group, you come with me—you'll get some combat footage."

He said nothing.

"Did you hear me?" I glanced at him, waiting.

"I, uh, would rather get some pictures of the horses." Baughman fiddled with his camera and wandered off to where the horses were.

At 0455 the first mortar round hit the top of the hill and we moved out. It was cold and damp, the grass soaking my camo's as I scrambled up the hill. Moving from rock to rock, we ran out of cover just as first light started to outline the black tree trunks.

Four more HE rounds crumped in the hilltop. Up and running the last twenty-five meters, we now were using recon fire at likely ambush sites, the orange-red tracers ripping into the thick bush.

"That bastard. . .they're gone," panted Sergeant Olivier, chest heaving. No terrs.

We 360'd the camp, circling to find signs of tracks, then stumbled back down the hill. I thought seriously of blowing the CT prisoner's fucking head off. That magnum was such a fine weapon it seemed a shame not to use it.

Going back, Baughman took what seemed to be ninety-seven dozen feet of film—horses, troopers, kraals, houts, goats and nannies. He stuck with me two more weeks.

After two weeks of Baughman I was at my wits' end. I didn't want to let him near the ops room or radio shack. With him prowling around the area, security had become a real problem. In spite of the PRO's insistence that ComOps was happy with the reporter, I had a very bad feeling that Baughman was going to screw us before it was all over.

One evening, sitting on a sandbag by the machine gun bunker, I was drinking a Lion ale with one of the senior NCOs.

"Sir, you look worried," he said.

"No, it's nothing—just that fucking reporter. I don't trust him and I've got a hunch he's going to shaft Rhodesia before he leaves the country." I took a pull on the ale bottle.

"Shit, sir, I'll take care of that little cunt. Let me take him on patrol tomorrow." I thought about it for a moment, then shook my head.

"Thanks, but I don't need a dead AP photographer on our hands." I finished the ale and jumped down from the sandbag.

"Cheers, sir," the sergeant grinned.

I walked into the radio room and closed the door.

"Get Acorn over here for me, please." I had had enough. I waited, while the cops got the Intelligence representative. "Get on to JOC Wankie and see if they'll do something about Baughman," I asked the SB Cop when he arrived.

"Sure thing."

Within an hour, the SB rep and the 21/C from JOC Wankie landed at our airstrip. They had a short talk with Baughman which resulted in all three men crawling into the Islander aircraft and flying off to Salisbury. Once again I forgot J. Ross Baughman. At least until the radio signal came in a week later.

"Major, Brigade wants you, ASP." The duty signaler pointed to his headset. I got on the set to Brigade and spoke with the commander.

"Report back here tomorrow, out." Short and not very sweet.

Brigade Headquarters in Bulawayo had that cardboard "Brigadoon" air of every HQ I'd seen in Rhodesia. Out of the bush, that is!

"Mike, what do you know about any skull-bashing by your troops at Sipepa?" The colonel was serious. He was a damned fine soldier and a straight shooter.

"Sir, I don't know a damn thing. I haven't heard of any hassles except one involving Ross Baughman, an AP photographer." I frowned. "One of my

sergeant's told me Baughman kicked and burnt a hout suspect."

"O.K., keep me posted, though." Dismissed, I left the office, walking out into the bright sunshine. My R&R was long overdue and I put J. Ross Baughman out of my thoughts.

Once again, I flew back to the States, really tired this time. My ribs were bothering me again, and I found it was difficult to lie on my right side.

When I returned to Rhodesia, the feces hit the fan! A series of photos had hit the international press. Baughman, evidently bored with nothing to photograph at Sipepa, had talked the members of one call sign into posing some Africans in a push-up position, then persuaded one of the troopers to put a rope around a suspect's neck, and finally had taken a picture of Lieutenant Baillie holding a small baton, with an African in the background lying on the ground.

"These pictures tell a terrible story." the lead read in one paper. Obsessed with what they call "world opinion," the Rhodesian Government and the Army in particular, went up the wall.

I found myself at Army Headquarters getting a royal ass-chewing for all types of naughty antics. These included such heinous crimes as patting a sexy brunette on the snatch as a farewell gesture when I left her home after cocktails, and being blamed for "inviting Ross Baughman to the bush," ad nauseam.

I had submitted a resignation earlier, but had asked that it be withdrawn. That hadn't been done and the army was now looking for scapegoats. The

previous commander of Grey's Scouts, Major Tony Stephens, had submitted his resignation along with mine. We'd both had a bellyful of being forced to write letters of apology to Catholic bishops for alleged "coarse and rude behavior" by Grey's Scouts in hunting for terrs in Catholic missions, and receiving a never-ending stream of other chicken-shit directives aimed at harassment rather than at helping us win this war!

I sat down at the bar in the officers' mess at Inkomo. I knew I loved commanding troops. Also, this would most likely be my last war. Sadly enough, this was turning into a political struggle—another Korea, another Viet Nam. Why didn't the bloody politicians let the military do their job? Silly question on the face of it.

"Major, we feel your effectiveness in the Rhodesian Army has been badly damaged." The colonel at army headquarters fixed me with what I'm sure he thought was a piercing stare. "Furthermore the stigma, (what stigma?) attached to Lupane will follow you wherever you go in the army." Harrumph!

I got up from the leather armchair and saluted. Happily, I managed to stifle a "Good show, old chap."

"Thank you, sir," I said. My mouth felt like I'd eaten a bad oyster.

Sitting next to me, the new CO of Grey's Scouts, Major McKenna, was dumbfounded. He'd talked me into going with him to army headquarters to see where I stood. Now we knew. That was December 1977.

In February, 1978 McKenna called me into his office. "Well, Mike, you're not the most popular man in the Rhodesian Army." His words weren't exactly staggering news. "However, the army commander says you can stay, provided you don't do anything—*and he means anything*—else!" I looked at him in disbelief.

"How does that sound?" he asked.

"Let me think it over," I replied and left the headquarters building.

For one week, I thought over "how it sounded." Would I miss the army? Like cutting off my arm. But go back to the squadron under those conditions? Given the way in which the war had changed in the meantime—not likely!

The cops were now showing up wherever curfew-breakers had been shot and were taking names of all military personnel involved.

"Just police routine, old chap." Routine, my ass! If so, it was different from what I'd seen during the previous two years.

On the 28th of February 1978 the Rhodesian Army and I parted company. I felt like a *pistolero* who'd outlived his usefulness. There were no feelings of regret on my part; I had given them my best shot, but their methods of running a counter-insurgency war were identical to those the United States government had following in losing Viet Nam.

The name of the game now was "No Win"—there could be no military victory! No-win wars mean exactly that! No commander worth his salt is going to put up with this type of thinking for very long.

Modern history is full of them. . .MacArthur, Van Fleet, Ridgeway, Westmoreland and most recently Singleaub.

I certainly wasn't in their class, but I damned well couldn't adjust myself to deliberately losing a war that could be won militarily at any time. Before I packed my kit and prepared to leave Rhodesia, Major McKenna dropped by my apartment in Borrowdale, the posh center of the horsy set, a ten-minute drive north of Salisbury's downtown area. I was listening to a Willie Nelson album when I heard the sound of a Landrover stopping in front. I opened the door and McKenna walked in.

"How about a snort?" I asked, motioning for him to take a chair.

"Anything." He settled back and put his briefcase down beside him, glancing around the room.

"Here you go. . .cheers!" We tossed off a couple of drinks and he began talking.

"You know, Mike, we Rhodesians don't know quite how to handle people like you." He took a sip of his drink. "We've been isolated so long, we have some rather strong preconceived opinions. And when people don't act exactly the way we think they should. . ." He shrugged and grinned, the smile warming his bulldog features. I liked and respected McKenna. He was a good soldier and an intelligent man.

"What do you think of this?" With a flourish he pulled a large white feather from his briefcase.

"What the hell is it?" I asked, looking at the damned thing.

"Why, you dumb Yank, it's a bloody ostrich

feather!" he snorted, turning the object in his right hand and gazing at it admiringly.

"Wonderful. Now would you kindly tell me just what you're going to do with it?"

He looked up indignantly, brandishing it like a saber. "What do you think I'm going to do with it?"

I took a deep pull on my scotch. "I give up—tell me."

"I'm thinking this might go very well stuck in our hats for our dress uniforms."

I sat silently for a few seconds. Unwittingly, he'd made a statement that for all its seeming irrelevance completely summed up the unflappability of the Rhodesian Army.

The war was being waged the same way the U.S. had fought in Viet Nam, and lost: allowing Communists to use neighboring countries as privileged sanctuaries where political trickery prevented the military from flattening the bases daily. Yet, here was one of the best soldiers I knew carefully evaluating the suitability of a frigging white feather to stick in his hat.

"Mick, you're a damned good man but I'll be the first to say I don't understand Rhodesians." I shook my head in bewilderment.

He laughed. "well, you mad bugger, I don't understand you Yanks, either." He finished his drink, picked up his ostrich feather and lovingly replaced it is his briefcase.

I shook his hand. "Keep your head down, Mick."

"Cheers. . .See you around, mate."

I saw him to the door and watched as he walked down the sidewalk to his jeep. Three nights later I

boarded a South African Airways jet at Salisbury airport. I looked through the window next to my seat and watched as we pulled away from the terminal. It felt as if I were leaving a home behind me—not going back to one.

Returning to the land of the big PX, I called Robin Moore who was on home leave from his "embassy" in Salisbury. To my deep chagrin I learned that J. Ross Baughman had been nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for those spurious pictures the Associated Press had disseminated throughout the world. The good news was that professional photographers of the Overseas Press Club of America pronounced the pictures posed fakes.

So what does an old war horse do when he's been fired from the only war he believes in? He writes a book—and here it is. I hope it gives the reader a better understanding of the conflict in Rhodesia. If so, this exercise has not been wasted.

Just as I was finishing the book a new Marxist insurgency situation came up, this time in Nicaragua. So, even though I always said Rhodesia would be my last war, it looks as though I'll be taking one more shot at disrupting the Communist timetable. By the time you read this I should be down there with my own version of Grey's Scouts, slowing down the Marxist *Sandinistas*, a brother organization to Fidel Castro's 28th of July Movement which created the Soviet satellite ninety miles from Florida.

I have no plans for ostrich feathers adorning our caps.

Part IV

Glossary

A-76, A-30, A-60—Field radios

AFRIKANER—South African of Dutch Extraction—Native South African

AK—Soviet manufactured assault rifle—Proper name Kalashnikov

AKM—Same weapon, latest model

ALPHA—First letter of phonetic alphabet used in radio transmission. The remainder are: BRAVO, CHARLIE, DELTA, ECHO, FOXTROT, GOLF, HOTEL, INDIA, JULIET, KILO, MIKE, NOVEMBER, OSCAR, PAPA, QUEBEC, ROMEO, SIERRA, TANGO, UNIFORM, VICTOR, WHISKEY, X-RAY, YANKEE, ZULU

AUSSIE—Australian

BAAS—Afrikaner term for Mr. or sir

BERET—Headgear, Rhodesian Army

BINOS—Binoculars

BIVVY—One part of a shelter half. Two troopers can use their individual bivvies to form a tent

BLUES—Air Force

BREN GUN—World War II British automatic rifle similar to U.S. Browning automatic rifle

BREW-UP—Order to boil tea. A popular order in the bush.

BRIT—Englishman

BSAP—British South African Police

BUSH—In the bush—serving in the field

CALL-SIGN—Unit, either army or police, on ground

CALL-UP—Orders to active duty

CAMOS—Abbreviation for camouflage uniforms

CASEVAC—Medical/Casualty evacuations

CHARLIE TANGOS—Communist Terrorists

CHAT-UP—Talk to a girl

CHUFFLED—To be proud

CID—Criminal Investigation Division, BSAP

CLASSIC WARFARE—Rhodesian term for conventional war

COIN—Counter Insurgency

COY—Rhodesian Army abbreviation for Company

DA—African District Assistants—Uniformed guards, armed, who act as private bodyguards for District Commissioners.

DC—District Commissioner, local representative of Internal Affairs. Has authority over local Africans and handles administrative affairs. In most cases meddles in army operations within his district

DINING IN—Military protocol—traditional dinner attended by officers, usually informal

DOLLY BIRD—Girl, usually prettier than most

DONGA—Shona word for gully or small washout

FIRE FORCE—Helicopter-borne infantry troops lifted into center of terrorist attacks

FLOPPIES—Africans

FN—Standard Belgian or British 7.62 Rifle, issued in Rhodesian Army

FREDDIES—Frelimo troops—armed forces of Mozambique, Federation for Liberation of Mozambique

FUZZ—BSAP

GET YOUR END AWAY—Get laid

GOFFLES—Afrikaner word for Colored in Rhodesian Army

GONGS—Military decorations

GOOKS—Communist Terrorists

GUARD FORCE—Para-military organization charged with the responsibility of guarding PV's (protected villages)

HOUT—Slang term for Africans used in Rhodesian Security Forces—actual meaning is wood

INDEPCOY—Independent Rifle Company

INTAF—Abbreviation for Internal Affairs, a civilian organization charged with handling administration of the TTL's

JOC—Joint Operations Center

JUMBO—Elephant

KAFFIRS—Any black person

KOPJIE—Hill

MAG—Rhodesian machine gun of British manufacture—7.62 millimeter

MANTLE STICKS—Police support units, multi-racial, with army weapons, using standard army tactics in anti-terrorist roles

MASHONAS—One of the two largest tribes in Rhodesia. Used as slaves by the Matabele's.

MATABELE—The other large tribe—descendants of Zulus. Warriors

MEALIE—Corn

MIRAH—Halt

MOON BUGGY—Mine-protected vehicle

MP—Military Police

MPLA—Angola's Communist Party forces

MUNT—African

NANNY—Female African

NDEBELE—The language of the Matabele's

N'GANGA—A witch doctor

ORDERS—A form of military court to try offenders

PADDOCK—Any area, large or small, enclosed by either wood or wire fences to hold cattle or horses

PATU—Police Anti-Terrorist Unit

PISSED—To be drunk

PM—Prime Minister

PRONTO—Radioman, Signaller

PULLED—Slang term used by Army to denote someone killed

PULL THEM—Shoot them

RAR—Rhodesian African Riflles—Black Infantry Regiment, formerly commanded by white

RAT PACKS—Rhodesian form of "C" rations. Cardboard boxed rations of tinned goods for field consumption by troops on patrol

RECCO—Reconnaissance

REVV—Being fired on

RHINO—Armored vehicle

RIC—Rhodesian Intelligence Corps

RL—Stores vehicle

RLI—Rhodesian Light Infantry

RP—Regimental Police

RPG—Soviet Rocket Launcher

RPD—Soviet-manufactured light machine guns

R & R—Rest and Recuperation

RWS—Rhodesian Woman Soldier

SADF—South African Defense Force

SAS—Special Air Service

SB—Special Branch—Intelligence Section of BSAP

SCHOOL OF INF—Infantry School in GWELO

SELOUS SCOUTS—Elite, multi-racial Reconnaissance Unit. Training equivalent to U.S. Army Rangers

SHELL SCRAPES—Rhodesian term for foxholes

SHONA—The language of the Matabeles

SITREP—Situation report

SLOPES—Rhodesian slang for South Africans

SLR—Standard issue rifle, 7.62 caliber, Rhodesian Army

SLOT—To kill

SLOTTED—Killed

SPARROWS—Trackers

STRETCHER—A field cot used by troops

SUN RAY—Commanding officer

SUN RAY MINOR—2nd in Command

TAKE THE GAP—Leave Rhodesia or go AWOL

TERRS—Abbreviation for Terrorists

TERRS, CT's—Communist Terrorists

TF—Territorial Force, similar to U.S. Army Reserve or National Guard

TM 46—Soviet land mine

TO BE GONGED—To be decorated

TO BE HAPPY WITH—To be satisfied with a situation, assigned mission, or development

TO BE ON ORDERS—To be charged with an offense and slated to be tried

TO GET FLAT—To become angry

TOKAREV—Soviet automatic pistol

TTL—Tribal Trust Land

U.K.—United Kingdom, Britain

UNITA—Dr. Jonas Swimbi guerilla force who fight MPLA Marxist forces in Angloa

UZI—Israeli sub-machine gun

VLEI—Open plain in the bush

VOELDSCHOEN—Commercially manufactured shoes by BATA corporation worn by many Rhodesian troops. Low-cut oxfords resembling "Hush Puppies" in U.S.

WP—White Phosphorus

YANK—Any American

ZANLA—Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army

ZANU—Zimbabwe African National Union—Robert Mugabe's branch of terrorist murderers

ZAPU—Zimbabwe African Peoples Union—Joshua Nkomo's branch of terrorist murderers

.303—British Bolt Action Rifle WW II

60 MIL—60 mm Mortar

9 MIL STAR—Standard 9 mm pistol issued by Rhodesian Army

9 MIL BROWNING—14 Shot Pistol

MAJOR MIKE

HE'S ONE OF AMERICA'S BEST KNOWN SOLDIERS OF TWILIGHT: A MERCENARY. HIS LAST MAJOR ACTION WAS IN RHODESIA, WHERE HE WAS A COMBAT COMMANDER WITH GREY'S SCOUTS, FIGHTING THE COMMUNIST-LED INSURGENTS. HE LOST THAT COMMAND WHEN SOME DOCTORED ATROCITY PHOTOS STARTED MAKING HEADLINES. HE THOUGHT IT WAS HIS LAST WAR.

THEN CAME NICARAGUA AND ANOTHER CHANCE TO UPSET THE COMMUNIST TIME-TABLE. THESE, THEN, ARE THE ADVENTURES OF

MAJOR MIKE

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