

Falklands War | Rhodesia's Selous Scouts | XB-70 Bomber | Anti-Satellite Weapons | Military Microbots | Gen. Walker at Pusan

# MODERN WAR

#5 MAY - JUN 2013

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PYONGYANG**



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# MODERN WAR

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## FEATURES

**6**  
**Drive on Pyongyang:**  
Battlefield Korea  
There's been a ceasefire, but no real peace, on the Korean peninsula for over half a century. Here's our analysis of the factors involved in maintaining—or ending—that situation.  
*by Maciej Jonasz*

**24**  
**Up Front in the Falklands**  
Looking back on it today, the British victory in this savage little war can easily seem to have been inevitable—it wasn't. Here's our analysis.  
*by Phil Sharp*

**42**  
**The Selous Scouts:**  
Black Ops Elite for a Doomed Cause  
The Selous Scouts were an elite unit in the service of a doomed cause. Here's our analysis.  
*by Kelly Bell*

## DEPARTMENTS

**22**  
**Design Theory**  
Drive on Pyongyang  
*by Joseph Miranda*

**52**  
**On the Horizon**

**54**  
**Systems of War**  
•The XB-70:  
Mach 3 Bomber That Failed  
*by Steven K. Dixon*

**Weapons**  
•War in Space: Anti-Satellite  
*by Jeff Dougherty*

**New Arenas**  
• Military Microbots  
*by David R. Higgins*

**Spotlight On**  
• Gen. Walton Harris Walker  
& the Defense of Pusan  
*by David March*



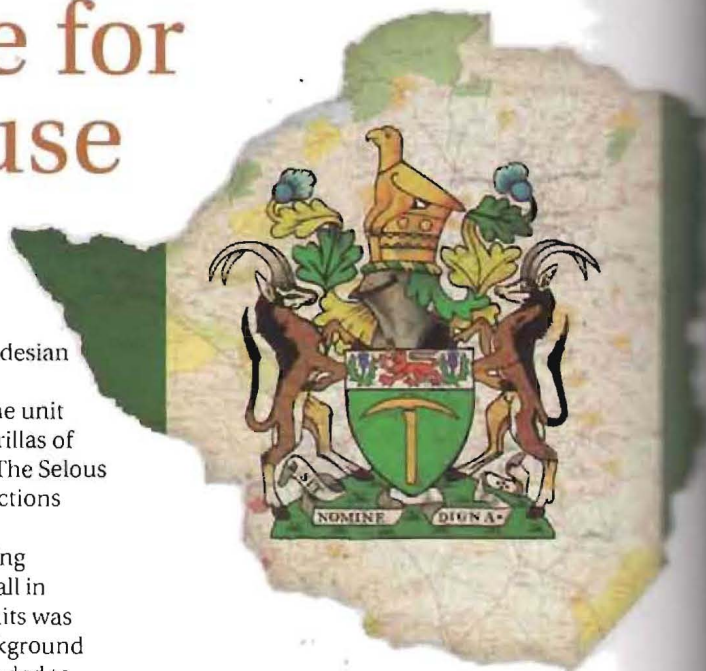
# The Selous Scouts: Black Ops Elite for a Doomed Cause

By Kelly Bell

One of the notable units to come out of the 1964-79 Rhodesian Bush War (a.k.a. the Second Chimurenga War and the Zimbabwe War of Liberation) was the *Selous Scouts*. The unit was organized to fight using the same tactics as the enemy guerrillas of the ZANLA/ZANU and ZIPRA/ZAPU factions and defeat them. The Selous Scouts engaged in a wide range of operations, from “fireforce” actions on open battlefields to clandestine missions in enemy territory.

The Rhodesian military created the *Scouts* in 1973 as a tracking unit to locate guerrillas infiltrating across the border and then call in larger conventional units to eliminate them. Command of the unit was given to Lt. Col. Ron Reid-Daly, a retired army officer with a background in counterinsurgency warfare. The unit’s missions quickly expanded to include a further range of operations, including “externals” (raids against enemy bases in adjoining countries), and other clandestine activities.

The *Scouts* were trained to operate in small teams that spent long stretches in the bush and were able to pass themselves off as insurgents. Every trooper was a volunteer, and only 12 percent of the applicant pool passed the selection process. A scout had to be able to work both as part of a team and as a loner capable



A Scout team on patrol deep in the bush.

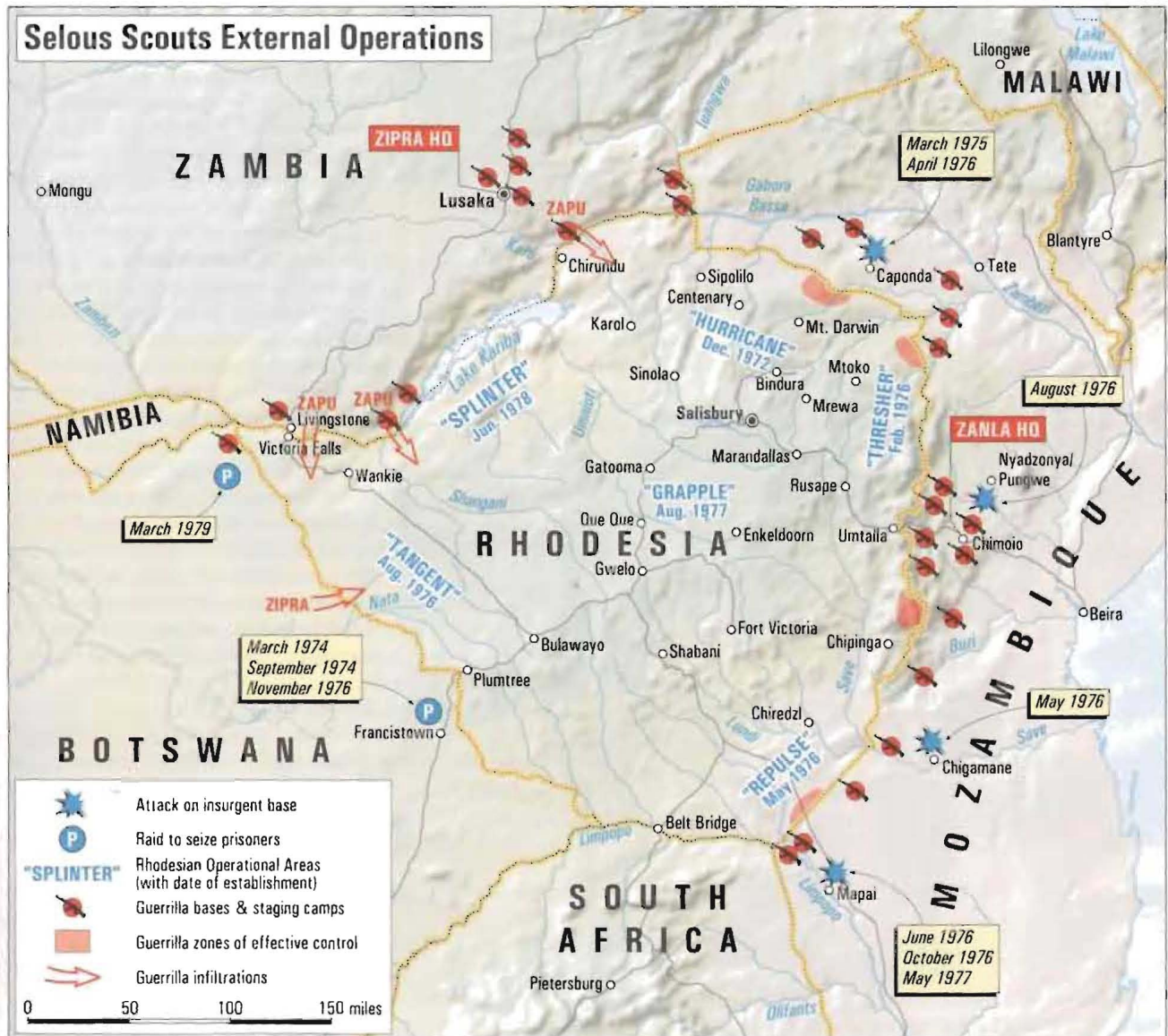
of thinking and acting on his own. Daly described the ideal scout candidate as “a certain very special type of man. In his profile it is necessary to look for intelligence, fortitude and guts, potential, loyalty, dedication, a deep sense of professionalism, maturity—the ideal age being 24 to 32 years—responsibility and self-discipline.”

That list makes it easy to understand why so many hopefuls fell by the wayside and, in turn, why the *Scouts* acted so determinedly in their recruiting efforts when such men were identified. When recruiting opened, many lined up to join.

Many of those first volunteers were formerly of the British South Africa Police Special Branch. They had specialized skills in intelligence and combat tracking that were vital for the new unit. Others recruits came from abroad: South Africans,



A Scout team aboard a helicopter taking them on a raid into neighboring Mozambique.





*Two Scouts on patrol in the bush provide clear illustration of their unit's unorthodox mode of dress and grooming.*



*Two newly arrived recruits at Wafa Wafa find some food to supplement their ration pack.*

British and Americans, among others, bringing with them a wealth of varied military experience.

Blacks were also recruited in order to take advantage of their ability to infiltrate insurgent ranks. That was also done to create a more favorable internal political situation by giving them a stake in the country. Indeed, most of the Rhodesian active armed forces came to be composed of blacks who, for various reasons, saw the government of Ian Smith as preferable to the political agenda of the insurgents.

Defecting guerrillas were especially prized as recruits. Given the choice between imprisonment or joining the *Scouts*, many eagerly signed on. Even some already in prison were accepted. (Daly's operatives would fake their escapes from jail and whisk them away to training facilities.) The notion of recruiting and rearming enemy combatants, many of whom had been under arms since childhood, was unpalatable to some Rhodesians; nevertheless, Daly considered them essential for the accomplishment of some missions.

Gaining intelligence about the enemy has always been a vital part of unconventional warfare, and one of the best ways to do that is via the "pseudo-gang" ploy, in which small counterinsurgent units disguise themselves as guerrillas. The British Army had some experience in that tactic from its various small wars at the end of the colonial era and, in turn, many Rhodesians had experience serving in those conflicts. It was found that turned guerrillas generally performed well.

The size of the *Selous Scouts* varied. By late in the war they had 420 men on the rolls. The standard tactical unit was the troop, a platoon-sized formation composed of three sections of nine to 12 men each.

### **Black Ops**

The *Scouts*' main mission was intelligence gathering: determining the locations of insurgent units, uncovering their plans, and pinpointing their bases and lines of supply. Undercover scouts infiltrated insurgent units and then moved freely through enemy areas. Gathered information was passed to other branches of the armed

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46



## Becoming a Scout

Volunteers for the *Selous Scouts* faced great challenges in simply becoming qualified to join the unit. Just the trip to the boot camp at Wafa Wafa, on the shores of Lake Kariba, was a major trial. Dropped off by helicopter 15 miles from Wafa Wafa, 60-man groups of recruits had to trek the distance to the training compound. Upon arriving they found nothing but a few crude huts.

Motivation was determined by pushing the volunteers to their limits via an exhaustive training regimen. For the first five days the trainees were given a single one-meal ration pack to eat. Then they were allowed some rancid animal carcasses and could go out and forage. Generally, the majority of each new group dropped out after two days, returning to their original units or prison. The initial training lasted 17 days.

From dawn until 7:00 p.m. the recruits conducted calisthenics and drills in basic combat techniques. They also had to traverse obstacle courses designed to banish the fear of heights and instill confidence. When the sun went down they undertook night combat exercises.

They celebrated completion of that initial part of their training with a 62 mile hike, with each man carrying a backpack containing 66 lbs. of rocks. The stones were painted red so no one could cheat by discarding some at the march's start and then refilling his pack at its conclusion. Following that initiation they were given a week of leave, and were then taken to another facility for what was called the "dark phase" of training.

That advanced training camp was laid out to resemble a clandestine guerrilla installation. There the men were taught more combat tactics, counter-ambush drills and the use of communist bloc weapons. Enemy tactics were studied so they could be countered or imitated when needed for infiltration.

A critical part of dark phase training concerned how to impersonate guerrillas in preparation for infiltrating enemy areas. Recruits learned to avoid shaving while getting used to going to bed and rising at irregular hours. Non-smokers practiced deeply inhaling smoke from strong Soviet-made *machorka* tobacco without coughing, and teetotalers learned to hold their liquor. They were taught to talk and walk like guerrillas and to live the insurgent lifestyle in a convincing fashion.

Fieldcraft was critical, including dealing with big game such as elephants, rhinoceroses and lions. Troopers were taught to avoid shooting at such targets, since their military rifles weren't powerful enough to bring them down quickly and could instead start stampedes. The course finished up with parachute qualification, both static line and free fall.

Eight and a half months after joining, recruits were ready to graduate as entry level *Selous Scouts*. +



A modern-day artist's view of an idealized Scout.

## A Tale of Two Scouts



### Frederick Courteney Selous

The *Selous Scouts* took their name from British African explorer Frederick Courteney Selous. He died in 1917, but he's remained legendary in southern Africa.

He was born in London in 1851, where as a young man he showed interest in the "dark continent," as Africa was then popularly known. At age 19 Selous went to Africa, where he crisscrossed the Transvaal and Congo regions in pursuit of big game. In 1890 he went to work for Cecil Rhodes, the British magnate who was a driving force in colonization, railroads and mining in southern Africa. He guided a pioneer column into the territory that would become the colony bearing Rhodes's name, later fighting against native uprisings in the First and Second Matabele Wars.

Selous married and settled in southern Rhodesia, where he became a celebrity. Among his friends were Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scouts, and Theodore Roosevelt, a former American president and outdoorsman.

When World War I broke out, Selous rallied to the colors and was commissioned an officer in the British Army—at the age of 64—in a special unit of frontier troops. He was involved in the campaign against German Gen. von Lettow-Vorbeck's East African forces, and was killed in action on 4 January 1917.

Selous's legacy as an explorer, hunter and naturalist survived him. Among other things, author H. Rider Haggard used him as the inspiration for his Allan Quartermain character in novels such as *King Solomon's Mines*.

### Ronald Reid-Daley

Born in what was then the Southern Rhodesian capital of Salisbury, Reid-Daly entered the military in 1951 at the age of 20. He served with the British Special Air Service (SAS), which had a *Rhodesian Squadron* from World War II until 1960.

He fought against communist insurgents in Malaya, then returned home, where he joined the *Rhodesian Light Infantry*, an elite regular army unit, retiring as a captain in 1973. Later that year Rhodesian Army Chief of Staff Gen. Peter Walls talked him into forming the *Selous Scouts* to take on the growing guerilla threat. Basing his recruiting and training techniques on his time in the Malayan jungle, Reid-Daly created an unorthodox but effective unit.

Those unorthodox methods and characteristics sometimes led to tensions with the regulars, exacerbated by everyone's increasing war weariness. That came to a head on 29 January 1979, when Reid-Daly discovered a bugging device in his office. He found out it had been placed there as part of an investigation concerning alleged ivory poaching by some of his men. That charge was never proved, and Reid-Daley was outraged since he was a supporter of wildlife conservation.

He also feared the wiretap may have worked to compromise the security of upcoming missions, forcing him to abort them. That then led to a confrontation between Reid-Daley and the army commander-in-chief, which resulted in an official reprimand. Soon afterward he resigned and began a lawsuit to clear his name.

The Reid-Daley feud with the Rhodesian Army only ended when he emigrated to South Africa in 1982. There he served as commander of a unit called the *Transkei Defence Force*, and later headed a private security firm called Security Services Transkei, Ltd. He died of natural causes in 2010.



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forces and police who would take action, such as sending in a "fireforce" (see page 47) to destroy a guerilla unit, or arresting members of underground cells. Due to their expertise at information gathering, the *Scouts* were at times better informed on overall enemy activities and intentions than were the various guerilla units themselves.

In the field the troopers had leeway in terms of dress and equipment.

Enemy weapons were frequently carried to facilitate infiltration. The men often grew beards and a wide range of clothing was worn. Those characteristics sometimes created friction when scouts met with conventional units. One tactic to minimize that was to declare an area "frozen," meaning the only Rhodesian force allowed to operate there was the *Scouts*. The idea was to minimize friendly fire and other disruptive incidents.

Of course, there was more to *Scout* operations than simply locating the enemy. They took the fight to them, often using terror to fight terror. Clandestine operations included bombing insurgent safe houses, abducting enemy leaders, retaliation attacks against enemy villages, sabotaging railroads in neighboring countries providing sanctuaries to the guerillas, attacks on insurgent base

CONTINUED ON PAGE 50 »

## Data File

The Rhodesian Bush War of 1964 to 1979 was known to the insurgents as the Second Chimurenga War. (The First Chimurenga War was the Matabeleland Rebellion of 1896-97, a rising against British colonial domination of the region that would later become Rhodesia.)

The two major insurgent factions in the war were the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), headed by Robert Mugabe, and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), under Joshua Nkomo. ZANU's military wing was the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), while ZAPU's was the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA).

Both ZANU and ZAPU officially took a Marxist-Leninist political line, though that's often been interpreted as having been nothing more than a cover used to gain the support of the communist powers. Red China tended to support ZANU, while the Soviet Union backed ZAPU. Each of the insurgent movements had their roots in the major ethnic groups of the country: ZANU among the Shona of the east, and the ZAPU among the Ndebele of the west.

Both insurgent groups had much of their strength outside the country. ZANU was based mainly in Mozambique, and ZAPU in Botswana and Zambia. Even so, those bases were never secure, as Rhodesian forces frequently attacked them in order to keep the insurgents off balance.

Each movement had a different approach to the war. ZANU's strategy was that of Maoist insurgency, relying on mass mobilization. ZAPU worked toward building up enough strength to launch a major conventional offensive. Both ZANLA and ZIPRA conducted political indoctrination among their troops, often at the expense of military training.

A typical ZANLA unit was a guerrilla detachment of 100 to 200 men, usually broken into smaller teams of 10 to 30. ZIPRA's military branch contained both guerrillas and regulars. The latter, in theory, were being prepared for "Operation Zero Hour," a massive and culminating conventional offensive to seize strategic points across the country using Soviet-supplied weaponry.

Insurgent tactics revolved around infiltrating guerrilla teams into various parts of the country. They would form base camps near friendly villages where cadre could address the locals, trying to win them over and recruit more guerrillas. There was also use of terror to attack the links between the Rhodesian government and the populace. Extensive mining of roads was carried out with the intent of paralyzing the economy. The guerrilla teams had various mixes of Soviet and Chinese weapons, but they were usually armed with AK-47s, machineguns, light mortars, RPGs and Strela-2



*A fireforce patrol from the Armoured Car Regiment.*



*A fireforce infantry team disembarking from a helicopter at the edge of a contact area.*

(SA-7) man-packed surface to air missiles.

Government security forces were able to prevent the formation of large guerrilla units, so most combat "contacts" were between small units. Actions at company level and above were almost unheard of. Guerrillas usually attempted to immediately break off instead of engaging in firefights. That was to preserve strength, which was intended for use in mobilizing the populace. Insurgent marksmanship was generally poor, which meant small Rhodesian units could take on much larger numbers of guerrillas.

In the mid-1970s ZANLA had about 3,000 guerrillas inside Rhodesia, while ZIPRA had some 3,200. There were also local auxiliaries who acted as scouts and provided logistical support. By the time the war came to an end in 1979, guerrilla strength within the country had multiplied several fold.

In 1975 ZANLA and ZIPRA merged to create the Zimbabwe People's Army (ZPA), while ZANU and ZAPU later formed the ZANU/Popular Front. Much of the war was actually resolved outside the area of combat operations, in propaganda and political battles at the United Nations, in the global media

and Western capitals, and it was on those fronts the conflict was finally decided.

## Rhodesian Security Forces

The Rhodesian armed forces initially included the army, air force and British South African Police (BSAP). Combined Operations Headquarters in the capital at Salisbury coordinated the actions of all services. Coordination was, by doctrine, to extend down to the lowest levels.

The provision of civil services was done to maintain the support of the African population, while the BSAP and combat units provided protection and kept the guerrillas off balance. Raids against insurgent sanctuaries in adjoining countries were supposed to seize the initiative and make it politically expensive for those countries' governments to maintain support for the insurgency.

The country was divided into operational areas with codenames such as "Hurricane" and "Thrasher." Each

CONTINUED ON PAGE 48 »





*A motorized fireforce patrol takes a smoke break.*



*A fireforce engineer unit searching a mine-blast area along a road.*

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area had a Joint Operations Centre (JOC) to coordinate all activities within it.

The primary army unit was the battalion, with operations often conducted by smaller units. There were several "brigades," but they were merely headquarters in charge of administration. Other than the *Selous Scouts*, the primary combat units included the following.

#### **Rhodesian Light Infantry**

Originally a regular infantry battalion, it was later reorganized as a commando unit to facilitate the use of counterinsurgency tactics. The RLI was parachute-trained and was the backbone of fireforce operations.

#### **Rhodesian African Rifles**

This unit consisted of two battalions (later four) of black troops commanded by white officers.

#### **Rhodesian Regiment**

This unit had up to eight battalions, essentially reservists who were mobilized for short tours of service in emergencies.

#### **Rhodesian Armoured Car Regiment**

This unit conducted reconnaissance, convoy escort and motorized patrolling.

#### **Rhodesian Artillery**

This unit had two batteries of medium guns. Given the low intensity combat characteristic of the war, and the desire to avoid collateral damage, artillery wasn't a major factor in operations.

#### **Grey's Scouts**

This was a horse-mounted tracker battalion noted for its mobility in the bush.

#### **Special Air Service**

This was an elite special operations battalion based on British concepts.

Rhodesia had a small air force with about 150 pilots. There was a total of eight squadrons with light tactical aircraft, transports and helicopters. The air force's main utility was in providing transport to ground units, thereby allowing them to react rapidly to insurgent moves as well as striking into enemy territory.

The British South African Police (BSAP), despite the name, was entirely Rhodesian. It had a range of counterinsurgent duties, including intelligence work, population protection, maintaining local services and the occasional combat action. Some of its specialized counterinsurgent units proved more effective than those of the regular army.



*Helicopters were also used by fireforce infantry for speedy transit into contact areas.*

## Fireforce Tactics

When a tracking unit detected guerrillas, it would usually call in a "fireforce." A fireforce was an on-call unit of platoon size. It would be transported to the location of the contact by light helicopters, such as the Alouette (nicknamed "G-cars") or by Dakota cargo aircraft. Insertion was also often by parachute: by the late 1970s most Rhodesian regular infantry were airborne qualified.

The usual unit of tactical deployment was the four man "stick." That was the troop-carrying capacity of the helicopters, but was also tactically efficient in dealing with small guerrilla forces. Coordination was via an airborne command post called the "K-car." Fire support could come from armed helicopters or fight aircraft.

A second wave might also be added as reinforcement via ground vehicles. A common mission for them was to secure landing strips for refueling and resupply.

Fireforce tactics were effective, with an 80:1 kill ratio. The tactics worked because of superior Rhodesian training, intelligence and tracking capabilities, combined with control of the air. In the end, though, there weren't enough fireforces to cover the entire country.



*A fireforce infantry patrol.*

— **Joseph Miranda** ✦

camps and occasional assassinations. For example, using a car bomb, the *Scouts* nearly succeeded in killing ZAPU commander Joshua Nkomo. In other instances pseudo-guerrillas would lead genuine insurgents into ambushes or provoke firefights among different guerilla units.

One of the more notable actions was in August 1976: Operation Eland, against a ZANLA base on the banks of the Nyadzonya/Pungwe River in Mozambique. Eland involved 72 (or 84 by some counts) scouts, along with possible South African involvement, driving a truck and armored car convoy disguised as members of FRELIMO. (FRELIMO was the insurgent organization that had fought the Portuguese in Mozambique and, with the collapse of that nation's empire in 1974, it controlled the former colony and gave sanctuary to ZANU.)

Eland went off perfectly as the *Scouts* first cut the telephone wires leading into the insurgent base, drove into its center, jumped from

the vehicles and opened fire. Taking the enemy unaware, the *Scouts* killed over 1,000 guerillas while suffering only five friendly wounded.

### Conclusions

Rhodesian security forces lacked the manpower needed to control the entire country. There were also the political factors of being diplomatically isolated, with only South Africa providing support, as well as the lack of a broadly viable alternative to the insurgent political program. By the late 1970s large areas of the countryside were no longer under government control.

At the same time, the insurgents were incapable of taking any towns and they remained incapable of mounting even minor conventional military operations. That was in large part owing to the *Selous Scouts* keeping the guerillas off balance. Guerilla bands came to distrust each other, and their morale was undermined by the lack of security in the field and in their supposedly

secure base areas. It was therefore difficult to coordinate attacks, and those attacks that were made were often intercepted by the Rhodesians.

Of course, the *Selous Scouts* wasn't the only unit involved in counterinsurgency. There were many less glamorous units that conducted much of the day-to-day fighting. It's estimated, though, that the *Scouts* were responsible for approximately 68 percent of all guerillas killed in Rhodesia between 1973 and 1980, due to their direct actions or to calling in fireforces. They accomplished that while losing just 40 of their own.

The unit disbanded in 1980, following the end of the war via the Lancaster House Accords of December 1979. Many of the unit's veterans moved to South Africa and enlisted there in the Reconnaissance Commandos, the special forces branch of the South African Defense Force (SADF). Some then served with the SADF fighting against communist bloc forces in Angola during the campaigns of the 1980s. Others couldn't adjust to the more strict regime of SADF discipline and returned to private life or joined private security companies.

The *Scouts*' unit crest featured a stylized osprey, a bird of prey. Like their symbol, the *Scouts* were never numerous (a total of about 1,500 men over the course of the entire war), but they were formidable. Their fighting philosophy stressed unity. In the African Shona language their motto, *pamwe chete*, means "forward together." 🦅



A new Scout team all trained up and ready to go into the field.



The Selous Scouts' unit crest & motto.