

FIRE FORCE -2-

Helicopter Warfare in Rhodesia: 1962-1980

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An infantry company of the RAR or a commando of the RLI would be designated as a Fire Force at a forward airfield for six weeks, or sometimes, several months. By 1977 all regular infantry were trained paratroops and would in turn be deployed by helicopter or parachute or brought in as reinforcements from the vehicles of the 'land-tail'.

There were a number of considerations as to where the Fire Force base would be sited in an operational area. As it needed only an airstrip in the bush capable of taking a Dakota, there were a variety of geographical options but, as its role was to react to incidents as they arose and as intelligence played such a role in Fire Force operations, it was important to base the Fire Force close to the JOC and its major intelligence agencies such as the Special Branch.



The tasks of the Fire Force commander were many and varied. The pressures upon him were intense. His troops demanded kills as a measure of success. The personnel on the OPs would evaluate his performance in reacting to their sightings. The RhAF would be eyeing him critically. The burden of command was heavy and his position a lonely one. As will be seen, successful Fire Force commanders had to be men of high and varying skills.

The siting of the base was only one of the considerations for a Fire Force commander when he assumed command. If satisfied by the strategic siting, he would review the base's tactical siting, its vulnerability to attack, its defences, alarm system, the protection of the aircraft [the Rhodesians protected them with drums filled with sand, fences and overhead nets to detonate incoming rocket and mortar rounds]. He would be concerned with the communication systems, the radios which were so vital for his operations, and efficacy of the joint operations room. In the last three years of the war the RIC was able to supply maps on which current information had been overlaid which he would need for his briefings. His troops needed to be reasonably housed, close to the aircraft for speedy call-outs. He had to establish close rapport with the senior pilot who would fly him in the K-Car and command the aircraft. He needed the active support of the FAF commander, the Special Branch representative, the technicians and base personnel. The Fire Force commander would want to know what other forces were deployed in his area, their tasks and how many would be available as reinforcements for Fire Force actions. He could never have enough men.

All related equipment had to be checked. Of crucial importance was his aircraft helmet and headset. The helmet was not just worn for protection. It muffled the engine noise, making it easier to hear transmissions. Just as vital were the links that the K-Car's intercom and radios provided with the pilot and the troops on the ground. Thus the pressle [transmitting] switch of the microphone and the headset's connections would be tested. A spare headset would be carried in case his failed (and it sometimes did), leaving the pilot to direct the battle. The G-Cars had headsets for all stick leaders to keep them abreast of developments while in the air. The troops' VHF sets, particularly the telehand sets, had to be serviceable as more than one operation was hampered by faulty radios transmitting continuous carrier waves. The K-Car would carry two A63/A76 VHF radios, one a spare for the ground troops and the other for the commander if he had to disembark through the K-Car being forced down by ground fire or mechanical malfunction or if it had to depart for refuelling. In the K-Car with him, he would carry the radio codes and in particular the daily *Shackle* code. In action some Fire Force commanders would wear gloves to cushion their thumbs from damage from the repeated use of the pressle switch. All

would don flak jackets to protect them from fire from the ground when orbiting above the battle.

Along with his FN 7.62mm automatic rifle, his webbing (containing ammunition, grenades, compass, medical kit, and rations), binoculars, and a pen and notebook, the Fire Force commander would have a spare FN to issue to replace any which malfunctioned in action. The School of Infantry checklists reminded the Fire Force commander that he could not be distracted by airsickness and had to have the necessary pills on hand if he was susceptible. In practice, air sick commanders would have short careers because the K-Car pilots would not tolerate them. The checklists ordered him to have with him a talc board and chinagraphs. In practice again, he would write crucial information on the perspex of the aircraft's windscreen. He would have complete map coverage of the operational area at 1 : 250 000 and 1 : 50 000 in a briefcase. The maps had to be correctly folded and indexed so that the correct one could be quickly found in the air. Numerous sets of co-ordinates were pencilled in to avoid having to unfold the whole map to find them along the edge.

The Fire Force commander would check that, as well as the small yellow smoke grenades for target marking, the helicopters were carrying large smoke generators for marking dropping zones for the paratroopers and indicating wind direction. The generators were locally produced and were designed by what Peter Petter-Bowyer describes as 'an American pyro-maniac' whom local industry had found for him. The generators produced dense white smoke which lasted for three minutes. The G-Cars would have hoods for captives and body bags for fatalities.

Each Fire Force 'stick' of four comprised : a junior NCO, equipped with a VHF A63 radio and a FN rifle; two riflemen; and a machine-gunner carrying a MAG 7.62mm machine-gun. The MAG was heavy to carry but its high rate of fire often won a fight and it was highly prized. Indeed, when they could, the stick commanders would include two MAGs in their section. If a night ambush was contemplated, and if weight was not a consideration, the stick would be issued with claymore anti-personnel mines. As they had to move rapidly over the ground, the troops dressed in camouflage tee-shirts, shorts and light running shoes or hockey boots. They would carry little else other than ammunition, grenades, water, medical kits and basic rations. Short sharp action meant that they were usually back in base by nightfall for re-deployment in the morning. If they expected to set a night ambush after the contact, regulation camouflage denim uniforms would be worn and light sleeping bags carried.

Because it was crucial to the Fire Force commander to be able to see positions of his troops on the ground (to avoid sticks firing on each other and the like), methods of visual identification would be adopted. Troops would use strobe lights (if available), heliographs, 'dayglow' or white panels, smoke and white phosphorous grenades, or flares. Often the troops would simply wave the white backs of their maps. One Support Commando stick leader, 'Messus' Moore, was asked to reveal his position by displaying his map. He replied that, as he had forgotten his map, he would hold up his cigarette packet. His Fire Force commander, Major Henson, surprised to see the upheld packet, responded '*Stop One*, are they Kingsgate or Madison?' [two Rhodesian blends].

Most vital was the team work in the K-Car. The Fire Force commander would take every opportunity to discuss methods, ideas, latest tactics and lessons learnt with his K-Car pilot. They would find time to practise their roles in the air. As the pilot had the aircraft to fly and the airgunner/technician sat well back behind the 20mm cannon, it was the Fire Force commander who, sitting on the left, was well positioned to spot the enemy. Thus he could play a crucial role in target identification, for example. This had to be rapid and precise. On spotting the enemy, he would call a course correction - 'Hard left!' - and point out a feature close to target and order the firing of two rounds. He would then correct the gunner's aim from the strike of the shells. Fire Force commanders and pilots, of course, had much on their minds and very often keen-eyed, experienced gunners saw the enemy first. Following the action intensely, the gunners would prompt the Fire Force commander on orientation, the whereabouts of stop groups and other details. The Fire Force commander had also to understand what the aircraft could and could not do, particularly how long it could fly. Such matters were, of course, the responsibility of the pilots, but experience taught the Fire Force commanders to keep an independent eye on the fuel gauge as they had

to base their plans on the aircraft's performance.⁴⁷

There was much initial planning to be done and the Fire Force commander, his second in command, his officers, the senior and other pilots, the FAF commander and the operations and intelligence officers would meet to review the current intelligence, discuss activating call-outs, and general modus operandi.

The RhAF personnel would detail how many aircraft were available. The use of the Dakota would be reviewed including the height and number of paradrops, the drop procedure, the radio channel for drops, emergency drills and the use of 'wanker' sticks (men dropped purely to collect the parachutes as sanctions made their replacement costly and difficult). The 'wanker' sticks more than once found themselves in action when fleeing insurgents broke through sweep lines. The Lynx and its weapons would be discussed. Command, briefing and spare radio channels would be allocated. The Fire Force commander would select an alternative VHF channel for the ground troops so that the command net did not become cluttered. This channel could be monitored by the accompanying Lynx on its second radio. Aircraft formations to be used en route to targets, the masking of aircraft noise and associated problems would be examined. Colour codes would be selected - G-Car *One* becoming *Yellow One* etc. The provision for refuelling and rearming would be laid down. Finally the equipment to be carried by the aircraft would be reviewed - the smoke generator, spare VHF radios, spare rifles, body bags etc.

The Fire Force commander would describe the stop details; the callsigns; their equipment; the dispersal of medics and trackers among the sticks. He would deal with the 'land-tail', selecting its commander, escorts, medics, trackers and the 'second wave' reinforcements. There was a tendency for everyone at a Fire Force base to volunteer for the 'land-tail' but essential functions at the base could not be neglected, men had to be fed on their return and much more.

There would be a general briefing of all personnel on call-outs, briefings and methods such as the OP talk-on; target marking (using the Lynx or the K-Car to deliver smoke or the firing by the OP of Icarus, Very, the SNEB rocket [the shoulder-held launcher which Petter-Bowyer had developed] or Miniflare markers); target correction; the marking the position of the troops (by dayglow or white panels or by waving the white back of maps or the use of smoke grenades, flares, instant light, heliograph); smoke signals (blue for casevac, orange for radio failure, white phosphorous for a contact and the white generator for a dropping zone). Details of the casevac procedures would be given along with the proximity of hospitals or mobile resuscitation units. The use of air support, tactics in general and post-contact procedures would be discussed.

The meeting would review the recovery of the heli-borne troops, the paratroops and their parachutes, the second wave sticks and the dead and captured insurgents and their kit. The information required from an OP for a call-out would be laid down - the map number; the OP's locstat, callsign, radio channel; the locstat of the enemy, their numbers, weapons, dress and current activity. The Fire Force would want to know : if the OP could still see the enemy or where they were last seen, their escape routes; the nature of the terrain; possible landing and drop zones; the compass bearing from the OP to the target; the proposed method for the OP marking the target; and the locstats of other OPs or nearby troops.

If time allowed, all Fire Force and base personnel including the RhAF would practise the immediate action on call-out, familiarising themselves with emplaning, deplaning and other drills. The troops would practise fire and movement, movement across open ground, cave and obstacle clearing and other tactics. They would zero their weapons on the range and practise quick reaction snap shooting on jungle ranges [bush ranges with targets that sprung up].⁴⁸

Out in the field, hidden in the hills, would be the OPs of the Selous Scouts, other Rhodesian Army or Police units. Once a target was spotted the OP commander would report back to his unit, supplying his locstat, callsign etc. He would stand by, observing the enemy while Fire Force was activated. Everything would be done with a minimum of words for efficiency. The OP commander would be ready to update his report for the incoming Fire Force.

At the call-out, sometimes initiated by the sounding of a klaxon, the troops of the Fire Force would follow the rehearsed procedures. In the early stages, the reaction times were as little as four minutes. It was soon learnt that time taken in briefing was more valuable than speed and the Fire Force would take 10 minutes to get airborne. It still depended on the nature of the reported incident. The first question asked was always : 'How much time have we?' and often there was no choice but to get the aircraft airborne and to plan on the way to the target. In addition, a refuelling stop on the way, would provide time for a methodical briefing.

The Fire Force commander and the K-Car pilot would make a quick appreciation of the OP's report and devise a plan to preserve the element of surprise and annihilate the enemy. The K-Car pilot would examine the route and consider various options such as an initial air strike by the Lynx (some Fire Forces preceded attacks with a mini-Golf bomb) or, if the target warranted it, by Canberras or Hunters, to stun the enemy and drive them to ground. He could use of noise cover by preceding the helicopters with a Trojan or Lynx. The entire Fire Force could arrive simultaneously from different directions or the K-Car would accelerate to arrive over the target first to allow the Fire Force commander to orientate himself, confirm the OP's information and to reassess his appreciation before his troops arrived. The Fire Force commander and the K-Car pilot would select the optimum killing zones into which the enemy could be driven. They would identify escape routes - thickly bushed riverbeds and ravines - which should be blocked by stop groups. To contain the insurgents they would plan dummy drops of stop groups by the G-Cars and the positioning of their assault troops near enough to the target to be able to exploit the shock of the initial airstrike by the K-Car or fixed-wing aircraft. They would select a rendezvous for the aircraft to meet the vehicles of the 'land-tail'. This would be as close as possible to the target area and would be in a sufficiently open area to allow two or more helicopters to land, refuel and re-arm simultaneously. However, to avoid casualties and the loss of vehicles, the 'land-tail' would often only approach on tar roads to preclude the danger of mines. The Fire Force commander and the K-Car pilot would select dropping zones for the paratroopers with a view to bringing them quickly into the action. They would plot the position of other security forces in the area to avoid firing on them and to employ them, perhaps, on the periphery of the battle to intercept any fugitives. They would review their fire power requirements. Teargas to drive insurgents out of difficult places, such as caves, could be carried. Finally, they would consider having a deputy Fire Forces commander carried in the Lynx to co-ordinate the resupply by the 'land-tail', using the aircraft's second radio, and pass any developments to the JOC. The Lynx pilot, himself, might be used for these tasks.

The plan would be presented at the overall briefing. While the K-Car pilot briefed the aircrews and operational staff on the aircraft involved, airstrikes, routing plans and refuelling, the attack directions, the drop plans, refuelling and recovery arrangements, the Fire Force commander would be describing to his stick commanders and the second wave the known details of the target [the map reference, estimated numbers, enemy dress, weapons, current activity, etc.] and the plan. He would allocate the radio channels and appoint the heliborne stop groups [giving them easily remembered callsigns such as *Stop One*, *Stop Two* etc and placing *Stop One* in G-Car *Yellow One*, *Stop Two* in *Yellow Two* and so forth]. He would describe their drop plan [arranging it in a counter-clockwise sequence in the order of their stop numbers so that he could remember where they were and everyone could recall easily who was on their flank]. He would point out the dropping zone for the paratroopers and give details of the deployment of the second wave and the equipment and ammunition to be carried by the 'land-tail'. If he assigned a stick the task of searching for the enemy, the Fire Force commander had to ensure that it contained trackers or he would reinforce it with trackers.

The Fire Force commander would remind the stick commanders of pro-words to be used such as 'Stop; Show Map' [the white back of a map would be waved to indicate a stop's position]; 'Show Dayglow' [the troops had 'dayglow' orange panels and sometimes 'dayglow' linings to their combat caps which, when the cap was turned inside out, would indicate to the aircraft that they were friendly forces]; 'Throw Smoke; Go Two for uplift'. A most important proword was 'Ters visual' because too often a stop group would catch sight of the enemy but, when trying to report the sighting in a normal manner, would be told 'Wait, out' by a busy Fire Force commander.

The stick leader would return to brief and inspect his men, checking the number and condition of their loaded magazines, machine-gun belts, grenades, field dressings, rations, water bottles, sleeping kit. He would share out : the spare radio batteries, the pangas and toggle ropes [for use in difficult country]. He would check the medic pack and detail who would carry it. He would show his stick where he carried his morphine. He and his men had to use camo cream to darken their fair skins a white man's skin, even darkened by sunburn, could be seen at a considerable distance]. He had to ensure that all controlled stores [compasses, binoculars etc] and his codes were secure and waterproof. He had to remember that he had a clean white backing to his map, that he had written his radio callsign - *Stop One*, for example - on his hand. He would detail positions in the G-Car and remind his men of the emplaning and deplaning drills. The MAG gunner would take the rear right seat to give the aircraft additional firepower if the pilot requested it, (for example, to keep enemy heads down when landing). The riflemen would not fire from the aircraft because, unlike the MAG, the FN ejected the spent cartridge case upwards into the spinning blades and the riflemen could also easily hit the blades from a tilting helicopter. An additional reason was that loose cartridge cases rolling around on the floor could be sucked out of the open doors and rearwards into the tail-rotor. The G-Cars guns for this reason ejected into shoots. The riflemen would take the middle rear and front seats, leaving the stick commander the left front seat and the spare headset so that he could follow the progress of the deployment and receive his orders.

The paratroop stick leader would detail the order of the stick. He would remind the stick to watch where the rest of the sticks landed. He would brief stick on regrouping channels and which was the senior stick. All stick leaders would remind their men of tactics, formations : the drills for clearing kraals and caves, for crossing open ground, the use of fire and movement; what to do if the radio failed; arcs of responsibility, hand signals; action on contact with the enemy, the use of smoke, of grenades, target indication. Men would be assigned the searching of bodies and warned against looting. Chains of command within the stick would be established and everyone would be apprised callsigns and radio channels.

The stick commander had to answer his radio first time, (in Support Commando failure to answer immediately would draw the response of a cannon shell from the K-Car which would have an electrifying effect - it would also confirm that a radio was not working). He had to remember that he was responsible for the success of his men. If he had 'wankers' or useless members in his stick he was to report to his Troop or Platoon commander. And he was warned : 'If you don't brief your stick properly you will have your arse kicked.'

Once the Fire Force was airborne the responsibilities of the K-Car Pilot were navigation, communication with OP including the OP's talk-on to the target and the co-ordination of the arrival of the fixed-wing aircraft. The Fire Force commander and the K-Car pilot would consult the OP for an update on the target, review the plan and rebrief the stick commanders and the G-Car pilots over the radio on any changes. If the call-out had been rapid, this might be the first briefing or the first briefing might be held at the refuelling stop en route. The Fire Force commander would order the second wave sticks to move to their rendezvous point to be ready for uplift by the G-Cars. He would remind the sticks how they would be able to recognise the K-Car - by its rotating beacon or by letters or numbers on its belly or by the height - 800 feet - at which it flew. The G-Cars which would be hugging the tree-tops for safety.

The Fire Force commander would establish communications with other ground forces to confirm what callsigns were on the ground, their position in relation to the target, and who was the senior callsign. When reviewing his selected dropping zone, the Fire Force commander had to remember that paratroops were not limited by a few trees on the dropping zone, but heavily wooded areas could be dangerous as were rocks, sloping ground, powerlines and 15 to 20 knot winds. He had to remember that he and all his troops had to be orientated on the approach. Paratroops, in particular, had difficulty in seeing the target area.

On arrival, the OP would give the Fire Force commander the latest information and talk the K-Car onto

the target, indicating it with a tracer bullet or other means.⁴⁹ Ron Flint, a somewhat flustered territorial sergeant, of the Fifth Battalion, the Rhodesia Regiment, pointed his pencil flare projector and informed the incoming K-Car just behind him : 'Marking Target NOW!'. The pencil flare refused to ignite. Coolly observing the corporal's agitated efforts, the K-Car pilot laconically commented from above : 'Don't worry. I can see where your finger is pointing.' On another occasion, great difficulty was experienced in spotting the smoke of the target marker (an adapted SNEB aircraft rocket), because the Selous Scout OP, a black sergeant, had marked the target so well that the rocket was buried in the chest of one of the enemy, dampening the smoke. The Selous Scouts did not, however, always mark targets because they would be acting as pseudo gangs and wanted to appear to the tribesmen as the survivors of any contact.⁵⁰

The Fire Force commander would select the most prominent feature to the north of the target as a main reference point and orientate himself with the terrain - the hills, rivers, roads, maize fields and habitation and the direction in which the terrain and rivers ran - because his own disorientation was a real possibility as the K-Car orbited.

Pulling up to 800 feet the K-Car pilot would control all aircraft movements and the use of their weapons. As overall commander, the Fire Force commander bore the responsibility for the success of the engagement and would make his final tactical appreciation, bearing in mind the speed of the enemy's flight and the objective of preventing their breakout. He would intend to 'stabilize' them to ensure their elimination or capture. The insurgents could be expected to 'bombshell', fleeing in all directions to make it difficult to track them. Thus dummy drops would be used to convince them that there was no way out of the trap. The orbiting aircraft would deter them from moving across open ground and a pre-planned airstrike or a burst of K-Car fire could stun them into immobility. The Fire Force commander, however, would not deposit his men on the ground until he had a clear idea of the incident - sighting, ambush or reported insurgent base.

The Fire Force commander would quickly confirm where the stops should be placed and the G-Cars would be directed to their landing zones by the K-Car pilot. The commander was trained to draw a sketch-map of the contact area and to mark on it the positions of stop groups. When a stop group moved, he would re-mark its position on the sketch-map to avoid contacts between friendly forces. Control from the air by the Fire Force commander was crucial so it was essential, as has been said, that he remain over the target area at all times, changing to another aircraft if necessary. He also had to be ready to react speedily to changing situations. If the insurgents broke out of the net, the Fire Force commander had to deploy his trackers early to establish the direction of the enemy's flight so that he could leap-frog his stops ahead to cut them off.

Once his men were on the ground, the Fire Force commander had to recognise their problems and assist them with them. If a stick's radio failed, and if he could not land to replace it with the spare, he would ensure that the stick did not move and therefore not blunder into a killing ground. As soon as he could he would unite them with a stick which had communications. The commander was not to set his sticks impossible tasks nor was he to expect them to take independent action. He had to ensure that they identified the features of the target and were properly orientated, knowing who was on their flanks. He had to appreciate their difficulties in crossing terrain and not over-estimate the speed at which they could move. It was not advisable merely to give men the grid reference of their objective if it was possible to describe the route or if the K-Car could indicate their objective by overflying it. Anything which could assist the sweep and stop troops would enhance their performance.

It was vital to apprise the sticks of what was happening, what the enemy was doing. This did not mean that the Fire Force commander had to provide a running commentary because the stick leaders would be monitoring to the radio transmissions. The Fire Force commander was, of course, in a superb position, orbiting at 600-800 feet and sitting on the extreme left of the aircraft to guide his men.

In quiet moments the Fire Force commander would have the K-Car orbit the sticks to confirm their

positions and to reassure them. The sight of the supporting fixed-wing aircraft striking the target was always good for morale as was the rapid evacuation of any casualties by the stand-by G-Car. Prompt congratulations from the K-Car for any success also boosted morale and preserved the vital intimate trust between the commander in the air and the men on the ground.

There were fundamental rules with regard to tactics which could not be broken. The first was : never to sweep uphill - always downhill; the second : never to sweep into the sun; and the third was always to sweep from cover into open ground - never from open ground into cover. Major Henson recalls that, whenever he broke these rules, he lost men - five in all. And he would only break the rules because time was pressing, the sun was setting and there was no time to get his men round to the top of a hill to start a downward sweep.

It was imperative that the Fire Force commander appeared and sounded calm and confident. Any displays of impatience, excitement or anger would only rattle inexperienced sticks and prompt a mutinous reaction from experienced ones slogging through thick bush in the heat. Calm tones, clear, crisp explanations had a sobering effect on jittery ground forces. This was particularly important when dealing with African forces whose command of English was often not good and who might not understand brisk, terse commands, mistaking 'affirmative' for 'negative', for example. The Fire Force commander would allow time for aircraft noise to diminish before speaking to a stick and would arrange that aircraft orbits were sufficiently high and distant to avoid deafening the stick leaders. An important duty was to control radio transmissions to prevent the channels becoming cluttered with unnecessary 'waffle'.

The Dakota bearing the paratroops would have flown to an 'IP' (intermediate point) four minutes away, out of earshot, to await developments. The Fire Force commander would use his stops and his firepower to stabilize the situation by immobilising the insurgents. Once he had stopped their flight and driven them to ground, he would bring in his paratroops to sweep the area, driving the enemy into the open (the favoured killing ground of the aircraft) or into the waiting stop groups. Before having his paratroops dropped, the Fire Force commander would ask his K-Car pilot or the first available G-Car to confirm that the landing zone was suitable, bearing in mind the vulnerabilities of the paratroopers - exposure to enemy fire in the air, cross-winds and rough landing zones. The G-Car might establish, by landing, the precise altitude of the LZ and transmit the QNH setting for the Dakota's altimeter. The K-Car or G-Car would mark the centre of the dropping zone with smoke and talk the Dakota in.

Where possible, the troops would be dropped facing the contact area, in the direction of their sweep. It took considerable skill by the pilots to position the Dakota precisely, when flying at 90 knots (to create sufficient slipstream to open the canopies), so that the paratroopers landed on the often small dropping zones. For mutual defence and for efficiency it was essential that the paratroops came down close to each other. To expose the paratroops to ground fire for the shortest time, the prescription for the drop was from 500 feet and never lower than 450 feet. The D-10 American parachute used required 250 feet in which to open fully and in fact, drops were often made from 300 feet so that none of the paratroops drifted off the dropping zone. The Fire Force paratrooper carried little more than his weapon, ammunition, grenades, and water and thus was not heavily burdened as often is the case in military jumps.

The advice was 'Rather too high than too low'. On 17 February 1978, however, paratroops from A Company, Second Battalion, the Rhodesian African Rifles, were dropped at 300 feet due to an error of 150 feet in the setting of their Dakota's altimeters. Their commander, Major André Dennison, estimated that the canopies were open for only nine seconds before the men struck the ground - unharmed.⁵¹ John Hopkins, late of the RAR, maintains that in fact RAR probably held the record as 16 paratroopers commanded by Lieutenant 'Blackie' Swart jumped on 9 October 1978 at something less than 300 feet, through a pilot error. They hit the ground only as their chutes began to deploy. None were killed in the fall but eight were injured, four of them seriously. Four days later, an MAG gunner died from a fatty embolism being released into his bloodstream.⁵² The RLI, however, would dispute Hopkins's claim as

in 1979 a Support Commando drop near Rushinga left 14 of 22 men injured when their Dakota maintained a constant height over rising ground. The first men went out at 250 feet but the last jumped at 200 feet.⁵³

Once on the ground the paratroops would marry up using a separate radio channel and once gathered together, report 'ready' to the Fire Force commander. They would lay out an identification panel and face the contact area. The Fire Force commander would attempt to observe the landing so that further indications were not necessary. Only the leader of the senior stick of each group would report in once he had regained control of all sticks under his command. The parachutes would be abandoned to be picked up later by the closest troops after the contact. Or a 'wanker' stick would be dropped to collect the parachutes.

The Fire Force commander also had to brief all fresh troops on their way to the contact. While doing all this he would keep the JOC informed so that it could plan its wider reaction. He would bring in his reinforcements as soon as possible as he could never have enough troops on the ground and might need a reserve on hand for decisive action or for unforeseen eventualities. When the reinforcements arrived the K-Car would lead their helicopters through the pattern of landing zones, ordering each G-Car to deploy its troops when the particular landing zone was flown over, to maintain the order of the deployment.

The enemy had to be dealt with immediately and never left alive and unattended. Sweep lines were to disarm and to frisk all insurgents alive or dead on the first sweep. This was to be done because insurgents were known to feign death when fired on by the K-Car and then abscond when the sweep line had passed through. It was essential that the first captured insurgent was flown out immediately for proper and prompt interrogation because he could reveal precisely how many enemy were in the area, what their intentions were, where they intended to rendezvous, their destination, last base and name of their leader. The Fire Force commander would take care not to compromise the identity of captives, masking them with hoods, keeping them away from the locals because in many cases they would be 'turned' and recruited into the Selous Scouts for pseudo operations. Thus their local identity as ZANLA or ZIPRA insurgents had to be protected.

The Fire Force commander would make maximum use of fire from the aircraft into known insurgent positions. He would use the G-Cars for flushing fire so that the K-Car remained on station above the target. Flushing fire or 'Drake' shooting, was also used by the sweep lines. The troops would fire several rifle shots into bushy thickets to drive out the insurgents from hiding places. To promote accuracy and conserve ammunition, the Fire Force troops fired their FN Rifles on semi-automatic rather than full-automatic. Fully automatic fire was restricted to the MAG machine-gun, which would be used to lay down sustained fire, to cover the outflanking of the position by the remainder of the stick.⁵⁴ When insurgents were trapped, the sticks would often call for fire from the K-Car or other aircraft after the enemy position had been marked by the ground forces with a smoke grenade and the stick had been pulled back.⁵⁵

Most contacts were with small groups so the Fire Forces usually outnumbered their opponents. Later in the war the Fire Forces did confront groups of a hundred or more but were never defeated, never driven away. Much of the reason was the presence of air power, particularly the K-Cars and their 20mm guns but part of it was the discipline and training of the Fire Force troops and their marksmanship. Their opponents, by contrast, fired widely and on automatic. Long bursts from an AK lifts the barrel towards the sky.⁵⁶

Once the contact was over, the Fire Force commander would have the target area thoroughly searched so that all abandoned equipment, ammunition and spent cartridge cases were picked up. This was done for ballistic, intelligence and other purposes and to deny the survivors' ammunition. If there was time, the Fire Force commander would document bodies, weapons and equipment. Even if no enemy were encountered, careful sweeping was required so nothing of intelligence value was missed. The next step

was the recovery of all the dead and captured insurgents and their arms and equipment by helicopter or vehicle. Parachutes and the troops on the ground would likewise be recovered. In many cases, the troops would be ferried to the Dakota waiting on a nearby strip or to the vehicles of the 'land-tail'. If necessary, troops would be left to ambush the contact area or to follow up on the tracks of the fleeing survivors. The Fire Force commander, before leaving the area, would brief them on their task, directing them to ambush positions and assigning radio channels for communication with him and the Fire Force base. He would ensure they were adequately equipped for their task and, in particular, that they had the correct maps. If they were needed for fresh sightings the next morning, they could be recovered by helicopter with relative ease. It was not necessary for them to return to their base every time.

Once everyone was back at base, the Fire Force commander would debrief those involved. He would review the course of events : the initial briefing; the accuracy of the original intelligence; the choice of routes to the target and the formations flown; the calibre of the talk-on and the identification by the OP and the OP's subsequent action; the noise factor; the possible compromise of the OP; actions by local inhabitants; the difficulties presented by the insurgents' choice of base; the efficacy of air weapons; the performance of the troops on the ground - the stops, the para-drop, the sweeps and action on contact; casualties and their subsequent extrication; reasons for insurgents escaping and their numbers; and the efficiency of the recovery and any subsequent action. The Fire Force commander would transmit his comments to the unit which had supplied the OP.⁵⁷

Rhodesian national servicemen in the independent companies of the Rhodesia Regiment at times served as Fire Forces, as did the First and Second Battalions of that regiment, and many impromptu Fire Forces were created by troops present at a JOC. The permanent Fire Forces, however, were drawn from the ranks of the white regular soldiers of the Rhodesian Light Infantry, who achieved the highest kill-rate with relatively small loss to themselves, and the black professional soldiers of the Rhodesian African Rifles who also achieved enviable results. The troops assigned to the Fire Forces could expect to find themselves called out two or three times a day. Many call-outs produced 'lemons' because the intelligence was faulty or the insurgents had disappeared into the bush or had melded into the local population or because the Fire Force did not spend enough time searching the area of a sighting. With deployments in the Rhodesian bush war as long as six-ten weeks, the strain would often tell. Three operational jumps in a single day was something no other paratrooper had ever been expected to do. Indeed other paratroops of other nations had endured nothing like it. In 1950-1952, for example, the French Colonial Paras in Indo-China proudly boasted of their fifty odd combat jumps.⁵⁸ This was more than double the 24 operational jumps which the two vaunted French Foreign Legion Para battalions made between March 1949 and March 1954.⁵⁹ Altogether the French were to make over a hundred combat jumps while later in Vietnam the Americans only made one major combat jump. The Americans, of course, were by then making tactical use of helicopters.⁶⁰

The records of Support Commando, 1RLI (commanded by Major Nigel Henson) in the crucial months of February to May 1979 give a taste of Fire Force action at the height of the war, at the moment when the new constitution of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia was brought in, conceding for the first time majority rule. In late April, Bishop Muzorewa and his United African National Council gained the majority of the seats in the new Legislative Council with the overwhelming support of the electorate who had defied the efforts by the ZANLA, and the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) (the military wing of Nkomo's ZAPU), to deter them from voting. Muzorewa's popularity would quickly fade because the governments of the west, and, in particular, the new British Conservative Government of Margaret Thatcher, refused to recognise the legality of his election.

The forces ranged against Muzorewa - ZANLA and ZIPRA - took a terrible pounding from the onslaught of the Rhodesian security forces both internally in Rhodesia and externally in their host countries of Mozambique, Zambia and, on one occasion, deep in central Angola. Support Commando was in the thick of the fighting as one of five Fire Forces. The pilots of the Fire Forces had the additional burden of constantly being drawn away to support a programme of continual air and ground external attacks by the Rhodesian SAS and Selous Scouts. In April Support Commando itself would

raid Mozambique.

In February 1979 Support Commando was supplying troops for two Fire Forces, *Delta* and *Echo*. On 22 February, at 1.45 p.m. on a bright, very hot afternoon, elements of Support Command, IRLI, acting as Fire Force *Delta* and commanded by Lieutenant V.A. Prinsloo, contacted twelve green-clad ZANLA cadres at UL 128518 [a grid reference]⁶¹ in the mopani forest and thorn bush of Sengwe TTL in the extreme south of Rhodesia, close to the South African and Mozambican borders. Fire Force *Delta* had been brought in to reinforce a callsign of the mounted infantry regiment, the Grey Scouts, who had been on the spoor of a group of ZANLA. The Greys had killed an insurgent and called for Fire Force *Delta* to seal off the escape routes with stop groups and sweep the area.

Fire Force *Delta* (comprising a K-Car, three G-Cars and a Lynx) had been pre-positioned nearby but in the five minutes it took to reach the target, the ZANLA were fleeing south east. The Fire Force flew over the southern area and a keen-eyed trooper in a G-Car spotted the insurgents some three kilometres from the contact area. The K-Car attacked the group while *Stop One* was dropped on a riverline a kilometre west of the target. *Stop Two* was dropped about a kilometre south of *Stop One* on a track. Both stops swept eastward parallel to each other. *Stop Three* was dropped in a small kraal 800 metres to the west of the target. By this time the insurgents had bombshelled, fleeing in all directions. One insurgent put up his hands and surrendered to the K-Car. He and a wounded man were taken into custody by *Stop Three* who immediately thereafter killed a third. The K-Car's 20mm cannon knocked down three insurgents in a gully a hundred metres away to the west and sent *Stop Two* to investigate. The K-Car scored its fourth kill another hundred metres on and dispatched *Stop One* to clear the area. The Lynx pilot then spotted two ZANLA running west behind *Stop One* who turned about and searched west along the other side of the riverline. The Lynx put in two Frantan attacks onto these two insurgents, apparently without success, but *Stop One* killed an insurgent on arrival, re-swept the area and shot and killed two more.

Lieutenant Prinsloo recorded in his report that nine ZANLA were killed, two were captured and one escaped. He noted the poor state of the ZANLA weaponry, with its woodwork old and rotting. Four SKS self-loading rifles, six AK assault rifles, an AKM, six stick grenades, twelve thirty-round AK magazines, one forty-round AK magazine, three percussion grenades, 2 000 rounds of 7.62 intermediate rounds, five RPG7 rockets and four RPG7 boosters and an 82mm mortar secondary were recovered. The twelve RLI troops had fired 250 rounds of 7.62mm ball and had thrown a white phosphorous grenade. The K-Car had fired a hundred rounds of 20mm and the Lynx had expended two Frantan bombs and fired 120 rounds of .303 inch ball from its front guns. A mini flare projector had been lost as well as three FN magazines. Prinsloo noted that interrogation had revealed that the insurgents had not known that the Fire Force was in the area despite its earlier move to a position close by to await the call-out.⁶²

Two days later, at 10.30 a.m. on the rainy morning of 24 February, Support Commando's other Fire Force, *Echo*, commanded by Major N.D. Henson, contacted an unknown number of ZANLA at US 222435 in the Chiweshe Tribal Trust Land, north of Salisbury and south west of the white farming area of Centenary. Henson was faced with many problems. He had only a K-Car, a G-Car and a Lynx, the target area was large (five kilometres by three) and covered in thick bush. Visibility from the air was poor and heavy rain swept in at ten minute intervals throughout the day. Henson had responded to a confirmation received at 10.15 a.m. from the Special Branch that ninety-five insurgents were in the area but he was not given a precise location. Henson had been forewarned and, having only one troop-carrying helicopter, had pre-positioned his second wave sticks, comprising six RLI and ten Police Anti-Terrorist Unit sticks [64 men in all] with fuel about five minutes from the contact area.

No movement was seen from the aircraft when they arrived over the suspected area. Henson deployed *Stops One-Seven* in a curving line from south to north along the banks of the Ruya River. *Stops Three-Five* started sweeping northwards and contacted an insurgent across a small tributary of the Ruya. The result was the wounding of Trooper Cummings so Henson requested airstrikes by the Lynx with

Frantan and a mini-Golf bomb. He reinforced *Stops Three-Five* with *Stops Six* and *Seven* but ZANLA replied with mortar fire. Henson moved *Stops Eight-Eleven* to the west and had them sweep north eastwards. *Stops Three-Seven* killed an insurgent armed with a 60mm mortar on the hill in front of them and then resumed their sweep. On the second central hill, *Stop Eight* reported ZANLA ahead. The Lynx and the K-Car attacked but an immediate sweep found nothing. Henson ordered a further sweep of the area, and this time *Stops Three-Seven* came under intense fire from the summit. Further airstrikes were put in and the sweep line found three ZANLA bodies on the northern flank of the hill.

In his report, having recorded the killing of four ZANLA, the escape of fifteen, and the wounding of Trooper Cummings. Henson stressed the difficulties of operating in heavy rain which had masked the escapes. The size of the area of operations had also militated against a bigger kill. An AKM assault rifle, a PPSH submachine-gun, a 60mm mortar, grenades, ammunition and documents were recovered and handed to the Special Branch at Mount Darwin. Henson confessed that the idea of tackling 95 ZANLA with a K-Car and a G-Car was daunting because the lack of G-Cars had drastically limited his ability to move his troops. Those killed, Henson wrote, had been more inept with their attempted escape than he had yet experienced.⁶³

At 6.30 a.m. in the difficult light of the early morning of 6 March, Lieutenant V.A. Prinsloo's Support Commando men of Fire Force *Delta* contacted seven ZANLA, at TL 016872 in grassland with scattered trees and thorny undergrowth in the Mtetengwe Tribal Trust Land, north of Beit Bridge in the south of Rhodesia. Intelligence gathered by One Independent Company, Rhodesia Regiment, (1 Indep) had led the JOC to devise an all-arms programme to attack five ZANLA camps. The first and second camps (at SL 978892 and SL 971887) were to be bombed by a Canberra at first light. Simultaneously, with a K-Car, three G-Cars, a Lynx and a Police Reserve Air Wing aircraft (PRAW), Fire Force *Delta* was to attack the third (at TL 016872) while the fourth and fifth (at SL 955853 and SL 956841) were to be engaged by artillery.

The plan went somewhat awry. The artillery bogged down on the mud road and could not get into position. The Canberra had communications problems and had to abort.

Undaunted Fire Force *Delta*, which had been pre-positioned nearby, decided to continue with its task. *Stops One* and *Two* were dropped on a 'cut line' [a bush-cleared fire break] to the east of the third camp. *Stop Three* was placed on a ridge in the south on the river which ran directly north to the camp and beyond. When the K-Car flew over the camp, Prinsloo could see the sleeping places and the blankets but no movement. *Stops One* and *Two* moved directly west along the cut line to the river and then along its banks southwards towards the camp. On reaching the proximity of the camp area they shot and killed three ZANLA in the undergrowth. The thorns were so thick that the troops spent much of their time on their hands and knees. An insurgent killed himself by blowing his head off with a grenade. Seeing movement in the undergrowth, the troops fired and killed ten African women. Prinsloo had *Stops Four* and *Five* dropped in the east on a tributary of the main river to work down it towards the camp. *Stops One, Two, Four* and *Five* then swept the swamp just to the north, working up the main river towards *Stop Three*. In the thick thorn bush six more African women were killed in dense thorn bush. The sweep returned towards the camp and captured two females. The bodies of a female and an insurgent were recovered. The thorns were so thick that the bodies of the other three insurgents and the African women could not be recovered and were left behind. The captured females informed the security forces that the camp had held seven insurgents and eleven women. In the aftermath, the troops were sent on foot to check the other four camps, finding them unoccupied.

Lieutenant Prinsloo recorded the score of four ZANLA and eight civilians killed, and that his 20 men (12 RLI and 8 riflemen from 1 Indep) had fired 500 rounds, expended four white phosphorous grenades and a high explosive grenade. The K-Car had fired fifteen rounds of 20mm. The troops had lost a MAG belt. An AK, a SKS, two stick grenades, an offensive grenade, seven AK magazines and 500 rounds of 7.62mm ammunition were picked up.⁶⁴

At 11 a.m. on the next day, 7 March, Prinsloo and his Fire Force *Delta* were back in action. They had responded to a sighting by the Selous Scout OP, callsign *Three Three Bravo*, and had contacted eight insurgents at OG 624854 in the Godlwayo Tribal Trust Land, south of Bulawayo, in the Tangent operational area.

The OP bungled the talk-on and time was wasted. Then the K-Car spotted and killed an insurgent in the camp at QG 624855. and Prinsloo had *Stops One* and *Two* dropped to sweep the area of the camp. During the sweep, an orbiting G-Car noticed two insurgents about two kilometres north west. The K-Car flew over, shot both of them and diverted *Stops One* and *Two* to search this area while *Stops Three* and *Four* were dropped to the east to sweep the original camp. When *Stop One* and *Two* failed to find one of the two men the K-Car had shot, it was concluded that he had escaped wounded. After searching the area, all stops were recovered. The Fire Force returned to base.

An hour later, the same OP, *Three Three Bravo*, called Fire Force *Delta* back to a position five kilometres north east of the contact area because it could see that three insurgents had regrouped on a hill. Fire Force arrived and one insurgent broke cover as *Stop One* was put on the ground. The K-Car opened fire and killed him. *Stop Two* joined *Stop One* and swept the northern flank of the hill while *Stop Three* searched the kraal to the south of the hill. *Stops One* and *Two* flushed two insurgents off the hill who fled north east only to be killed by *Stops One* and *Two*.

A SKS, three AKs, five stick grenades, an armour piercing rifle grenade and 400 rounds of AK ammunition were recovered and handed to Special Branch at Gwanda. Recording the score of five ZANLA killed and three escaped, with one of the escapees being wounded, Prinsloo felt that, if the first talk-on had been accurate, all eight insurgents could have been killed.⁶⁵

On 9 March 1979, the Fire Force manned by Three Commando IRLI and commanded by Major Frederick Watts, contacted 23 ZANLA and killed 21 of them.⁶⁶ At 4 p.m. that day, Major Henson's Support Commando's Fire Force *Echo* (a K-Car, three G-Cars and a Lynx) contacted an unknown number of ZANLA at US 8085, in the Masoso Tribal Trust Land in the Zambezi Valley on the northern border with Mozambique. The country was flat, covered with thick jesse thorn bush interspersed with patches of mealie lands and a northward flowing riverbed.

Fire Force *Echo* had been diverted from another call-out but the talk-on by OP, callsign *One Two Charlie*, was inaccurate and confused, and wasted twenty minutes while the aircraft milled about. Henson was particularly annoyed when the OP refused to fire his target marker into the Muvadonha Valley. The the K-Car only acquired a target when its aircrew spotted two insurgents fleetingly. The K-Car fired its 20mm at a point where an east-west track crossed the riverbed. The Lynx followed with Frantan. Henson had *Stop One* put down on the track where it skirted a mealie land to the west of the river. *Stop Two* was dropped on a mealie land close to the riverbed and just north of the sighting. *Stop Three* was put down on a third mealie land in the south. The first in action was *Stop Two* who shot and killed an insurgent shortly after landing. They swept forward to the site of the airstrike where blood spoor and an AK were found. *Stop One* killed an insurgent on the eastern edge of their mealie land. *Stop Three* working up the riverbed, soon encountered an insurgent and killed him. The light had faded so ambushes were set up on the riverbed. A sweep at first light yielded no signs of further insurgents. Henson blamed the talk-on, the thick bush and the poor light for what he considered a poor score of three ZANLA and one wounded escaped. An RPD light machine-gun, a PPSH submachine-gun, two AKs, grenades, ammunition and documents were recovered and handed to Special Branch at Mount Darwin.⁶⁷

On 12 March, Second Lieutenant Simon John Carpenter distinguished himself in a contact with insurgents while commanding a sweep line of ten men from Support Commando's Fire Force *Delta*. When the sweep line was held up by five insurgents in a concealed position, Carpenter coolly outflanked the position, with the result that his section killed all five.⁶⁸ A month later, in April 1979, Carpenter was to account personally for two insurgents who were concealed in a well-sited defensive

position which completely dominated his own position.⁶⁹

At 4 p.m. on 12 March, Major N.D. Henson's Fire Force *Echo*, contacted an unknown number of ZANLA at VQ 384518 in the Makoni Tribal Trust Land, east of Rusape, in the Thrasher operational area. This took place in an area of open fields divided by thickly bushed riverlines, flowing north to south west, and a range of heavily wooded rocky hills, running north west to south east. The hills were divided by the river. The OP was on the summit of the north western hill overlooking the valley. Because the target had seemed so important Fire Force *Echo*, comprising a K-Car, three G-Cars, a Dakota and a Lynx, had been summoned from Mount Darwin, getting airborne at 1 p.m. At Rusape, Fire Force *Echo* was told at the briefing in the Selous Scouts' Fort that there were three targets, in the form of huts, within the square kilometre. The first hut was at the foot of the OP's hill, the second across the riverline directly east between two hills and the third also across the the river but to the south east at the foot of the south eastern hill.

Once over the target, Henson had *Stop One* put down to the west of the first hut, *Stop Two* was put on the river to the north and *Stop Three* just south of the third hut. Then, before any action could be taken on the ground, the orbiting K-Car spotted an insurgent sitting in a zinc bath in a maize field just north west of the second hut. Attending the man were two African women who abandoned their role as bath attendants and fled. The bather, however, now under 20mm fire from the K-Car reached out for an AK47 and fired back. The naked African stood his ground while the K-Car circled, firing. Then he ran out of ammunition and began to run. The K-Car gunner knocked him down killing him.⁷⁰ The K-Car crew then spotted two insurgents in the riverbed just beyond at the confluence of a small tributary and fired at a further insurgent who was captured by *Stop One*. Henson ordered the Dakota to drop his paratroopers. Para sticks were dropped to the west of the first hut and *Eagle One* and *Two* [para-sticks] were placed in the north, either side of the confluence of the river and a tributary. They began a sweep down the river and killed two insurgents in the riverline near the confluence. At that moment, a G-Car, moving away to refuel, saw 12 insurgents running in a ravine two kilometres to the south west. *Eagle Four* was brought in down the ravine in the south east and began to sweep north west. Henson knew the direction the insurgents were fleeing but was unable to cut them off because his aircraft were running out of fuel. The K-Car left to acquire fuel which the Special Branch personnel of the Selous Scouts Fort at Rusape assured Henson had been pre-positioned nearby but found nothing. This to Henson was inexcusable. The K-Car had to return to Rusape to refuel. The G-Cars found some diesel being carried by a Police Anti-Terrorist Unit stick and refuelled with the help of watering cans. The fuel for the G-Cars did not arrive until 20 minutes before last light. Thus no fire from the air could be brought to bear on the fleeing men and the stops could not be re-positioned. All that Henson could do, shortly before last light, was to have *Stop Two* and *Eagle Four* uplifted and placed in ambush. Sweeps the next day yielded nothing. Henson recorded the score as three ZANLA killed and one captured. Two SKS and two AKs and miscellaneous documents were recovered.⁷¹

Twenty-four hours later, at 4.15 p.m. on 13 March, Henson's Fire Force *Echo* - comprising a K-Car, two G-Cars, a Dakota and a Lynx - was back in action, contacting fifteen ZANLA at US 849839 in the Masoso Tribal Trust Land in the north east, just south of the Mozambique border, among low, sparsely vegetated hills intersected by thickly bushed riverlines running north. Called out to a sighting of ten-fifteen insurgents in a base camp the Fire Force *Echo* had been airborne from Mtoko at 3.40 p.m. The initial talk-on was poor and finally one kilometre to the east the K-Car spotted some insurgents and opened fire. *Stop One* was positioned in the north where the two riverlines converged and *Stop Two* was placed in the east of one of the southern hills. The para sticks were dropped in the south. *Eagles One* and *Two* swept north along the westerly river. *Eagles Three* and *Four* joined *Stop Two* and swept the southern hill from the east. *Eagles Five* and *Six* went north and then moved east along the northern flank of the next range of hills. There they joined *Eagles One* and *Two* on their sweep northwards along the western river. The K-Car killed an insurgent on the southern side of the second range of hills and killed another in the river ahead of the sweep line led by *Eagle One*. *Stop One* killed an insurgent at the confluence of the river.

Eagles One and *Two*, led by Temporary Corporal Neil Kevin Maclaughlin, had killed two insurgents in the riverline before they reached the second range. Success was attributed to Maclaughlin's clever use of minor tactics. Maclaughlin, ignoring his own vulnerability to enemy fire, moved down in the open ground of the riverbed to control the sweep effectively. After *Eagles Five* and *Six* joined him, Maclaughlin's sweep line came under fire from a third group of four insurgents, hidden in thick cover on the riverbank near a hut just to the east. The sweep line returned fire, killing two of the enemy. Undeterred, the ZANLA kept up their fusillade, bringing down Trooper M.J. Jefferies. Corporal Maclaughlin ran forward through the hostile barrage to assist Jefferies. Maclaughlin administered first aid and then, while the aircraft and the sweep line fired to distract the enemy, carried Jefferies to safety. The K-Car ordered a G-Car to casevac Jefferies, delaying the advance.

When Maclaughlin led his men forward again, they shot and killed an insurgent within the first few metres. *Stop Two*, *Eagle Three* and *Four* killed three insurgents in the easterly riverline as they reached it. They killed a further insurgent on the western flank of the southern hill. They then swept the second range.

Action continued during the night. Ambushing the area between the two ranges of hills, *Stop One* opened fire on locals coming in to remove three undiscovered but wounded insurgents. One local was killed adding the existing tally of twelve ZANLA dead. The three wounded ZANLA escaped into the night. Three SKSs, one DP machine gun, two FN rifles and six AKs and documents were recovered and handed to the Special Branch at Mount Darwin. Henson concluded that, if he had not had to stop the advance to casevac Jefferies, a complete kill could have been achieved. The discovery of ZANLA armed with FNs worried him because of the danger which their powerful rounds posed to his troops and aircraft. He recommended the decorating of Corporal Maclaughlin.⁷² Consequently, Maclaughlin was awarded the Bronze Cross of Rhodesia on 8 June.⁷³

At 9.30 a.m. on 19 March, Support Commando's Fire Force, commanded by Lieutenant Prinsloo, contacted ten insurgents at US 858688, again in the Masoso Tribal Trust Land, after being called out by a Selous Scouts OP to a sighting in an area that had a river flowing eastwards across its northern sector. A tributary joined it from the south east. To the east of the tributary was a long hill running south east to north west. To its south was a large hill running east-west, on the southern flank of which there were three clusters of huts. On the northern flank there was a small village in the east and a line of kraals beyond that. The bush of the area was fairly thick and was dense at the river. The Selous Scouts OP was on a hill three and a half kilometres to the east.

Prinsloo had *Stops One* and *Two* placed in the west at the foot of the first hill. The paratroops were dropped with *Eagle Two* across the river, *Eagle Three* to the west on the southern flank of the hill and *Eagle One* just south of the river in the west. *Stops One* and *Two* swept up the eastern stream of the tributary and then worked back down it towards the river where *Eagle Two* joined them. They moved back towards the main hill at the foot of which was the insurgent base camp behind a rocky outcrop. Half way to the hill they killed three ZANLA. They moved on to the base camp where they met *Eagle Three* who had come in from the west along the hill. *Eagle Three* continued along the hill and killed an insurgent in front of the small village of huts before moving north. *Stops One* and *Two* and *Eagle Two* moved north. *Eagle One*, in the west, moved south and immediately killed an insurgent. Shortly afterwards they killed another and then another further on, before sweeping back to the north. In all seven insurgents were killed and three escaped. Seven SKSs and a nearly new AK were recovered along with webbing, grenades, magazines, ammunition and documents which were handed to the Special Branch at Rushinga. The OP continued to observe the area. Prinsloo was complimented for a well controlled action.⁷⁴

Support Commando seems to have been stood down for a rest but was back in action on 1 April, when Corporal Christopher William Rogers and his section were pinned down by accurate fire from four insurgents at close range. The insurgents succeeded in wounding Rogers and another RLI soldier. Ignoring his wounds, Rogers continued to exchange fire with the insurgents. The exchange was

extremely heavy at times but Rogers managed to kill two of the insurgents. He neutralised the insurgent position, enabling other troops to close with and eliminate the entire insurgent group. Rogers was awarded a Military Forces Commendation (Operational) for his deeds.⁷⁵

The first majority rule election was approaching and it was known that ZANLA and ZIPRA would attempt to deter the blacks from voting by sending into Rhodesia a substantial number of their more experienced men to ensure that the tribesmen did not vote. Measures were taken to counter them. Later in April 1979 there would be a mass mobilization of all territorials and army and police reservists. Before then the Fire Forces went to work. Support Commando, for example, was deployed on Monday 2 April. A small sub-unit was detached to provide protection for some of the more vulnerable polling stations and the remainder of the Commando was divided into two Fire Forces, one stationed at Grand Reef airfield, near Umtali, and the other at Inyanga, further to the north on the Mozambican border.⁷⁶

By 1 p.m., that day, 2 April, Henson and 36 Support Commando men (flying in a K-Car, three G-Cars, a Lynx and a Dakota) were in action in what would be a four and a half hour long contact with an unknown number of ZANLA. The ZANLA had been spotted by an OP, manned by Peter Curley of the Selous Scouts, at VR 923043, just north east of the Inyanga Downs and close to the Gairezi River on the eastern border with Mozambique. The area comprised hills which were cut into by thickly bushed riverlines.

The OP had not had a clear sighting. Curley believed that he could see a weapon in the doorway of a hut but he was not sure that he was right. Henson knew that Fire Force would not have been summoned without the Selous Scout being confident that there were ZANLA present. Thus Henson put his stops down, placing *Stop One* in the south on the western flank of a long range running northwards. *Stop Three* was placed in the middle and *Stop Two* in the north. The para sticks were dropped to form a sweep line to search three riverlines which flowed eastwards to a river flowing along the foot of the eastern range. The southern end of the sweep encountered thirteen insurgents and killed them before discovering their camp on the side of a spur. Most were killed in the main river valley. Henson noted that the ZANLA had adopted the tactic of running, hiding and then throwing grenades. In support of the troops, the K-Car fired eighteen 20mm rounds and the Lynx dropped three Frantans. Henson praised his troops for their good soldiering, saying 'the troopies were complete stars'. The troops managed to lose two MAG belts, two sleeping bags and two pangas and sheaths.⁷⁷

After being called to a sighting by an OP, Henson's Fire Force (36 men, a K-Car, 3 G-Cars, a Lynx and a Dakota) at 9.30 a.m. on the next day, 3 April, contacted an unknown number of insurgents at VR 168038 on the Wensleydale Estate, a white-owned farm, north of Headlands. The contact lasted one hour on a thickly bushed rocky ridge. To the north of the ridge, which ran east-west was a river flowing in the same direction. Between the river and the ridge was heavy bush. Henson strung out his troops in a sweep line from the river to south of the ridge. The K-Car killed an insurgent, who was hidden in the heavy bush, and the sweep line killed another nearby. Just before then two captures had been made. One AKM and two SKS rifles were recovered.⁷⁸

Success came again that day for Henson. At 3 p.m. his Fire Force (still 36 men and a K-Car, 3 G-Cars, a Lynx and a Dakota), contacted ten ZANLA at VR 058055 on the Rathcline Estate, north west of Inyanga Village. Again they had been summoned by an OP. This contact lasted one and a half hours in thick bush in front of a hill which ran south west to north east. The Inyangombe River flowing north, curved round to the east behind the hill. The K-Car killed three insurgents while the troops killed four, two in the bush, one on the hill and one over the hill by the river. Henson summed up :

An excellent action by an extremely well trained and steely-eyed commando.

Four AKs and three SKSs were recovered and handed to the Special Branch at Inyati.⁷⁹

Success continued the next morning, on 4 April, but at the cost of the life of Lance Corporal M. Overbeek. 56 Support Commando men led by Major Henson were called to a sighting by a Selous Scouts' OP, manned by Sergeant 'Jenks' Jenkinson, of approximately 50 ZANLA in a base camp at VR 345051, again on the Rathcline Estate. At 10.30 a.m. contact was made with the insurgents and would continue for eight hours in terrain which Henson described as 'unreal'. He was confronted by a square shaped mountain, crowned by a series of summits and stretching four kilometres in one direction and two in the other. The size and importance of the target led Henson to call in an initial strike by a Canberra bomber. This was precisely on target and the Fire Force's K-Car, three G-Cars, Lynx and Dakota, arrived exactly on time.

On the summit of the northern hill, a stick, led by Temporary Corporal Peter Malcolm Binion, approached a clump of rocks and was surprised by point blank rifle fire from two ZANLA insurgents hidden there. Overbeek was killed instantly. Corporal Binion immediately returned the fire. Then, while the remainder of his stick put down covering fire, Binion dashed forward in full view of the ZANLA to a position from where he was able to kill the two insurgents. Shortly afterwards, Binion received a minor shrapnel wound from an exploding RPG rocket, fired at short range by a third insurgent. Ignoring his wound, Binion closed with and killed this man. A further insurgent was killed close by.

Later the sweep killed two ZANLA on the western end of that hill, two on the eastern flank of the second northern hill, one on the west of its southern flank. Two more insurgents were killed near the stream that ran to the south east across the feature. The K-Car killed an insurgent at the southern base of the easternmost summit. In all twelve insurgents, dressed in the green uniforms of Mozambique's FPLM, were killed and one wounded escaped. Ten AKMs, two SKSs and an RPG7 were recovered.

Calling the terrain the most difficult he had ever experienced, Henson had high praise for his troops. He recommended the decoration of Corporal Binion⁸⁰ who would be awarded the Bronze Cross of Rhodesia. Binion had been a stick leader for two years and had been involved in numerous successful actions.⁸¹ On the way back to base, the K-Car began to vibrate and the pilot, Luigi Mantovani, landed it. When the blades came to rest, it was clear they were so badly damaged by ground fire from ZANLA that flying was out of the question. Mantovani radioed for new blades. The request was relayed to No. 7 Squadron at New Sarum, outside Salisbury. New blades were promptly placed aboard a Dakota and flown to Grand Reef. A G-Car brought the blades to the stranded K-Car where Mantovani, the technician and Henson replaced the damaged blades. The afternoon light was going when the K-Car lifted off for base. Helicopter blades have to be calibrated and this the technician had been unable to do in the field. The consequent level of vibrations from the unbalanced blades worried Mantovani enough for him to keep landing after short intervals.⁸²

Other forces were scoring similar successes. For example, on 5 April, a Fire Force from One Commando, 1RLI, commanded by Major Frederick Watts, contacted two groups of insurgents totalling 27 men and killed 21 of them. In the next eleven days, until 16 April, Watts, his men and the aircraft of his Fire Force would eliminate 106 ZANLA.⁸³

Corporal Binion again scored at 3 p.m. on 7 April, when Henson's Support Commando men contacted seven insurgents, dressed in green FPLM uniforms and kit, at VR 175003 in the extreme south of the Weya Tribal Trust Land, just north of the white farming area of Headlands. One insurgent escaped and six were killed with Binion accounting for four of them on a low ridge just north east of a high rounded hill.⁸⁴ The K-Car killed the fifth insurgent on the ridge and the sixth at its western end. Rifles, grenades and ammunition were picked up and handed to the Special Branch at Inyanga.⁸⁵

On 11 April, Support and Three Commandos and a detachment from the Rhodesian African Rifles were sent into Mozambique to attack a complex of five staging camps which were believed to hold up to 250 ZANLA. The operation was aborted when the helicopters and Dakotas were circling the camps because ZANLA had already left. Support Commando returned to Grand Reef where it was reinforced by its

Inyanga detachment.⁸⁶ That day, Rhodesia mobilised its territorials and reservists to protect the election. They would be stood down on 24 April.⁸⁷

At 10.15 a.m. on the next morning, 12 April, Henson and 28 of his men, supported by a K-Car, three G-Cars, a Lynx and a Dakota, made contact with an unknown number of ZANLA at UP 673648, in the Sabi Tribal Trust Land east of Buhera, after a sighting by an OP. The contact lasted four hours. For once the terrain was favourable and was divided by converging riverlines, flowing west to east towards the Sabi River. The K-Car killed one insurgent in the north west, on the central river and at the confluence of the rivers. A G-Car killed insurgents in a village in the south west. *Stop Two* was dropped astride the river in the west and killed an insurgent after advancing a few metres and *Eagle One* was placed on the most southerly tributary above the confluence and killed an insurgent again after a few metres. An insurgent was captured near the northern tributary. Just north of the confluence, the sweep line killed the remainder of the insurgents. The final score was fifteen insurgents, all dressed in FPLM kit, killed and one captured. Rifles, machine guns, grenades, magazines and ammunition were picked up and handed to the Special Branch at Dorowa. Henson concluded that the contact was 'Like eating green mealies'.⁸⁸

Four days later, on 16 April, Henson, a K-Car, two G-Cars, a Dakota, a Lynx and 29 of his men were summoned to a sighting by an OP of an unknown number of ZANLA at VR 586237 in the Zimbiti Tribal Trust Land, north east of Inyanga. The sighting had been on the northern flank of a mountain which was crowned by twin peaks. A stream flowed down from the saddle between the peaks. On the saddle was the OP. Henson put his helicopter-borne troops down on the eastern flank and dropped his para sticks to the north. He formed a sweep line on the eastern end of the northern flank. When the sweep reached the stream at 2 p.m., it encountered fifteen ZANLA in FPLM [Mozambican Army] uniforms, killing ten of them while five made their escape. Rifles, grenades and ammunition were picked up and were handed to the Special Branch at Inyanga. Henson was particularly pleased by the performance of his troops during the six hours of the operation.⁸⁹

At 12 noon on 17 April (the day that the four days of voting by all inhabitants over the age of 18 began), Henson and 27 of his men, supported by a K-Car, two G-Cars, a Lynx and a Dakota again made contact with the enemy, this time seven ZANLA, at VQ 030056 in the south of the Chiduku Tribal Trust Land, west of Umtali. The contact lasted four and a half hours among three and a half kilometres of kraal lines with brick buildings, rubber hedges and thousands of mango trees stretching along an east-west road, parallel to a river which also flowed east-west. The K-Car killed insurgents on the road just short of a stream which flowed south to the river. The sweep line killed insurgents at a house by the stream and in the houses either side of the road. Trooper M.C. Moore was killed at a pair of houses across the river in the south east. In all nine green and blue clad insurgents were killed and two escaped. Ten rifles, grenades and ammunition were picked up and were handed to the Special Branch at Inyazura. Henson recorded that the contact had taken place in a very difficult area '(virtually FIBUA [Fighting In Built Up Areas])'.⁹⁰

On 19 April, Support Commando's Fire Force *Bravo*, commanded by Lieutenant Prinsloo, responded to a sighting by a Selous Scouts OP of ten ZANLA in a village at VQ 004089, close to the last contact in the Chiduku. This result was a contact with thirteen insurgents, starting at 10 a.m. and lasting four hours in a series of kraal complexes along a river. When the Fire Force was overhead the K-Car threw out a smoke marker. The Selous Scouts OP callsign *One Three Golf* indicated the target with smoke and a number of people were seen to run from the kraal. The K-Car fired on them and stops were dropped. *Stop Two* was placed in the south on the river. The paras were then dropped in the west and a sweep line went up the river in a northerly direction and swept east through the kraals. After killing the majority of the insurgents, *Eagle Four* was approaching yet another kraal cautiously when Trooper R.F. Poole was shot through the chest. Corporal Binion, the MAG gunner, ran to help but Trooper Poole was mortally wounded and died a little while later. The K-Car then killed the insurgent responsible as he fled from the hut. A feature of the contact was that the insurgents were wearing civilian clothes over

their denims and tried to conceal their weapons under their clothes. Some left their weapons in the kraals and ran. Four AKs were handed to the Special Branch and the latter removed four more from burning buildings. Prinsloo commented that there were obvious dangers in approaching insurgents who were holed up in kraals. The final tally was ten ZANLA killed, two captured and one escaped.⁹¹ The death of three members of the Mortar Troop of Support Commando reduced it to 13 men. To recover their morale the members were sent on four days of leave in Salisbury.⁹²

A military spokesman said on 21 April that during the elections 230 guerrillas had been killed for the loss of 12 regular soldiers and security force auxiliaries. There had been a total of 13 attacks on polling stations, most of them at night and all, according to officials, 'ineffectual'.⁹³ The final result of the elections was announced on 24 April, with Muzorewa's UANC winning 67.27% of the votes and securing 51 seats of the 80 seats in the new Legislative Assembly of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. The poll had been over 60 per cent and ZANLA and ZIPRA were stunned by the tribesmen's defiance of their orders not to vote. As ZANLA and ZIPRA went to ground and their leaders left the country for orders, the Rhodesian security forces kept up the pressure.

To harass ZANLA on its own ground, Combined Operations Headquarters proposed to send Support Commando on Sunday, 29 April, fifty kilometres over the southern border into Gaza Province of Mozambique in 'Operation Oppress' to attack a logistics and transit base at Chicualacuala called Petulia. The mission was to destroy the base and kill or capture any ZANLA present. The base comprised three camps, containing a resident section of 22 ZANLA. Intercepted radio messages indicated that fresh ZANLA were being brought in. The operation was to comprise an airstrike followed by a ground attack by Support Commando. The RhAF was to supply two Hunters, two Canberras, seven G-Cars, three K-Cars, two AB205A Cheetahs, two Lynxes, and 3 Dakotas (including a Command Dakota equipped with radios and teleprinters to control the operation from the air).⁹⁴

At Grand Reef on 28 April, Support Commando, reinforced by the return of the Mortar Troop, was issued extra light machine-guns and RPG-7 rocket launchers and drew as much ammunition and grenades as the men could carry. Each rifleman took ten 20-round magazines and 100 loose rounds in addition to numerous grenades, extra machine-gun belts for the gunners and spare 40mm RPG-7 rockets. In the evening, the Commando was flown to Buffalo Range to be briefed by intelligence officers on the importance of the staging post, which had been monitored by security forces but had hitherto been deliberately left alone. As an influx of ZANLA into Rhodesia was expected, it was deemed an appropriate moment to bomb and attack the base. Support Commando was expected to encounter at least two members of the ZANLA hierarchy, who would be dressed in camouflage uniforms with hammer and sickle insignia on the collars. Eastern Bloc military advisers were also believed to be in the area and in the vicinity. High ranking officers were not to be killed but captured if possible. Combined Operations wanted at very least one ZANLA guerrilla for interrogation. The operation was being used to test an experimental landmine of which a stop group would lay a number in the approach road to delay an reaction by Mozambique's FPLM. In the event, it became clear that the survival of Support Commando's men had depended on the mines functioning.⁹⁵

On 29 April the Hunters attacked the target with Golf bombs and were followed by the Canberras, dropping 300 Mk II Alpha bombs each. The 50 men of Support Commando, flying in the eight G-Cars and two AB205A Cheetahs, came in with the escort of two K-Cars and two Lynxes, landing on the fringes of the camps in the brown fog of dust and smoke of the airstrikes. Sergeant Frank Terrell, a former British marine commando serving in Support Commando, recalls the sound of continuous explosions of burning ammunition, the methodical reply of an anti-aircraft gun to the Hunters' repeated attacks. Eventually a Hunter silenced it. The RLI troops began their advance and first encountered a ZANLA kitchen littered with dead. They encountered and shot dazed ZANLA while carefully avoiding unexploded red-painted round Alpha bombs. The camp was burning so fiercely that the troops could not at first penetrate its lines of bunkers, weapon pits and tents. The camp was littered with equipment, Soviet Army helmets, abandoned and destroyed anti-aircraft guns. These guns were dismantled, while

the RLI troopers cleared the trenches and bunkers. The huge haul of rifles and equipment were collected but no further ZANLA were encountered. It was clear, from the dropped weapons, that the ZANLA had fled before the attack.

Once the area was secure the Cheetahs flew in to be loaded with AK and SKS rifles, grenades and three 14.5mm and a 12.7mm machine-guns. Uniforms, packs, web-equipment, propaganda leaflets and enormous quantities of tinned food were burned. Major Henson then had the troops search the surrounding bush. The search yielded six empty pistol holsters and a leather briefcase which contained papers bearing names and weapon numbers, messages, letters and photographs of uniformed ZANLA in the company of East German or Soviet military instructors. A follow up was instituted and Terrell believes that the troops were closing on their quarry - six high-ranking ZANLA officers - but ran out of time. The day was drawing to a close and the remaining light was needed to airlift the attacking force out. The Command Dakota, carrying Lieutenant Colonel Brian Robinson and Group Captain [later Air Vice Marshal] Hugh Slatter called off the pursuit.

During the airlift, FPLM sent in a counter-attacking force in a convoy of trucks which was brought to a halt by striking the landmines laid by the stop group.

Although Support Commando had not secured a prisoner, Operation Oppress was pronounced a success because 28 ZANLA had been killed without any RLI casualties. As had happened so often before in the Rhodesian war, a large number of ZANLA had vacated the camp on the previous night, 28 April, but Support Commando was to eliminate many of the escapees within days. On 14 May, it killed or captured 21 ZANLA from a large group which had recently crossed from Mozambique and which included several high ranking officials. A follow-up on the border on 16 May resulted in a running, day-long fight with the survivors of the group. Two of the dead were wearing Ethiopian camouflage uniforms with hammer-and-sickle insignia on the collar.⁹⁶

In a seven-week period in April/May 1979, Support Commando, 1RLI, under the command of Major Nigel Henson, together with its supporting aircraft, accounted for 165 insurgents in Fire Force operations and on Operation Oppress, and had seized large amounts of heavy weapons. Henson's skill, aggression and other qualities as a leader earned him a recommendation for the award of the Officer of the Order of the Legion of Merit (Military Division, Combatant).⁹⁷ By 20 May *The Sunday Mail* reported that worn-out, dispirited insurgents were surrendering. 'Their morale is shattered,' remarked a senior police officer who claimed that hundreds more were longing to give up but that they feared execution by the fanatical cadres 'trained in communist Ethiopia by Cubans'.⁹⁸

The data collected and collated by Rhodesian military intelligence confirmed that ZANLA's morale, in particular, was shattered by the defection of the tribesmen to Muzorewa and by the devastating onslaught by the Fire Forces since February. To exploit this, what Muzorewa needed was international recognition, but the British Conservatives went back on their promises to him. Not wishing to defy the British Commonwealth, the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement, Margaret Thatcher's Government persuaded Muzorewa to accept the settlement negotiated at Lancaster House which brought Robert Mugabe to power, ending the grim toll of war, to which the helicopter had contributed so much.

¹ The names, G-Car, K-Car were adopted by the Rhodesians for a number of reasons. G stood for 'General Duties' in military parlance, K was adopted for the cannon-armed Alouette III. The well-known BBC TV police series, 'Z Cars' was being screened in the late 1960s and the title 'Z-Car' was given to the South African Police Alouettes after the South African Police were deployed in Rhodesia in 1967. At that time the Rhodesian Police, the British South Africa Police, had called their patrol vehicles 'B-Cars'. There were phonetic reasons. Even when radio reception was poor, the phonetic endings 'ED', 'EE' and 'AY' could not be mistaken. Interview with Group Captain Peter Petter-Bowyer, 24 March 1992.

- ² No 7 Squadron, Rhodesian Air Force, diary, April 1977, cutting, *The Star*, 15 April 1977.
- ³ Interview with the late Victor Cook, 13 November 1991. Vic Cook was tragically killed in a helicopter accident in South Africa on 23 February 1992.
- ⁴ The engine was governed to achieve a constant output of 33 500 revolutions per minute. The tail rotor spun at precisely 2 001 r.p.m.
- ⁵ Interview with Group Captain Peter Petter-Bowyer, 24 March 1992.
- ⁶ RLI Papers, Support Commando 1RLI, Contact Reports, 6 January, 1977 to 5 December 1978, contact report by Major N.D. Henson, 14 October 1978.
- ⁷ Interview with Group Captain Peter Petter-Bowyer, 24 March 1992.
- ⁸ Bill Gunston & John Batchelor, *Phoebus History of the World Wars, Special, Helicopters 1900-1960*, Phoebus Publishing, London, 1977, p. 45; Bill Gunston, Editor, *The Encyclopedia of World Air Power*, Hamlyn-Aerospace, London, pp. 65-66.
- ⁹ Telephone conversation with Squadron Leader W.E. Brown, 25 March 1992.
- ¹⁰ The air frame was tubular and filled with nitrogen. To detect cracks, soap would be spread over the airframe before the pressure of the gas was tested. The technician would look for telltale bubbles. Interview with Group Captain Peter Petter-Bowyer, 24 March 1992.
- ¹¹ W.A. Brent, *Rhodesian Air Force : A Brief History 1947-1980*, Freeworld Publications, Kwambonambi, 1987, pp. 13-14.
- ¹² J.R.T. Wood, *The Welensky Papers : A History of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland*, Graham Publishing, Durban, 1983, p. 357.
- ¹³ The C4 was a general purpose aircraft which embodied features of the Douglas DC4 and DC6 aircraft and was called the 'Argonaut' by its civilian operators.
- ¹⁴ Dudley Cowderoy & Roy Nesbit, *War in the Air : Rhodesian Air Force 1935-1980*, Galago, Alberton, 1987, pp. 26-27.
- ¹⁵ Cowderoy & Nesbit, *op.cit.*, p. 29.
- ¹⁶ Wood, *op.cit.*, p. 801.
- ¹⁷ David Arnold, draft typescript for Bruce Hoffman, Jennifer M. Taw, David Arnold, *Lessons for Contemporary Counterinsurgencies : The Rhodesian Experience*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, 1991), p. 229.
- ¹⁸ Written comments on the author's script by Wing Commander Harold Griffiths, 8-9 April 1992.
- ¹⁹ *Frantan* was napalm in a frangible container with fins which could be accurately delivered. The *Golf* bomb was a 460 kilogram Amatol percussion bomb with a metre long probe in the nose to detonate the bomb above the ground. The *Alpha* Mk II bouncing bomb - a football size round bomb, 300 of which would be carried by a Canberra and when dropped would devastate an area of one hundred metres wide and a 1 000 metres long. The *Alpha* bomb had a double casing with 250 hard rubber balls between the inner and outer casings. This produced a forward bounce of some 18 metres at a maximum height of four metres before an ingenious three-way detonator exploded the bomb at three metres above the ground. Forty-five per cent of the casing - against seven and a half per cent of the conventional anti-personnel bomb - would saturate the target. These bombs were feared by ZANLA and ZPRA. Cowderoy & Nesbit, *op.cit.*, pp. 119-124 ; Interview with Group Captain Peter Petter-Bowyer, 24 March 1992.
- ²⁰ The North American T26 Trojan was the first post-war primary trainer for the US Air Force and Navy and also saw service in the Congo and Vietnam as ground attack aircraft. The French Air Force evaluated the T26 and consequently Sud Aviation modified a considerable number of ex-USAF T26s. These aircraft, called 'Fennecs' were given 1 425 h.p. Wright R-1820-56S radial air-cooled engines, two 12.5mm machine-guns in a pod under each wing and four mountings for 300lb bombs. Gunston, *op.cit.*, pp. 286.
- ²¹ Interview with Group Captain Peter Petter-Bowyer, 24 March 1992; comments by Wing-Commander Harold Griffiths, 8-9 April 1992.

- ²² Conversation on the telephone with Beaver Shaw, 13 November 1991.
- ²³ *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, Keesing's Publications Ltd, London, 8 February 1980, Vol. XXVII, p. 30073
- ²⁴ Interview with Group Captain Peter Petter-Bowyer, 24 March 1992.
- ²⁵ Interview with Group Captain Peter Petter-Bowyer, 24 March 1992.
- ²⁶ Notes faxed to the author by Group Captain Peter Petter-Bowyer.
- ²⁷ Interview with Lt Col Ron Reid-Daly, 3 November 1991.
- ²⁸ J.R.T. Wood, *The War Diaries of André Dennison*, Ashanti Publishing, Gibraltar, 1989, p. 185 fn 7.
- ²⁹ Interview with Major Nigel Henson, 3 November 1991.
- ³⁰ Notes faxed to the author by Group Captain Peter Petter-Bowyer.
- ³¹ RIC Research Report No 30 Examination of Contact Reports Received by RIC by 17th March 1979.
- ³² Stiff, Peter, *Selous Scouts: A Pictorial Account*, Galago Publishing (Pty) Ltd, Alberton, 1984, pp. 23-24.
- ³³ Lt-Col Ron Reid-Daly, 'War in Rhodesia', in Al J. Venter (ed), *Challenge : Southern Africa within the African Revolutionary Context*, Gibraltar, Ashanti, 1989, p. 149.
- ³⁴ Interview with Group Captain Peter Petter-Bowyer, 24 March 1992. The ZANU dead were : Simon Chimbodza, Christopher Chatambudza, Nathan Charumuka, Godwin Manyerenyere, Peter, Ephraim Shenjere and David Guzuzu.
- ³⁵ John Lovett, *Contact : Rhodesia at War*, Galaxie Press, Salisbury, 1977, p. 177. This was not a medal but a small silver or bronze pick - denoting acts of bravery, distinguished service or continuous devotion to duty - which was worn the ribbon of the General Service Medal.
- ³⁶ Reid-Daly, 'War in Rhodesia' op.cit., p. 149; Cowderoy & Nesbit, op.cit., pp. 43-48; Ken Flower, *Serving Secretly*, Galago, Alberton, 1987, p. 106.
- ³⁷ Arnold, op.cit., p. 232.
- ³⁸ Interview with Major Nigel Henson, 3 November 1991.
- ³⁹ Scrapbook : No 7 Squadron, Rhodesian Air Force.
- ⁴⁰ Interview with Group Captain Peter Petter-Bowyer, 24 March 1992.
- ⁴¹ Scrapbook : No 7 Squadron, Rhodesian Air Force.
- ⁴² Telephone conversation with Beaver Shaw, 13 November 1991.
- ⁴³ Interview with Commandant Neal Ellis, 2 November 1991.
- ⁴⁴ RLI Papers, Support Commando 1RLI, Contact Reports, 20 October, 1975 to 30 December 1976, contact report by Major P.W. Armstrong, 17 August 1976.
- ⁴⁵ Arnold, op.cit., p. 233.
- ⁴⁶ Lieutenant Colonel Ron Reid-Daly, *Selous Scouts : Top Secret War*, Galago, Alberton, 1982, pp. 84-85.
- ⁴⁷ Interview with Major Nigel Henson, 3 November 1991.
- ⁴⁸ Arnold, op.cit., pp. 236-237.
- ⁴⁹ Plasticised OP cards in the author's possession.
- ⁵⁰ Interview with Group Captain Peter Petter-Bowyer, 24 March 1992.
- ⁵¹ J.R.T. Wood, *The War Diaries of André Dennison*, Ashanti Publishing, Gibraltar, 1989, p. 191.
- ⁵² Hopkins MSS, John Fairey to the author.
- ⁵³ Interview with Major Nigel Henson, 3 November 1991.
- ⁵⁴ Arnold, op.cit., p. 235.
- ⁵⁵ Arnold, op.cit., p. 235.

⁵⁶ Arnold, op.cit., p. 235.

⁵⁷ 'Do's of the Airborne Commander' & 'Don't's of the Airborne Commander', 'List of DO's and DONT's of K Car Commander by Capt E.F. Evans - RAR', and other photostats in author's possession.

⁵⁸ Leroy Thompson, *Dirty Wars : Elite Forces vs the Guerrillas*, David & Charles, Newton Abbot, 1988, p. 84.

⁵⁹ Leroy Thompson, op.cit., p. 116.

⁶⁰ Leroy Thompson, op.cit., p. 77.

⁶¹ The drawing of grid lines on ordnance survey maps was a product of the First World War to enable the speedy pinpointing of positions for artillery and other purposes. The grids are labelled with the letters of the alphabet. The map reader finds the lateral and vertical lines and then calculates the position sought in tenths of the relevant square, taking the horizontal measurement first. References are given in four or six figures.

⁶² RLI, op.cit., contact report by Lieutenant V.A. Prinsloo, 22 February 1979.

⁶³ RLI, op.cit., contact report by Major N.D. Henson, 24 February 1979.

⁶⁴ RLI, op.cit., contact report by Lieutenant V.A. Prinsloo, 6 March 1979.

⁶⁵ RLI, op.cit., contact report by Lieutenant V.A. Prinsloo, 7 March 1979.

⁶⁶ RLI Papers, Honours & Awards, Continued.

⁶⁷ RLI, op.cit., contact report by Major N.D. Henson, 9 March 1979.

⁶⁸ RLI Papers, A/33 Honours & Awards.

⁶⁹ RLI, A/33 Honours op.cit.

⁷⁰ Henson, op.cit.

⁷¹ RLI, op.cit., contact report by Major N.D. Henson, 12 March 1979.

⁷² RLI, op.cit., contact report by Major N.D. Henson, 13 March 1979; Honours & Awards, Continued.

⁷³ RLI, Honours, op.cit.

⁷⁴ RLI, op.cit., contact report by Lieutenant V.A. Prinsloo, 19 March 1979.

⁷⁵ RLI, Honours, op.cit.

⁷⁶ Frank Terrell, 'RLI Support Commando : Support Commando, Rhodesian Light Infantry - Mozambique 1979', *The Elite*, Orbis Publishing, London, 1987, Vol 10, Issue 113, pp 2241-2247.

⁷⁷ RLI, op.cit., contact report by Major N.D. Henson, 2 April 1979.

⁷⁸ RLI, op.cit., contact report by Major N.D. Henson, 3 April 1979.

⁷⁹ RLI, op.cit., contact report by Major N.D. Henson, 3 April 1979.

⁸⁰ RLI, op.cit., contact report by Major N.D. Henson, 4 April 1979.

⁸¹ Binion's citation reads : 'Corporal Peter Malcolm Binion has been a patrol commander with Support Commando, 1st Battalion, The Rhodesian Light Infantry, for a period of two years. During this period, he has been involved in many contacts with the enemy and has personally accounted for numerous terrorists.

'On 4th April 1979, Corporal Binion was the Second-In-Command of a patrol which was sweeping towards some terrorists. As the patrol approached a clump of rocks, the patrol commander was killed instantly at point blank range by fire from two terrorists who were concealed in the rocks. Corporal Binion, immediately put down covering fire himself and under covering fire from the remainder of the patrol, he manoeuvred himself into a position where he was able to kill the two terrorists at considerable danger to himself. Shortly afterwards, the patrol came under rocket fire at short range from another terrorist who was using an RPG rocket launcher. Corporal Binion received a minor shrapnel wound. Despite this he was able to close with and kill this terrorist.

'On 7th April 1979 Corporal Binion was again involved in a contact in which six terrorists were killed. He personally accounted for four of these terrorists.

'Throughout these and other engagements, Corporal Binion has shown remarkable courage and tenacity. His desire to close with and kill the enemy is uppermost in his mind. His standard of professional soldiering, and dedication to duty are of the highest order.' RLI, Honours, op.cit.

⁸² Henson, op.cit.

⁸³ RLI, Honours, op.cit.

⁸⁴ RLI, Honours, op.cit.

⁸⁵ RLI, op.cit., contact report by Major N.D. Henson, 7 April 1979.

⁸⁶ Frank Terrell, 'RLI Support Commando : Support Commando, Rhodesian Light Infantry - Mozambique 1979', op.cit., p 2243.

⁸⁷ David Caute, *Under the Skin : The Death of White Rhodesia*, Allen Lane, London, 1982, pp. 324-325.

⁸⁸ RLI, op.cit., contact report by Major N.D. Henson, 12 April 1979.

⁸⁹ RLI, op.cit., contact report by Major N.D. Henson, 16 April 1979.

⁹⁰ RLI, op.cit., contact report by Major N.D. Henson, 17 April 1979.

⁹¹ RLI, op.cit., contact report by Lieutenant V.A Prinsloo, 19 April 1979.

⁹² Frank Terrell, 'RLI Support Commando : Support Commando, Rhodesian Light Infantry - Mozambique 1979', op.cit., p 2243.

⁹³ *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, Keesing's Publications Ltd, London, 10 August 1979, Vol. XXVI, p. 29757

⁹⁴ PP/MI/106/37, 'Confirmation Orders : Op Oppress', Salisbury, 26 April 1979.

⁹⁵ Frank Terrell, 'RLI Support Commando : Support Commando, Rhodesian Light Infantry - Mozambique 1979', op.cit., p 2243.

⁹⁶ Frank Terrell, 'RLI Support Commando : Support Commando, Rhodesian Light Infantry - Mozambique 1979', op.cit., pp 2243-2247.

⁹⁷ RLI, A/33 Honours, op.cit.

⁹⁸ David Caute, op.cit., pp. 361-362.

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