

WAR SINCE 1945 SEMINAR AND SYMPOSIUM

Rhodesia: Tactical Victory, Strategic Defeat

Major Charles M. Lohman, USMC
Major Robert I. MacPherson, USMC

7 June 1983 Marine Corps Command and Staff College
Marine Corps Development and Education Command
Quantico, Virginia 22134

Synopsis:

This paper, which describes the guerrilla war in Rhodesia conducted from 1966 to 1980, is divided into four chapters. Chapter I describes the history and background of the country from its establishment at the end of the 19th Century until the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from Great Britain in 1965. Chapter II is devoted to an examination of the guerrillas - their leaders, politics, strengths, weaknesses and tactics. The Rhodesian government forces are analyzed in Chapter III, while the final chapter describes major actions of the war, and lessons applicable to future conflicts. Although the nation is presently called Zimbabwe, this paper will use the name Rhodesia, since this was the official title during the period in question.

The two major guerrilla factions involved in the war were the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU) headed by Joshua Nkomo, and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) eventually led by Robert Mugabe. This split, caused partially by dissatisfaction with Nkomo's leadership and partially by tribal differences, was a major source of guerrilla weakness. ZAPU and ZANU received material and training support from the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China respectively. Black leaders of the nearby nations, Zambia, Angola, Tanzania, Botswana and Mozambique also supported the guerrillas and furnished training areas and base camps.

Initial guerrilla efforts were hampered by lack of proper training, superior intelligence obtained by the Rhodesian forces, lack of coordination between the guerrilla groups and failure to properly prepare the large black population of Rhodesia. It was only in the latter stages of the war that the insurgents were able to effectively neutralize the government's intelligence sources through "persuasion", and to field sufficient forces in rural areas to force the Rhodesian government to the bargaining table. The split between ZAPU and ZANU, however, was never healed, and manifests itself in the present day problems in Zimbabwe.

In opposition to the guerrillas, Rhodesia formed a well trained, moderately equipped, and integrated armed force. In 1976, the regular Rhodesian Forces consisted of three infantry battalions, supported by one Special Air Services Squadron, and several specialist units. By 1979, the country's reserves were mobilized, and the Security Force included an additional 8 infantry battalions. These units were composed of 10,800 regulars and approximately 15,000 territorial reserves. The Air Force consisted of eight operational squadrons. These included a fighter bomber squadron, two fighter squadrons, one reconnaissance squadron, two transport squadrons, and two helicopter squadrons. The British South Africa Police, a supporting force with military training had approximately 8,000 active members and 19,000 reservists. This unit was neither British nor South African. The name originated during Great Britain's colonial era in Southern Africa, and was retained by the Rhodesian Government upon its declaration of independence.

Although the Rhodesian Security Forces were small and its Air Force was supported by well-worn

equipment, it was one of the finest counter-insurgency units in the world. Its lack of sophisticated weaponry and equipment was the basis for its success. It was an army which dealt with the insurgent on his own level. It lacked extensive lines of logistics support, and the Air Force was incapable of dropping tremendous quantities of bombs. Yet it was very adept at small-scale operations throughout a broken and ragged countryside. In order to compensate for its small numbers, the Rhodesian combatants had to rely upon the basic ingredients of victory - professionalism, training and an intimate knowledge of the terrain. It operated in small units, and relied upon mobility, surprise, flexibility, and tactical dispersion for success. The Army tended to confront the insurgent on his own ground in a man-to-man fashion of combat. The Security Forces also reflected the spirit of the Rhodesian culture. It was a highly efficient organization. The tight bonds within the Rhodesian society reduced the elements of traditional friction between soldiers, civil servants and politicians. The Army and Police Forces were not plagued by a sense of social isolation. The European population was willing to endure the necessary taxation, and the required conscription of its children in order to achieve a gradual and moderate transition of power to a black majority which would tolerate a privileged European minority.

To this end, in April 1979, Rhodesia attempted to pacify its critics throughout the West, and relieve the increasing pressure from the insurgent forces inside and outside of its borders. Prime Minister Ian Smith relinquished his position to a moderate black leader, Bishop Abel Muzorewa, whose first official act of government was to offer amnesty to all insurgent forces, and to invite Mugabe and Nkomo to return to Rhodesia in an effort to form a coalition government. This offer was rejected, and the war began to intensify. By the summer of 1979, Nkomo's conventional forces positioned in Zambia had increased to approximately 20,000 men armed with MiG fighters and armoured vehicles. The newly created British peace talks at Lancaster House in England provided an additional impetus to both Mugabe and Nkomo. If these talks produced a settlement, they would need to rush as many of their troops into Rhodesia as possible in order to secure a majority status in their traditional tribal areas.

The Rhodesian Security Forces were being assaulted from all sides. The elected and appointed officials within Muzorewa's government were beginning to prepare for what appeared to be the inevitable assumption of power by the insurgents. No one wanted to be associated with any element of the white minority government which had caused the guerrillas so much pain throughout their struggle. Yet the military remained the single cohesive element of power within this fragile nation. Although the government was administered by a black Prime Minister, the Rhodesian Security Forces remained an instrument of the white minority. It realised it was incapable of halting a full-scale invasion of the country by the black nationalists, but it could delay such an advance long enough to persuade Nkomo and Mugabe to accept the moderate and guaranteed conditions of the Lancaster House settlement in lieu of a costly invasion. If this occurred, a peaceful transition of power under British supervision would result with a degree of political guarantees for the white minority.

The Security Force developed a strategy which would delay ZAPU's use of their mechanized assets as the basis for their invasion. The Rhodesian Special Air Services (SAS), the Rhodesian Light Infantry (RLI), and the Selous Scouts were tasked with the destruction of the major bridges along the Zambian lines of communication leading to the Rhodesian border. This was accomplished with surgical precision under the guidance of the SAS. They had already destroyed the road and rail bridges along the major thoroughfare which linked Zambia to Tanzania. Because this route served as the primary means of import/export exchange with the international community, it had a significant impact on the Zambian economy. In a period of approximately three weeks, the SAS directed the destruction of 8 additional road and railway bridges in Zambia. This action crippled Nkomo's invasion force, and virtually halted all Zambian trade in the international community. At this point, Zambia's President, Kenneth Kaunda, added additional pressure upon Nkomo by assuring him that his support of ZAPU did not include the physical and economic destruction of his nation.

The SAS is credited with accomplishing Rhodesia's final political and military objectives. Nkomo decided to disregard the advice of his Soviet, East German and Cuban advisors to continue the war. He was forced to accept the negotiated terms of the Lancaster Peace Settlement. An "all party" agreement was signed on December 17, 1979. On December 12, Lord Christopher Soames had entered Salisbury

and assumed the role of British Governor. This act officially returned the nation to a colonial status. Great Britain's dominion ensured the peaceful transition of power through free elections held between February 14-29, 1980. As a result of this vote, Robert Mugabe was elected Prime Minister, and the nation state of Zimbabwe was born.

CHAPTER I

THE SEEDS OF CONFLICT

In order for one to understand the seeds of the recent guerrilla war in Southern Rhodesia, it is important to briefly examine the geography which has played such an important part in the nation's development. Rhodesia is a relatively small, land-locked nation located in south central Africa. Its dominant geographic feature is the high central plateau.

Unlike so many of the states created by the European partition of Africa, it is not an artificial entity owing its shape merely to the political bargains of the chancelleries of Europe. On the contrary it has had for centuries a geographic unity of its own and it possesses natural frontiers; on the north the formidable barrier of the Zambezi; on the south what Kipling erroneously called 'the great grey-green greasy Limpopo River, all set about with fever trees'; on the west the dry sands of the Kalahari desert; on the east the mountains which divide Rhodesia from Mozambique and provide the pleasantest scenery and climate in the country.¹

Several points about the geography are important. Although Rhodesia does not possess the huge natural resources of its neighbours to the north and south, its central position made it a significant buffer during the last thirty years, between the emerging black African nations and the conservative apartheid government of South Africa. Secondly, the temperate climate of the high plateau made this region very desirable to European colonists. With this geographic frame of reference in mind, we will now examine the tribal background of the black majority in the country.

British anthropologists working in the central plateau of Africa have discovered some of the earliest ancestors of mankind. The earliest people known to have inhabited Rhodesia were relatives of the Bushmen now relegated to the Kalahari Desert. The Bushmen were displaced by the Shona (also referred to as Mashona) tribes from the north.

By the second millennium A.D. this culture was erecting stone structures. The largest complex of buildings, located at Zimbabwe, served as the center of a loose sociopolitical confederation that reached its zenith during the fifteenth century.²

Pictures of the Zimbabwe Ruins indicate that they achieved an architectural level comparable to the Mexican tribes of this era. Unfortunately, little is known of the history of the time, since no written records were kept.

During the period 1500-1700, Portuguese from East Africa (the area now known as Mozambique) made sporadic attempts to contact the Shona tribes. Although several missions were established, the missionaries normally met an untimely end. One method used by the Shona to discourage missionary zeal was to occasionally flay a priest alive. Portuguese attempts to establish settlements in this area ceased as Portugal's influence in the world began to wane.

The next significant series of events to affect Rhodesia was the migration of Dutch and British settlers to what is now known as South Africa. As the British placed pressure on the Boers, the latter moved inland, in turn displacing the Zulu tribes to the north. The Zulus, an extremely aggressive and warlike tribe, had formed a well-organized military machine. About 1837, the Ndebele (also known as Matabele) broke away from the Zulu and moved across the Limpopo River into the southern portion of

Rhodesia. The more peaceful Shona were no match for the fierce Ndebele. By 1890 the location of the Shona and Ndebele had become stabilized as shown on Map 1. The dominance of the Ndebele, under King Lobengula, is even more striking when one notes that they made up only 15 percent of the country's population.³

In 1867 an event occurred which was to mark the beginning of the end of Lobengula's reign - the discovery of gold. Various British companies vied for mineral rights for the next thirty years. At this time a young British businessman who had made a fortune in South African gold and diamonds appeared on the scene - Cecil John Rhodes. A charming but ruthless man, Rhodes decided to challenge the various groups attempting to secure mining rights.

Rhodes outwitted his competitors and the king by bribing Lobengula's white missionary translator to incorrectly translate a paper which Lobengula signed. The paper was, in fact, a treaty between the king and Rhodes, giving Rhodes' British South Africa Company 'complete and exclusive charge over all minerals situated and contained' in Lobengula's kingdom. When Lobengula discovered the trickery, he sent a letter to Queen Victoria repudiating the document, but to no avail.⁴

Efforts to trade with the Ndebele came to naught.

The Ndebele judged wealth mainly in terms of cattle and captives, and showed little interest in trade.⁵

Rhodes decided that in order to fully exploit his exclusive treaty he would have to resort to subterfuge. He was able to get King Lobengula's permission to introduce no more than 10 miners, who would promise to obey the laws of the Ndebele.⁶ As events unfolded, Rhodes intended to neither limit the party to ten, nor make mining their principle business. In 1890, Rhodes' now famous Pioneer Column moved north from South Africa and established settlements at Fort Victoria and Fort Salisbury. The "ten miners" had expanded exponentially to become slightly less than 700 adventurers. Lobengula was not amused.

For several years, the success of the colony was in doubt. Climate and disease took their toll among the early settlers. Finished goods had to be transported long distances overland, and were consequently expensive.

The interplay between the native tribes and the white settlers was somewhat complicated during the period between 1890 and 1893. The Shona tribes looked to the settlers to counterbalance the aggressive Ndebele who regularly conducted raids on them. Conversely, the dominant group resented the Pioneers for entering their territory in larger than the agreed upon numbers, and for engaging in pursuits other than mining. The settlers, for their part, had to contend with a paradox. Although the inhabitants of Fort Salisbury would have liked to deal directly with the more cooperative Shona, this would have imperilled the treaty signed with Lobengula which recognized him as the native authority.⁷

In July 1893, an incident occurred which would forever shape the future of the country. One of Lobengula's impis, or warrior groups, attacked a Shona village near Fort Victoria and slaughtered a large portion of its inhabitants. Although no white settlers were injured, the carnage inflicted by the raiders convinced the leaders of the company that something must be done.⁸ They presented Lobengula with a series of ultimata which he could accept only with the loss of his prestige and authority. War ensued in which the Ndebele were decisively defeated. Although African historians describe the war as simply a triumph of rifles over assegais (the Zulu thrusting spear), the Ndebele ensured their own defeat by engaging in conventional tactics over open ground.⁹ Their descendants would not make the same mistake eighty years later.

Although it had no effect on the outcome of the war, an incident took place in December 1893 which would significantly impact upon the psychology of white Rhodesians. Thirty-six settlers under the command of Major Allan Wilson were trapped by the Ndebele at the Shangani River and annihilated in an action quite similar to Custer's defeat at the Little Big Horn River. Blake comments with tongue in cheek,

The episode has come to be a symbol of Rhodesian history, a symbol of courage, heroism and endeavour, a symbol too of the civilized few among the savage multitude. The fact that it was utterly futile and affected the war in no way whatever is irrelevant.¹⁰

Throughout the course of history, the final defeat of one party to a conflict usually sows the seeds of the next conflagration. The war of 1893 was no exception. Earlier in this paper the importance of cattle to the Ndebele was emphasized. When Rhodes' settlers confiscated Lobengula's grazing land they destroyed the basis of the Ndebele economy and main source of wealth. Furthermore, there was an inability or unwillingness on the part of the settlers to realize the difference in status between the various tribes, or the hierarchy within the tribe itself.

As so often in colonial history the fault of the whites lay not in failing to treat blacks as equals but in failing to realize that some blacks were more equal than others.¹¹

The third cause of the second Ndebele uprising was the fact that although the natives were decisively defeated in 1893, many of their impis remained intact and anxious to redeem themselves.

The British South Africa Company failed to establish an adequate intelligence gathering network, and were therefore surprised when the Ndebele attacked in force in the southwest during march 1896. This time the Ndebele avoided many of their mistakes of 1893. They had practiced their marksmanship and revised their tactics, avoiding the set-piece battle and using rough terrain to their advantage. Shortly after their offensive began, the Ndebele surrounded a large contingent of settlers at Bulawayo (see Map 2) on only three sides. Some historians feel that this was done on purpose in order to leave an escape route for the settlers. Others contend that lack of unanimity on the part of the Ndebele chiefs left this side open. In any case, it provided an access for the reinforcements which saved Bulawayo and routed the Ndebele.

In June of 1896, just as the settlers were making some headway against the Ndebele, the Shona tribe attacked in the northeast, killing ten percent of the white population there.¹² The whites were aghast at what they considered to be incredible treachery on the part of a tribe they had protected. The Shona, led by a chief named Mkwati, were simply taking advantage of the Ndebele uprising to free themselves of the settlers.

Rhodes, faced with a war on two fronts, decided to get personally involved. In August, he met with the Ndebele chiefs and carried on negotiations for several weeks. Two months later they had agreed upon a peace treaty. Rhodes was now able to turn his full attention to the rebellious Shona. When the latter retreated into caves found in their area of the country, the settlers used dynamite to close the openings - a tactic to be utilized by United States Marines in the Pacific a half century later. Eventually, the pressure grew too great for the natives.

The Shona Chiefs surrendered in increasing numbers. Mkwati, now on the run, vanishes from the scene. He is said to have been chopped up alive into pieces at the order of disillusioned chiefs who thought he had made enough trouble in his lifetime.¹³

The campaign against the Shona, waged with ferocity by the settlers as a result of the perceived treachery of the natives, was completed in July 1897 with the elimination of the last pockets of Shona resistance.

It is interesting to speculate if the early surrender by the Ndebele further poisoned relations between

themselves and the Shona. In any case, their uncoordinated attacks and surrenders were a harbinger of troubles to come among black Africans in their struggle to free their country from Rhodes' descendants.

At this point in Rhodesian history there were four major groups with responsibilities to be exercised, or interests to be protected. First, the Ndebele and Shona tribal groups, although numerous, were relatively weak. The interests of the settlers and the British South Africa Company did not always coincide, for obvious reasons. Finally, the British government was forced to introduce an element of fair play into the game. Although Great Britain was obviously interested in spreading her influence throughout the world, this desire was tempered by a need to justify her actions by appearing to improve the lot of the "heathen."

In 1899 the British created the Legislative Council, the first attempt to administer the territory gained by Rhodes through the use of political intrigue and, when necessary, war.

The Legislative Council was composed of five company representatives, four elected settlers, the company administrator - who served as chairman - and the British resident commissioner; all but the latter could vote.¹⁴

It should be immediately obvious that one of the major groups - the African - was left out of the council. Apparently the British decided that they could discern the needs of the natives better than the natives themselves.

Another example of early racial (and perhaps sexual) discrimination was the Immorality Suppression Ordinance of 1903. This law made extra-marital relations between black men and white women illegal and punishable by death. The law was curiously silent concerning relations between white men and black women. Later, even this law proved bothersome to the settlers because a white woman attacked by a black would obviously suffer a social stigma if the black were convicted. The law was therefore amended to include an "attempted" rape. Any white woman then involved in a trial could claim that the act had not been consummated, and that she had defended herself in the best traditions of Wilson at the Shangani River.¹⁵

Although the settlers chafed under company control during the early part of this century, efforts to modify the government were temporarily halted during World War I. Upon conclusion of the war, however, Great Britain studied ways to alter the status of the colony. She finally presented the settlers two choices in 1923 - either merge with the Union of South Africa, or create their own colony. The Rhodesians, wary of being dominated by the more numerous South Africans, chose the latter course. The British government reserved for itself veto power over legislation, yet never exercised this power.

The formal body created by the British for the purpose of ruling the white community was the Rhodesian Legislative Assembly.

The colonists, however, rapidly came to regard this structure as the territory's government, responsible for administering all of the affairs within the colony.¹⁶

Interestingly enough, during the early colonial period the Africans seemed far more interested in holding on to the land than in holding on to their vote. The vastly outnumbered whites decided that they would have both the land and the vote.¹⁷ One of the most bitter pills, therefore, for the Africans to swallow was the Land Apportionment Act of 1930. In retrospect the act was very similar to American legislation creating reservations for the Indians. Both efforts ostensibly created protected areas in which the indigenous native could exist in safety. In Rhodesia, as in the United States, the best agricultural areas and land near major cities was reserved for the white settlers.

During the remainder of Chapter I, the authors will examine the development of Black political parties and organizations. Although several White leaders and parties will be mentioned, our purpose is not to

dwell on this aspect of Rhodesian history. This is done because there was not a large difference between the political philosophy of the parties. Their political outlook toward the Black natives varied from very conservative to reactionary. At each election, the various parties vied with each other to tag their opponents with the label of being “soft on the native question.”

By 1910 the basis for African political movements had begun to materialize. The first Africans to develop political awareness were labourers in Bulawayo and rural Ndebele farm workers. Bulawayo was developing more rapidly than Salisbury as an industrial and commercial centre, and there was greater mobility and short-term migration among rural Ndebele in the south of the territory than among the Shona. The Ndebele izinduna (chieftains), moreover, had been the first to send their sons to school in South Africa - one of the heirs to Lobengula's throne was studying law - and a small educated urban elite composed of clerks, teachers and clergymen was emerging in Bulawayo.¹⁸

Obviously, these political groups had to be somewhat circumspect during their formative years. In their attempts to better the lot of their people, they could not directly threaten the position of the White establishment. Their position was somewhat analogous to that of Blacks in the United States during the same time period.

By the 1930s the basic patterns of African political movements in Rhodesia had been established: Ndebele nationalism had presented its case and failed; attempts to build on the basis of an African electorate had not succeeded because of their limited numbers; government obstruction and other limitations had caused the organization of African workers to fail; and lobbying had proved ineffective. Alternation of these techniques was continued through the decade with little increase in success. The most significant development was the shift in leadership in African associations from the uneducated to new groups of educated Shona and Ndebele.¹⁹

Most of these early African political groups were either organized on religious grounds, or in conjunction with established labour unions. An example of the former was the Old African National Congress (OANC); of the latter, the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union.

By 1955 all African labour and political organizations had become interracial and had disappeared into European organizations.²⁰

In retrospect, 1955 proved to be a pivotal year in Rhodesian history, for in that year the African Youth League was formed. Although the league was made up of Africans, it should be noted that they were certainly not all youths. By mid-1957, it was leading strikes and boycotts to increase pressure on the White government. A few months later this group was significantly expanded to include the OANC, and given a new name - the African National Congress (ANC). Joshua Nkom was elected president of the congress, and James Chikerema his deputy.

This group gradually increased its influence and power until February 29, 1959, when the Rhodesian government moved to simultaneously ban the ANC and arrest its members. Davis B.C. M'babe (not to be confused with Robert Mugabe, later leader of the country) provides a vivid description of the events that followed.

The ban came on a Saturday morning in an operation coded ‘Operation Sunrise.’ Immediately after midnight police contingents backed by the army moved into African towns in groups of twelve or more. They knocked doors down with the butts of their rifles and as the house lights went on they rushed in with guns at the ready. A policeman read the proclamation banning the party and detaining a particular individual. They gave him ten minutes to throw some clothes on his body and in thirty minutes the individual was in a police truck with many of his fellow party members. If the man was really a top official of

the party or a member considered to be dangerous, he was put on a plane to a remote security prison at Khami, some forty miles outside Bulawayo. If he was a middle level leader or a very active supporter of the movement, he ended up at one of several internment camps that had been built within fifty miles of Salisbury and Bulawayo.²¹

Two observations concerning this roundup of leaders are pertinent. First, one has to be impressed by the thoroughness of the Rhodesian intelligence effort. Not only was "Operation Sunrise" a complete surprise, but it netted almost every leader of significance. This leads to the second observation - the only leader to escape was Joshua Nkomo. On the day the raid commenced, Nkomo was out of the country - a not unusual circumstance for this gentleman, who enjoyed life's pleasures, many of which were not available to him in his native land.

Early in 1960 a new organization began to arise, the National Democratic Party (NDP). There were two main factions in this young organization. The dominant faction, led by Michael Marvema, Sketchley Samkange and Nazario Marondera, wanted to continue with the goals and methods of the banned ANC. The rival faction, headed by Ndabaningi Sithole, Daniel Madzimbamuto and James Maluleke were more radical and favoured some sort of guerrilla campaign. For the time being, the second group was suppressed.

In June of 1960, Prime Minister Sir Edgar Whitehead decided to curb the growing influence of the NDP by ordering the arrest of Michael Marvema and his deputy, Leopold Takawira. In doing so, Whitehead seriously misjudged the African reaction. A huge protest in Salisbury was followed by riots in townships all over the country. The government, after a series of hasty conferences, backed down and released Marvema and Takawira. The Africans wildly celebrated their first significant political victory. The victory was, however, to be short-lived. Two months later Joshua Nkomo returned from exile in London and used his political power to assume the leadership of the rejuvenated NDP.

In 1961 a new constitution was drafted and approved for Rhodesia. The Declaration of Rights was featured as the centrepiece of this new constitution. Upon close inspection, however, it was discovered that "the Declaration of Rights was an eleven-page document covering items that have been protected in English tradition. Nearly every right granted, however, was hedged by exceptions and restrictions that left the declaration little power."²²

The Constitution provided for a Legislative Assembly of 65 seats. Fifty of the seats were elected by voters on the "A" roll and fifteen were reserved for voters on the "B" roll. The requirements for the "A" roll were constructed of income, property and education parameters so that almost all whites and no blacks could qualify. The requirements for the "B" roll were such that enough blacks could qualify to control the seats. If inflation ever threatened white control of the "A" roll, the requirements were simply raised. (In practice, the rules were much more complicated, but the above discussion suffices for the purpose of this paper.) It should be noted that a two-thirds vote of the assembly was required for any change to the Constitution - a number which was no problem to the whites, who controlled fifty seats.

There was a significant amount of discussion by the blacks prior to the elections of 1962. Moderates were excited by the prospect of fifteen seats, a voice in the Legislature, and a hope for more in the future. More radical elements felt that the only way majority rule would be achieved was by force. Nkomo finally called for blacks to boycott the 1962 elections. It is interesting to speculate on the outcome of Rhodesian history had this not happened. In any case, the black boycott enabled Ian Smith's extremely conservative Rhodesian Front party to secure control of the Legislative Assembly.

At this point it is necessary to return to the development of the black political parties. In December 1961 the National Democratic Party was banned by the authorities. Almost immediately, the leading members of the outlawed body simply changed their name to Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU). When the authorities banned ZAPU in October 1962, the party changed their name again to the Peoples Caretaker Council (PCC). The former name was used by party members outside Rhodesia, and the latter

within the country. On August 8, 1963, dissident members of ZAPU/PCC, who had originally challenged the leadership of the old National Democratic Party, broke away to form the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). As will be shown, this split was much more significant than the similarity of the names would imply. Ndabaningi Sithole was elected president of ZANU, Leopold Takawira vice-president, and Robert Mugabe secretary.

One concept of the reason for this split is as follows. "The division had almost no ideological basis, nor was there any lasting important disagreement over tactics. Ethnic and regional interests played only a minor part, although most Ndebele stayed with Nkomo, who was a member of the Kalanga, a branch of the Shona but one closely associated with the Ndebele. At first the split also reflected some differences between rural and urban interests. The basis of the conflict, however, was largely over Nkomo's leadership.²³ Although Nkomo's leadership, or lack thereof, may have been the proximate cause for the final fracture of ZAPU and ZANU, the authors have described in detail the historical antagonisms between the Ndebele and the Shona. Although it is possible that a strong charismatic leader might have been able to unite all Black factions in an attempt to overthrow the Smith government, the present situation in Zimbabwe indicates that tribal enmity continues unabated today.

The period which followed was, all writers agree, the lowest ebb of the Black political parties. Gangs from ZANU and ZAPU/PCC attacked each other's leaders and meetings, wasting lives and efforts in an ever rising spiral of hate and violence. The internecine struggle between the parties continued throughout 1963 and 1964 unabated. The Rhodesian government made no discernible effort to separate the two parties, apparently willing to let them eliminate each other. By the middle of 1964, however, ZAPU/PCC had lost control of its youth gangs and the government was finally forced to intervene lest the violence spill over into the white community. In August 1964, both ZANU and ZAPU/PCC were banned in Rhodesia, and Nkomo and Sithole were arrested and given a sentence of ten years in jail. The remaining leaders of the outlawed political parties fled Rhodesia and set up operations in nearby sympathetic African nations. Since ZAPU was an older organization, and Nkomo better known than Sithole, his followers began with an advantage in organization and in recognition by foreign governments. With ZAPU and ZANU outlawed and in exile, their leaders in jail, they will be left until Chapter II.

The final act of the preliminary drama took place in 1965. As described earlier, Ian Smith's Rhodesian Front gained a narrow victory in the 1962 elections when Nkomo urged a black boycott. In 1965, with the troublesome ZAPU and ZANU banned, Smith won an overwhelming victory in the May election, and claimed the two-thirds majority necessary to amend the Constitution. On November 11, 1965, Smith published the famous Unilateral Declaration of Independence. Although the results of this document are well known, the reasons for doing so are not clear. Some authors feel this was simply done by the Rhodesian Front in a mood of euphoria after their smashing electoral victory. This theory ignores the careful planning and coordination Smith carried out with South Africa and Portuguese-ruled Mozambique. Others feel that the grievances between Rhodesia and Great Britain had accumulated over a period of time, and Smith simply took advantage of the relative weakness of Harold Wilson's leadership in Great Britain. This theory ignores the fact that the White inhabitants of Rhodesia had, for all practical purposes, ruled themselves since 1923. Finally, no-one has ever been able to prove that Great Britain ever had a secret plan for the imminent imposition of majority rule.

The opinion of these authors is that Smith and the leaders of the Rhodesian Front were aware of the overall trend towards Black rule on the African continent. With the United States engaged in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic, world interest was fixed elsewhere. South Africa appeared to be a solid and sympathetic friend, and Wilson's narrow majority in the British Parliament made intervention unlikely. Emboldened by their election victory, Smith and the Rhodesian Front simply decided that this was the best opportunity to buy time for the future of the White minority.

This chapter has traced the general development of forces which shaped the country of Rhodesia, concentrating on the period since 1890. No attempt was made to discuss the common heritage of Whites

in Rhodesia and South Africa. A detailed examination of the White governments since 1923 and the interplay of the political parties was similarly beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice to say that the parties varied little in their determination to maintain White control of the nation. If the reader is interested in studying these aspects of Rhodesian affairs, "A History of Rhodesia" by Blake (listed in bibliography) is strongly recommended.

[1](#)Robert Blake, "A History of Rhodesia" (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), p.4

[2](#)Howard D. Nelson, et al. "Area Handbook for Southern Rhodesia" (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1975) p.9

[3](#) "The Boys in the Bush," Time; 31 December 1979, p. 33

[4](#)George M. Daniels, "Drums of War" (New York: Joseph Okpatu Publishing Co., 1974), p. 10

[5](#)Nelson, "Handbook", p. 16

[6](#)Blake, "History", p. 47

[7](#)Blake, "History", p. 100

[8](#)Blake, "History", p. 105

[9](#)Blake, "History", p. 107

[10](#)Blake, "History", p. 109

[11](#)Blake, "History", p. 119-120

[12](#)Nelson, "Handbook", p. 22

[13](#)Blake, "History", p. 142

[14](#)Nelson, "Handbook", p. 22

[15](#)Blake, "History", p. 159

[16](#)Blake, "History", p. 150

[17](#)Nelson, "Handbook", p. 28

[18](#)Nelson, "Handbook", p. 24-25

[19](#)Nelson, "Handbook", p. 30

[20](#)Daniels, "Drums", p. 25

[21](#)Davis B.C. M'babe, "The Nationalist Movement of D'Zimbabwe," in "Drums of War" (see note #20), p. 28

[22](#)Nelson, "Handbook", p. 151

[23](#) Nelson, "Handbook", p. 179

War Since 1945, Seminar: Chapter 2	Online Book Project - Main	Rhodesia: Military History
--	--	--