

## Bush tracking and warfare in late twentieth-century east and southern Africa

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### Introduction

Tracking is the ability to pursue and close with an animal or human by following signs, commonly called spoor which is an Afrikaans word, left behind in the environment. These include footprints, disturbed vegetation, evidence of feeding, biological waste, sounds and smells. Experienced trackers use the appearance of these signs to determine the direction of their subject's movement and the approximate age of spoor which indicates how far ahead in time and space the subject is. Tracking requires a thorough familiarity of the geography, climate and ecology of a specific locale. It also involves a great deal of informed speculation that allows a tracker who loses a trail to imagine the most likely path of the subject and attempt to pick up further signs in that direction. Anthropologists tell us that tracking was crucial in the evolution of early humans as part of persistence hunting; man's ability to regulate body temperature by sweating and to hydrate by carrying water, which allowed him to run down animal prey.<sup>1</sup> The literature on tracking consists of some books advocating its practise as a form of therapy for modern people to re-establish connection with the natural environment and others that represent technical "how to" manuals for hunting animals and/or humans some of which are military or law enforcement oriented.<sup>2</sup>

During Africa's late twentieth century decolonisation wars, tracking became an important skill mobilised by both state security forces and insurgents. According to British counter-insurgency practitioner and theorist, Frank Kitson, "of all the specialist activities relevant to the prosecution of a counter-insurgency campaign none is more important than the provision of trackers."<sup>3</sup> To some extent this was informed by established stereotypes that associated tracking skill with specific marginalised and supposedly primitive African minorities, and the history of tracking in nineteenth century colonial warfare. There was a clear evolution in the use of tracking in the counter-insurgency campaigns mounted in white minority dominated Kenya in the 1950s; Rhodesia in the late 1960s and 1970s; and South

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1. L. Liebenberg, "Persistence Hunting by Modern Hunter-Gatherers", *Current Anthropology*, 47, 6, December 2006, pp 1017–1026; L. Liebenberg, *The Art of Tracking: The Origin of Science* (David Philip, Claremont, 1990).
2. For the environmental literature see T. Brown, *The Tracker* (Berkeley Books, New York, 1978); T. Brown, *The Science and Art of Tracking* (Berkeley Books, New York, 1999). For technical guides, see D. Scott-Donelan, *Tactical Tracking Operations: The Essential Guide for Military and Police Trackers* (Paladin Press, Boulder: CO, 1998); R. Carss, *The SAS Guide to Tracking* (Lyons Press, London, 1999); D. Diaz with V.L. McCann, *Tracking: Signs of Man, Signs of Hope: A Systematic Approach to the Art and Science of Tracking Humans* (Lyons Press, Guilford: CT, 2005); L. Liebenberg, A. Louw and M. Elbroch, *Practical Tracking: A Guide to Following Footprints and Finding Animals* (Stackpole Books, Mechanicsburg: PA, 2010); J. Hurth, *Combat Tracking Guide* (Stackpole Books, Mechanicsburg: PA, 2012).
3. F. Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency and Peacekeeping* (Faber & Faber, London, 1971), p 193.

West Africa from the late 1960s to 1980s. While security force officials were influenced by previous or ongoing campaigns in other places such as 1950s Malaya, the application of tracking to counter-insurgency was largely determined by local geography, technology and colonial culture. Of course, it must be remembered that tracking represented an important part of just one element of counter-insurgency; that of engaging the guerrillas. It had little to do with attempts to win the “hearts and minds” of the civilian population though it could be said that effectively locating insurgents would prevent them from subverting broader society.<sup>4</sup> The aim of this paper is to look at how one essential but under-studied tool in the counter-insurgency tool-box was used in Africa’s late twentieth century decolonisation wars that were fought within the common context of settler colonialism, African nationalism and broadly British security force culture.

## Kenya

From 1952 to 1956 British security forces in Kenya waged a counter-insurgency war against a rebellion by the Kenya Land Freedom Army, popularly called Mau Mau, which was related to the historic dispossession of the Kikuyu people by white settlers. The conflict was largely fought in the Kikuyu reserves where the fighters derived support and recruits, and the high altitude forests around the Aberdares and Mount Kenya where the insurgents hid. It is important to realise that Mau Mau lacked a formal theory of revolutionary warfare, and did not enjoy external sponsorship or cross-border sanctuaries.<sup>5</sup> The usual view of British operations in Kenya during the 1950s is that the failure of large and clumsy security force sweeps eventually gave way to more effective small unit operations involving pseudo-teams that impersonated guerrillas and tracker combat teams that hunted them more directly.<sup>6</sup> In fact, security force tracking was practised right from the beginning of the emergency albeit mostly in an ad hoc fashion and official preparations for the formation of small, specialised tracker units began very early in the conflict. State game-keepers, mobilised as part of the Kenya Police Reserve

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4. There is a massive literature on the history and theory of insurgency and counter-insurgency. J.J. McCuen, *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War: The Strategy of Counter-Insurgency* (Stackpole Books, Harrisberg, 1966); R.G.K. Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: Experiences from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chatto & Windus, London, 1966); I. Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies: Guerrillas and their Opponents since 1750* (Routledge, London, 2001); J.A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counter-Insurgency Lessons From Malaya and Vietnam* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2002); A. Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth: The British Experience of Irregular Warfare* (Routledge, New York, 2012); D. Porch, *Counter-Insurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013).
  5. For the causes of Mau Mau see F.D. Corfield, *The Origins and Growth of Mau Mau: A Historical Survey* (Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, Nairobi, 1960); C.G. Rosberg and J.C. Nottingham, *The Myth of “Mau Mau:” Nationalism in Kenya* (Praeger, New York, 1966); R. Buijtenhuijs, *Mau Mau. Twenty Years After: The Myth and the Survivors* (Mouton, New York, 1973); D. Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau, 1945–53* (James Currey, Oxford, 1987); F. Furedi, *The Mau Mau War in Perspective* (James Currey, Oxford, 1989); B. Berman, and J. Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa* (James Currey, London, 1992). For recent work see D. Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 2005); C. Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain’s Gulag in Kenya* (Henry Holt, New York, 2005).
  6. D. Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counter-Insurgency, Civil War and Decolonization* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009); H. Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau: The British Army and Counter-Insurgency in the Kenya Emergency* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013); R.W. Heather, “Of Men and Plans: The Kenya Campaign as Part of the British Counter-Insurgency Experience”, *Conflict Quarterly*, Winter 1993, pp 17–26.

or Kenya Regiment, led small tracking teams and were particularly influential in recruiting and promoting the use of indigenous trackers. Kenya's local hunting culture characterised by a white hunter who did the shooting and his faithful black tracker, often from the Ndorobo hunter-gatherer minority, who found the game, was important in shaping security force tracking during Mau Mau. The stereotyping of certain Kenyan ethnic groups as inherently martial people, preferred as gun-bearers by professional hunters and soldiers by the King's African Rifles (KAR), such as the Kamba, Samburu and Maasai also impacted recruitment of trackers by the security forces. There was also an element of divide-and-rule as these groups were considered historically hostile to the Kikuyu.<sup>7</sup>

The involvement of Kenya's gamekeepers in pursuing insurgents contributed to the growth of a security force discourse that, as Wendy Webster points out, "produced the Mau Mau as a form of savage wildlife to be tracked and killed".<sup>8</sup> At the start of the emergency, game warden Rodney Elliott and several of his black game scouts tracked Mau Mau insurgents through the Mount Kenya forests and called for security force assistance when they discovered camps. During 1952 and 1953 Fred Bartlett struggled to find time for his game control duties as he constantly led trackers in pursuit of Mau Mau groups from African labour huts to the high forests. In 1953 game warden Jack Sim led "Sim Force", ten Kenya Regiment white soldiers and several Game Department black trackers, which successfully hunted Mau Mau insurgents. In December 1953 and January 1954 George Adamson, a game warden in northern Kenya who became famous for his and his wife's work with lions, and his African trackers were dispatched to the Aberdares to assist two British battalions. Adamson later returned to his home station where he led a detachment of African trackers and horse mounted police, and supported British troops in the search for insurgents making contact with Somali smugglers along the border.<sup>9</sup>

Kenya's game-keepers were important in recruiting African trackers for the security forces. In 1952 Bill Woodley, recently appointed assistant warden at the new Tsavo National Park, recruited several Waata specialist elephant hunters as trackers for a KAR battalion and they quickly proved effective in locating insurgents.<sup>10</sup> Beginning in December 1952 a Kenya Regiment operational company known as "Intelligence Force" or "I Force" pioneered several innovations that would become common for security force units in Kenya including the recruitment of loyalist Kikuyu, Ndorobo, Samburu and Turkana trackers who were given weapons training; the deployment of tracker dog teams from the South African Police; and the use of captured and turned Mau Mau insurgents as trackers. In February 1953 Game Department warden Monty Brown "produced" the first official Kenya Regiment African tracker, an African Game Department

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7. For colonial hunting in Kenya see E.I. Steinhart, *Black Poachers, White Hunters: A Social History of Hunting in Colonial Kenya* (James Currey, Oxford, 2006); for martial tribes see T.H. Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902–1964* (James Currey, Oxford, 1999), pp 53–103.
  8. W. Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939–1965* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005), p 125.
  9. I. Parker, *The Last Colonial Regiment: The History of the Kenya Regiment (TF)* (Librario Publishing, Moray, 2009), pp 207, 273, 343–344; F. Bartlett, *Shoot Straight and Stay Alive: A Lifetime of Hunting Experiences* (Rowland Ward Publications, Johannesburg, 1994), p 47; A. House, *The Great Safari: The Lives of George and Joy Adamson* (William Morrow, New York, 1993), pp 197–209.
  10. D. Holman, *Elephants at Sundown: The Story of Bill Woodley* (W.H. Allen, London, 1978), pp 71–73; D. Holman, *The Elephant People* (James Murray, London, 1967), p 94.

employee named Kibwezi Kilonzo from the Kamba ethnic group, who assisted patrols in the Aberdares. In February 1953 Woodley, recently returned to his parent Kenya Regiment, was sent to recruit more trackers from the Waata hunting community which was poaching in Tsavo. Other Kenya Regiment white troops brought in African trackers some of whom had been members of the KAR and Kenya Police. Officially titled "Tracker Kenya Regiment", an African member's conditions of service were based on those of other black colonial troops such as those of the KAR because he could progress no higher than sergeant major and for administrative purposes belonged to racially segregated platoons though operational patrols were racially mixed. Although their service records were destroyed to avoid post-colonial retribution, at least 1 500 African personnel served in the Kenya Regiment during the Mau Mau emergency, which represented half the unit's operational strength. In terms of ethnic composition, 34 percent were Kalenjin; 20 percent were Kikuyu, Embu and Meru; 18 percent were Kamba; and 10 percent were Turkana and Samburu.<sup>11</sup> Kenya Regiment commanding officer Guy Campbell maintained that "Africans were even more at home in the terrain; trackers were found to increase efficiency by 50 per cent".<sup>12</sup>

In November 1953 Britain's East Africa Command opened a Tracking School at Nanyuki, a military centre in a white farming area northwest of Mount Kenya. The original staff consisted of Game Department personnel such as Elliott as commander and Adamson, Brown and Don Bousfield, and National Parks warden Peter Jenkins as instructors. Another founding instructor was farm manager and legendary tracker Jim Tooley who spoke Kipsigi and Kikuyu, brought several of his own African trackers to help and recruited African trackers for the security forces including among suspected Mau Mau prisoners. The school focused on testing prospective African trackers before their deployment with operational units and providing British junior leaders with enough tracking knowledge for them to effectively employ African trackers. In late 1954 the Tracking School was absorbed into a new East African Battle School which consisted of wings devoted to tracking, dog handling and bush warfare.<sup>13</sup> At the start of 1954 every British battalion in Kenya was meant to have 30 local African trackers and this was later expanded to 36. Initially, the British officers of the KAR battalions did not want local trackers as they believed their African soldiers naturally possessed these skills. However, this changed when KAR officers observed local trackers at work during Operation Anvil in April 1954 and from that point each KAR battalion was assigned 15 to 20 local trackers.<sup>14</sup>

The security force use of pseudo-teams to try to infiltrate insurgent groups is one of the best known counter-insurgency techniques of the Mau Mau war and was copied in subsequent campaigns. However, a type of small unit called Tracker Combat Team (TCT) was introduced around the same time yet has received far less attention from historians. From the beginning of December 1953 the three

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11. M. Brown, "The Tracking School – Nanyuki (1953–54)", *Buffalo Barua: The Newsletter of the Kenya Regiment Association of Europe and North America*, November 2007, pp 35–40; Parker, *Last Colonial Regiment*, pp 229–235; Holman, *Elephants at Sundown*, p 74.
  12. G. Campbell, *The Charging Buffalo: A History of the Kenya Regiment, 1937–1963* (Leo Cooper, London, 1986), p 58.
  13. Brown, "The Tracking School", pp 35–40; Parker, *Last Colonial Regiment*, pp 245–246; National Archives (UK) WO 373/121/40, "Recommendation for Award for Tooley, James Peter", 31 January 1956.
  14. National Archives (UK), WO 276/248, Chief of Staff to Member for Finance and Development, Nairobi, "African Trackers", 13 July 1954; Butler for Commander-in-Chief to Minister for Finance and Development, Nairobi, "African Trackers", 17 December 1954.

brigade commanders in Kenya were told by East Africa headquarters that patrols and ambushes were not having much success because they were often detected and avoided by insurgents. A study conducted in Malaya reached similar conclusions. Most of the blame was put on British soldiers' poor noise discipline and shooting, and lack of skilled trackers. New small "commando-style" units were to be formed which would practise a high standard of bush craft such as silent movement, remain in the field for long periods, move rapidly, report information quickly by radio, and include trackers.<sup>15</sup> This plan informed the creation of the East Africa Battle School to cultivate better bush warfare skills among the security forces. It appears that Tracking School commander Elliott first proposed the concept of a TCT consisting of a tracking section of three African trackers under a European leader, a support group of four or more soldiers to do the fighting, and a dog section with a patrol dog for early warning of ambush and a scent tracker dog. Elliott also insisted teams work in the same area for a long time so they would become familiar with it and that six teams operate together under a Tracker Group commander to allow them to concentrate for an assault on a large Mau Mau force and use fresh teams to spell off exhausted ones during pursuit.<sup>16</sup> Although each battalion formed a TCT in July 1954 and members were sent to the Battle School for special training, brigade commanders ignored Elliott's advice and employed their teams separately. To demonstrate the possible effectiveness of grouping several TCTs, 49 Brigade's teams were placed under the command of Venn Fey who was a white Kenyan farmer and master tracker commissioned into the Kenya Regiment.<sup>17</sup> Beginning in September 1954, Fey led a group of three TCTs into the bamboo forest of the south Aberdares and by mid-October they had killed, wounded or captured 27 insurgents. Shifting his Tracking Combat Group to the forest edge around Fort Hall, Fey pursued several large insurgent units and led an attack on a camp in late October that resulted in six Mau Mau dead and 16 wounded.<sup>18</sup> Subsequently, brigades were given strict instructions to group their TCTs and expand the number of teams which meant that each battalion would form a Forest Operating Company consisting of several TCTs and support personnel.<sup>19</sup> In January 1955, during Operation Hammer which involved a massive security force sweep of the edge of the Aberdares forest, Fey commanded 49 Brigade's Tracker Combat Group which operated 2 700 metres ahead of the main force and killed 12 Mau Mau, five of whom were personally dispatched by Fey on a single day. Since Operation Hammer employed nine infantry battalions and resulted in the death of 161 insurgents at a cost of over £10 000 each, the work of Fey's comparatively tiny group in accounting for almost ten percent of enemy

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15. National Archives (UK) WO 276/249, Major General Heyman, Chief of Staff, "General Headquarters East Africa, Training Instruction No. 9, Patrols and Ambushes", 2 December 1953.
  16. National Archives (UK) WO 276/248, Elliott, "Notes on Tracker Combat Teams", undated (circa July or August 1954).
  17. National Archives (UK) WO 276/248, 49 Brigade Commander to General Headquarters, East Africa, "Tracker Combat Teams: Mr Venn Fey", 30 August 1954; Major General Heyman, Chief of Staff to Kenya Regiment, "Commission", 31 August 1954; V. Fey, *Cloud over Kenya* (Collins, London, 1964), p 17.
  18. National Archives (UK) WO 276/248, Captain Venn Fey, "Report on Patrols Carried out by 49 Brigade Combat Tracker Group from 29 September to 8 October", 10 October 1954; Lieutenant Colonel GSO1 to Chief of Staff, "49 Brigade Combat Tracker Teams", 16 October 1954; Captain Venn Fey, "Report on Patrol Carried out by 49 Brigade Combat Tracker Teams along the Forest Reserve Edge Bordering Loc. 16, Loc. 2 Fort Hall, 18 to 31 October 1954", 31 October 1954.
  19. National Archives (UK) WO 276/248, Lieutenant Colonel GSO1 Ops, "Specialist Forces to Combat Mau Mau", 25 November 1954; Lieutenant Colonel GSO1 Ops, 4 December 1954, "Operations after Hammer – Draft Directive for C in C".

losses confirmed its effectiveness and cost efficiency.<sup>20</sup> In April 1954 the Kenya Police formed their own TCTs in direct response to complaints from white farmers about stock theft. Advised by Game Department head Melvin Cowie, police tracker teams were led by white professional hunters and their black trackers during the safari industry off-season. Although the police tracker teams enjoyed great initial success by recovering 336 out of 473 cattle reported stolen in May 1954 and more teams were formed, Kenya Policeman Derek Franklin led one of the teams and believed “... our efforts to combat the threat were largely ineffectual. It was more a case of following up after an incident, sometimes following tracks for half a day or more, but never achieving a satisfactory contact.”<sup>21</sup>

Mau Mau insurgents were keenly aware that the security forces were tracking them. According to Mau Mau leader General China, “We learned, too, to walk through the forest with great care, leaving no traces of footprints or broken twigs...” and that discarding “a spent match could put the enemy on our track.”<sup>22</sup> When anti-tracking, Mau Mau insurgents walked backwards to make it appear as if they were moving in the opposite direction, took high and long steps to minimise the number of footprints and had the last man of a group brush away tracks with a branch. They also walked on stilts to avoid making footprints, used vaulting poles to jump sections of open ground or obstacles, stepped on blankets which were then removed, and disguised their tracks by wearing elephant or rhino feet.<sup>23</sup> Mau Mau fighters sometimes created a false and obvious trail into the forest edge and then circled back to set an ambush for security force trackers. Odour was also important as the insurgents smelled like the bush where they lived while their enemies often reeked of soap, hair-products or tobacco.<sup>24</sup> Varying by area, insurgents created a code of symbols left behind in the forest to tell allies about direction or give warning. These included bent or broken twigs or leaves, marks on bark, purposely positioned quills and holes dug along a path which usually indicated the presence of a hidden food cache. In addition, and likely in response to pseudo-operations, they employed whistles and animal calls to identify each other in the dark.<sup>25</sup>

## Rhodesia (Zimbabwe)

After Rhodesia’s white minority government rejected political reform and unilaterally declared independence from Britain in 1965, the Zimbabwe liberation movement embarked on an armed struggle from exile in neighbouring Zambia. With Eastern Bloc support in a Cold War context, the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) founded the Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) established the Zimbabwe African

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20. For Hammer see Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, p 126; for Fey’s work during Hammer see National Archives (UK), WO 373/121/16, “Recommendation for Award for Fey, Venn”, 19 July 1955; WO 276/249, Major Guy Campbell, Kenya Regiment to General Headquarters, East Africa, “Forest Operating Companies”, 12 January 1955.
  21. National Archives (UK) WO 276/249, Ministry of Defence, “Police Tracker Teams – Nanyuki District”, 20 June 1955; for the quote see D. Franklin, \*A Pied Cloak: Memoirs of a Colonial Police (Special Branch) Officer\* (Janus Publishing, London, 1996), pp 99, 55.
  22. Waruhiu Itote (General, China), *Mau Mau General* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1967), p 73.
  23. “Training for Forest Operations”, Kenya Regiment Training Pamphlet, 1953, p 12, obtained from John Davis.
  24. M. Clough, *Mau Mau Memoirs: History, Memory and Politics* (Lynne Rienner, Boulder: CO, 1998), p 151.
  25. “Training for Forest Operations”, p 12.

Nationalist Liberation Army (ZANLA). Since both groups lacked sufficient military preparation or resources for protracted warfare, their initial campaigns of the late 1960s were poorly planned and aimed at frightening the Rhodesian regime into negotiation and satisfying external sponsors like the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). During the first phase of the war in the late 1960s ZAPU infiltration from Zambia was done in conjunction with South Africa's exiled African National Congress (ANC) which sought to move insurgents through Rhodesia and enter apartheid South Africa which was surrounded by a buffer of friendly or dependent states. This resulted in South African Police (SAP) elements being dispatched to assist Rhodesia. The Rhodesian army consisted of a full-time component of two infantry battalions, the all-white Rhodesian Light Infantry (RLI) and the white-led but predominantly black Rhodesian African Rifles (RAR), and an exclusively white Special Forces unit called the Rhodesian Special Air Service (SAS). Young white men were obliged to undergo a period of military training and subsequent call-up within several part-time or territorial infantry battalions of the Rhodesia Regiment (RR). A long held fear among Rhodesian whites of arming black soldiers meant that there were major delays in expanding black military manpower. As a legacy of better relations with Britain during the 1950s, Rhodesia had developed a capable air force with up-to-date jet fighters and bombers, transport aircraft and light helicopters. The British South Africa Police (BSAP), Rhodesia's law enforcement organisation, was a white-led but predominantly black force with a full-time and quickly expanded para-military reaction element and a large white and black reserve. Though its anti-communist stance meant that Rhodesia retained some friends in the West, it became an international pariah subject to sanctions and switched its main economic and military alliance from Britain to nearby South Africa.<sup>26</sup>

Some Rhodesian soldiers, particularly in the SAS and RAR, gained tracking experience during the British counter-insurgency effort in Malaya during the 1950s.<sup>27</sup> In the early 1960s Alan Savory, a game ranger and Territorial Army officer who studied recent conflicts in Malaya and Kenya, suggested the formation of a special military tracking unit and began training the SAS in bush survival and tracking. In 1965 Savory, now a private game rancher, was authorised to establish the Guerrilla Anti-terrorist Unit (GATU) with white SAS operators and black policemen who would specialise in tracking and counter-tracking, and pose as insurgents to infiltrate and eliminate their groups. However, the unit was quickly disbanded given differences between the army and police. In the late 1960s the army allowed Savory to select white territorial soldiers who were professional

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26. For examples of the large literature see D. Martin and P. Johnson, *The Struggle for Zimbabwe: The Chimurenga War* (Monthly Review Press, New York, 1981); J.K. Cilliers, *Counter-Insurgency in Rhodesia* (Croom Helm Publishing, Beckenham, 1985); T. Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe: A Comparative Study* (James Currey, London, 1985); T. Ranger and N. Bhebhe, (eds) *Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War* (James Currey, London, 1995); P. Moorcroft and P. McLaughlin, *The Rhodesian War: A Military History* (Pen and Sword, London, 2008); J. Nhongo-Simbanegavi, *For Better or Worse: Women and ZANLA in Zimbabwe's Liberation Struggle* (Weaver Press, Harare, 2000); E. Sibanda, *The Zimbabwe African People's Union, 1961–1987* (Africa World Press, Trenton, 2005).

27. B. Cole, *The Elite: The Story of the Rhodesian Special Air Service* (Three Knights Publishing, Amanzimtoti, 1984), p 11; G. Turner-Dauncey, "The Happy Hundred" and M. Coetzee, "Lessons from Malaya", in J. Pittaway and C. Fourie (eds), *SAS Rhodesia* (Dandy Agencies, Musgrave, 2003), pp 58 and 88. A. Binda, *Masodja: The History of the Rhodesian African Rifles and its Forerunner the Rhodesia Native Regiment* (30 Degrees South, Johannesburg, 2007), pp 126–140; and J. Essex-Clark, *Maverick Soldier: An Infantryman's Story* (Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1991), pp 3–15 and 32–49.

hunters and game rangers in civilian life to form the Tracker Combat Unit (TCU) and without black personnel the planned pseudo role was set aside. Utilising four man teams, the unit developed standard procedures for tactical tracking and emphasised silence, instinctive shooting, long distance tracking and fast movement on foot to catch fleeing prey. While Savory knew that scent tracking dogs had been used by British forces in Kenya, his experience with them in the Game Department and professional hunting informed his decision to exclude them from the TCU. Dogs made noise that would warn an enemy, they obliterated spoor, they lost scent in hot weather, and they required food and water. In theory the full-time SAS, which had its own tracker teams, focused on external operations while the part-time TCU worked inside Rhodesia responding to reports of insurgent activity.<sup>28</sup>

The BSAP also applied tracking to counter-insurgency. In 1964 BSAP member Bill Bailey, a veteran of irregular desert warfare in North Africa during the Second World War, formed a Tracker Combat Team with volunteer police and police reservists in the Lomagundi district in the northern part of the country. This local part-time tracking unit was quickly disbanded by conservative BSAP authorities but continued informally under the auspices of Volunteer Advanced Training. With the dissolution of Savory's combined army and police GATU, Bailey's experiment influenced the 1966 creation of the country-wide Police Anti-Terrorist Unit (PATU) similarly consisting of white and black police and police reservists who, in addition to their regular duties or civilian jobs, volunteered for rural patrols to gather intelligence and pursue insurgents. PATU's volunteer and localised character meant that its training and employment of trackers remained ad hoc. Some PATU members already possessed tracking skills gained as civilian hunters or game rangers, Africans with tracking skills including minority Bushmen from the southwest were encouraged to join by enrolling in the African police reserve and civilian African game-trackers were sometimes employed.<sup>29</sup>

Another BSAP element in which tracking became important was ground coverage which, beginning in the 1960s, dispatched small teams of white and black personnel to collect intelligence from specific rural areas. Their only relevant training consisted of the standard ten-day BSAP counter-insurgency course and tracking expertise was usually acquired on the job or by engaging civilian specialists.<sup>30</sup> The BSAP also assembled a force of civilian pilots and aircraft, called the Police Reserve Air Wing (PRAW), which became skilled at tracking insurgents from the air and was inspired by a similar venture in Kenya.<sup>31</sup> Since the BSAP had begun using scent tracking dogs to apprehend criminals in 1948, security force insurgent tracking operations in 1967 and 1968 included police tracker dogs but the results were mixed. Although the BSAP continued to use tracker dogs throughout the war, they were never widely adopted by counter-insurgency forces for the reasons listed above. Attempting to accelerate tracking, the Rhodesian Air Force and BSAP, during 1968 and 1969, experimented with

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28. Communication with Allan Savory, 11 January 2013; B. Robinson, "Into the Bush War," in Pittaway and Fourie (eds), *SAS Rhodesia*, p 194.
  29. P. Gibbs, H. Phillips and N. Russell, *Blue and Old Gold: The History of the British South Africa Police, 1889–1980* (30 Degrees South, Johannesburg, 2009), pp 334–343; P.J.H. Petter-Bowyer, *Winds of Destruction: The Autobiography of a Rhodesian Combat Pilot* (30 Degrees South, Johannesburg, 2005), p 133; email communication with Anthony Trethowan, 10 April 2013.
  30. A. Trethowan, *Delta Scout: Ground Coverage Operator* (30 Degrees South, Johannesburg, 2008), pp 129, 135–136.
  31. Moorcroft and McLaughlin, *The Rhodesian War*, p 56.

equipping a tracker dog with a harness radio to give basic orders and an orange panel to allow it to be followed by a helicopter carrying its handler and troops to be deployed on the ground when insurgents were found. The project failed because regular police dogs were expected to fill the role of tracker dogs.<sup>32</sup>

During the early phase of the conflict the Rhodesian Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management (DNPWLM), formed its own counter-insurgency tracking cadre called the Volunteer Tracking Unit (VTU) or Parks Tracking Unit that dispatched teams of one white wildlife officer (WO) and one or two black game scouts to aid the security forces. As an operational team, the unarmed game scouts conducted the actual tracking protected by the armed WO. The VTU began in the late 1960s when Paul Coetsee, provincial warden for Mashonaland North and a founding TCU member, lent National Parks trackers to the police to help apprehend criminals and insurgents. This arrangement was formalised in the early 1970s with the spread of the insurgency to the northeast and the launching of Operation Hurricane which signalled the start of a new phase in the conflict. National Parks VTU teams took turns on two to three week operational assignments and by 1976 there were always at least three of them at work in different parts of the country.<sup>33</sup>

In the late 1960s the location of ZAPU and ZANU staging areas in Zambia presented problems for infiltrating neighbouring Rhodesia. The two countries were divided by the obstacles of the Zambezi River and the newly man-made Lake Kariba, and Rhodesia's northern Zambezi Valley was far from likely insurgent targets and its sparse and un-politicised African population could not be relied on for support. Furthermore, the area's large and uninhabited game parks were patrolled by rangers; water sources were limited in the dry winter and thin tree cover made aerial observation a possibility. In the remote Zambezi Valley, according to Rhodesian military historian J.R.D. Wood, "fresh human tracks command instant attention".<sup>34</sup> To make matters worse, ZAPU/ANC insurgents who crossed into Rhodesia in 1967 and 1968 travelled in relatively large groups of up to 100 and all wore the same Cuban-manufactured boots that made a distinctive "figure 8" pattern footprint which facilitated tracking. According to Thula Bopela and Daluxola Luthuli, veterans of the disastrous ZAPU/ANC Luthuli Detachment of 1967, "We didn't know much about tracking and back-tracking in those days and took no precautions."<sup>35</sup> Assisted by the TCU and National Parks trackers, elements of the Rhodesian Army and BSAP supported by the Rhodesian Air Force successfully tracked and engaged all the insurgent groups that crossed the Zambezi in the late 1960s.<sup>36</sup>

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32. J.R.T. Wood, *A Matter of Weeks Rather than Months: The Impasse Between Harold Wilson and Ian Smith, Sanctions, Aborted Settlements and War, 1965–69* (Victoria, Canada: Trafford Publishing, 2012), pp 363, 373, 437; Petter-Bowyer, *Winds of Destruction* pp 126, 139–140.

33. K. Thomas, *Shadows in an African Twilight* (Uthekwane Press, Cape Town, 2008), pp 115–117; email communication with Trethowan, 10 April 2013; B. Orford, *Kamchacha: Rhodesian Game Ranger* (privately published, Bulawayo, 2008), pp 228–229.

34. J.R.T.. Wood, *Zambezi Valley Insurgency: Early Rhodesian Bush War Operations* (Helion & Co., Solihull, 2012), p 20.

35. T. Bopela and D. Luthuli, *Umkhonto we Sizwe: Fighting for a Divided People* (Galago, Alberton, 2005), p 63.

36. D. Scott-Donelan, "Zambezi Valley Manhunt", *Soldier of Fortune*, March 1985. On the insurgent infiltrations of Rhodesia in 1967, see R.M. Ralinala, J. Sithole, G. Houston and B. Magubane, "The Wankie and Sipolilo Campaigns", in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 1 (1960–1970)* (Zebra Press, Cape Town, 2004), pp 479–540.

Since it was dependent upon National Parks trackers who were not always eager to enter combat and who demanded additional pay for security force work in 1968, the Rhodesian Army began to develop its own expertise in this field. In the late 1960s some soldiers were sent on National Parks tracking courses and in 1970 the Rhodesian Army's School of Infantry opened its Tracking Wing at Kariba. Founding Tracking Wing commander and SAS officer Brian Robinson, a former member of GATU, and Savory developed the concept of a four man tracking team that moved 100 or 200 metres ahead of a larger infantry unit to be called forward when the enemy was discovered. The wing offered basic, intermediate and advanced tracking courses, and survival courses and sometimes South African Special Forces operators participated in the training.<sup>37</sup>

By 1968 the all-white RLI had begun to develop its own tracker teams. In late July 1968, while pursuing a group of 50 ZANU insurgents who had crossed the Zambezi River, Rhodesian Air Force pilot Peter Petter-Bowyer experimented with using a helicopter to leapfrog RLI trackers toward possible water sources that the insurgents were likely heading for because it was the dry season. While the helicopter-borne trackers made up seven days lost time in a few hours, they ultimately landed too close to the insurgents who heard the helicopter and escaped into neighbouring Mozambique. From this, the RLI developed a standard tracking practise of using helicopters to gain ground on insurgents. One tracker team remained following the spoor while another was flown forward to search for the same line of tracks, although they tried to avoid landing too close to the suspected enemy. Another tactic meant to box-in fleeing insurgents was for helicopters to deposit small teams ahead of trackers to ambush or contain fleeing guerrillas. These methods became standard security force practise during the 1970s.<sup>38</sup> The experience of tracking for Portuguese troops in Mozambique (see below) prompted the RLI to launch its own tracking courses in 1969 which eventually prepared soldiers for training at the army's Tracking Wing. It also influenced the 1971 formation of the RLI's organic Tracking Troop which consisted of several tracker teams.<sup>39</sup> Other Rhodesian army units had a different approach to tracker organisation. With a core of experienced trackers from Malaya and many African soldiers who had grown up herding and hunting in rural areas, the RAR conducted its own basic tracking training, sent some soldiers to Kariba and spread tracking specialists among companies. In 1968, Sergeant Laurie Ryan, who excelled in bush craft eventually took an army tracking course, joined the all-white territorial 4 RR based around the eastern town of Umtali on the Mozambique border and was influential in that unit forming a specialist tracker team.<sup>40</sup>

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37. Wood, *A Matter of Weeks*, pp 373, 447; B. Robinson, "Tracker Combat Teams", in Pittaway and Fourie, *SAS Rhodesia*, pp 204–205; D. Croukamp, *The Bush War in Rhodesia: The Extraordinary Combat Memoir of a Rhodesian Reconnaissance Specialist* (Paladin Press, Boulder: CO, 2006), pp 80, 88; T. Bax, *Three Sips of Gin: Dominating the Battlespace with Rhodesia's Elite Selous Scouts* (Helion & Co., Solihull, 2013), p 169.
38. Petter-Bowyer, *Winds of Destruction*, pp 140–141; A. Binda, *The Saints: The Rhodesian Light Infantry* (30 Degrees South, Johannesburg, 2007), p 80.
39. D. Price, "RLI Tracking", in M. Adams and C. Cocks, *Africa's Commandos: The Rhodesian Light Infantry* (Helion, Solihull, 2013), pp 56–58; Binda, *The Saints*, p 130; *The Cheetah*, 31 October 1980, pp 44–45.
40. Communication with former RAR officers Vince Leonard and Malcolm Clewer, 2 August 2013; A. Binda, *The Rhodesia Regiment: From Boer War to Bush War, 1899–1980* (Galago, Alberton, 2012), pp 190, 415.

Fighting insurgents in nearby Angola and Mozambique, Portuguese security forces were particularly interested in their Rhodesian allies' emergent tracking skills. With the exception of Bushmen trackers formed into a unit called the "flechas" (arrows) in Angola and a militia consisting of Portuguese hunter Danny Roxo and his African trackers in Mozambique, most Portuguese troops were conscripts from Europe with little knowledge of the African bush or interest in the war.<sup>41</sup> At secret meetings held in Mozambique in 1968 and 1969, Rhodesian officials promised the Portuguese assistance in a number of areas including tracking.<sup>42</sup> During the late 1960s and early 1970s Portuguese officers visited Rhodesia to observe tracking demonstrations, Portuguese troops attended Rhodesian Tracking Wing courses and a Rhodesian SAS team went to Angola to conduct tracking training. Since Rhodesia and Mozambique shared a common border, and the Portuguese there had been slow to mobilise African troops, tracking teams from the Rhodesian SAS and RLI worked directly with Portuguese forces in that territory. In January 1969 a RLI tracking team in Mozambique's Tete Province found the first evidence that insurgents from the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) had crossed south of the Zambezi River which was important because up to that point they had been confined to northern Mozambique with staging areas in Tanzania but now threatened Rhodesia's access to Mozambican ports. Another RLI tracking team with Portuguese paratroopers, in November 1970, followed a FRELIMO group for five days until they discovered a base and major arms cache. While the Rhodesians influenced the Portuguese to establish their own Combat Tracking Special Groups in 1970 and Portuguese army trackers began to deploy, it was too little and too late to have any significant impact on counter-insurgency in Mozambique.<sup>43</sup>

In 1972 ZANLA, ZANU's armed wing, moved from Zambia to Tete in Mozambique where it allied with experienced FRELIMO guerrillas and began infiltrating adjacent northeastern Rhodesia. With Portugal's sudden withdrawal from Africa in 1974, FRELIMO seized power in Mozambique and allowed ZANLA to establish bases along the entire border with eastern Rhodesia leading to a rapid escalation of the insurgency. Unlike the Zambezi Valley in the north, Rhodesia's northeastern and eastern border had no large natural obstacles, insurgents found hiding places in the hilly and sometimes forested terrain, and guerrillas blended into the dense African population in the Tribal Trust Lands (TTLs). Approaching this new phase of the war with Maoist revolutionary ideology and Chinese support, ZANLA penetrated northeastern and then eastern Rhodesia with small units that, for security reasons, did not know about one another, focused on politicising rural communities and tried to avoid Rhodesian forces. Insurgent activity increased during the rainy season as growing bush provided cover though moving after rainfall usually left clear tracks. ZANLA began to practise effective anti-tracking

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41. J.P. Cann, *The Flechas: Insurgent Hunting in Eastern Angola, 1965–1974* (30 Degrees South, Pinetown, 2013); S. Nielsen, "The White Devil of Mozambique: One Man Army against FRELIMO", *Soldier of Fortune*, October 1978, pp 78–83; P. Nortje, *32 Battalion: The Inside Story of South Africa's Elite Fighting Unit* (Zebra Press, Cape Town, 2003), p 86. Roxo later joined the SADF and was killed in Angola in 1976.
  42. P.E.S. Correia, "Political Relations between Portugal and South Africa from the End of the Second World War until 1974", PhD thesis, University of Johannesburg, 2007, p 210.
  43. A. Binda, "Mozambique, 1968–1972: Rhodesian and Portuguese Cooperation", available at [www.rhodesianforces.org/Mozambique1968-72.htm](http://www.rhodesianforces.org/Mozambique1968-72.htm); Croukamp, *The Bush War in Rhodesia*, pp 134–139. See also Robinson, "Tracker Combat Teams", p 205; Binda, *The Saints*, pp 104–110; A.J. Venter, *Portugal's Guerrilla Wars in Africa: Lisbon's Three Wars in Angola, Mozambique and Portuguese Guinea 1961–1974* (Helion & Co., Solihull, 2013), pp 387–388.

and greatly favoured the practise of “bombshelling” which meant that a unit discovered by security forces would split into small groups or individuals who fled in many different directions to prevent trackers from following them all. The insurgents would then meet at a prearranged location. ZANLA fighters also walked in streams or on popular footpaths, changed footwear or went barefoot to alter footprints, and had sympathisers brush away their tracks or drive livestock over them. The war was further expanded in the late 1970s when ZIPRA, ZAPU’s Soviet supplied armed wing which was more inclined to confront security forces, established staging areas in Botswana to infiltrate arid southwestern Rhodesia where the hard ground often proved difficult for trackers.<sup>44</sup> Insurgents also used tracking to gather information on the security forces. Agrippah Mutambara, a ZANLA training officer in Mozambique during the mid to late 1970s, recalled that his colleagues:

acquired a thorough knowledge of tracking skills which, together with the chameleon skills of camouflage and concealment, turned them into an invisible rebel force against the Rhodesian regime. The terrain which they traversed became the main source of their operational intelligence. They were trained to glean intelligence from foot prints and other disturbances on the ground, and to determine how long ago they could have occurred.<sup>45</sup>

Anthony Trethowan, a veteran of BSAP Ground Coverage, explains, “tracking, ambushing, follow-ups etc – were simply not working as they had in the earlier days of the bush war in the sparsely populated Zambezi Valley: the guerrillas were now mixing with the povo, the local peasants, in the heavily populated TTLs.”<sup>46</sup>

Trying to contain the growing insurgency, Rhodesian forces turned to pseudo-teams to locate guerrillas and air mobile reaction units called Fire Forces to eliminate them. In 1974 the Tracking Wing and 90 strong TCU were absorbed by the new Selous Scouts which used tracking as a cover for its primary and covert mission of utilising captured and turned insurgents and black security force personnel to infiltrate guerrilla groups. Although the white territorials of the old TCU were unsuitable for pseudo-operations, their continued work as army trackers helped maintain the unit’s cover.<sup>47</sup> According to Major General Archer Bruce Campling, a Malaya veteran and Rhodesian Army brigade commander in the late 1970s, “the Selous Scouts continued to train and deploy trackers until the end of the war but this became very much of a secondary role and it was neglected to the detriment of the rest of the Army effort.”<sup>48</sup> Indeed, Selous Scouts recruitment drained core units like the SAS, RLI and RAR of many of its best personnel including skilled trackers. It also undermined the Tracking Wing which became the Scouts’ Training Troop and focused on pseudo-operations and other units hesitated to send their personnel there for tracker training as they might be enticed into joining the Scouts. Selous Scouts Training Troop staff may have put their hunting skills to other uses as some were accused of poaching and illegally selling products from endangered species such as ivory and rhino horn. As the RLI was

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44. Moorcroft and McLaughlin, *The Rhodesian War*, pp 72, 100; Thomas, *Shadows in an African Twilight*, p 121; Binda, *Rhodesia Regiment*, p 339.

45. A. Mutambara, *The Rebel in Me: A ZANLA Guerrilla Commander in the Rhodesian Bush War, 1975–1980* (30 Degrees South, Pinetown, 2014), p 78.

46. Trethowan, *Delta Scout*, p 131.

47. R. Reid Daly (as told to P. Stiff), *Selous Scouts: Top Secret War* (Galago, Alberton, 1982) pp 82–83.

48. Major General Archer Bruce Campling, DCD, “Pseudo-Terrorist Operations in Rhodesia,” Paper dated 2006, supplied by Kevin Thomas.

transformed into an air mobile Fire Force that would respond to reports from pseudo-teams, the unit's tracking expertise declined and its Tracking Troop was reconceived as a broader Reconnaissance Troop.<sup>49</sup>

Despite these new methods, Rhodesian security force emphasis on tracking continued as part of the overall but narrow strategy on killing as many guerrillas as possible. In the early 1970s, Rhodesia began building a 25-metre wide cordon sanitaire along the Mozambique border which was fenced on both sides, cleared of vegetation by chemical defoliants, and seeded with landmines and electronic warning devices. A dirt road along the Rhodesian side of the inner fence was swept clean and patrolled on a regular basis which facilitated tracking of infiltrators. However, there were insufficient resources to patrol its entire length and it was too narrow which meant it "never proved a serious obstacle to guerrilla infiltrations".<sup>50</sup> Rural people were herded into protected villages (PVs) to inhibit their support for insurgents and force guerrillas into uninhabited "no-go" areas where they could be tracked more easily especially in bulldozing sections of bush. The PV fences were routinely patrolled for signs of insurgent entry and tell-tale tracks.<sup>51</sup> In 1975 the Rhodesian Army created a horse mounted unit called the Grey's Scouts that patrolled the Zambian and Mozambican borders for signs of infiltration. Attempts to monitor the frontier with electronic devices had failed for technical reasons and motor vehicles proved unsuitable for the rough terrain. The Grey's Scouts consisted of mostly white regular and territorial soldiers but also some African members from the Shangaan minority of the remote southeast which was considered particularly skilled at tracking.<sup>52</sup>

In 1977 IRR formed a motorcycle troop to patrol border and security fences but after a few months the border patrols were reduced as riders were vulnerable to ambush and they focused on reaction duties including tracking with men and dogs.<sup>53</sup> In early 1977 private game rancher and territorial Selous Scout, Mark Sparrow formed the Civilian African Tracking Unit (CATU) that employed African civilian trackers mostly from the Shangaan community who, given their age or lack of formal education, were unable to enlist in the security forces.<sup>54</sup> In the late 1970s the Air Force and Army renewed experiments with guiding or following tracker dogs from helicopters but these also failed.<sup>55</sup> By the mid-1970s the Rhodesian Air Force had developed aerial tracking skills.<sup>56</sup> Tracking still resulted in some

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49. Robinson, "Into the Bush War", p 195; Price, "RLI Tracking", p 58; J. Parker, *Assignment Selous Scouts: Inside Story of a Rhodesian Special Branch Officer* (Galago, Alberton, 1999), p 31; Croukamp, *The Bush War in Rhodesia*, p 383; Thomas, *Shadows in an African Twilight*, pp 278–281; S. Ellis, "Of Elephants and Men: Politics and Nature Conservation in South Africa", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20, 1, March 1994, pp 55–56.
50. H. Ellert, *Rhodesian Front War: Counter-Insurgency and Guerrilla War in Rhodesia, 1962–1980* (Mambo Press, Gweru, 1989), pp 27–28; Cilliers, *Counter-Insurgency in Rhodesia*, p 107.
51. Cilliers, *Counter-Insurgency in Rhodesia*, pp 15, 83; Parker, *Assignment Selous Scouts*, p 113.
52. Interview with Michael Watson, *Soldier of Fortune*, 22 December 2012.
53. Binda, *Rhodesia Regiment*, p 278.
54. J. Lott, "Run the Bastards Down: CATU Tracks Terrorists: Rhodesia's Civilian Tracking Unit", *Soldier of Fortune*, July 1979, pp 46–51.
55. Petter-Bowyer, *Winds of Destruction*, pp 325–326; J.R.D. Wood (ed.) *The War Diaries of Andre Dennison* (Ashanti Publishing, Gibraltar, 1989), p 141; Croukamp, *The Bush War in Rhodesia*, pp 380–381.
56. B. Whyte, *A Pride of Eagles: the Story of Rhodesia's Air Force* (Graham Publishing, Salisbury, 1976), p 43.

successes such as in November 1976 when a 4RR tracker team and an RLI Fire Force located and killed 31 insurgents in the eastern Honde Valley representing the largest number of fatalities inflicted by the security forces in a single engagement up to that time. However, numerous accounts by security force members demonstrate that much more often than not, tracking operations lost insurgents who practised effective anti-tracking and slipped into populated TTLs.<sup>57</sup>

### South West Africa (Namibia)

South Africa had occupied the neighbouring German colony of South West Africa during the First World War and then administered it as a mandate of the League of Nations. In 1962, exiled African nationalists of the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) formed an armed wing called the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) to fight South African occupation and gain independence. At this point PLAN's objective of infiltrating South West Africa was hampered by the location of its staging area in western Zambia which shared a narrow border with the remote eastern Caprivi Strip and was far from the populated northern area of Ovamboland where it enjoyed support and the white farming area in the centre of the country which was its main target. SWAPO/PLAN cooperated with Angolan insurgents such as the Movement for the Popular Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) who were fighting the Portuguese. However, the vast territory of Angola was difficult to cross and patrolled by Portuguese forces and sometimes their South African allies. In 1965 PLAN insurgents first infiltrated South West Africa and in August 1966 their camp at Ongulumbashe in Ovamboland was discovered and destroyed by South African forces. During the late 1960s and early 1970s PLAN focused primarily on infiltrating small groups into the Caprivi Strip, targeted local officials who worked with the South African administration, and planted landmines on roads.<sup>58</sup>

When SWAPO infiltration began in the late 1960s the SAP was responsible for counter-insurgency in South West Africa and used trackers from the Bushmen minority and National Parks trackers, and tracker dogs to pursue insurgents. As members of historic hunter-gatherer communities, the Bushmen had a well-known reputation for tracking prowess.<sup>59</sup> Around 1970, the SAP formed small tracking units among some of the most isolated and least politicised Bushman groups. Based at a series of camps spaced about 40 to 60 kilometres apart, they conducted daily patrols of the frontier and reported signs of infiltration. The SAP also dispatched Bushmen trackers into neighbouring Botswana to gather

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57. C. Reynolds, "Forces Bag 31 in One Battle", *Rhodesian Herald*, 18 November 1976, pp 1–2; Binda, *The Saints*, p 200; Binda, *Rhodesia Regiment*, pp 278–279, 415; Parker, *Assignment Selous Scouts*, p 56; Wood, *War Diaries of Andre Dennison*, pp 95–96 and 175; E. Bird, *Special Branch War: Slaughter in the Rhodesian Bush Southern Matabeleland, 1976–1980* (Helion, Solihull, 2014), pp 58, 75, 79, 86, 90, 119, 177, 201 and 229.

58. S. Brown, "Diplomacy by Other Means – SWAPO's Liberation War", in C. Leys and J. Saul (eds), *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: The Two-Edged Sword* (James Currey, London, 1995), pp 19–29

59. The African Communist, No. 28, First Quarter 1967, p 10; L.J. Bothma, *Buffalo Battalion: South Africa's 32 Battalion: A Tale of Sacrifice* (L.J. Bothma, Bloemfontein, 2007), p 31.

information on insurgents and recruit new members.<sup>60</sup> Based on its experience in Rhodesia's Zambezi Valley and unfolding events in South West Africa, the SAP established a counter-insurgency school in South Africa in 1970 and an elite Special Task Force trained in urban and rural operations in the mid-1970s. Consequently, during the 1970s the police developed tracker training programmes in South Africa and by the early 1980s this included a six week basic tracking and survival course near Potgietersrus (now Mokopane), also the site of the police dog school, and another six week advanced tracking course in the Kruger National Park.<sup>61</sup> During the early 1970s, as PLAN stepped up operations, the SAP formed "Cobra Teams" each consisting of five white personnel and one black special constable/interpreter, transported by helicopter into northern South West Africa for week-long patrols to collect intelligence on SWAPO that was reported to the South African Defence Force (SADF) for reaction. These teams often worked with unpaid black special constables called "Oscar Zulus" or OZs who were often Bushmen trackers. In 1974 the SAP began to pay and train Bushmen and Ovambo OZs, their weapons were upgraded and some were seconded to security force units as trackers. By 1978 the OZ programme had been transformed into a 3 000 strong Ovambo Home Guard.<sup>62</sup>

In April 1974, with a military coup in Portugal that likely meant independence for Angola and the expansion of insurgency south of the border, the SADF took over counter-insurgency operations in South West Africa. Angola's subsequent and sudden independence prompted a civil war between the MPLA around the capital of Luanda, UNITA in the south and the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) in the north. Beginning in September 1974, the SADF established a camp in the Caprivi Strip for Angolan Bushmen who had been flechas for the departing Portuguese and were crossing the border to seek sanctuary. They were formed into an ad hoc military unit that patrolled into southeastern Angola to hunt SWAPO and some were attached to SADF units as trackers.<sup>63</sup> Since an MPLA government would give the Soviet Union access to Angola's oil and sponsor SWAPO, the SADF invaded Angola in August 1975 in support of UNITA and FNLA. Called Operation Savannah, the South African intervention was enacted by two battle groups of Angolan troops; Alpha consisted of the Angolan Bushmen unit based in Caprivi and Bravo comprised other Angolans who had been members of FNLA and UNITA. In Angola, Alpha functioned as motorised infantry and recruited additional Bushmen including more former flechas, others seeking employment and some enlisted at gunpoint.

Thwarted by the arrival of a Cuban expeditionary force and the withdrawal of covert American support, the South African-led columns withdrew into South West Africa in March 1976. After Savannah, Alpha and Bravo were based in

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60. R. Lee and S. Hurlich, "From Foragers to Fighters: South Africa's Militarization of the Namibian San", in E. Leacock and R. Lee (eds), *Politics and History in Band Societies* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982), pp 334–335 and 340–341.
61. Interviews conducted with Francois du Toit, Radium, 14 November 2012; Herman van der Walt, Polokwane, 15 November 2012; Callie Calitz, Odendaalsrus, 16 November 2012. See also G. Cawthra, *Brutal Force: The Apartheid War Machine* (International Defence and Aid Fund, London, 1986), pp 123, 225.
62. P. Stiff, *The Covert War: Koevoet Operations Namibia, 1979–89* (Galago, Alberton, 2004), pp 47–50.
63. K. Grundy, *Soldiers Without Politics: Blacks in the South African Armed Forces* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1983), p 254; Nortje, *32 Battalion: The Inside Story of South Africa's Elite Fighting Unit*, p 17; I. Uys, *Bushmen Soldiers: Their Alpha and Omega* (Fortress Publications, Germiston, 1993), pp 1–25.

northern South West Africa and became the SADF's first primarily black fighting units designated 31 and 32 Battalion, respectively. Studying the counter-insurgency operations of the French in Algeria and Americans in Vietnam, SADF heads increased employment of indigenous troops. At this time the Caprivi based 31 Battalion was a regular infantry unit the members of which had a reputation as skilled trackers given the long-standing hunter image of the Bushmen. To fill 31 Battalion's ranks, the SADF launched an aggressive and sometimes coercive recruiting campaign among South West African Bushmen who had an antagonistic relationship with the majority Bantu-speaking peoples.<sup>64</sup>

With a friendly MPLA regime in Luanda, SWAPO/PLAN established bases throughout southern Angola where they received military assistance from the new Angolan army and its Soviet and Cuban allies, and dramatically increased infiltration and "hit-and-run" attacks in northern South West Africa. While the South African forces responded by increasing the number of personnel and resources in the area, the guerrillas' elusiveness and their retreat into Angola when detected led to tracking related initiatives. In 1976 the South Africans, to detect insurgent infiltration, removed around 50 000 people from South West Africa's frontier with Angola and created a one kilometre-wide depopulated strip called the "Yati". Between the border and the white farming areas to the south a network of sandy roads called "cutlines" or "kaplyne" were regularly swept by vehicles dragging trees and routinely patrolled for footprints.<sup>65</sup>

From the late 1970s and continuing throughout the 1980s, PLAN's infiltration of northern South West Africa became more difficult. Ever larger South African military incursions into southern Angolan forced PLAN to withdraw its staging areas further from the border. UNITA, sponsored by South Africa and the United States, gained control of southeastern Angola which meant PLAN was denied that area from which to cross into northeast South West Africa, and PLAN was increasingly drawn into the Angolan civil war. Within South West Africa, South African security forces relied on frequent patrols to detect infiltration and when needed called on air mobile or armoured vehicle mounted reaction teams to pursue and eliminate insurgents.<sup>66</sup>

During Operation Cobra, an SADF attempt in May 1976 to find and destroy SWAPO bases in northern South West Africa and southern Angola, Bushmen

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64. R. Gordon and S. Douglas, *The Bushman Myth: The Making of a Namibian Underclass* (Westview Press, Boulder: CO, 2000), pp 1–2, 183–185; Uys, *Bushman Soldiers*; G.B. Kolata, "IKung Bushmen Join the South African Army", *Science*, 211, 4482, February 1981, pp 562–564; A.K. Battistoni and J.J. Taylor, "Indigenous Identities and Military Frontiers: Reflections on the San and the Military in Namibia and Angola, 1960–2000", *Lusotopie*, 16, 1, 2009, pp 113–131; A. Peled, *A Question of Loyalty: Military Manpower Policy in Multiethnic States* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1999), pp 27–92; *Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume 2*, 29 October 1998, p 23.
65. Brown, "SWAPO's Liberation War", pp 29–39; Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, p 181; J.H. Thompson, *An Unpopular War: From Afkak to Bosbefok: Voices of South African National Servicemen* (Zebra Press, Cape Town, 2006), p 118.
66. A. Esterhuysen and E. Jordaan, "The South African Defence Force and Counter-insurgency, 1966–1990", in D-P. Baker and E. Jordaan (eds), *South Africa and Contemporary Counter-insurgency: Roots, Practices and Prospects* (International Publishers, Claremont, 2010), pp 104–123. There is a large literature on the war in Angola and Namibia. For a few examples see E. George, *The Cuban Intervention in Angola, 1965–1991: From Che Guevara to Cuito Cuanavale* (Frank Cass, London, 2005); W. Steenkamp, *Borderstrike! South Africa into Angola, 1975–80* (Just Done Productions, Durban, 2006); L. Scholtz, *The SADF in the Border War, 1966–1989* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2013).

trackers from 31 Battalion were first employed by other South African units. After Cobra, select 31 Battalion trackers were sent to Ovamboland to assist SADF units counter SWAPO infiltration and some of these, in 1977, were formed into a separate SADF Tracker Unit. In February 1977, 40 of the most skilled Bushmen trackers in 31 Battalion were trained by SADF Special Forces and formed the battalion's Reconnaissance Wing and the following year a few were absorbed into Special Forces.<sup>67</sup>

In 1974 the SADF established an Equestrian Centre in Potchefstroom, South Africa, to breed and train horses, and train white national servicemen as mounted infantry for counter-insurgency. In South West Africa, mounted units were meant to find insurgent spoor during patrols and use their horses' speed to catch up with the quarry. Mounted platoons were assigned to infantry battalions and bases across South West Africa, and patrolled the various cut-lines accompanied by Bushmen and other trackers. Since horses and riders were big targets and thus exposed to ambush, a mounted patrol tracking insurgents usually called in a mechanised unit to take over pursuit when they were getting close to the enemy, and they often operated 500 to 1000 metres ahead of a mechanised force. In 1977 the SADF consolidated several reaction units into 101 Specialist Unit which combined trackers and tracker/mine detector dogs with the mobility of horse and motorcycle mounted infantry. It became part of the South West African Territorial Force (SWATF), established in 1980 to localise command of the counter-insurgency effort, and was renamed 1 South West African Specialist Unit (SWASPES) with a permanent base built at Otavi. While horse mounted infantry and dogs and their handlers were taught at different schools in South Africa, motorcyclists and trackers were trained at the unit base. SWASPES established a bush school which regularly offered basic and advanced tracking and survival courses also taken by personnel from other units. Although there were some problems with South African commanders not knowing how to employ tracker dogs, it was claimed that 60 percent of the unit's operations resulted in insurgent contact. However, PLAN claimed to have killed and captured SWASPES horses. A PLAN veteran of over five years guerrilla warfare in thickly forested eastern Ovamboland maintains that South African security forces did not use dogs in his area after 1979 as too many had been killed by ambushes and landmines.<sup>68</sup>

In mid-1978, with increased SWAPO infiltration from Angola, South African security chiefs decided to establish a special unit modelled on the Rhodesian Selous Scouts to conduct pseudo-operations with the SAP, gathering intelligence and the SADF's Special Forces (Recces) organising pseudo teams. In January 1979 the SAP, as its part of this project, established a unit called Operation K or Koevoet, Afrikaans for "crowbar", in Ovamboland consisting of white police and Ovambo special constables from the Home Guard. The original pseudo approach did not materialise as the Recces were too involved with external operations to

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67. Uys, *Bushmen Soldiers*, pp 49, 56, 64–66; Gordon and Douglas, *The Bushman Myth*, p 186.

68. J.J.P. de Vries and S. Swart, "The South African Defence Force and Horse Mounted Infantry Operations, 1974–1985", *Scientia Militaria*, 40, 3, 2012, pp 398–428; H-R. Heitman, *South African Armed Forces* (Buffalo Productions, Cape Town, 1990), pp 109–111; Uys, *Bushmen Soldiers*, p 157; J. Geldenhuys, *At the Front: A General's Account of South Africa's Border War* (Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg, 2009), pp 105–106; Helmoed R. Heitman, *South African War Machine* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1985), pp 108–110; O.O. Namakalu, *Armed Liberation Struggle: Some Accounts of PLAN's Combat Operations* (Gamsberg MacMillan, Windhoek, 2004), p 139; interview conducted with Peter Ekandjo, Windhoek, 21 July 2014.

capture insurgents for the police to “turn”, police and military culture were incompatible, and SWAPO groups were too well established within the country to be infiltrated by impostors. In June 1979 Koevoet teams on foot tracked a SWAPO group for 200 kilometres over five days and ultimately killed eight insurgents. Inspired by this success, Koevoet expanded and formed platoon-size teams that did not restrict themselves to certain areas but pursued insurgents based on intelligence collected in the field. In late 1979 and early 1980 Koevoet began experimenting with having mine-protected vehicles accompany tracker teams so fresh trackers riding on them could spell off those on the ground and more water, ammunition and weapons could be carried. Collecting information from informants and looking for spoor as they travelled, Koevoet teams would circle a village at more than a kilometre to avoid masses of civilian footprints and determine if insurgents had visited recently. They developed a standard procedure of having some trackers on foot followed closely by others in vehicles, leapfrogging two vehicles sometimes up to ten kilometres forward to find the continuation of the same line of spoor, speculatively firing mortars and grenade launchers in the suspected direction of the enemy to panic them into running which would leave obvious tracks, and upon closing with insurgents they called in helicopter gunships or a spotter plane for support.

Moreover, the unit began employing captured SWAPO insurgents who changed sides bringing knowledge about their former colleagues’ methods and teams went out of their way to apprehend particularly skilled anti-trackers. Since Koevoet mostly operated in Ovamboland, the centre of insurgent activity and recruiting, unit membership was quickly dominated by Ovambo trackers who were familiar with the area and its people. Very few Bushmen worked within Koevoet where both whites and Ovambos stereotyped them as inferior trackers and cowards. Poorly paid trackers were motivated by cash bonuses for dead guerrillas and captured weapons. Not all Koevoet experiments worked as attempts to use tracking dogs proved useless given the area’s extreme heat which became worse inside a vehicle, engine noise and combat stress. Environment determined Koevoet tactics. In western Ovamboland, an open area with hard ground difficult for tracking and where people generally supported SWAPO, Koevoet teams spread out and hoped to encounter insurgent spoor by accident. In eastern Ovamboland, with thick bush and less politicised inhabitants, they patrolled and gathered information from locals. Since vehicles could not operate in much of mountainous Kaokoland, Koevoet teams there employed infantry tactics such as observation posts and night ambushes. In sparsely populated Kavango, Koevoet mortared the relatively large insurgent groups operating there to prompt them to split up so that smaller groups or individuals could be tracked with less danger of ambush. By the end of the conflict in 1989, Koevoet had 3 000 personnel and 42 teams, had fought 1 615 engagements in which 3 200 alleged insurgents were killed at a cost of 161 of its men killed and 950 wounded.<sup>69</sup>

During the early 1980s Koevoet developed a standard air support tactic for tracking operations. Since Koevoet kept the South African Air Force (SAAF)

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69. Stiff, *The Covert War*; A. Durand, *Zulu Zulu Golf: Life and Death with Koevoet* (Zebra Press, Cape Town, 2011); A. Durand, *Zulu Zulu Foxtrot: To Hell and Back with Koevoet* (Zebra Press, Cape Town, 2012); S. Kamongo and L. Bezuidenhout, *Shadows in the Sand: A Koevoet Tracker’s Story of an Insurgency War* (30 Degrees South Publishers, Johannesburg, 2011); J. Hooper, *Koevoet: Experiencing South Africa’s Deadly Bush War* (GG Books, Warwickshire, UK, 2012); E. de Kock, *A Long Night’s Damage: Working for the Apartheid State* (Contra Press, Johannesburg, 1998) p 77.

informed of its actions, helicopters were pre-positioned at a series of bases and were usually about 20 minutes flying time from any team in the field. A Koevoet team tracking insurgents updated the SAAF by radio as it gained ground on the enemy which allowed pilots to be briefed and wait in their cockpits for dispatch to the scene. The ground team typically requested air support when it was 20 or 30 minutes, which the SAAF believed amounted to roughly one kilometre, behind the enemy. Two helicopter gunships usually responded to a Koevoet team's call and remained at a distance until direct radio communication was established with the ground team which ignited a smoke grenade to indicate its location. The helicopters then flew two overlapping orbits over the team. The lead helicopter flew a narrow orbit at an altitude of around 60 metres and ranged about three kilometres ahead of the team to detect ambushes, and the other helicopter flew at between 180 and 250 metres and circled two to five kilometres from the team to discourage the insurgents from "bombshelling". When the trackers observed distinctive signs of insurgents hiding under trees or running from tree to tree, they knew that the enemy was within the helicopters' orbit. The movement of the lead helicopter was then changed to determine how far ahead the insurgents were and therefore, how far ahead to send the advance vehicles to catch them. Once the ground team was very close to the enemy, the lead helicopter tightened its orbit and fired on insurgents it observed which signalled the vehicles to speed forward and engage with overwhelming firepower. To avoid friendly fire from the helicopters, Koevoet trackers reversed their hats to reveal an orange reflective panel. When helicopters were not available, the SAAF dispatched small reconnaissance aircraft to try to spot the insurgents or panic them into diving under trees. Koevoet developed several other innovations to enhance co-operation with helicopters. Each team's supply vehicle carried fuel to keep helicopters overhead longer. Given the flat terrain and lack of landmarks that often disoriented pilots responding to directions from the ground, a clock code procedure was developed in which tree shadows, seen the same way from the air and ground, represented 12 o'clock.<sup>70</sup>

During the early 1980s the SADF copied the successful Koevoet approach. This happened at the same time that large conventional SADF cross-border incursions and support for UNITA rebels forced PLAN to withdraw its bases deeper inside Angola. Beginning in around 1980, 201 Battalion (the new name for 31 Battalion as part of the SWATF) began fielding mechanised tracking teams called "Romeo Mike" after the Afrikaans "Reaksiemag" or "Reaction Force". In late 1982 teams from 201 Battalion operating in eastern Ovamboland tracked a SWAPO detachment for 278 kilometres, of which 190 kilometres were run on the ground, over three days and killed all seven of them without losses.<sup>71</sup> In 1983 the SWATFs 101 Battalion, an ethnic Ovambo unit, was restructured with Koevoet organisation, vehicles and tactics. Since 101 Battalion consisted of Ovambo soldiers and white national servicemen, it had fewer skilled trackers than Koevoet and rarely leapfrogged far forward. Unlike Koevoet teams led by experienced police sergeants, army RM teams were usually commanded by young lieutenants who struggled to co-ordinate a mobile force and sometimes prematurely requested

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70. D. Lord, *From Fledgling to Eagle: The South African Air Force during the Border War* (30 Degrees South Publishers, Johannesburg, 2008), p 252; A.J. Venter, *Gunship Ace: The Wars of Neall Ellis, Helicopter Pilot and Mercenary* (Casemate, Newbury, 2011), pp 100–105; Hooper, *Koevoet*, pp 138, 148–149; interview conducted with Laurens Musore, Warmbad, 14 November 2012.

71. Uys, *Bushmen Soldiers*, pp 103 and 117.

air support which alerted insurgents that they were being tracked.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, the SADF reported in 1986 that 101 Battalion “had the best combat record of all SWA and RSA units during the year”.<sup>73</sup>

PLAN field commander Johannes Gaomab explained that “The problem with guerrilla war is that you have to walk, and if you walk, you leave spoor. The SADF had trackers patrolling up and down the border with Angola”.<sup>74</sup> Although the sandy soil of northern South West Africa made insurgent anti-tracking difficult, the flat and featureless terrain enhanced mobility on foot and sometimes dense bush blocked visibility. Additionally, PLAN’s predominantly Ovambo fighters blended with the rural population.<sup>75</sup> PLAN cultivated a high level of anti-tracking. Insurgent training in Angola involved constant anti-tracking, even when going to the toilet at night, and a special school offered advanced training culminating in a 300 kilometre tracking/anti-tracking exercise. Insurgents were most active from November to April as summer rains covered their footprints, more vegetation provided cover, mud hindered cross country driving by security force vehicles, and more drinking water was available in the bush. SWAPO insurgents used a multitude of anti-tracking measures. They wore boots with layers of removable soles to leave different footprints; wore plastic bags on their feet to obscure spoor; alternated between walking with boots and bare feet; shuffled along wire fences to avoid touching the ground; walked on fallen leaves or rocks; stepped in each other’s footprints; lifted grass bent by their movement; used a stick with a cloth at the end or a tree branch to erase tracks; sprinkled water on their footprints to mimic rain which made them appear older; enlisted civilians to destroy their tracks; ignited bush fires to obliterate spoor and distract trackers; suddenly changed direction; walked in circles to come back over their pursuers’ spoor; walked on tarred roads when possible; and moved toward the sun to blind trackers which usually meant they were preparing an ambush.

As in Rhodesia, PLAN insurgents bomb-shelled and larger units regularly dispatched small groups in different directions. When being pursued, SWAPO guerrillas tried to increase speed and endurance by taking drugs and commandeering horses, bicycles and motor vehicles from local communities. Knowing the direction their pursuers were coming enabled them to plant landmines on their tracks and set ambushes though security force firepower, armour and mobility usually made this a desperate measure.<sup>76</sup> One veteran SWAPO insurgent survived numerous Koevoet pursuits by staying just 100 meters ahead of trackers at which distance they could not spot him in the bush and aircraft flew too far forward to detect him.<sup>77</sup> Sending their younger colleagues forward to make spoor, some practiced PLAN fighters lay still in thick bush and let security force trackers and vehicles pass them. There were also cases of guerrillas moving just 50 metres ahead of a Koevoet team and pretending to point at spoor with sticks, a Koevoet habit, to deceive circling helicopter spotters into thinking

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72. Stiff, *The Covert War*, pp 220–221, 248–249, and 254.

73. *Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume 2*, 29 October 1998, p 23.

74. N. Basson and B. Motinga, *Call Them Spies* (Africa Communications Project, Windhoek, 1989), p 12.

75. Heitman, *War Machine*, p 157.

76. Interviews conducted with Sisingi Kamongo, Springbok Flats, Warmbad, 14 November 2012; Francois du Toit, Radium, 14 November 2012; Callie Kalitz, Odendaalsrus, 16 November 2012; communication with Gavin Manning, 31 January 2012; A. Vines, *Still Killing: Landmines in Southern Africa* (Human Rights Watch Arms Project, New York, 1997), p 104.

77. Durand, *Zulu Zulu Foxtrot*, p 17.

they were security force members. Indeed, some of the most experienced and skilled Koevoet trackers specialised in deciphering PLAN anti-tracking and were only deployed to solve difficult problems.<sup>78</sup> Of course, anti-tracking could also be used more aggressively. In early April 1989 PLAN officer “Communist” Ambambi, fresh from military college in Yugoslavia, used tracking deception to lead an SADF mechanised force into a large ambush.<sup>79</sup>

### Security Force anti-tracking

As the wars in Rhodesia and South West Africa escalated, the role of tracker and tracked were sometimes reversed. Since the Selous Scouts often located guerrillas by using hilltop observation posts occupied surreptitiously at night, they had to carefully avoid leaving spoor in places that young boys (or *mujibas*) working for the insurgents checked every morning.<sup>80</sup> In both campaigns, Special Forces practised anti-tracking to avoid detection during covert operations such as reconnaissance, sabotage, minelaying and raids in neighbouring countries sheltering insurgents. The Selous Scouts’ practice of using just one or two men on external operations, later copied by South African Special Forces, was meant to minimise the chance of discovery by reducing spoor. Within Mozambique, FRELIMO troops adopted a method of tracking infiltrators to a patch of forest, circling it to look for signs of exit and then shooting into the trees to drive out anyone hiding inside. The Rhodesians and South Africans were not the only ones to mobilise the tracking skills of marginalised groups. During the 1970s ZAPU employed civilian Bushmen trackers along the Botswana-Rhodesia border and FRELIMO soldiers in Mozambique’s Gaza province were often Shangaan trackers.<sup>81</sup> Infiltrating Angola, platoons from the SADF’s 32 Battalion tried to avoid detection by going barefoot, wearing insurgent footwear and walking ahead of cattle to eliminate their tracks. Since PLAN personnel were less concerned about anti-tracking inside Angola and prints from their distinctive chevron pattern boot soles were easily observed, 32 Battalion patrols used tracking and back-tracking to locate their bases or set ambushes on regular routes or water sources. If 32 Battalion troops observed the tracks of a man and a dog crossing from Angola to South West Africa, they suspected that PLAN had sent a civilian sympathiser to scout an infiltration route as it was common to take a dog to sniff out security force positions. In these cases 32 Battalion personnel back-tracked the civilian and dog, distinguishable as a pair from other tracks, to locate the community they came from inside Angola and wait for insurgents.<sup>82</sup>

### Conclusion

In 1950s Kenya, security force trackers were mostly Africans, initially from groups stereotyped as skilled trackers or martial people but eventually from the Kikuyu community embroiled in the rebellion, and were supervised by Europeans with hunting experience and/or special training. In the high forests, technology was unhelpful and counter-insurgency tracking was based on the old method of

78. Kamongo and Bezuidenhout, *Shadows in the Sand*, pp 120–121, 133–134, 251.

79. Namakalu, *Armed Liberation Struggle*, pp 134–136.

80. Parker, *Assignment Selous Scouts*, p 136.

81. Croukamp, *The Bush War in Rhodesia*, pp 226, 244, 250, 262, 308, 343, 366 and 379; J. Greeff, *A Greater Share of Honour: The Memoirs of a Recce Officer* (Just Done, Durban, 2008), p 99; M. Bolaane, “The Role Played by Botswana during the Liberation Struggle”, no date, Paper for the Hashim Mbita Project, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania..

82. J. Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers: The Story of South Africa’s 32-Battalion, 1975–1993* (Galago, Alberton, 1999), pp 188, 190, 197, 206–207.

persistence hunting with patrols searching for insurgent tracks and then trying to catch up on foot. This was very difficult but conducted in a comparatively limited set of areas. The main innovation involved the grouping of several specially trained tracker combat teams in a specific area under a single commander who co-ordinated pursuits. In Rhodesia, during the late 1960s, security force tracking was highly successful as insurgents lacked anti-tracking skills, and operations took place in the remote and lightly populated Zambezi Valley where it was generally easy to observe spoor and helicopters were used to leap-frog trackers ahead on a trail. Rhodesian security forces focused recruitment and training of trackers mostly on minorities such as whites, Bushmen and Shangaan which meant there were never enough of them. Tracking became much less useful for the Rhodesian forces in the 1970s when ZANLA insurgents in Mozambique infiltrated the vast, populated and sometimes forested east of Rhodesia, and the guerrillas began practising anti-tracking techniques. Furthermore, the Rhodesian switch to pseudo-operations and air mobile reaction forces depleted tracking capability. In northern South West Africa during the late 1970s and 1980s, the flat and generally open terrain facilitated security force tracking innovations involving the use of mine-resistant vehicles to accompany tracker teams and leap-frog ahead, and co-ordination with helicopters. It was also important that the security forces expanded the recruitment of trackers beyond the Bushman minority to the Ovambo majority who were just as skilled and a better source of manpower. Since SWAPO insurgents developed a high degree of anti-tracking ability, this became a trackers' war with both sides constantly refining their methods. In Kenya and Rhodesia, state game-keepers played a key role in counter-insurgency by leading tracker teams, recruiting African trackers, and developing tracker training and tactics. Although scent tracking dogs were employed by security forces in all three campaigns, it was only in the high altitude forests and low-tech operations in Kenya where they were really useful. In Rhodesia and South West Africa, and to a lesser extent in northern Kenya, security forces tried to use horse mounted troops for fast tracking but they were vulnerable to ambush.

### **Abstract**

During the decolonisation era guerrilla wars fought in East and southern Africa, tracking represented an important skill mobilised by state security forces in their hunt for elusive insurgents who themselves tried to use it to avoid detection. In 1950s Kenya state game-keepers played a central role in recruiting skilled indigenous trackers, establishing a tracking school which taught British troops how to supervise African trackers and developing the tactical concept of specialised small units called Tracker Combat Teams grouped into Forest Operating Companies. Although the Rhodesian forces enjoyed considerable success in counter-insurgency tracking in the sparsely populated Zambezi Valley during the late 1960s and cultivated a tracker training programme that favoured members of the white minority and used helicopters to gain ground on their prey, the shifting of the war into the more populated east in the 1970s and the insurgent use of anti-tracking techniques led to a decline in the effectiveness of Rhodesian combat tracking. In South West Africa during the late 1970s and 1980s the combination of semi-open terrain and available technology greatly enhanced South African security force tracking which employed trackers from the Ovambo majority, mine-resistant cross-country vehicles for greater mobility and close co-operation with aircraft all of which insurgents attempted to counter with highly imaginative anti-tracking methods.

**Keywords:** Tracking; Warfare; Counter-insurgency; Decolonization.

### Opsomming

Tydens die guerrilla-oorloë in die dekoloniserings-era wat in Oos- en Suidelike Afrika geveg is, was opsporing 'n belangrike vaardigheid wat aangedryf is deur staatsekuritietsmagte in hul soeke na ontwykende insurgente wat self ook probeer het om te voorkom dat hulle opgespoor word. In die vyftigerjare van die vorige eeu het staatswildbewaarders van Kenia 'n sentrale rol vervul ten opsigte van die werwing van vaardige inheemse opspoorders deur 'n opsporingsskool tot stand te bring waar Britse troepe geleer is hoe om toesig te hou oor Afrika-spoorsnyers en die taktiese konsep van gespesialiseerde klein eenhede genaamd *Tracker Combat Teams* wat in *Forest Operating Companies* ingedeel is, te ontwikkel. Hoewel die Rhodesiese magte in die laat-1960's beduidende sukses behaal het met die teeninsurgensie-opsporing in die ylbevolkte Zambezi-vallei, en 'n opspoorder-opleidingsprogram ontwikkel het wat voorkeur gegee het aan lede van die wit minderheid en helikopters gebruik het om 'n voorsprong op hul prooi te kry, het die verskuiwing van die oorlog na die digter bevolkte ooste in die 1970's en die insurgente se toepassing van teenopsporingstegnieke gelei tot 'n afname in die doeltreffendheid van Rhodesiese gevegsopsporing. In Suidwes-Afrika het die kombinasie van semi-ooop terrein en beskikbare tegnologie die Suid-Afrikaanse sekuriteitsmag-opsporing, in die laat-sewentiger- en laat-tagtigerjare van die twintigste eeu grootliks bevorder, wat opspoorders uit die Ovambo-meerderheid, my-weerstandige oorland-voertuie vir beter mobiliteit en noue samewerking met vliegmasjiene ingespan het – alles dinge wat insurgente probeer teëwerk het met behulp van hoogs verbeeldingryke teenopsporingmetodes.

**Slutelwoorde:** Opsporing; Oorlog; Teen-insurgensie; Dekolonisasie.