

**COMBAT & SURVIVAL  
SECRETS  
of the  
RHODESIAN  
SAS**



**ANDY RYAN**

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Please Note: This book is intended for entertainment purposes only. It is not an instruction manual and not written as such.

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**This book uses UK spelling.**

## Foreword

Since its inception in WW2, the SAS has made every effort to play its hand close to its chest. This need for secrecy was never more evident during the operational life one of the overseas regiments of the SAS family.

Throughout the 1970's, fighting a war on two fronts against the large communist terrorist armies of ZIPRA and ZANLA, the Rhodesian SAS had to make up for their lack of numbers by the quality of its soldiers, their fighting spirit and, most importantly of all, their superlative training regimen.

Literally outnumbered by thousands to one throughout the duration of the bush war, the RhSAS went into action behind-the-lines soon after the commencement of hostilities and continued hitting the enemy hard up until the very end, achieving spectacular results which were completely out of proportion to its size.

The terrorists and their backers learned the hard way that there was no hiding place from the SAS; wherever they tried to conceal themselves and however far away from Rhodesia's borders they made their camps, both ZIPRA and ZANLA knew were never safe from the attentions of the SAS.

Firstly as C Squadron, then later as the 1<sup>st</sup> RhSAS Regiment (which never numbered no more than 250 men) the Rhodesians took the fight to the enemy in a fashion which was in the best traditions of the SAS family; killing and wounding countless thousands of terrorists, attacking their training and holding camps, as well as mounting long-range sabotage operations in Zambia, Mozambique and elsewhere.

As a unit, they mounted some of the most audacious operations in SAS history, including the mission to assassinate the ZIPRA leader, Joshua Nkomo. On that occasion an SAS raiding party dressed as Zambian troops (using black theatrical type paint to make them appear like black men) and driving Land Rovers painted in Zambian army livery, drove from the shores of Lake Kariba, some 120 miles (200km) through hostile territory to the suburbs of the Zambian capital, Lusaka.

Another operation was an audacious daylight heliborne attack upon the ZIPRA intelligence service headquarters in Lusaka, where the SAS killed many ZIPRA and captured the entire paper files of that organisation then transported them back to Rhodesia for analysis (they also captured one of the leaders of the ZIPRA intelligence service).

Another spectacular daylight raid saw the SAS attack and destroy the main ZIPRA arms dump in Zambia.

Over in Mozambique, Robert Mugabe's ZANLA terror machine fared little better at the hands of the SAS. As well as fighting ZANLA, the Rhodesians were also active against the incumbent regime. FRELIMO were openly assisting ZANLA and in some cases were sending their troops across the border into Rhodesia to operate with ZANLA terror gangs.

In response, the SAS were tasked to not only destroy ZANLA bases and lines of

communication, but attack the military and civil infrastructure of Mozambique itself. One illustration of this was when an SAS team (working with a Mozambique resistance group) entered the port city of Beria to attack the main fuel storage depot. Sneaking through the suburbs on foot, they launched the assault with automatic gunfire and RPG rockets, laying waste to this vital facility and its stocks of oil, diesel and petroleum.

The SAS also mounted many operations to destroy bridges, communications networks and other critical points which were crucial to the FRELIMO and ZANLA war effort.

*For more details of these operations and many others, see 'Bravo Ten' and 'The Rhodesian SAS: Their Most Daring Missions' by Andy Ryan.*

However, for every SAS mission which involved direct confrontation with the enemy, there were many more which required stealth, the sort of stealth which ensured the terrorists and their supporters would never know the SAS had come calling. Reconnaissance and intelligence gathering work was a lonely and tedious task, far removed from the 'glamour' of the headline grabbing attacks upon the terrorists. Despite that, they were every bit as important in securing victory after victory against ZIPRA and ZANLA.

Unlike comparable western Special Forces of the time, the RhSAS did not have the luxury of air support. The Rhodesian Air Force was only able to field a small fleet of fixed/rotary wing aircraft. The limitations of its capacity was always in evidence, and no more acutely felt by SAS teams operating deep behind enemy lines. If things went wrong, there was little prospect of assistance or rescue. Of course the RhAF would always try their best, and many was the occasion that they'd risk their necks to successfully extract compromised SAS teams from under the very noses of the enemy, braving often savage fire to do so. The fact remained that the deeper the SAS ranged into Zambia and Mozambique, the more likely it became that they'd have to rely on themselves, simply because the RhAF helicopter fleet lacked the range to help.

Taking men who were already self reliant, quick thinking and level headed and moulding them into effective soldiers who were able to successfully operate under all circumstances, however trying, has always been the hallmark of the SAS family, but none more than with the Rhodesian regiment. Through thick and thin, and often under what seemed impossible circumstances, the RhSAS pulled off operations which shattered the enemy and astounded onlookers in the world's SF community.

While this book is not intended as a training manual and is written for entertainment purposes only, it's designed to give the reader a rare insight into some of the operational procedures of Rhodesian SAS operators by providing detailed descriptions of how they would approach different situations, as well as the unique problems they faced while operating in the unforgiving African bush. I believe that some of what's contained within these pages will not only prove informative to those interested in the history of the Bush war and Rhodesian SAS, but some of the tips and tricks could also be helpful if applied in certain civilian contexts.

Andy Ryan

## Personal Preparation For Operations in the Bush

Too many people think that the SAS trooper is a six foot two muscled Ramboesque figure who is possessed of superhuman powers and who goes round with bandoliers of ammo strapped across his chest, firing a machinegun one handed from the hip. If you are one of those people, prepare yourself for a shock. If you're young, fit and healthy and carrying no excess weight, simply look in the mirror and the image staring back at you is that of a typical SAS operator. Some are tall, some are short, some are stocky, some are skinny. What makes them vastly more capable than other soldiers is their personal fortitude of mind and their training. As a civilian, if you adopt the same low key positive way of thinking, you will find that you are able to achieve things which you otherwise would never consider yourself capable of, both physically and mentally. You have just to prepare yourself never to give in.

For the SAS soldier, everything is in the detail, because he knows – once he's out on operations where there's a very real chance of his being shot at – his life may depend on those same, often minor, details. It's the detail which goes into planning and preparation and, surprisingly to some, the detail he applies to his own 'personal admin'.

Once he'd been given his tasking and, where applicable, participated in planning, the Rhodesian SAS operator would turn his attention to himself. Unlike other troops in other units, the SAS man had considerable autonomy over what he took on operations and it was left to his own discretion as to what he thought would be of most use. There was no one standing over him telling him what he should or shouldn't be doing, men like that had been quickly weeded out during training and selection. The SAS operator was self reliant and self motivated, he could think for himself under all circumstances.

Much preparation time would be spent on what many would ignore, or simply fail to identify as possible problems. For example, on an extended patrol the simple act of losing a button might seem unimportant, but to someone who is relying on that button to secure an epaulette, which in turn is helping to secure his webbing, the loss of that button at the wrong time could prove disastrous (just imagine a webbing yoke flapping out of control if you were in a contact). The solution to this was simple; remove the buttons then re-sew them on using dental floss. It may seem like overkill, especially when you consider that good, strong twine was used to sew buttons on military uniforms in the first place, but out in the wilds of the African bush where he was far away from assistance, anything the soldier can do to make his life as painless as possible would pay dividends in the end. *This wrinkle can be equally applied by the reader, especially if he/she is an outdoor enthusiast. If you're hiking or hunting, the last thing you need is to start shedding buttons.*

Likewise, attention would be paid to bootlaces, stripping them then examining for signs of wear.

When they knew they'd be out in the wilds for long periods of time, a few operators would change their boot laces before every mission, for others it would be enough to satisfy themselves as to the integrity of the laces (*that's another habit you, the reader, should get into if you are an outdoors person*). Carrying spare laces was okay, but SAS operators would routinely carry

paracord which was used for all manner of odd jobs. Using paracord as bootlaces as a matter of routine was not unknown. Cutting it to length, dying it brown and sizzling the ends with a lighter to form expedient aglets would give those using them a virtually indestructible pair of boot laces.

Speaking of boots, the reader should be aware that they form the main 'transportation system' of the foot soldier, be he infantryman or SAS, as such much attention was always paid to footwear. Well cared for and waterproofed (for the rainy season) boots will carry the SAS operator as far as he needs to go without causing problems for the feet. In the author's opinion a good pair of boots is just as important as a rifle. Dependent upon tasking, he may have worn traditional style boots, with extra ankle protection for parachuting, or slick soled lightweight boots, or even hockey style canvas boots which were more suited for anti-tracking.

The SAS man would also carry the necessary needles and thread to effect repairs to his clothing and kit while in the bush. Any soldier will do the same, so this is not an exclusive SAS practice.

Now you've been made aware that the Rhodesian SAS man could sew, we'll move on to other matters which were of great importance to him.

The Rhodesian SAS Bergen was what each operator relied upon to carry all his kit while out on operations in the bush. Fully loaded, it could easily weigh in excess of one hundred pounds (45 kilos), combine that with webbing and weapon and the prospect of carrying it all over rough terrain in extreme heat for many miles at a time and you will begin to realise why the Rhodesian SAS demanded the standards of personal fitness it did from its men.

As with everything else, there was a system to packing the Bergen. Firstly, it was up to the operator to decide what he required on the mission, he'd be carrying the thing so it was in his interest to make sure it was as light as possible, but as also able to sustain him for sometimes weeks at a time. The trick to packing the Bergen (*which can be successfully applied to you who go out hiking/camping*) was to ensure the things which the operator knew he would have need of most frequently would be packed last. By doing so he was assured that those items were at the top of the Bergen and readily to hand.

It goes without saying that food was a priority within the loadout of the Bergen, the SAS rations were standard Rhodesian issue stuff which included some weird and wonderful items such as 'cheese' in tubes! Ration packs came in boxes, but the wily SAS operator would always break into them and plunder the contents, making sure he only packed the items he liked. Biltong (dried strips of beef) was a non-issue favourite. Light, tasty and nutritious, it could be eaten without preparation while on the move and packed in enough quantity to last a whole patrol. Some SAS men would also carry sadza (corn meal) which, when mixed with water, could make a porridge or a sort of mashed potato like food.

Because it was impossible to carry all the water required to sustain him in the hot southern African climate, the SAS soldier would carry water purification tablets. Most important of all though was knowledge of the location of watering holes or rivers within his area of operation.

It was standard procedure that anything which was deemed absolutely necessary to keep the operator alive was carried on his webbing belt. Under all circumstances, if a callsign suddenly found itself under attack, the cumbersome Bergens would be immediately ditched.

Sometimes the retrieval of the Bergens post contact was out of the question so the operator had to be able to survive and fight with what he carried upon his person. Apart from ammunition, a water canteen and puritabs, essential additions to the belt were spare field dressings, a small first aid kit, a small torch (with a red lens), a length of dyed paracord, a lighter and/or matches. *(A tip for you outdoors people; pack matches in a watertight container, the old 35mm film canister was ideal for the task. Pre-prepare the matches by dripping melted candle wax onto them, that way they will remain waterproof. Stick a patch of emery cloth inside the lid to act as a striker)*

Another useful measure – and one which can be successfully applied in civilian circumstances – was the habit of packing things in exactly the same place every time. For example, imagine being in a contact and scrabbling round in your pouches to find a magazine, you are immediately placing yourself at a severe disadvantage. Now imagine the fluidity of that same search if you knew exactly where your spare magazines were. *It's a good habit to be in when applied in the civilian context. If you're wearing a coat, make sure you put the same items in the same pockets. That way you won't be scrabbling about for car keys, your mobile (cell) phone, wallet, or whatever else you routinely carry.*

One of the main items to be carried on the person (not the belt) was the survival tin. This was simply an old tobacco tin into which was placed the essentials needed to survive in the bush until the SAS operator could be rescued or make his own way to friendly territory. Each man would pack whatever he wished, but the staples were a simple fishing kit, sewing kit, a couple of condoms, scalpel blades and a small piece of mirror polished metal for signalling. Although seemingly innocuous, this last bit of kit would allow the stranded SAS operator – who had no other means of communication – to signal to a passing friendly helicopter should one appear, giving his status and the need for rescue.

Heliography has been around for eons and is a highly effective way of silent communication across surprisingly long distances. Under the African sun, there was never shortage of 'power' for the device. *Again, for those of you who like to spend time in the wilderness, a heliograph makes an excellent piece of emergency signalling equipment. When your mobile/cell phone has died, or you are out of signal area, and you suddenly find yourself in a jam you can make your location known to passing aircraft, other outdoors people or search teams.*

Before I move on, I'd just like to point out that the condoms are not for employment in their traditional role. Opened up, turned inside out then placed in a sock for support, they make excellent expedient water carriers, each with the capacity to hold at least a litre of water; essential if you are travelling in an emergency/survival situation and have no other means of carrying water.

### **I will be returning to the subject of survival later on**

As touched upon earlier, the need to pare the weight of the loads carried by the SAS operator while still taking everything he would need to sustain him over long patrols was a delicate balancing act. To save carrying the bulk of a sleeping bag, a blanket would suffice in most circumstances. Laid on the ground, with the operator sandwiched between it and his poncho, it would provide enough 'comfort' to give a night's sleep. The real trick was to scrape a hole in the dirt to allow the hip to settle in, that way 'side sleepers' could get comfortable *That's one to try if you sleep outdoors under the stars because it take the pressure off the hip and helps prevent*

*backache and stiffness.*

Shaving kit was an unnecessary luxury. The space required to stow a shave kit – although miniscule – could be put to better use. The SAS operator would simply grow facial hair for the duration of the operation, be it a few days or a few weeks.

Personal hygiene, although an absolute must – especially in the hot environs of the southern African bush – was a point which had to be given careful consideration. It may seem fanciful to the reader, but the fact was that the enemy, be they terrorists or local bush folks friendly to the communist cause, had incredible sense of smell. It was far more tuned in to its surroundings than even the most sensitive European nose. The result being that smells which were often ‘invisible’ to an SAS operator’s nose could be picked up at quite long range by an enemy. To this end, the use of scented soaps or any kind of deodorant was a big mistake. Keeping the scent generated by sweating was also a priority, so particular attention had to be paid to armpits, feet etc during daily washing routines.

It goes without saying that under these circumstances, smoking was out of the question. The enemy’s ability to identify smells on the breeze also meant that cooking was almost always impossible. ‘Hard’ routine of cold food and water was often the order of the day (remember when I mentioned biltong?)

Lastly, the SAS operator didn’t carry Rambo style fighting/hunting knives – why? Because they were pointless, all that stuff is pure Hollywood. There was occasion to carry Panga’s (machetes) but that was when these tools were needed to serve the purposes they were designed for. The only bladed article any self respecting SAS operator would keep about his person while on operations was a good quality clasp knife, to be used for mundane camp tasks, but which could be employed in a survival situation for gutting fish or animals and suchlike. It was best practice to keep the knife sharp, on operations this could be achieved by using a flat stone. Some people had different techniques, but wetting the face of the stone then running the blade along it in small circles, repeating the process on both sides of the edge worked as well as anything. Stropping could be done on the sleeve of a combat jacket or trousers. This could never be as effective as using a proper leather strop but, as an expedient, it would work well enough.

The author considers it within the scope of this subject to briefly speak about the preparations the callsign would make. This was done on a personal level but concentrated on routines needed to make the operation and the callsign function correctly and with maximum efficiency.

Primarily, this centred on the patrol radio. SAS teams operating behind enemy lines were utterly reliant upon the patrol radio to keep them in touch with Rhodesia. The radio would have already been tested before it was allocated, but once in the hands of the callsign radio operator, it would be double checked to make certain it was functioning correctly. Unlike the movies, where voice communications can be instantly established over vast distances, the reality was very different. For anything other than short range transmissions, the Rhodesian SAS always used Morse code. It was far more reliable than voice transmission and could be encrypted accordingly. The callsign would be issued with a transmission schedule and the all important frequencies (plus the emergency frequency) These frequencies were the only way the callsign could make contact with friendly forces once in the bush so it was vital that they were triple checked with higher authority to make absolutely sure there had been no mistakes. Climatic conditions and other factors (such as how much iron there was in the earth) could disrupt or knock out communications for

indeterminate periods of time, leaving the callsign unable to make contact with Rhodesia. This isolation was a fairly regular occurrence, so missing a scheduled radio report wasn't a cause for concern for those involved.

**With these and other factors taken into consideration, the SAS operator would be ready to take to the bush.**

## Insertion & Extraction

I'm not going to dwell on this, and will only give a general overview, but for any Special Forces unit, one of the basic principles for success is how to get the troops into position whereby they can carry out operations against the enemy and safely return them home afterwards.

In Rhodesia, with its long land borders and large tracts of sparsely inhabited areas, infiltration by vehicle was always a viable option (though this decreased as the war progresses). Slipping unseen across the border into Mozambique was easy, it was what came afterwards which could prove problematic, for example, it was often not feasible to use vehicles in areas of heavy enemy concentration, or in terrain where concealability was an issue. Aside from when mounting full-scale attacks against terrorist camps (where, as well as transporting troops, the vehicles were used to collect captured weaponry and other supplies then return them to Rhodesia) general vehicle borne operations were few and far between.

The Rhodesian SAS often made use of boats to cross the Cabora Bassa or Lake Kariba before making their way into Mozambique and Zambia on foot, but this was confined to shallow penetration missions, where the callsigns involved wouldn't be forced to cover long distances on foot.

There were instances where SAS teams operated from Klepper canoes for extended periods, principally on the Cabora Bassa Lake in Mozambique. These teams were supplied by air and spent their time causing much mischief for FRELIMO and ZANLA terrorists based along its banks. Such was the importance of this type of operation that all SAS soldiers were trained in small boat and canoe handling.

The use of helicopters was the preferred method of getting an SAS callsign into the operational area. The next preference – and the only option on long range missions – would be to deliver by parachute (either static-line or freefall HALO). Invariably, and whatever the method of aerial insertion, Rhodesian SAS teams would be delivered to their destinations 'blind' (this means there was no friendly troops on the ground to act as pathfinders/reception committee).

Unlike their counterparts in other SF units across the globe, those responsible for delivering/extracting SAS teams had no access to advanced guidance systems. For the Rhodesians, everything was reliant on old fashioned navigation skills. Flying a helicopter at low level, in low light conditions, while doing your own map reading, could easily result in troops being deposited in entirely the wrong location and it's testament to the skill of the RhAF chopper pilots that this was a rare occurrence. For this reason helicopter operations were restricted at night time, and halted altogether in bad weather/no moon periods. The rule of thumb was if the pilot couldn't see the horizon he wouldn't fly.

This, of course would have an impact on when an operation could be launched.

Recovering a callsign was not as straightforward as it may first seem because the most common helicopter in the RhAF inventory, the French built Alouette III was a small aircraft with a maximum carrying capacity of two crew and four troops. When fully loaded, it often needed to

make a 'rolling' takeoff as opposed the classic vertical one. Therefore, provision had to be made to prepare an LZ prior to the helicopters arrival. A suitable flat area of ground which was free enough of trees and other obstructions in the immediate vicinity to facilitate a rolling takeoff would be first identified then cleared of rocks and suchlike which might catch and foul the wheels.

RhAF Helicopters carried a crude homing device called the Becker which, when in receipt of a signal from the callsign's patrol radio, could guide the pilot into the vicinity of the LZ. Afterwards, once visual contact had been established, the helicopter was guided in to its landing point by means of signal markers. The SAS would make sure the helicopter's approach would be made into the wind. Light markers, laid out in a 'T' configuration would tell the pilot where he needed to make his approach and landing (he'd come in towards the bottom of the T and land to the left hand side of the vertical line and underneath the horizontal one. Once down as instructed, the pilot knew it was safe to make the required rolling takeoff.

With the chopper down it wasn't a case of the SAS men simply clambering aboard. This is where the pilot took over. Irrespective of the rank of the callsign commander, the pilot had complete authority. The callsign would assemble at the forward starboard quarter of the aircraft – beyond the sweep of the rotor blades – where the pilot could see them. Once, and only when the pilot was satisfied, would he give the hand signal which told the callsign they had permission to board. On the SAS team's part they would have already ensured that any hats or other loose items of clothing were safely stowed away (a hat could easily be blown off in the rotor wash and thereafter possibly ingested into the engine's air intake, damaging the engine and disabling the helicopter). Likewise, with endangerment of the aircraft in mind, all weapons would be made safe. A stray bullet from an accidentally discharged rifle hitting a vital component would also put the helicopter out of action.

Sometimes, when the short-ranged Alouette was operating at the edges of its limits, it was necessary to make provision to top up the fuel tanks. This was achieved by carrying a drum of aviation fuel in the helicopter. This being the case, and acting under direction from the pilot, prior to boarding, a couple of callsign members would approach to help the second crew member – the door gunner/technician – to unload the drum. Alouettes carried manual or (later on) electric pumping gear to allow transfer of fuel into the helicopters tanks. The engine was left running and once the fuel transfer was completed, the SAS men would roll the empty drum clear and, with the say so of the pilot, board the chopper.

Flying in RhAF helicopters the SAS callsign commander would wear a headset so he could communicate with the crew.

All SAS operators would wear a 'hot extraction' harness while on cross border missions. The reason for this was simple. If the callsign found itself compromised and under attack, it was not usually possible to land a helicopter to pick them up.

Flying into the face of sometimes heavy enemy fire, the Alouette crew would swoop in to the hover and lower its cable winch upon which the individual SAS operator could attach his harness.

Over the course of SAS bush war operations, the Alouette made many such daring rescues, snatching SAS men from under the noses of an enemy who would have otherwise overwhelmed them by force of numbers.

For traditional static-line and HALO parachuting, the RhAF relied on the DC-3 Dakota of WW2 fame. While many in the military of other nations enjoyed modern equipment, the 'ParaDak' was all the Rhodesians had available. That said, it proved an utterly reliable and invaluable addition to the RhAF fleet, regularly delivering SAS callsigns deep into Zambia and Mozambique and conventional infantry units into Fireforce engagements. The DC-3 was worked hard by the RhAF (who, aside from parachute duties, used it as everything from the traditional cargo movement, to flying command and communications posts to makeshift bomber). Despite everything which the RhAF could throw at it, the Dakota never failed to deliver.

As with its rotary wing counterparts, the ParaDak, lacked anything but the most basic of navigational aids. Dead reckoning (especially) in heavy crosswinds), looking out for salient ground features while flying at low level was hard work and could easily lead to miscalculation. Flying at higher altitudes was not much better. One mistake by the navigator could see the aircraft lost, the mission aborted, or the troops dropped miles from their intended DZ. Low lying mist was another hazard which could easily catch out the ParaDak crew, making it impossible to pick out points on the ground with which they could cross reference on the map. As with the helicopters, moonless nights made accurate navigation a real issue. Under such conditions, drops were usually aborted at the last moment and the SAS teams returned to base.

The host nations of the ZIPRA and ZANLA terrorist armies, Zambia and Mozambique, both had sophisticated air defence networks. These posed a real danger to RhAF aircraft, and especially the cumbersome and slow flying ParaDak. Search and tracking radars, linked to surface to air missile systems meant caution had to be exercised at all times. Often, to confuse the radar operators, the ParaDaks would fly low – often extremely low. While this meant the aircraft could be lost to radar, it was still a dangerous method of insertion. There were plenty of traditional anti-aircraft assets in place, such as large calibre cannons which were ready and waiting to open up on passing Rhodesian aircraft. While many of these sites were marked on the maps of the RhAF, FRELIMO, the Zambian military changed the locations of some of their batteries with tedious regularity. Therefore, and although its flight plan might have been made along what was considered a safe route, it was entirely possible that the aircraft could suddenly run into concentrated AAA fire along the way. To add to the danger, Large groups of terrorists were scattered across the bush. Apart from being quick to shoot at a low flying Rhodesian ParaDak (unless they were under orders not to give away their positions) with small arms or HMGs, ZIPRA had another tool at its disposal. The Strela was a heat seeking shoulder launched anti- aircraft missile system which ZIPRA was in possession of in some numbers. While it was not particularly accurate and less effective against fast moving jets, the ZIPRA Strela teams could hear the ParaDak coming and have time to prepare the weapon for launch. As a counter to the Strela threat, the RhAF fitted special extended exhaust tubes to the Paradak's engines, to divert the heat signature away from the body of the aircraft.

When the aircraft arrived at the DZ, the SAS team would be dropped. A lot of the time this would happen at night. If the mission dictated that extra kit was needed, equipment panniers were also dropped. In the darkness it was easy for these panniers to get lost so strobe lights would be fitted to them to provide a visual reference to their descent and to act as visual markers once landed.

The SAS callsign would need to get out of the aircraft as quickly as possible, especially when

jumping from higher altitudes in windy conditions, because the possibility of becoming scattered multiplied with each fraction of a second.

Once on the ground and regrouped, the callsign would set to work retrieving the panniers (if they had any) then burying their parachutes. A map appreciation of the area would be carried out, to determine that they had been dropped in the correct location; this was achieved by cross referencing visual points of reference with the maps. If they had been deposited in the right place, the next phase of the mission could begin, if not then there would be no panic, they would identify their location then the plan would be adjusted accordingly.

While all SAS men were parachute qualified, not all were freefall trained. HALO insertions at night had their own problems, the main one being the need to keep the team together on the descent. Again, small strobe lights would be mounted to the rear of the helmets upon which the men could home in and keep track of.

All in all then, as SAS callsign had multiple potential problems to overcome before it even set foot on hostile territory. Getting out again posed a whole new raft of potential issues.

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More often than not, given the tremendous constraints and pressure upon the RhAF, the system for extracting SAS callsigns from the bush worked surprisingly well. It was only when some unexpected incident occurred that potentially deadly issues could quickly arise. For example, if a callsign suddenly found itself compromised and in need of immediate extraction, helicopters were not always available to take the call. Maintenance issues or commitments to other ongoing operations (or a combination of both) could mean that the callsign would have to fend for itself until such a time as a chopper could be dispatched to lift them out of danger. Obviously, when an emergency call was received, every effort to get a helicopter to the callsign in question would be made, but when it was physically impossible, all that could be done was to inform the men on the ground that assistance would arrive in due course.

For the SAS operator, it was vital that he be able to manage the situation on the ground, however serious it may be, until help arrived and the best way to do that would be the utilisation of his personal qualities and the advantages his training gave him over any enemy.

### **Movement on Foot & Subterfuge**

Once inserted into enemy controlled territory, more often than not the SAS callsign would face the prospect of a long march to reach their objective. This, like all other phases of the operation would consist of its own component parts. In other theatres of conflict, it is often not feasible for a military unit (even a small one like a four-man SAS team) to move during daylight hours but, given the correct circumstances, the emptiness of the African bush meant that it was safe to do so.

The route from the LZ to the target would have been worked out at the planning stage and would make maximum use of all available cover. It wasn't simply a case of marching in a straight line between points A and B, but often following the most circuitous of routes to make best use of said cover and take into account all the topographical features; although it may be longer, it is better to walk around a hill than over it, especially when heavily loaded and moving tactically.

The rule of thumb for the SAS team was to assume that the ground they would be travelling over was under enemy observation, that way the chances of suddenly walking into a contact was lessened. The callsign would move in single file with spacing taking into account the closeness of the country. One man would be navigating and a second would act as 'check navigator', making sure that the first man wasn't making any mistakes, this left the remaining team members to cover the arcs, looking out for danger. *(All SAS operators wore wrist compasses, these looked like wristwatches and allowed the operator to quickly orientate himself while on the move. The usual roamer compass was also carried as a matter of routine, while some men elected to hide survival type 'button' compasses on their clothing.*

The route would be broken down into 'legs' with each leg having its own start and end points, at the end of the legs the operators would rest briefly to take a drink of water or eat a strip of biltong or simply take the weight of their Bergens off their shoulders by leaning forward and placing a hand on their knee.

Each leg of the journey would also have its own ERV (Emergency Rendezvous), a pre-determined point on the map where – if the patrol became split for any reason – the men could converge and reassemble. This was a vital detail in any movement phase of any SAS operation and meant that the callsign could carry on with their tasking or, in the event of enemy action, withdraw in an orderly fashion to a helicopter pick up point.

Passage could be eased considerably through dense bush by following game trails. These were plentiful and, as well as providing a 'highway', they also were useful for anti-tracking purposes. In areas where the enemy knew or suspected that Rhodesian troops were operating they would conduct sweeps of the bush in search of 'spoor' AKA 'sign' which, if found, would be followed up until the terrorists or FRELIMO could make contact with whoever was leaving it. The trackers in the pay of the enemy were masters of their craft, and were able to interpret the most minute traces of spoor which were invisible to anyone else. They'd know how many men were in the group they were following, how heavily loaded they were, (obviously) the direction of travel, and how old the spoor was.

Anti-tracking had to be taken very seriously by SAS callsigns operating behind the lines but, however hard they tried, the individual who was carrying a fully loaded Bergen could do nothing

but leave something in his wake.

Getting onto game trails meant that the SAS could go some way to neutralising the threat of follow up. Trodden hard by countless thousands of hoofs, the game trail resembled concrete, and thus made it very difficult for a tracker to pick up sign of passage. Difficult, but not impossible, for the best trackers were so good that they could pick out enough to tell them that humans had passed that way. Other techniques employed were to carry a small stick and use it to return any grass or disturbed leaves to their former state as the callsign passed by (both of these small signs would act as distinct markers to an enemy tracker). Though, the more measures the callsign took would negatively impact on the speed they were able to move.

The problem with trackers became such that the SAS would go into an area where they were known to be active, deliberately – but subtly – leave sign and when it was followed up they'd spring an ambush. The prime targets for these operations were the trackers themselves and, once a few had been shot dead, the penny dropped among some of them that they shouldn't be too keen to lead tracking operations.

Staying in areas of shade while moving was always a good idea, as, combined with effective camouflage, it became more difficult for an enemy observer to spot the callsign (though movement always draws the eye – the only way to completely conceal yourself is to be in cover and stay still). Effective camouflage didn't mean adopting the 'walking bush' technique; too much camouflage was just as bad as too little. The ability to read the ground and adapt to it accordingly was the basis of staying out of sight. Moving along an area where the callsign would be skylined meant that they could be spotted at distance, so there was no walking along ridges and care was taken when cresting hilltops or similar features.

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Moving tactically and listening to the sounds of nature was standard practice for the SAS callsign and never more important than if the operator found himself in an evasion/survival situation.

When he heard birdsong or the normal noises of animals he could be fairly sure that all was well, however, when the bush suddenly fell silent, and in the absence of alarm calls, he knew there were predators in the vicinity and he must heighten his alertness. Where the bush was closely confined, it was quite easy for a large animal to stalk within striking range without being seen or heard, therefore it was vital that the operator kept his weapon at the ready at all times. While firing shots to kill an attacking animal carried the very real risk of being heard by any enemy in the vicinity, when it was either that or being mauled to death then eaten, the choice was clear.

Baboons were well known for their ability to spot danger and it was normal for them to begin to screech maniacally when anything untoward was seen. In fact, such is their value as an early warning system, it was advisable to lay up near them whenever possible so that the callsign could react instantly should the alarm calls suddenly shatter the peace of the bush.

Should an SAS operator find himself on the run he could never relax. Apart from the knowledge that the enemy was out to get him, there were a multitude of predators which – if they

got a chance – would attack and kill him. The amount of concentration required was phenomenal and would quickly grate on most people, but SAS selection had weeded those who were predisposed to panic or fail long before they were introduced to squadron life and live operations.

Night time, alone in the bush is what separated the men from the boys. The darkness, the hostile environment, the predators, the noises from unseen animals, the calls of a billion insects, the occasional rustling of undergrowth and countless other factors could easily conspire to turn the operator who was in an evasion situation into a gibbering wreck. Again, Rhodesian SAS selection and training, along with the necessary inbuilt character traits of its personnel, meant that – although always maintaining a vigil – the operator could continue to maintain his efficiency no matter what.

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The uniforms SAS troopers wore while on operations were in the main standard Rhodesian issue camouflage pattern. Although a lot of operators liked to wear jackets with the sleeves rolled up and/or shorts, this was not good for concealment. White flesh – even sunburned white flesh – stands out like a marker to anyone who is on the lookout for it. The SAS man could compensate for this to some degree by applying camouflage cream to his bare limbs, but it was never truly effective. As the bush war continued, the ‘casual’ attitude to personal camouflage by having bare flesh in show waned. SAS operators (and RSF troops in general) decided that the wearing of long sleeved long legged uniforms were far more effective.

Apart from the use of scrim headcover’s in a close observation situation, personal camouflage was largely restricted to clothing. There was no garnishing of the uniform by applying bits of foliage to break up the outline of the operator. Apart from the fact that, under the African sun, it would quickly wilt and stand out, the process of collecting it would be spotted by enemy tracker teams.

Often it was tactically necessary for the SAS callsign to wear enemy uniforms, especially in areas where there were large concentrations of hostile forces or civilians. These could range from the odds and sods worn by ZIPRA and ZANLA terrorists to the uniforms of FRELIMO and the Zambian army. In these instances, and to round these disguises off, the SAS operator would apply ‘Black is Beautiful’ camouflage cream. This was a theatrical type paint which, when applied correctly, would have the effect of turning white skin black. It was an effective prop and could fool people even at quite close range. It had proved worthwhile on countless occasions over the course of SAS operations when SAS callsigns had unexpectedly encountered terrorists or FRELIMO/Zambian military or police and the civilian population. The trick to making it work was to apply it liberally to all parts of exposed skin, so making sure behind and inside the ears were covered was as important as covering the face, neck and forearms. Use of the appropriate headwear would help to throw faces into shadow and hide the European features of the SAS operators was another simple yet effective tool which added the effect of Black is Beautiful.

Often, SAS operators could speak enough of the local languages to ward off any challenge should they unexpectedly have a close encounter with an enemy; indeed some men were fluent and able to issue instructions or warnings to unsuspecting passersby. Usually though, the sight of military uniforms were enough in themselves to make most civilians steer clear.

Aside from the threat posed by the enemy or hostile civilians, there were other ever present dangers lurking to hurt, maim or kill an SAS operator. The bush was full of flora and fauna which, if given the opportunity, would do grievous harm. I'm only going to present a few examples, because to compile a complete list would require a book in itself.

Bushes with dagger like, needle sharp thorns were waiting in their millions to puncture skin or drag at and tear clothing. There was one particular bush called the 'wait awhile' which if anyone or anything got caught in it, it was virtually impossible to get free; in fact, the more the victim struggled the more they'd become entangled. Such was the reputation of the wait awhile bush that it was sometimes used as an expedient method of holding prisoners. Just push them into it and they could be left alone, the callsign could return many hours later and the POW would still be there, held fast in the clutches of the bush.

The buffalo bean plant was a terrible hazard for anyone passing through the African bush. Coming into contact with the hairs which covered the seed pods and leaves would have devastating consequences. The affected area would become covered in red bumps and immensely itchy and no amount of scratching could calm it. It is no exaggeration to say that contact with the buffalo bean could quickly put a soldier out of action. There were no medicines which could effectively treat a buffalo bean rash, the only expedient remedy (to which there was conflicting reports of success) was to urinate on the affected skin.

If the operator managed to dodge the spikes and the buffalo beans, he could well find himself treading on the devil thorn. It was a ground covering plant with an oval type seed. It was the seed which formed the hazard. The seed had needle sharp spikes protruding from it. Stepping on one – even while wearing army boots – would see the seed penetrate the sole and go straight into the foot.

If all the plants weren't enough, there were insects and beasts in their billions who were waiting to bite or sting. The Black Mamba is one of the most poisonous snakes on earth and notoriously aggressive, one bite can deliver enough venom to easily kill a man. Even passing relatively close by one would be enough to have it strike and they'd bite multiple times before letting go. In the undergrowth and shade they were virtually invisible, meaning that accidentally coming into contact with one was a very real possibility.

The 'food chain' of predators would go all the way up to big game; elephants, big cats and everything in between.

So, as you can appreciate, the host of routine hazards awaiting the Rhodesian SAS soldier was far more plentiful than his European or North American counterparts could expect to encounter.

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Moving through the urban environment presented a whole new set of problems for any SAS callsign who were tasked to attack critical points located in towns or cities.

Unlike the bush, where an encounter with civilians or hostile forces was low, the very real prospect of compromise lay around every corner.

Even in the depths of the night, it was almost guaranteed that there'd be civilians out and about.

Route planning was every bit as vital as it was in the bush, and had to take into account such factors as areas where there were sure to be heavy concentrations of civilians, as well as fixed

police or military checkpoints, police stations or barracks. Usually, the intelligence available to the SAS was low grade and inaccurate, so much of the actual execution of the operation would be down to chance. Every man would know the routes in and out as well as the location of the obligatory ERVs.

All incursions on foot into built up areas would take place under cover of darkness, and almost certainly while wearing disguises appropriate to the location (though there were a few exceptions, when SAS teams wore their own uniforms).

Anyone who has moved through narrow side streets on foot in an unfamiliar town during darkness will be aware how easy it is to become disorientated, this was magnified when dealing with the rag-tag disorder which was typical of many an outskirts of an African town.

Trying to keep out of sight, while picking their way to the target was slow and laborious work for the SAS teams involved. Regular navigation checks had to be made and detours sometimes taken to avoid an unexpected checkpoint. If contact with the enemy occurred unexpectedly, the operation would be aborted and the focus shifted from attack to escape and evasion; escape from the build up area before the enemy had chance to deploy and seal the area off, and evasion of units which were deployed to hunt them down. For obvious reasons, this would all be 'immediate action' in nature, with the callsign reacting to threats as and where they arose. For example, seeing a roadblock being set up at the end of the street, or a military or police patrol wouldn't result in gunfire – a contact of that nature would have to be the absolute last resort, and would only really ever occur if the enemy opened fire first – even then the callsign would make sure it was as brief as possible. Breaking contact would be the priority.

In the instances where enemy activity was observed, the SAS team would simply melt back into the shadows before carefully picking their way around the 'obstruction'.

Stealth would have to be combined with a certain amount of speed as the callsign would be intent on clearing the built up area before daylight. Sometimes though, they would have no choice but to stop and wait until the danger had passed.

So then, movement in all its forms, both in the bush and urban environments encompassed many subtle techniques which were all designed to keep the callsign safe, unseen and would enable them to successfully complete their mission.

#### 4

### **Observing the Enemy**

Reconnaissance was one of the most important functions of the Rhodesian SAS, and one which often gets overlooked by those with an interest in the unit.

The ability gather information on a variety of targets was crucial to operational planning and

as a source of much needed intelligence.

The targets of SAS recce efforts were wide ranging, encompassing the whole gamut of ZIPRA and ZANLA activities and extended to those of FRELIMO and the Zambian military.

While aerial photographic reconnaissance was often available, as well as interrogation reports from captured terrorists, a complete picture could only be built up by putting men on the ground to conduct covert reconnaissance missions.

This was especially true if the target in question was a terrorist training/holding camp which had been earmarked for attack by Rhodesian ground troops in what was known as 'Fireforce' operations.

Before the mission was launched the SAS team tasked for the job would be given their briefing. They would be told what information the planners required (*for the purposes of this study, we will assume that the target is a suspected terrorist training camp, but the same rules apply equally to any other objective*). The location of the target area, along with all other relevant elements, was supplied in as much detail as possible. Thereafter, a considerable amount of freedom to work out how the mission was to be conducted was given to those involved. Everything will be broken down into 'phases' and planned in great detail.

Initially, and before planning took place, a full map appreciation of the target location and study of existing intelligence reports would be undertaken to determine the lay of the land and what, if any, potential hazards lay in wait to snare the callsign. As explained in a previous section, the callsign had to consider a wide range of possibilities which could adversely affect the operation and – if any were present – had to plan around them accordingly. For example, were there any points of habitation within the area of operations? If so, what were the expected routines of the local civilian population? Were they farming (roaming the land and therefore creating the potential for compromise)? Was there any enemy patrol or activity in the area (both terrorist and local military or police forces)? If yes, then what form did it take? Were the enemy mounting patrols? Did they appear to be actively searching for Rhodesian troops? Or was it just random movement between certain points?

Once the above (and much more) had been examined in detail, the team could turn their attention to the infil (infiltration) phase of the mission. *For this study we will assume that the best method of delivery will be by helicopter.*

Through the map appreciation/ground situation dictated that the callsign should be landed twelve miles (twenty kilometres) from the target. An LZ would be identified in an area where the callsign were confident was free from all forms of human activity, where the chopper can land and the troops disembark without being seen or more importantly, given the noise that a helicopter generates, heard.

The focus would then turn to the approach phase. How could the callsign get itself from the LZ to the location they'd designated at the site of the OP (Observation Post). Everything up to that point had been planned so that the team did not come into contact with the enemy or unfriendly civilians (any civilians for that matter) and this will be the watchword of the entire mission. The callsign were not there to get into any firefights, but to watch and quietly gather information before withdrawing without anyone ever knowing they'd been.

Upon arrival at the area where they'd elected to set up the OP (Observation Post) the team

would split into pairs, and while two would provide protection, the last two would move forward to survey the site to ensure it matched up to expectations. If for any reason it was found not to be suitable then the alternative locations which had been identified during the planning stage would be explored.

For it to be successful, the site of the OP had to fulfil a number of requirements, the most obvious of which being it afforded a good view of the target. It had to be close enough to be effective, but not too close so that it might be in an area patrolled by the enemy.

Sometimes, when there was no risk of enemy patrols or overflight by hostile aircraft, the OP could take the form of a simple patrol base, on other occasions, especially when there was no option but for it to be in very close proximity to the target, the OP would be heavily camouflaged and provide heavy cover from view for the callsign members. If the latter (which I will assume it is for this exercise) much time and effort would be expended setting it up so that it melted completely into its surroundings and was invisible even at point-blank range. The maxim among the SAS was that the enemy should only be able to discover an OP by inadvertently standing on it.

With the protection team moved out onto the flanks, at the limit of their vision or hearing (whichever was furthest) construction of the hide would begin. Because this would be done under cover of darkness, pre-deployment practice was the key. Also everything would be done tactically, to minimise noise and movement. The two 'builders' would first erect a low black hessian screen behind which they could conceal themselves while working. It would be secured to the vegetation using bungee cord and adjusted accordingly so that anyone who happened to be looking couldn't see a black slab against the undergrowth. Next, the overhead cover, a groundsheet, pre-cut to the required size was stretched low overhead (no one could sit up in the hide, as it had to be kept as low as possible for concealment purposes). After stretching and then securing the overhead sheet with more bungees to the surrounding bushes, the hide would be draped in camouflage netting (which again was cut to size while back at base). When in close proximity to the enemy it was never a good idea to cut and add local vegetation to add to the overall effect as it would have to be replaced too frequently under the heat of the sun. The best alternative was to use cut up strips of old camouflage uniforms, or bits of hessian, dyed to match local conditions then tie them to the cam net. Unlike cut vegetation, these would never wilt then stand out and draw attention to the OP. The time of year would also dictate the colour of the net and its garnish. The cam net would be large enough to loosely drape over the hide to all sides and stop it from being seen from any angle. At this stage the OP would be ready for occupation and if of low enough silhouette and sited correctly within existing undergrowth, would be rendered invisible. To the front, where observations were to take place, the black hessian screen would have been incorporated into the hide itself to provide cover from view into the interior. Sometimes, dependent upon circumstance, it would be better just to list the hessian screen enough to push binoculars or the patrol camera underneath it. At other times, the man on watch would put his head under it to look out. How the actual watching was done was all a matter of circumstance and depended on the risk involved.

Once the men were settled into the OP the routines of observation would begin. This would rotate in two hour long shifts with two men on duty and two men off. After a while watching is a tedious business and concentration begins to fade so it was imperative that it was done in relatively short bursts. Of the two men on duty, there'd be one doing the actual target observation

while the other would be acting as security, watching for enemy patrols or other movement which may threaten the OP.

As already mentioned, for the purposes of this exercise, we're going to presume that the target is an enemy camp. Some terrorist camps were vast, spread over several square miles with a main camp and satellite camps, that being the case it was impossible to build up a complete picture, so the callsign would concentrate on one part as per their orders. In this instance we'll assume that the callsign has been tasked to place the main camp under surveillance.

A complete and detailed picture of life in the camp would be slowly compiled over the length of the mission. Everything would be noted down on the OP log, range cards collated and many photographs taken. Hand drawn maps would also be compiled. The layout of the camp, what buildings (usually tents or traditional open pole structures with brush roofs and sometime mud or clay brick structures) were being used for what purpose. What were the camp routines? What time did the camp inhabitants get up, what were their mealtimes, when did they retire? What were the provisions for guarding the camp? How many men were on sentry duties, how were they armed, what was their state of readiness? Were there any AA guns?

When parades were held in the main camp they yielded excellent information as to the numbers of terrorists present. More often than not a morning parade was mandatory in these camps and being in possession of the time they occurred and their duration was always a good piece of intelligence to take back to Rhodesia. A camp's worth of terrorists all assembled on the parade ground was an ideal target for the RhAF bombers, a fast low pass dropping hundreds of small anti-personnel bombs would (and often did) decimate those present. With this in mind the terrorists put in place certain measures to prevent the RhAF getting the drop on them. Sometimes they'd keep baboons in cages. These animals had been purposely exposed to places where Rhodesian aircraft had mounted strike missions and as a result were traumatised. As you will know, a human can't hear a jet arrive until its overhead, by then it's too late to run from the bombs. The baboons were possessed of super sensitive hearing and the second they heard approaching aircraft, they'd go into full panic mode. The screeches and rattling of cages would alert the terrorists who would then immediately scatter to all points of the compass. If the SAS callsign would identify them, the knowledge that the terrorists had a baboon or two in their camp meant that the RhAF could adjust tactics accordingly, compensating for the fact that the enemy would be scattering, and drop their bombs in the areas where they were running rather than an empty parade ground. If they were close enough, and if they couldn't see them, they'd often be able to hear the baboons screeching because – unfortunately for the terrorists – they couldn't train them to differentiate between military and civil aircraft; if any jet airliners happened to pass overhead, or indeed within the acute earshot of the baboons, they'd be spooked into panicking.

Only by staying on station for days at a time could the SAS callsign hope to build up a complete picture of camp life.

Inside the hide (or open OP) life for the operators was 'austere'. They'd have the 'luxury' of a kip mat each for sleeping/resting on or to lay on while at observation duties, but that's where the 'comfort' ended. When they weren't on duty they'd attend to personal admin, eating, washing (as best they could) and sleeping. Going to the toilet was a particularly unpleasant experience, especially where defecation was concerned, as trying to direct the waste matter into a plastic bag while lying down often made for misses and sticky fingers. An expedient method of warding off the need to take a dump was achieved by the use of anti-diarrhoea tablet; these would play havoc

with the bowels, inducing constipation, but the discomfort was worth it.

Sometimes, but only rarely, the callsign might be issued with a night vision monocular – these were rifle sights which had been smuggled in to Rhodesia (Rhodesia was subject to harsh sanctions by the international community, most domestic goods and all military equipment was banned from being sold to the Rhodesians), but normally the operators would rely on binoculars, stills cameras, pencils and paper.

Regardless if they were on duty or not, every man was required to be on full alert at all times in case of trouble. If the OP was discovered and its occupants compromised, an ‘immediate action’ plan would swing into effect. Because they didn’t have the firepower to deal with the enemy, the callsign would attempt to withdraw without getting into any contacts. If contacts were initiated by the enemy, anti-ambush drills would be played out. The need to break contact and clear the area was paramount. If the callsign became split, the obligatory ERV would be headed for and, hopefully, the operators could reassemble for the next phase of the withdrawal. Each ERV had a set cut off time, after which the operator would assume his team members weren’t going to arrive and so strike out for safety on his own. Operationally, if the ERV was used, those arriving would most likely ignore the cut off time for as long as possible in the hope that the others were simply late.

Because of the nature of the operation (if it was to be conducted from a hide as opposed to an ‘open’ OP), only rifles would be carried, the folding stock AK-47 was a popular choice as it was compact and could be effectively shot in full automatic mode, thus providing the callsign with more weight of fire should they need it. Semi-automatic pistols were also a wise addition to the armoury, with each operator carrying one.

As important as personal weapons (but dependent upon season) was warm clothing. It could get chilly at night, especially if the men were unable to move, so some good clothes made a welcome addition to the kit list.

All rubbish generated by the callsign would have to be bagged up. The reasons for this were twofold; it would stop animals catching any scent, becoming curious and then ferreting around the immediate vicinity of the OP where they might catch the eyes of any enemy or unsuspecting civilian. Also, to make sure the terrorists had never known the SAS had been watching them, all rubbish (human and otherwise) was removed and carried out when the callsign vacated their post.

Upon successful completion of the mission, the callsign would be able to provide all aspects of the intelligence needed by higher authority in order to allow them to plan and execute an airstrike or a full blown Fireforce operation.

There were certain occasions where small SAS teams (sometimes only one man) carried out reconnaissance and intelligence gathering in the urban environment. Principally this happened in Rhodesian towns and cities during the run up to the 1980 elections, when – under the Lancaster House agreement – a ceasefire had been called and elections arranged. The Rhodesian, government, military and intelligence services were keen to build up a picture of movement and routines among the ZIPRA and ZANLA high command (including Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo) and the terrorists who had set up home in various locations in Salisbury and elsewhere.

The resulting covert observation could have been as simple as renting a hotel room which overlooked a building of interest, or surreptitious infiltration into occupied buildings. If the latter, then if the best place to be was on the roof where the risk of accidental discovery was negligible. A flat roof of a building higher than the target was an ideal OP, especially if it had a low wall running round the edge behind which an observer(s) could hide.

Entering a building in full view of everyone, dressed as workmen and carrying the appropriate ID and permits was a painless way of inserting a couple of men and the equipment they needed to mount the operation. The 'work party' could make some pretend repairs before leaving one or two men behind when they left. A couple from gang of twelve or so men would never be missed by any casual observer. Once in position they'd be free to carry out their tasking; building up a detailed profile of comings and goings and routines of those occupying the target building. They'd be collected at a later date when the 'workmen' returned to complete their repairs.

In some cases, when all other options were unavailable, a two man team could enter a building surreptitiously before gaining entry to the attic. Removal of a couple of roof tiles would give enough of a view of the target to allow it to be placed under observation. If operating this way, and especially if the rooms below were occupied, great care had to be taken not to generate noise, either by speaking in anything above a whisper or by movement. Nothing would convince an occupant that there was something untoward happening above their heads if they heard shuffling. It would be odds on that they'd think there was a rodent infestation and call a pest controller to investigate.

Sometimes cursory reconnaissance could be conducted by a simple slow drive by of the target – though this would yield nothing but how many guards were on duty outside the building at that precise moment in time. Observing from a parked van was a much better alternative, especially if the street was busy and parked vehicles were a common sight.

During the run up to the elections, the SAS expended time and effort on shadowing the men of their sister unit, the British 22SAS, who had been brought in to the country with the British contingent of the JMF (Joint Monitoring Force) and who were operating under the cover of that outfit. The author can only speculate at the nature of British SAS operations and if the RhSAS managed to find out, but the game of cat and mouse which the two sides played out, it's a safe bet to presume that the Brits knew what was happening and had their mission restricted as a result.

SAS callsigns were also busy in the Rhodesian bush, at various assembly points where ZIPRA and ZANLA terrorists had gathered as part of the ceasefire agreement. Utilising the techniques which have been explored earlier in this section, they managed to uncover photographic and video much evidence of breaches of the conditions of the ceasefire. For example, the terrorists were supposed to have laid down their weapons prior to entering these assembly areas (which were being monitored by the JMF) but continued to carry them.

The picture the SAS recce callsigns collated was also used in the planning of 'Operation Quartz', the mission to seize control of Rhodesia should the terrorists win the elections. (Although the Rhodesian security forces had prepared for it, this plan was never put into effect.)

## Assaulting an Enemy Held Building

There were occasions over the course of the bush war that the SAS attacked terrorist buildings, namely the attack on Joshua Nkomo's home, and the operation to take control of ZIPRAS intelligence agency, the NSO, at its headquarters in Lusaka.

There was also a great deal of preparation for similar attack which was planned as part of the abortive 'Operation Quartz' in Salisbury, 1980. (*See 'Bravo Ten' and 'The Rhodesian SAS: Their Greatest Missions' by Andy Ryan for more details.*)

RhSAS building clearing drill were closely modelled upon those of the British army.

More often than not it's always best to assault a building from the top down, that way the defenders can be driven out into the streets. Going in at ground floor level and fighting your way upstairs leaves the enemy with nowhere to go, meaning he's more likely to make a stand.

For the purposes of this section we're going to assume the target is a single storey building, in the style of Joshua Nkomo's bungalow in downtown Lusaka, or one of the office buildings in the compound of the NSO headquarters.

Regardless of what business the building serves, clearing it takes the same form, and in the two examples given, both were heavily defended.

Entry to the target building would be achieved in several ways, depending upon circumstances. The obvious points of entry had their advantages and disadvantages; for example a doorway could be covered by fire from within and/or booby traps, making it especially dangerous for the assault team to attempt to storm the building. The same was true of windows. Often windows on high value targets were barred (at least on the ground floor) so getting in that way was a non-starter. If resistance was expected to be particularly heavy, entry could be affected by using explosives to a blow hole in one of the exterior walls.

Approaching the target building was best done under covering fire. Support teams would shoot into the doorways and windows to suppress whoever was inside while the assault group rushed to the selected entry point. Sometimes, when no support was available, and if an approach couldn't be made without being seen, the assault team would have no alternative but to fire and manoeuvre their way forwards on their own.

The SAS were trained to use speed and aggression, keeping up the momentum of the attack at all costs. If the entry point was the door (as was the case with both Nkomo's home and the NSO buildings) it was certain that said door would be kept locked as a matter of routine at all times and covered by fire from inside. The door could be quickly overcome by the use of 'knock-knock' charges; a Rhodesian designed explosive device for use in overcoming such obstacles. Placed correctly, the knock-knocks would take a door, even a reinforced security door, off at its hinges.

With the door gone and men to either side of it, a fragmentation grenade would be hurled at full pelt into the void (this was done instead of tossing the grenade in order to lessen the chances of it being caught and thrown back) – also, after the pin had been pulled, the thrower would let the grenade 'cook off' for a couple of seconds so the enemy would have less time to react to it.

The resulting grenade blast would hopefully deal with and defenders within.

As soon as the grenade exploded two men would enter the room, pressing themselves with their backs to the walls to either side of the doorway, from there they would rake the room with automatic fire, killing anyone who'd survived the grenade blast as well as shooting into points of cover where it was possible a man could hide. That last detail might seem like overkill, but the fact was that otherwise it was entirely possible for someone to remain hidden from view and thereafter 'pop up' to attack the assault group from the rear where they were most vulnerable. Therefore, it made very good sense to ensure that no one was left alive, or had the chance to hide from the attacking force.

Once the room was secure, one of the men would shout 'CLEAR!' and this was the prompt for the second pair to enter. They would then deal with the next door (which normally would be only of flimsy construction) by whatever means necessary before throwing a fragmentation grenade and then entering that room to clear and secure it.

The two teams would work through the building, leapfrogging each other until the target had been secured. Obviously, a large building with – say – rooms running off a central corridor would be tackled differently, with two four-man teams working in tandem with each other. There was also the possibility that the enemy may be able to mount a scratch defence at the far end of a corridor, covering it with enough fire to make progress along it impossible. That being the case, and with the need to keep the momentum of the assault going, the assault teams would work their way along by blowing holes in the walls and passing from room to room in that fashion until they could close and kill whoever was defending the corridor. When effecting explosive entries in that fashion, the procedure was the same as if the assault teams were moving through doorways – with a grenade thrown through the hole before entry and the same raking of the room with automatic fire and leapfrogging in pairs until the far end of the building was reached.

The building could quickly become thick with fumes from grenades and gunfire and possibly even catch fire in places, catching the back of the throat and causing eyes to water.

Whatever obstacles the SAS teams faced, they knew they must not allow themselves to get bogged down and have the building clearing turn into a static firefight.

Outside, exit points would be covered by stop groups whose job it was to kill any enemy who tried to make a run for it. With the SAS bearing down upon them and with no means of stopping the attack, many terrorists would decide the cut and run. As soon as they emerged from doorways or had jumped from windows, they'd be shot down.

With the building cleared and secured, the SAS would move onto the next phase of the task. In the case of the attempt on Joshua Nkomo's life, they would be looking for his body. In the darkened confines of a building where furious shootouts had taken place at point-blank range, it was impossible to know who'd been killed. The dead would be examined to verify that the principal target was among them, if not (as was the case with Nkomo) another search would take place; this time the SAS would be looking for a hidden 'panic' room where the principal could have taken shelter. If found, the door would be dealt with by use of explosives and, once entry gained, fragmentation grenades and gunfire would finish off those hiding inside.

As was the case with Nkomo, neither his body nor any hidden room could be found, and with the Zambian army and police bearing down on them, the SAS did not have time to conduct a detailed search of the building. Instead they set it ablaze and were forced to leave it at that.

When it happened, one of the main reasons for hitting a terrorist controlled building was the acquisition of documentation (the attack on the NSO headquarters in Lusaka being a case in point). In that circumstance, once the target buildings were secure, the SAS turned their attention to emptying them of their paper files. Everything would be removed, placed in sacks and put aboard the helicopters. Not would only filing cabinets be plundered, but the contents of desk drawers, anything pinned to notice boards – even waste paper baskets. When the SAS hit the NSO HQ, they brought home several tons of paperwork to Rhodesia which blew many ZIPRA plans out of the water and effectively destroyed the NSO as an organisation.

## Evasion

Let's imagine if one of the operators taking part in the mission to kill Joshua Nkomo or the raid on the NSO had somehow become separated and left behind (it's a stretch of the imagination because the SAS golden rule was that no one was ever left behind – even dead bodies would be taken home. In this hypothetical scenario we were going to assume that in the confusion of combat, it had happened).

That being the scenario let's explore how the operator, cut off and alone with no means of making contact with Rhodesia, would evade hostile civilians, the Zambian police and military and the countless thousands of ZIPRA terrorists which stood between him and home.

Suddenly alone, the SAS operator on the mission to kill Joshua Nkomo had one chance to link back up with the team; head straight for the ERV at all speed. As soon as it was realised someone was missing (in reality though a check would be made before leaving the scene to make sure everyone was present). The ERV would come into play. The ERV would be as close to the target as possible and the assault group would converge on it to await the arrival of the straggler. As explained elsewhere, the wait at the ERV would be strictly time limited and, given the response of the Zambian authorities to the attack, and the need to link up with the other sub-team who had mounted a diversionary raid elsewhere, no allowance could be made to extend the waiting time.

Arriving at the ERV after the cut-off time had expired, the operator would fall back on his training to get him out of his predicament. In the darkness, wearing 'black is beautiful' and dressed like a Zambian soldier, he had an advantage as he'd be mistaken for a member of the local security forces if spotted.

It was no good flying into a panic, or running away in fright – SAS selection and training meant that there were no men within its ranks who were predisposed to do that anyway. The first thing he'd need to do was find somewhere quiet, the quieter the better, where he could assess the situation and make his evasion plan. Settling down where he was out of sight, he could make a map appreciation. While he wouldn't be carrying a street map, he'd be able to approximate the distance he'd need to cover in order to put the city behind him and the direction of travel needed to do it. Evading capture while clearing the city limits would become phase one of his personal mission to get back to Rhodesia.

With the Zambian response to the attack expected to take many forms – heavy mobile and foot patrols and snap checkpoints, the SAS operator knew he'd have to stay out of sight every step of the way.

The route out of the city would be painfully slow and circuitous, with the operator's priority being stealth as opposed to speed. There would be no prospect of clearing the city in the few short hours available to him before daybreak, so the knowledge that he'd need to lay up for the day would drive him to seek a suitable point. A patch of spare land, the more overgrown the better would be a good place to hide. Places like outbuildings or such were far less suitable, as they presented the very real possibility of compromise. Waste ground or areas where dense foliage was present were as good a place as the operator could hope to find. Looking at a potential hiding place in the darkness would never produce a true picture of its suitability. In the daytime the whole area could be swarming with civilians, all of whom would be hostile and, quite possibly, what looked like the perfect spot to lie up could – in the daytime – prove to

provide no real cover at all. The operator had to weigh up these factors and more before committing himself to the laying up point.

Crawling into the very centre of some tall grass or other area of bushes and scrub would afford as much safety from discovery as he could hope to have. All he could do then would be to settle down, try to get some rest and wait for darkness.

If you, the reader, has ever been in a position where you are forced to wait out in the open, you'll know that every hour which you think has passed only one minute has actually elapsed. A day waiting and hiding and expecting to be discovered at any moment is not for the faint hearted.

Assuming the operator made it through daylight without incident, in the urban sprawl, it's not simply a case of waiting for sunset before being able to resume his move. Dependent upon location, it could have taken until the early hours of the following morning before it was safe to leave the LUP. This being the case, the operator would only have a few hours to slowly pick his way the tangle of side streets and alleyways before he was forced to lay up and ride another day out.

Before breaking cover, the operator would take a moment or two to make sure all his kit was secured; the last thing he'd need was to have taken some rations from his belt only for the pouch to be left open. Making sure such things didn't happen was second nature, having been drilled into the operator during training. Loose kit also generates noise and the last thing he'd want would be to allow people to hear him coming.

Moving off from a laying up point under the circumstances as detailed here, especially one which offered limited view to the outside world, had to be done with extreme caution. The operator would use all his senses to see, hear or smell for sign of nearby activity. If, for any reason, he was suspicious that there may be humans in close proximity to his hide then he would simply wait until he was confident the threat had passed.

All in all, it wouldn't be out of the question to expect this phase of the evasion to take two or three days. During this time the operator would be sustaining himself from the contents of his webbing belt.

Once free of the city, things would be easier. At its nearest point, as the crow flies, the distance between the southern edge of Lusaka and the Rhodesian border was about sixty miles (100km). Not a real issue for an SAS operator as, from that point on he would be able to live off the land.

He would have already decided the route he intended to take. The best way home would be to avoid the Kafue River, loosely handrailing it until it converged with the Zambezi. That way both the wide, crocodile infested Kafue and Lake Kariba could be bypassed. Given the fact that all waterways were home to crocodiles, where ever there was no option but to cross a river, the operator would look to his map to provide a solution. Heading for a bridge, he'd put it under observation before making any attempt to cross.

At the latter stages of the bush war, the SAS had taken to destroying many bridges, especially in the south of Zambia, in an attempt to stem the flow of ZIPRA units to the front and disrupt the lines of supply for those already there. With this in mind, it was quite possible that the Zambian army may have mounted a guard on the bridge the operator had chosen as his crossing point. Even if there first appeared to be no one about, the operator could take no chances, for it could

be that the guards were hunkered down at the far end smoking and lounging their duty time away.

Only by keeping the bridge under observation could the operator be sure. Passing traffic would be as good an indicator as anything. If they were just passing across the bridge without stopping, then it was a safe bet to presume it was unguarded.

During this period of observation, the operator could use his time to best advantage by also taking note of the passing traffic. If he noticed anything which might belong to ZIPRA he'd make a mental note of the details which, when he returned home, could be passed on to the intelligence people (*picking up any scraps of information as he made his escape would be standard procedure*). It would depend upon individual circumstances, but the best time to cross the bridge would be during the hours of darkness, when traffic would be at its lightest. One quick bound from one side to the other would see the operator free to continue his journey.

When he finally arrived, crossing the Zambezi would present perhaps the operator's biggest challenge. At this point it wasn't at its widest but it couldn't be swum. Crocodiles abounded and those, along with the very real threat from hippos and the currents meant that entering the water would be nothing short of suicidal. At that stage in the evasion, the operator had a couple of options. RhAF choppers would be flying within the vicinity with some regularity so, using the heliograph I mentioned in another section, it was possible that he could attract the attention of a passing helicopter and effect his extraction. Otherwise, he could cast about along the shore looking for a settlement. Kraals (settlements) close to riverbanks were quite common almost certain to have canoes or such with which the locals used for fishing. The boats were always hauled out of the water but left within the immediate vicinity of the riverbank, if not on it. Under cover of darkness, the operator could steal one of these boats and paddle it across the Zambezi to safety. As I mentioned earlier, all SAS men were trained how to operate small boats and canoes so using the local homemade craft found dotted in settlements along the banks of any southern African river would pose no problem for the operator.

Come the following morning, when it was discovered that one of their boats had gone missing, it would be too late; the operator would be over on the far bank inside Rhodesian territory.

The problems he could face when stealing a boat meant the operator would have to exercise extreme caution. Every kraal would have its quota of dogs. They were invariably scrawny, flea bitten animals. They'd sleep outside and their job was to detect the presence of predators then alert the kraals folk by barking. To one of these dogs there was no difference between a four legged and two legged predator, therefore the operator would have to move silently, placing himself downwind of the kraal. Wind and rain would provide the perfect cover from scent and sound but, on still nights, the operator would have to rely on his own stealth.

Hauling a boat down to the riverbank, slowly and deliberately so as not to generate noise would present another danger. If he was spotted from either the bank or the water, and if it thought it had a good chance of catching him, a crocodile could strike at any moment.

If anyone had somehow gone astray during the attack on the NSO building in Lusaka, the prospects of a successful evasion would be very different indeed. That mission was an 'open' raid, with the SAS operators involved in it taking no steps to disguise themselves.

That attack took place in the early morning so the evader would have not only faced to prospect of standing out like a sore thumb, but would have not been able to clear the area for many hours. His only hope of evading capture would have been to go to ground as quickly as possible, while the shock of the attack was keeping some people off the streets, but before the Zambians could conduct any follow up operation. There was a large patch of waste ground next to the NSO, but both ZIPRA and the Zambians would have descended on it in force to clear it of ZIPRA who'd been killed in the battle. Assuming he was lucky enough not to be compromised in his hastily chosen laying up point, after darkness had fallen, the operator could then make his way very slowly and carefully from the scene. Thereafter, he could adopt the same measures which have already been discussed for escape from the urban environment.

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On occasion, when the SAS were operating behind the lines they found themselves compromised and forced to withdraw. The author is unsure if a callsign being split up ever actually happened or not, but the fact remains that during these compromises the SAS could easily become separated from one another. For the purposes of this next scenario, we'll assume that a split did occur so the realities of being alone and hunted far behind enemy lines can be explored and what the SAS operator could do to lessen his chances of being caught and make a successful escape.

If, for whatever reason, the individual operators couldn't make it to the ERV then they'd have to strike out for home, evading an enemy who was actively searching for them every step of the way. Breaking contact with the enemy was the first priority, the operator had to put as much distance between himself and his pursuers as possible. This didn't mean running away in blind panic, but a calculated response to the threat which was a compromise between speed and tactical movement. The reason for trying to put distance between himself and the enemy was simple, the further way that distance became, so the area to be searched increased. When the operator considered he'd achieved that initial goal he could then swap speed for tactical movement.

The enemy, be they terrorists, FRELIMO or the Zambian army, would be attempting to discover any spoor left behind by the operator onto which they could latch and follow up. They'd also be attempting to determine their quarry's direction of travel, if they knew which way the operator was heading they could take certain measures to interdict him. Dropping teams off by helicopter along the predicted line of march ahead of the operator meant that – with luck (luck on the enemy's part that is) – the man they were looking for would walk into them and be ambushed and killed or captured.

The deployment by chopper was only available to FRELIMO or the Zambians, however both they and the terrorists could use men riding in trucks to achieve the same effect.

Knowledge of how the enemy would try to catch him was an important tool in the SAS operator's armoury, as was the training he'd received on how to counter it, so let's examine what he'd do to evade an enemy who was actively hunting him.

The first factor would be anti-tracking. Making sure he left as little sign of his passage behind

him as possible was vital. However, as already discussed, when dealing with a good enemy tracker it was very difficult indeed to throw him off the scent. When moving in full anti-tracking mode the operator would be trading speed for stealth, therefore, once he'd picked up the trail, a tracker could gradually begin to close the distance between the search party and the quarry.

In order to neutralise the threat, or simply slow the search to a crawl, the SAS operator could employ a couple of tricks. A piece of fine fishing line, strung at ankle height across his trail would be invisible to most people, but not some trackers. Knowing that that Rhodesians looked upon him as a priority target, the sight of this line would signal the presence of a booby-trap – an explosive device laid to kill him and whoever was in close proximity to him. The sudden realisation that he could be walking into such a trap would cause the tracker to slow down and take extra care. Even if he realised it was nothing more than a length of line with nothing on the end would be enough to put the wind up most trackers, as they'd know that something infinitely more deadly may be awaiting them further along the trail. Two or three more of these fake booby-traps might have the effect of making him break off the contact altogether. However, that couldn't be relied on so – the operator could dig into his kit to produce the fragmentation grenade with its instantaneous fuse he was carrying for just this eventuality. Making sure he could lay the line in a patch of grass where it could not be spotted, the Grenade would be attached to a fixed object and the legs of the pin pushed together and partially pulled so that it would become detached with the minimum of force.

Regardless of what he'd done to throw off his pursuers, the SAS operator would have to assume they were still following.

His next move would be to confuse the search effort. As mentioned, once the enemy had determined the approximate direction of travel of the man (or men) they were hunting, they had the option of interdicting them by placing stop groups further along the predicted line of march. In order to counter, the operator would change direction at regular intervals. For example, if his true intention was to move south, he would move south for a while before going east or west then even perhaps north. While, perhaps, the enemy would be able to still work out which way he wanted to go, the constant change of direction would ensure that they couldn't place anyone ahead of him. Moving at different paces was also a good way to confuse the enemy. If they could work out the operator's average speed – a good tracker could tell how fresh prints were and could approximate speed of march – they'd be able to calculate the radius of search. If the operator could get onto a game trail he could really up his pace – the tactical situation allowing of course. Moving as fast as possible wherever possible would mean that such calculations as to his speed were rendered worthless.

By utilising these methods, plus using the ground to its best advantage to provide cover from view/tracking (as mentioned in a previous section) the operator would have a good chance of breaking contact with the search effort.

There'd be no circumstances where the enemy could put enough boots on the ground to conduct a cordon and search operation, so their own relatively modest presence in a large area of bush would work to the operator's advantage, allowing him to slip through the gaps in the net he'd manufactured by his constant changing of pace and direction.

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Although, the author knows of no circumstances where they were deployed against Rhodesian Special Forces, both the Zambian and FRELIMO police had tracker dogs available to them. If they were employed into any search effort it was vital that they too could be countered.

The most simple of methods of course was to lay a grenade trap and let the dog initiate it – end of story. However, if that wasn't an available recourse, the operator would have a number of alternatives available to him.

When he knew (or suspected) search dog teams were involved in the manhunt, the operator would have to adjust his tactic accordingly. Under those circumstances, he wouldn't just be dealing with leaving visible signs in his wake, but also his scent. Tracker dogs use ground scent as their principle method of following a trail so, with that in mind, the operator would do anything within his power to lessen or disguise his spoor trail.

Getting onto game trails was the best and most obvious way of throwing a tracker dog off the scent. Apart from the fact that they'd trodden hard over years by countless animals (which meant it was more difficult to leave spoor) they carried the smells of a multitude of beasts within which it would be difficult for the dog to pick out the scent of the man it was tracking. Combine hitting a game trail at an acute enough angle with a change of direction could be enough for the handler to have his dog go off the wrong way as he tried to get his animal to re-establish the scent.

Moving over rocky ground, where the operator could move from rock to rock without touching the earth for a period of time was almost as effective as along a game trail because the rocks wouldn't hold the scent like soft earth.

If, for some reason, the operator was unable to shake the dog team and the hunt moved from a pre-contact to distant contact phase, there were still things he could do to stop the animal from closing any further.

All search dogs work on long leashes, to have them running free would see them disappear after their quarry. The operator could turn this nugget of information to his advantage. Moving through areas of dense scrub where the handler and his dog got tangled up would cause the search to lose momentum. Likewise, pitting his personal fitness against the handler, the operator could conspire to tire his opponent out by moving through the most difficult terrain. It could be that, tired out, the handler may pull the dog from the search and tell those with him that his animal had lost the scent.

If the search closed into a close contact situation, the operator had one last ace up his sleeve. If he could see it, he could open fire on the dog team, killing either and thus ending the pursuit. If he didn't manage a hit, he would almost certainly cause the handler to pull the dog out of the search. However this would be as a last resort because it would mark his own position and set the remainder of the search team onto his trail but, if he thought he was able to break that contact by again using his superior fitness to outrun them, sometimes it could be a chance worth taking.

Let's assume that the SAS operator managed to evade the search effort and it went no further than pre-contact. He would still consider himself being hunted by dogs and trackers, so all necessary precautions would continue to be observed as he struck out for friendly territory.

We've spoken about how a tracker dog uses ground scent to home in on its prey, but airborne scent can also act as a marker.

When the operator finally came to rest, and if dogs were involved in the pursuit, he'd ensure that his 'signature' was as low as possible. If he still had his Bergen, he could lessen the release of scent into the wind by covering himself with his poncho. If all he had was his belt webbing, then the simple expedient of laying face down and breathing into the ground would lessen the chances of his being sniffed out by a tracker dog.

Relieving oneself in both forms would have to be done carefully to minimise odours (which a dog could associate with its prey) being released into the air. The one positive is that airborne scent is quickly dissipated, so a search dog operating at distance is unlikely to pick it up. On the other hand, under the correct circumstances, ground scent can last up to two days. The SAS operator knew that the dog wouldn't just be following his scent, but the trail of disturbance he'd made to plants and such as he moved.

Something else the operator would be aware of from his training is the fact that the range of a dog's hearing goes beyond that of humans. Making sure all kit was secured so that it makes no noise is a simple but vital component to successful evasion – of course it goes without saying that a dog would only hear such things within a matter of fifty metres or so in close country (more in open ground), so if the operator was close enough for the dog to hear him, he'd be in trouble.

While laid up at rest the SAS operator could utilise the wildlife as an early warning system. If the bush was being searched, and especially if a dog was involved, noise and general disruption to the bush would be generated in enough quantity to have birds and animals take flight in panic. Listening out for distress calls would not only alert the operator as to the impending arrival of the enemy, but he would be able to approximate the direction and range and take action accordingly.

## Survival

Although it may seem daunting to many people, and indeed could be a dangerous place to be in with regard to a lot of the plants and animals which inhabit it, the African bush can provide a rich source of food for anyone who knows how to utilise the environment to his/her advantage.

The Rhodesian SAS operator was trained to live off the land for indeterminate periods of time in case things went wrong while he was behind enemy lines and throughout the seasons there was always enough food to keep an evader alive, even well fed.

While a man can survive for weeks without food, he can only stay alive a matter of a few days without water, this was especially so in the hot climate of the African bush. Being in a high stress situation like an evasion scenario, where an enemy is actively searching for you, it is surprisingly easy to forget to drink. Thirst is only one indicator of the state of a person's dehydration and, for those of you who like to take to the wilds and have a companion, it could save their life if you can recognise the various stages and are able to act accordingly.

Thirst, discomfort, loss of appetite, nausea, headache, dizziness, difficulty speaking and breathing, inability to walk, failing senses, inability to swallow then finally collapse will occur if thirst isn't addressed.

For the SAS operator who was alone in an evasion/survival situation, he would need monitor his own fluid intake and be able to recognise the severity of hydration. Urine is a very effective indicator; the basic rule of thumb is under normal circumstances the urine will be a light straw colour. The darker it is the more dehydrated the person passing it has become.

In the rainy season, while getting water from the sky (which can safely be drunk) the humidity levels are intense and combined with the heat, would make the operator feel like he's being poached. Under these conditions it is possible to sweat up to 12 litres (over 21 pints) of fluids a day and this had to be replaced if the operator was to stand a chance of survival. Staying in the shade wherever possible would help to alleviate the issue, but not by much. Apart from fluids, vital minerals are also lost and must be replaced. Salt tablets were carried as a matter of routine and taking one of these while drinking would help to stave off the worst effects of loss of these essential minerals.

The Rhodesian SAS soldier would carry at least one canteen of water on his belt (we'll assume from this point on that he'd been forced to ditch his Bergen in order to affect his escape, but in the bush, even in the winter, a minimum of 3.5 pints (2 litres) of water a day was required just to keep a man alive. The more work and stress the body was subjected to then the quantities would increase accordingly. Fortunately for the SAS operator, he would be able to look to his training to find liquids to drink where, to the layman's eye, there appeared to be none.

In an earlier section I explained about the need for an SAS callsign to be aware of water sources in the area they were operating. This would help an operator who found himself in an evasion situation, however not for long, as he'd be moving away towards friendly territory.

Watching the movement of game and birds, plus coming across well used trails are all indicators of the presence of water. The animals will converge on these places to take their fill

and the SAS operator would allow them to lead him to watering holes. Aside from allowing him to drink, they also provided the opportunity for food. For example, the African bullfrog was to be found in the muddy undergrowth surrounding such places. Many frogs the operator came across would be poisonous to one degree or another (secreting toxins through their skin), so it was vital that he knew how to identify them. The bullfrog, although it did secrete poison, those toxins weren't particularly dangerous to humans. They did (do) have sharp teeth which could deliver a nasty bite. Bullfrogs would need to be cooked, Skin carefully removed, the legs and breast meat made a filling (but not tasty) bush meal.

The distinctive call of the bullfrog plus those of its relatives can carry quite a way and if the operator heard them, he could be sure that, by homing in on the noise, he'd come across what otherwise might remain a hidden water source. Grain eating birds also needed to drink more often than other types, so it made sense for the operator to be able to differentiate between species in order that he find water as quickly as possible.

The main problem for a man in an evasion situation, where the enemy is actively searching for him, is that they'd know the local water sources and may well place small teams of men at each one to ambush or capture their quarry when he turned up. For that reason – dependent upon circumstance – it was sometimes best to avoid obvious water points. It was up to the operator to weigh the risks of compromise against his need for water and act accordingly. If he decided that the risk was too great then he'd have to look elsewhere until he was confident that he'd broken all contact with his pursuers.

The operator has to also consider the fact that the animals who were using these water sources would defecate into them, this made the need to purify the water all that more important. An expedient method of filtering water of some of its impurities was to dig a hole next to the water source in question and wait for it to fill up with water seeping in from the main source. In many cases this would be completed quickly, however the more contaminated to water the further away from it the hole would need to be dug. Passing through more earth created a better filtration effect but it would take longer, often much longer, after which it was still advisable to boil or treat it with puritabs. That said, if the operator had no other means of cleaning the water, and it was a choice between drinking it or dying of dehydration, the course of action would be clear. If that was the case then he'd just have to be prepared for a consequence to emerge from his actions!

Hanging round watering holes for too long was never a good idea and was likely to bring the operator into conflict with the wildlife which used it.

A reliable method of collecting drinkable water was to do so in the early morning when dew had settled on the grass. Running a scrim scarf or other item of clothing through the grass while walking along would not only produce enough liquid to provide a drink when the cloth is squeezed out, but help to replenish the operator's canteen. It was also good to wash by (maintaining personal hygiene was a must, especially in areas of the body which were prone to sweat rash) just by running the hands through it.

While water can collect in the hollows of trees, the SAS operator would know to avoid it as it would be tainted with tannins from the bark. At a pinch, if he had no other way of collecting it and he was expecting rain, the operator could scoop out the water to empty the hollow and clear it of algae then, when the fresh rain had collected in it, use that for drinking and filling up his

canteen (though it would need to be boiled/purified beforehand). To do this he'd need to make a small fire and collect some dry stones – the more the better (wet ones are likely to explode when exposed to heat), heat them up to as high a temperature as possible then, using a couple of sticks as tongs, drop them into the hollow. While the heat contained within the stones won't boil the water and therefore would be unable to kill all bacteria, they would provide enough heat to deal with some of it. *Remember this was rain water, the bacteria would be that contained in the hollow, not the water.*

Standing pools of water would be avoided as a source of drinking water as they are often home to harmful bacteria and parasites. In the rainy season, if he had something to collect it in, rainwater could quickly fill the belly and the canteen. As an expedient, the canteen itself left out with the top off would catch the rain. Although wholly inefficient for obvious reasons, it was better than nothing. Holding it under something which channelled the rain was better, but the operator had to satisfy himself beforehand that whatever was doing the channelling wouldn't contaminate the water with toxins. There was also no need to purify rainwater so long as his method of collecting it was safe. In all circumstances though and, to be sure, it was always best to boil or add puritabs to any and all collected water. The very last thing the operator wanted to happen was to fall ill when alone with no prospect of help.

When the prospect of finding water was slim, the operator could try sourcing it in a dry river bed. Finding the lowest point then digging down into it can sometimes yield drinkable water.

Digging for the roots from certain plants can also yield water. Many would be unsuitable because they contained toxins, but the SAS operator's training allowed him to positively identify the correct plants. Once extracted then grated or pulped, they would produce a surprising amount of drinkable liquid. This could not be used to top up the canteen though as, if stored, it would start to ferment.

In extremis the operator could extract (suck) the liquid contained in the spinal column of an animal he'd trapped and eat its eyes, though the liquid he'd glean from those sources would be negligible and, if he found himself reduced to that then he'd most likely not be able to survive anyway. Getting such fluids would only ever be as a supplement to his existing intake not a replacement for it, after all, imagine how many eyeballs you'd have to chomp before getting anything approaching a meaningful drink?!

A river was always the best means of finding fresh water; however, it posed problems of its own for any evader. Rivers in southern Africa are swarming with crocodiles and they are waiting to catch the unwary at the first opportunity. A recce of the river bank to check for basking crocodiles, or any sign where they'd been moving in and out of the water was a must. Once the operator was sure the coast was clear he could approach the water's edge to fill his canteen. It was vital that he kept his eyes to his front on the water at all times for telltale signs of movement, ripples on the water's surface which were at odds with the way the river is flowing was an indicator that a croc may be making its way in for the kill. Anything – and I mean anything – which the operator spotted that was out of the ordinary was the signal to clear the riverbank. If there was a need to approach the river more than once, then the operator would never return to the same spot. If he'd been seen, a crocodile would lay in wait for his return.

Being creatures of habit, many animals would drink at the same point when they felt safe, that's when the crocodiles would strike. When a croc takes its prey it drags them underneath the

water and goes into the 'death roll', drowning the victim before eating it or taking it away for later consumption. It's not a pleasant way to die and should be avoided at all cost.

The hippopotamus is another deadly threat along the watercourses of Africa. In fact, they account for more human deaths than all other predators put together. They are herbivores, but are fiercely territorial and notoriously aggressive. If they see anything which they consider a threat, they will not hesitate to attack. They can easily outrun a man over short distances so should be avoided at all costs

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Dependent upon season, food can be abundant although sometimes it needed a strong stomach to feed on some of what was available. For example, a quick meal could be had by the operator putting his ear to a fallen acacia tree. If he could hear noise from within, stripping of the bark would reveal larvae from insects like the rhino beetle. The larvae are big, fat things, and can grow to be several inches long and the same width as a man's thumb. When fried they are considered a delicacy by the indigenous people but, for the evader, they can safely be eaten alive. In a tactical situation, where he believed the enemy was hunting for him, the SAS operator wouldn't take the chance of cooking. These grubs (and insect in general) are foul tasting in their raw state but – pound for pound – provide more protein than beef (as well as some liquids).

However, there were many grubs which would need to be squeezed to remove their innards then cooked before eating to make them safe for human consumption, therefore accurate recognition was a must.

Baobab trees abound in Africa and their ripe fruit can be eaten raw. A piece of wood, scavenged from the locality then used as a throwing stick, could be launched up into the branches to knock the fruit down onto the ground. Once the outer shell had been broken into the SAS operator could eat the chunks of food inside. Apart from filling the stomach, they are packed with vitamin C and are delicious to eat. They can also be mixed with water to produce a refreshing drink. Carrying a few Baobab fruits in the shells would ensure that the operator had a quick and nutritious snack whenever he was in need of one.

Trapping was another method of collecting food. The operator would know how to set snares and 'deadfall' traps with which to catch animals and he would be carrying the necessary fishing line or wire required to make these devices about his person. On many occasions the operator would be disappointed with his efforts to snare game, but when successful, he could provide himself with a substantial meal.

While a snare could yield a ground bird or small animal or rodent, the deadfall could catch snakes. Even poisonous snakes could be eaten so long as the operator took care to make sure the head was severed beyond where the poison sacs were located. It was then a case of slicing it open to remove the innards, peeling away the skin and cooking. *If the operator was near a river he could use the guts as bait to fish with, or to lure small carnivores into his traps.*

Sometimes, there was the prospect of taking meat from a kill, though the operator had to be quick and exercise extreme caution because the scent of a carcass would carry and be picked up at long range by hyena and suchlike who would quickly home in to finish off what was left. Suddenly finding himself confronted by a pack of hyenas was never a good place for anyone to

be. The animal which had made the kill could also return for second helpings and couldn't be best pleased to find a humanoid plundering its food.

Using his 'survival tin' (details of which were discussed in a previous section) the operator would have the means to fish. For the reasons just mentioned, standing on the bank was not a good idea so, using bait worms dug up from nearby, the line would be attached to something before being cast into the water. It would then be a case of retiring and waiting to see if anything happened. There are lots of fish in a typical African river – in fact they form the staple diet of many crocodiles – and some grow to enormous proportions. Given they live in silty waters they invariably taste like mud, but will provide something to eat for the hungry evader.

Now that I've mentioned them, earthworms are also edible as are Mopani worms (which, as their name suggests, live on Mopani trees) The Mopani worm is actually a grub, they are big beasts and contain large amounts of proteins, as well as phosphorous, iron and calcium. They were a delicacy in Rhodesia among the black population. They can be harvested in numbers and once prepared correctly before cooking, they would provide the operator with a nourishing meal.

Earthworms should be boiled for at least five minutes before eating to get rid of any bacteria, they can then be eaten 'as is' or combined with other treats the bush has seen fit to offer up.

Dependent upon season, if the operator could access them, he could raid bird's nests to steal the eggs. There is also enough ground nesting species from which to harvest eggs. The reader will already be aware of the nutritional value of commercially available eggs, and wild eggs are no different. The enterprising evader with a culinary bent could combine eggs with earthworms or grubs to make a 'bush omelette' which would fill his stomach and replenish his energy levels.

There are countless insect species which are edible and possessed of considerable calorific value, and their various life cycles mean they are available all year round. All in all then, and taking everything into consideration, the prospect of being cut adrift many miles from friendly territory, alone and without food, was anything but a death sentence for the SAS operator.

## Making Fire

While the SAS operator would be carrying the means to start fires (including flint & steel), the process is a little more involved than might be first thought. In a tactical situation, making a fire was out of the question. I already mentioned that the enemy had a sense of smell for things that were out of the ordinary, but the smoke generated by a fire put up a marker which any hostile force could home in on. At night, of course, there'd be the very serious issue of the breaching of light discipline.

For the evader, once he was confident that the pursuit had been broken and there was no human activity in the area, it was pretty safe to light a small fire on which to cook food and purify water.

A small fire, just a few sticks worth of fuel strong, using dry wood, would not put out an inordinate smell. As for smoke, that too would be negligible, and making the fire under a tree on a still day would mean that any smoke generated would disperse in the canopy before it could be spotted. The fire would only need to be as large as the task required so the reader can imagine its size if a mess tins worth of water was being boiled.

Another useful by product of a fire was the charcoal. When ground up and added to water, it would help if the operator had eaten/drank something bad and was suffering from diarrhoea.

Regardless if he was convinced he was totally alone in the bush, the SAS operator wouldn't risk having a fire during the hours of darkness, it was simply too much of a risk. As well as the heat of the fire itself, the light it generates will be reflected off nearby trees and vegetation or rocks. Even a small fire will generate enough reflected light to make it visible to anyone who happens to be in the vicinity.

For obvious reasons the rainy season presented its own problems when it came to making fire, while smell and smoke would be lessened by the effects of the rain, getting the raw materials required to start the fire was more of a challenge. That said, with a little effort, it was quite easily achievable.

The four components of a fire are tinder, kindling, fuel and oxygen. The tinder will catch the spark or flame, the kindling will burn from the tinder and the fuel will keep the fire going. Dry grass, shavings of bark, old birds' nests, dead leaves, etc can be employed as tinder. In the bush, in an evasion scenario, if it proved difficult to light then it could be added to by separating a bullet from its casing and sprinkling on some propellant before trying again.

Even in the rainy season, dry wood could be recovered from the centre of fallen branches or tree trunks. Once shaved or feathered it provided excellent tinder, kindling and fuel. If the ground was saturated, then the operator would attempt to raise the fire off the earth. This provided two benefits; it broke contact between the components of the fire and the wet earth and also allowed air to circulate underneath, thus making it easier to light. Placing rocks under the fire to elevate it would be exercised with caution as wet stones can explode. They not only had the potential to injure the operator, but throw the fire out in all directions.

Knowing how to make and maintain a fire under tactical circumstances, and understanding how it could be his friend or foe (if he was careless) was a vital skill. If nothing else – if he had

no puritabs – he would be reliant upon it to purify all the drinking water he gathered. Without the ability to create fire, the operator would put himself at a serious disadvantage and open himself up to the almost inevitable prospect of contracting severe stomach issues from drinking contaminated water as well as restricting the types of food he was able to consume.

In the worst case scenario the SAS operator's training would allow him to survive even if he had no kit on his person.

He could start a friction fire using the small dry branches of the myrrh bush which was particularly good for that purpose. A crude water container can be made from tree bark heated over a fire to make it pliable then moulded to shape. It's an almighty faff but it works). An animal stomach could be turned into a good water carrier, but care would need to be exercised in preparing it for the task.

Lastly, (I spoke about this method for collecting rainwater, but water collected from other sources could be purified – to a degree – by using the tree hollow/stone trick; placing the water into the hollow of a tree trunk – making sure that the tree isn't of the poisonous variety and clear of any debris/slime/moss etc)from the hollow. Heating up some dry rocks on the fire then dropping them into the water. It's a method the author would never fully trust, but in extremis was better than nothing.

## Health

Maintaining his health was vital to the SAS operator in any circumstances, but none more so on a live operation or survival situation. As part of a callsign, he'd have access to a highly skilled medic (it may be him!) and equipment which was able to treat most ailments and wounds. On his own, cut off from help in an evasion or survival situation, he'd have to rely on himself and his training to see him through.

Making sure his feet were kept healthy was a number one priority as any issues in that department could quickly lead to the operator's effectiveness being compromised or even his being put out of action altogether. Acting as part of a callsign in enemy territory, if one man became unable to keep up the pace, he would negatively impact upon his team members and perhaps cause the failure of their mission.

Because boots would be worn all day, and kept on while sleeping, good footwear and regular inspection was the watchword. The constant wearing of boots, especially in the hot environs of southern Africa, was against all conventional logic if applied in a civilian context, but when looked upon through the lens of the SAS operator, when he might be suddenly ambushed at any time, it starts to make perfect sense.

In a tactical situation, inspection of the feet was done by taking off one boot at a time, there'd be no circumstances where the operator would have both his boots off at once.

If he was on his own, evading the enemy, the health of the operator's feet was more important than ever as it was highly likely that he would be forced to trek long distances over many days to reach safety.

The biggest plus the SAS operator had in his favour that his feet were hardened and, as such more resistant to the damage which the abuse he put them through would cause to others. That said, he still had to guard against the multitude of ailments which, if his feet succumbed to, would affect his performance.

Sweaty, hot and swelled feet may cause infections like athlete's foot, which could be seriously detrimental to the operator's performance on operations. Corns could also become an issue in these circumstances, but the most common condition to arise was blisters.

As already mentioned, SAS operators feet were hardened by time. Training and selection meant going over the most difficult terrain, carrying exceptionally heavy loads for long distances. The subsequent blisters gave the SAS candidate a taste of what it was like to be forced to keep marching against the clock while every step of the way was agony. The training and selection also conditioned the feet to accept abuse which would immobilise others.

The foot inspections would provide the opportunity to change socks and ensure no grit or dust had entered the boot where it would then begin to act as an abrasive. The regular changing of socks was a must in the searing heat of the African bush as was the quality of the sock itself. Material which would wick moisture away as much as possible rather than allow it to sit on the skin was good news for the feet.

Blisters on the feet are a subject everyone can relate to as I'm sure you, the reader, have suffered from them at some point. You will know how painful they are and the debilitating effect they can have on mobility. Transfer your own experience to the African bush, where you are

behind enemy lines in a patrol or escape and evasion situation, where you are absolutely reliant upon your feet, and you will begin to realise just how serious a problem they could be for an SAS operator.

In a scenario where he was running for his life, hunted and trying to make his way to safety, the onset of blisters could mark more than just extreme discomfort for, if left untreated, it can turn into a bacterial infection called cellulitis, which can then cause further complications such as abscess or even sepsis (which can be fatal). As with anything else, prevention was always better than cure, so keeping boots and socks dry and free from matter which would cause abrasion went a long way to ensuring that the SAS operator was able to keep moving over long distances.

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If at some point, if he was in an evasion situation and regardless of his precautions, the operator found himself subjected to a bout of dysentery or diarrhoea as the result of ingesting something which was carrying microbes or parasites, or simply because it disagreed with him, it was vital that he be able to combat it.

Uncontrollable bowel movements will cause the body to lose vital fluids and minerals at an alarming rate which would quickly become a very serious issue to someone in a survival or evasion situation. Dysentery would involve severe stomach cramps, fever and blood in faeces and be accompanied by vomiting which would only add to the problems of fluid loss.

Even if he covered it up, leaving such material in his wake at regular intervals would also cause problems in the event he was the subject of an active search; the smell would be obvious to a tracker dog, and the signs of disturbance a marker for the man who was hunting him.

The operator would carry medication to help deal with instances like this upon his person if he was unfortunate enough to come down with it but he could use the expedient method (remember the charcoal I mentioned earlier to help with diarrhoea?).

It would be absolutely vital for him to replace the lost fluids, if not he would quickly become severely dehydrated in the African heat. The amount of water the operator would need to replenish his system would soon use up his stock of puritabs, therefore he would be forced to rely on boiling the water he was drinking. The tactical implications of lighting a fire – even a fire which was kept purposely small – would have to be weighed against the absolute requirement for drinkable water. Staying close to a water source in an area where he was unsure if there were any more could mean that the operator may have to lie up, perhaps for several days, until the worst of the problem had passed.

Many natural ways to aid the operator's health were available to him should he find himself in a survival situation. One example was the African myrrh tree. This plant was (and remains) a veritable pharmacy. The fruits can be used to help treat conditions such as stomach problems and even typhoid fever. The bark has anti-malarial properties and the cutting into the tree will result in the secretion of a sap which, when rubbed on the skin, acts as a natural insect repellent. The sap is also an effective antiseptic which can be applied directly to cuts and grazes to stop them becoming infected.

Another useful plant was the 'toothbrush bush' which, as its name implies, is very good for

keeping teeth clean. All the operator had to do was cut off a twig, remove the bark then feather one end by biting on it a few times before brushing his teeth in the normal way. The enzymes contained within the twig would clean his teeth with a remarkable degree of efficiency.

## What If?

While there were no instances of Rhodesian SAS operators being captured, there were a few occasions where black troops serving with other units were kidnapped by terrorist gangs while on leave (the SAS mounted a mission to rescue several black Rhodesian soldiers who were being held captive by ZIPRA during the latter stages of the bush war).

So the scenario's presented are here are indeed 'what if's'.

To put it frankly, the chances of surviving the first few minutes after capture for an SAS operator (or any soldier of European descent for that matter) would be slim. Unless they were specifically ordered to bring prisoners in for interrogation, falling into the hands of the terrorists would most likely result in the operator's head being paraded about on a pole.

But, in actual fact, and despite operating at ranges where they were out of reach of any prospect of helicopter extraction, and instances where they sometimes got into contact with the enemy, SAS callsigns always managed to evade the worst case scenario of becoming prisoners.

If the operator was caught, it would be best for him that he found himself in the custody of FRELIMO or the Zambian authorities (the latter being the much preferred option in the author's opinion). He could expect to be subjected to a beating immediately upon his capture – the severity of which would depend on circumstances – but at least he could be confident that they'd want to keep him alive for questioning.

Being caught in the wilds of the bush would present more opportunities for escape than being captured in the urban environment, simply because it would take whoever was handling the prisoner longer to get him to a secure facility. The operator's first thought would be to affect an escape as soon as an opportunity to do so presented itself. In the bush, where he and his party of captors were miles away from anywhere, they'd be forced to trek to a point where they could be recovered, so every step of that journey would be looked upon as a potential to break away. It would all be wholly dependent upon circumstance and the operator would need to be flexible and alert enough to seize his chance. It was odds on there'd be no finesse; it would be a simple case of perhaps passing through a dense patch of bush where he knew – if he could break from his guards – he would be able to quickly disappear from view in the undergrowth then capitalise upon it by simply running like hell until he was clear.

This being the case, the operator may still have his survival kit on him as those who caught him wouldn't be used to handling prisoners and almost certainly have only conducted a cursory search for weapons.

The operator would not only be looking for his chance to make a run for it, but also observing his guards. In the time period immediately after the capture they'd be hyped up and fully on the alert however, after trekking through the bush for a while it was likely that they'd start to lose concentration on their task, it was at this time that the SAS operator could take his chance, running like hell, making the most of the two or three seconds of confusion to get a head start and breaking visual contact. Changing direction as soon as he was out of sight and using all available cover to keep himself hidden, he'd have a good chance of evading their attempts to

recapture him (which – frankly – would most likely have been shambolic anyway). The enemy would probably open fire on the section of bush where they'd last seen the now escaped prisoner, so his change of bearing would also help keep the operator out of danger of being shot.

Once he was confident he'd put enough distance between him and the enemy, the operator could go into anti-tracking mode. As discussed previously, coming across a game trail would be ideal, but otherwise he'd have to rely on other methods to throw those who were now pursuing him off his scent. Apart from employing the techniques as already detailed in another section of this book – though this would mean he'd have to slow down; not a good move in a close pursuit situation. In the main the operator would be relying on the hope that none of his guard party were particularly skilled in tracking, thus allowing him to separate himself with the measures which speed would allow.

Using his superior fitness, covering ground which the enemy would find tiring to traverse, and frequent changes in direction would mean that the operator should soon have left the enemy behind for good.

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In the urban environment, the chances to make an immediate break after capture would be severely restricted, that said, it was not an impossibility. The operator would almost certainly find himself bundled into the back of an army vehicle. Anyone who's ridden in a military truck will know that they are open backed affairs, with a simple tailgate at the rear.

The operator would simply have to seize his chance and do so as soon as possible. The enemy would be riding with him would be armed and have their hands on their rifles. The operator would most likely be on the floor of the truck – possibly with his hands bound. Taking a corner, when the truck would be forced to slow down would be his cue to go. It would be simply a case of jumping up then – while the enemy were fumbling with their guns to try and grab hold of him – throwing oneself over the tailgate, using his parachute training to soften his landing a little, the operator could be back on his feet and sprinting for cover while his guards were shouting and banging on the cab roof to get the driver to stop.

The SAS operator could also expect to be handed over to different units in the opening phase of his capture and – possibly – he could have a chance to escape presented to him during or immediately after any such changeovers. It was about staying alert, looking for a weakness or situation he could exploit then seizing his chance without hesitation.

I've already spoken about the problems facing an evader in the urban environment and the difference made by the time of day. But in an 'immediate action' scenario such as this, expecting the police and military to descend on the scene quickly and in force to cordon the area off, the operator would have no choice but to move as quickly as possible, with stealth playing second fiddle to speed initially.

During the daytime it would be impossible for the operator not to come into contact with members of the civilian population, who would immediately report the encounters as soon as they realised what was happening. If this happened it was vital that the operator change direction as soon as he was out of sight as, using the point of his escape, the location he was spotted and the times of each, they'd be able to establish a direction of travel and radius of search. Throwing

a cordon around a specific area was easier in a built up area than in the remoteness of the bush. Roads, side streets and any footpaths could be covered by relatively few men, thus effectively sealing off the area and making it very difficult for the escapee to move. As well as police and military search teams, word would go out to the civilian population to be on the lookout for a white man in an army uniform. With the prospect of reward money in the air, they'd be out in force to comb every possible hiding place. If he was caught by civilians, the operator could expect to be beaten before being turned over to the authorities.

The period of confusion which would reign in the immediate aftermath of his escape could be used to great effect by the operator. If he was lucky, he'd get perhaps twenty minutes before the operation to recapture him swung into effect.

With one eye on the enemy response and his inability to clear the area, he could look to means which would allow him to evade capture. If an opportunity to take a car or motorcycle presented itself to him, then he'd be able to clear the area quickly and before the authorities could respond.

SAS operators were taught how to hotwire vehicles just in case they had need to steal one in order to get away from the enemy when they were operating deep inside hostile territory.

Taking a rock or a piece of timber or discarded scrap of metal (there was always enough detritus on the streets to find a suitable expedient tool) would be all the operator needed to complete his task. *Please note; cars and other vehicles have moved on security wise and the following information is obsolete.* Finding a parked car, the operator could smash the window (after first checking to see if the door was locked). Smashing the plastic cowl on the steering column was a simple task, as was breaking the steering wheel lock – a few hard jerks on the wheel was usually enough to put paid to those. With the cowl off the lock mechanism would be exposed. When he had the correct tools, the operator could apply some finesse, but under a circumstance such as this brute force was required. Smashing the ignition switch off the column (if the wires couldn't be accessed) would give entry to the wires which would fire the car up. Once connected – different cars had different coloured wires and some had plastic discs which, by inserting a screwdriver or similar would start the car a normal – the operator could complete the circuits and engage the starter motor. His task then would be to put as much distance between him and the location of his escape as possible.

Eventually – perhaps quickly – the car would be reported as stolen and the authorities might link its disappearance with the escaped soldier, but by that time he should have made good his getaway.

As far as the author is aware, both FRELIMO and the Zambian military didn't have any proper facilities for handling POWs. It must be assumed they'd be placed in either civil or military prisons. Neither did they have any trained interrogators. Their methods of extracting information would vary wildly and – in the case of FRELIMO – would most likely have included violence. Under normal circumstances, and given their lack of abilities to extract information, it would have been quite simple for the SAS operator to keep his secrets to himself. Had they known they had an SAS man as a captive, it was possible that he could have been paid a visit by the Russians or East Germans (in Zambia) or the Chinese in Mozambique. They'd want to know everything they could. In those or any other circumstances, the operator would only give his

name, rank and number. Anything else, however seemingly inconsequential, was strictly off limits. There'd be no signing of documents, however innocent they might first seem, or anything else which might be of propaganda value to the enemy

There was no Geneva Convention in Zambia or Mozambique so the operator could expect no 'favourable' treatment, if his captors decided to cut up rough with him then so be it, he'd just have to accept it and take whatever beatings they decided to dish out. The author knows of one instance where a white draft dodger surfaced in the Zambian (and most likely wider) press to denounce Rhodesia and the bush war, so it was possible that the Zambians or FRELIMO would try to coerce the operator into making a similar statement. It's also probable that he'd be paraded in front of the TV cameras so that whoever was holding him could make the most the publicity surrounding the capture of a white soldier offered – this would almost certainly happen if they knew he was SAS.

Under these circumstances, the operator had no choice but to comply, however, when asked questions he could simply remain silent. That said, an opportunity to communicate with Rhodesia would be gifted to him while he was on screen. For example, two fingers 'innocently' rubbing the cheek would be noted by the Rhodesian CIO intelligence people who were tasked to examine the footage for clues as to the operator's condition and whereabouts. They'd know he was making the V sign, indicating that he was well.

Once the initial interrogation phase had ended, and it was obvious to his captors that they weren't going to get anything out of their prisoner, he'd be moved to a place where he'd be incarcerated until the war's end or until (perhaps) they could negotiate a swap for him and a high value terrorist leader being held in Rhodesian custody. *The author suspects that this scenario would only play out if the operator was captured by the Zambians. While FRELIMO would probably keep him in custody, they may well have been inclined to execute the prisoner.* This being the case then the operator would have expended every effort into attempting to escape from custody.

The facility where the operator was being held would shape his escape plans. Tunnelling would be out of the question so he should look to other means.

As far as the author is concerned, the best opportunity to escape would be during an exercise period, when the prisoner was allowed out of his cell and into the yard. This would be dependent upon various factors such as the nature of the exercise yard, how it was enclosed and guarded. *While conducting security business I have seen the inside of several police station yards where prisoners were allowed out to exercise. Fairly low (12 to 15 feet high) walls with vehicles parked alongside them. The guards were switched off enough to be taken by surprise. A sudden break and sprint, jumping on the bonnet (hood) then the roof of the car and a would-be escaper would have been gone before those guarding him had chance to react – this being the case for an escape attempt the thing to remember about high walls is not to jump down off them but to lower yourself to arms length before letting go; even a trained parachutist would probably hurt himself if jumping from height – especially onto a hard surface – it would only take a few seconds to lower oneself down before making good the escape.* The moral of that little anecdote is that there are always opportunities for someone who is able to find them, it's all about being able to identify those weak points then exploit them accordingly. Being switched on the task at all times would mean chances could be spotted and, where circumstances allowed, exploited.

It was a good idea for the operator to maintain his fitness in readiness for his escape. Daily exercise periods were the obvious means for him to take a little light exercise, but he could really keep the edge on his athleticism by conducting workouts in his cell. As well as keeping fit this would also help to stave off boredom. It was also a good idea for the operator to familiarise himself with his surroundings, learning the layout of the building he was being held in as far as he was able. Watching guard routines, how alert they were while going about their duties, the construction of doors and types of lock, if there were any windows which were unbarred and – if so – finding out where they led to if they were climbed through. All these small details would quickly build up a pretty comprehensive picture of his place of incarceration which he could use to his advantage in any attempt to break out.

It may seem unrealistic, but some places which are used as holding accommodation for prisoners or as makeshift prisons in certain parts of the world are wholly unsuitable for the task from a security point of view. That being the case the chances to break out would be multiplied significantly. If the operator found himself in such a place the first thing he could do would be to inspect the door. Depending upon which way it opened, the hinges might be on his side. If so, it's quite possible they were the type with a central fixing pin. Using an expedient tool which he would hope to find somewhere, it would be possible to push these pins out then pull the door open at its hinges.

Being transferred between places of custody would be a good opportunity to effect an escape. Unless the operator was chained to the vehicle, he could try the jumping over the tailgate trick as mentioned earlier. If travelling by car, he may be able to open the door and throw himself out: it would be painful, and the chances of injury high, but if it was a risk worth taking then he'd have to grab it. He would just have to place himself on high alert and be ready to take the very first chance in the opening fraction of a second it presented itself to him. If the operator was handcuffed with the ratchet style cuffs which were in universal use at the time he could overcome them quite quickly. All he would need would be a thin piece of metal, like the tongue of a belt buckle or a small nail filed on concrete to suit, to act like a shim. Pushing it in between the ratchet and the spring loaded locking mechanism would cause the cuff to unlock; it was (is) as simple as that. Most times the shim would appear to jam as it was pushed into the gap where ratchet meets cuff body, but pushing the ratchet one more click would force the shim all the way in, thus opening the cuff.

It was possible that – in the custody of the Zambians at least – the operator may be allowed to send a letter home. If he was given the chance then a good way of communicating with the Rhodesian authorities (who would examine it for hidden messages) would be to use invisible ink. The operator could produce his own invisible ink in the form of urine. This, used to write messages into an otherwise innocuous letter – which would be closely examined before forwarding – could convey a mass of information. It would be completely undetectable until those on the far end (who also knew the trick) subjected it to heat. The 'ink' would turn brown and become legible.

Using this method the operator could pass on the location of his camp details of how it was guarded, etc.

The author considers that, if at all possible, the SAS would look to mount a mission to rescue one of their own, with that in mind, the more information he could pass on the better. To counter

this, if they were switched on enough, those who were holding the operator captive would keep moving him round. This again could have been looked upon as an opportunity for escape.

# 11

## EPILOGUE

In summary, now that you've learned a little of how the Rhodesian SAS soldier was trained, you should begin to appreciate some of the reasons for his effectiveness during the bush war.

It was acknowledged throughout the SAS family that the Rhodesian regiment had the most war fighting experience of all the SAS units and the selection and training which the would be SAS operator went through was also among the toughest of any SF unit in the world. If he was successful in his bid to join the RhSAS, the man would be equipped with all the necessary skills to operate, fight and win under any possible circumstance.

# 12

## Other Reading

Thank you for reading this book and I hope you enjoyed it. For your information, the rest of the Andy Ryan 'They Who Dared' series is available in eBook and paperback format from Amazon. The list is as follows:

**Bravo Ten**

**The Rhodesian SAS: Their Most Daring Missions**

**A Few Good Men**

**The Raid on St Nazaire**

**Never Say Die**

**Line of Duty**

**Kill Pablo Escobar**

Other titles will be available over time.