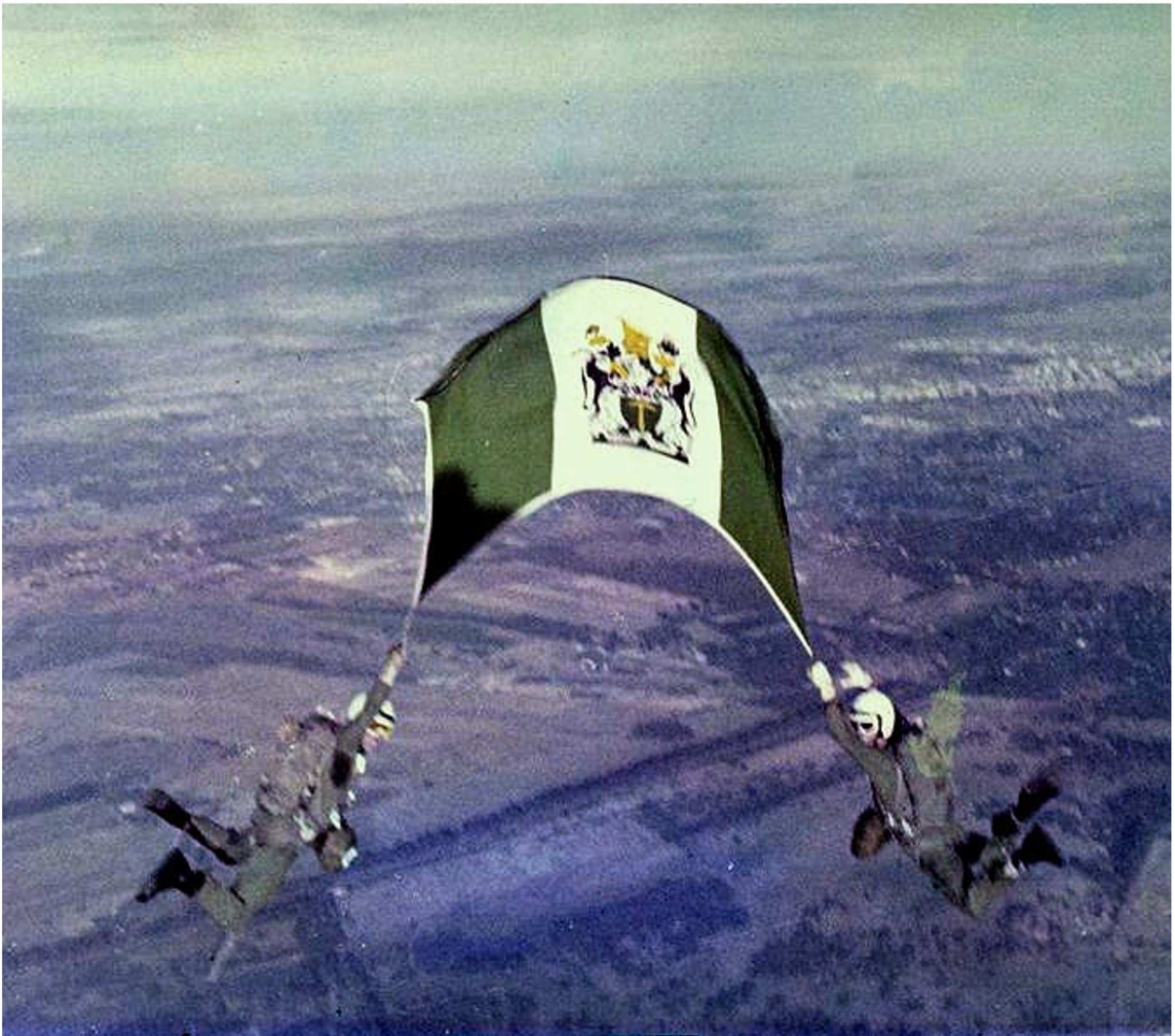


"ACTION STATIONS!"

*Parachute Training School
Rhodesian Air Force*



Kevin Milligan

"ACTION STATIONS!"

***Parachute Training School
Rhodesian Air Force***



Kevin Milligan
Parachute Jumping Instructor

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The front cover photograph shows the author and Mike Wiltshire jumping with the Rhodesian flag (photo by Frank Hales) and the back cover shows the Rhodesian Air Force Crest.

Writeup on the back cover by Brian Milligan.



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GLOSSARY

AK 47	Russian Assault rifle used by terrorists
BCR	Bronze Cross of Rhodesia
BSAP	British South Africa Police
ComOps	Combine Operations Headquarters
Dak or Paradak	Dakota aircraft
FN	Belgian Automatic Rifle used by Rhodesian Forces
DZ	Drop Zone
Fireforce	Rhodesian Army airborne/airmobile reaction force
FRELIMO	Front for the Liberation of Mocambique
G Car	Troop carrying Alouette 3 helicopter armed with twin Browning machine guns
GCV	Grand Cross of Valour
HAHO	High Altitude High Opening
HALO	High Altitude Low Opening
K Car	Fireforce Command Alouette 3 helicopter armed with 20mm Hispano cannon
MAG	Belgian Light Machine Gun used by Rhodesian Forces
Rapier	British Surface to Air Missile deployed by Zambian Forces
RAR	Rhodesian African Rifles
RhAF	Rhodesian Air Force
RLI	Rhodesian Light Infantry
RPD	Russian Light Machine Gun used by terrorists
RPG 7	Russian Rocket Propelled Grenade designed for Anti Tank but also used as Anti Aircraft by terrorists
SAM 7	Russian Surface to Air missile used by terrorists
SAS	Special Air Service
SCR	Silver Cross of Rhodesia
Stick	Rhodesian Army term for small unit of troops
ZANLA	ZANU's military wing, Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union (R.Mugabe)
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (J.Nkomo)
ZIPRA	ZAPU's military wing, Zimbabwe Peoples Revolutionary Army

FORWARD

I was requested to write a chapter for the book to be written by Peter Garratt on the History of the Rhodesian Parachute Training School. The chapter would relate my experiences as a Parachute Jumping Instructor during the time I served there. Several other PJI's would be doing the same thing as their contribution. It seemed like a great idea as so many things that happened would be lost in the mists of time if they were not recorded and also my family had asked from time to time that I write about my experiences. It was the opportunity to satisfy both needs.

For the history, the cut off point would be when Rhodesia ceased to exist and Independence was declared by the new Government, however, I continued to serve for some time after that so I have carried on my reminiscences up to the point when I left the Air Force.

This writing is not meant to be a definitive history for the student but only some highlights of my experiences which have been drawn from my logbook, with extensive reference to:

Pride Of Eagles - A History of the Rhodesian Air Force by Beryl Salt

The Elite – A History of the Rhodesian Special Air Service by Barbara Cole

Pamwe Chete – A History of the Selous Scouts by Lt Col R.F. Reid Daly CLM, DMM, MBE

Fire Force – by Dr. J.R.T. Wood. (An excellent paper on RLI actions.)

Counter Strike from the Sky - by Dr J. R. T. Wood

Emails and conversations with former PJI's, Airmen and Soldiers involved in the conflict.

In the case of "Op Cheese" I was able to refer to my draft of the Post Operational Report.

The RLI website.

In order to illustrate my text purely for the family, I have taken, without permission, from many sources such as Air Force Photographic Section, the above-mentioned publications, former serving personnel, the Internet and wherever else I could source them. I have written this particular chapter solely for the use of the family and because of the copyright now on the text because of the book and as the illustrations have been used without authorisation, in order to avoid any legal consequence, this must NOT be passed into the Public Domain in any way.

To gain a full understanding of the Geopolitical and military background to my writing one should read the aforementioned excellent books.

As you read, no doubt you will have questions but, by the time the whole chapter is read, those questions will be answered.

It must be remembered that at the times about which I write, the enemy were called Terrorists, commonly referred to as “terrs” because that is how we saw them and they did indeed apply terror tactics. We did not see them as "Freedom Fighters" and were fully aware of the atrocities they were committing on their own people in order to have their way. We saw their leaders, Mugabe and Nkomo, as communist monsters who would destroy our lovely country and were prepared fully to defend it.

In conventional warfare, success is normally measured by objectives achieved, territory gained or regained, battles won etc. You do not have this measure in a terrorist conflict and the method adopted to “measure” success was that of the body count or number of kills, which now

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sounds very macabre but then it was the norm!

It may seem that I glorify the conflict but I am very aware of the horror of war and saw many good men lost and severely wounded in the conflict. Hard action, however, has a way of bringing out the best in some men who show outstanding qualities of leadership, courage, initiative and endurance in a way that is not seen in peace time. Also the camaraderie created lasts for the rest of your life.

I hope you all enjoy the read as much I have in compiling it.

Kevin Milligan

Co Clare

Ireland

Part One

Signing Up

"ACTION STATIONS!"



PARACHUTE TRAINING SCHOOL
as seen by Chris "Schulies" Schulenberg, Grand Cross of Valour, Silver Cross

SIGNING UP

I joined the Rhodesian Air Force in February 1974 after being told of a Parachute Jumping Instructor vacancy by Denzil Ashworth, a motor mechanic in the MT section, who knew of my passion for parachuting. I was working at an engineering company in town at the time. Despite the salary drop, my wife Angie, knowing how I felt, said, "Kevin, if you want to do it, just go for it!"

I went to Air HQ to meet the Recruiting Officer, Trevor Smith. Imagine my surprise when, lo and behold, his brevet identified him as a PJI. He arranged for me to meet Derek De Kock, OC PTS, with the parting advice; "He's a good chap, but if he barks at you - bark back!" Subsequently, and with some trepidation I reported to PTS, only to discover that Derek was away and the interview was to be conducted by his second-in-command, Frank Hales. Frank, ex-British SAS and a Malayan veteran with scores of jumps and operations under his belt, was a true gentleman. He was also very discerning; he expressed concern that I was prepared to leave a better-paid job to become an under-training PJI (UTPJI).

Fearing a rejection I related that, at fourteen, I had joined the UK Air Training Corps and had thoroughly enjoyed my involvement with aircraft and their crews; how I had joined the 4th Para Battalion and proudly qualified for my wings at eighteen. (I did not tell him that, ironically, a few Rhodesian Air Force lads were also at Abingdon seeking to make the grade as PJIs and I met one of them, Norman Suttie. I never dreamed that one day I would join their ranks, let alone end up as OC PTS.) I explained to Frank that I loved the thrill of parachuting; whether from the hushed eeriness of a balloon or the clamorous Beverly Transport.

I revealed how I had been inexorably drawn to free-fall, like a moth to a light; jumping from a converted Tiger Moth at Thruxton had been exhilarating. The sport of skydiving was still in its infancy but this only added to the thrill of stepping off into space and falling free. I told him of my years in the Paras, accumulating military and sport jumps and how, when I moved to Zambia in 1969, working as a fitter, I had resurrected the Mufulira Skydiving club as its Chief Instructor. Frank sat quietly as I regaled him with tales of adventures there, and of how Zambian changes and a marriage had meant a move to Rhodesia.

Convinced that my passion overrode any financial concerns, Frank told me to get "signed up". It was to be the start of an incredible ten years. Incidentally, when I did meet Derek on my first official work day, he was equally charming, and I wondered how he had earned the nickname "knuckles". I was to learn that he was capable and dogged but not shy; he could be extremely outspoken when necessary!

In February 1974, activity at the school centred on training the SAS, and all levels – from basic static line courses and operational drops to High Altitude Low Opening (HALO) courses and parachuting trials – were comprehensively covered. Even then, PTS was already actively involved in dropping SAS on external operations. PTS also conducted "Parachute Familiarisation" for aircrew, which culminated in a water jump. The water jump was great fun and was rounded off with a braai and party on the shore. For water jumps, an un-inflated life jacket was worn under the parachute harness. Once you were under canopy you would loosen off the reserve parachute and by undoing the chest strap, you would inflate the jacket by blowing into the inflation tube until there was sufficient air to keep you afloat. Once you hit the water and bobbed back up to the surface you would operate the Capewell canopy releases to prevent being dragged. The nearby Army Engineers boat crews, in their Zodiac inflatables, would grab your canopy and pile it up neatly, take your reserve, and then pull

"ACTION STATIONS!"

you in. The system was easy, only took a couple of minutes and worked well.

Clive Bradnick a young 3 Squadron pilot remembers a water jump that he did:

"The water jump was a highlight of my Air Force Career. I originally did not want to do it, but gave into peer pressure. I never slept the night before, and was convinced that my parachute was not going to open. One thing I remember was Carlos (a fellow 3 Sqdn pilot) proclaiming loudly, just after we boarded the Dak, that his butt was clamped so tight the PJI's wouldn't be able to pull him off the bench. Everyone laughed and it relieved a lot of the tension. I was No. 1 in the second stick to jump and I remember after the first stick went, the recovery boats took longer than expected to pick them up, so the Dak did a few circuits before they were ready for us. I was already standing in the door but the long wait seemed to calm me down as I focused on the wing-tip. I wasn't going to back down at that stage and was able to give my exit technique a lot of thought. When the call came I hurled myself out in text-book fashion (well I thought so anyway), and what a ride. I've never been able to pluck up the courage to do it again though."

UTPJI

As a UT PJI, I was handed over to John Boynton for my training. He took me around the school – one half of an aircraft hanger. Modelled on RAF Abingdon, the school would later occupy the entire hangar and this would still be insufficient to meet our needs. Coir mats twisted our feet as we walked, and we were surrounded by suspended harnesses and an aircraft mock up. I recalled C.S. Lewis; "We regard God as an airman regards his parachute; it's there for emergencies but he hopes he'll never have to use it". Not here. High above our heads, nestled in the roof of the hanger, sat the infamous "fan trainer," known to paralyse many a hitherto fearless soldier. This was useful for us - a man who was likely to refuse an aircraft jump would baulk at the fan. I would get to know each piece of apparatus better than the back of my hand, but it was all so new to me then - a strange blend of nerves and excitement. I realised that my future trainees, looking up for the first time, would be far more anxious than I was, and would need plenty of encouragement.

John, a Brit who had served with Parachute Field Ambulance as a qualified medic and parachutist, was a very competent instructor.

With John it was either "right or wrong" - there were never any half measures, and no quarter was given. His standards were high – his work could mean the difference, after all, between life and death - and he was very well respected. I thought, because of my experience, that I knew about parachute instruction. John was to show me just how much I had to learn. He and the rest of the staff really put me through my paces, physically and emotionally. They worked me hard. Despite the rigours of training, or perhaps because of it, John and his team loved playing practical jokes on each other. Their humour characterised the school, and gave it life. Mike Wiltshire and John were renowned for being able to tell jokes all day without repeating themselves. When a course was running it was great fun. Tony Hughes, a fellow PJI, once mentioned in passing to Frank how much he enjoyed eating spicy food.

This was a bad idea - Frank had spent many years in Malaya with the SAS and knew his spices. The challenge was on, unbeknown to Tony. He was invited to dinner, and Frank prepared an Indian dinner that night. This is what happened in Tony's own words:

"Frank said at the start of the meal that I should add a few spoons of his personally prepared spicy sauce which I confidently did, thinking I could "handle" pretty much any chilli type sauce. After committing the first teaspoonful to my mouth I felt like a nuclear reaction was developing around my whole mouth, but I was too late to prevent myself from swallowing it. What followed was a sort of sensory meltdown. In quick order I lost visual acuity, lost the use of my nose as a breathing device, became uncontrollably breathless, experienced several pronounced adrenalin surges, began panting and, with everyone asking what was wrong, found myself speechless and in the throes of some thrillingly athletic palpitations! All the while, Frank watched me with that look of quiet amusement only he could use, and which clearly stamped me as an amateur when it came to eating things spicy."

You were never safe. On one occasion I was being checked just prior to doing a static line jump. This was an essential part of the drill. Charlie Buchan checked my front, and then went around to check the back. As he was checking he said, "Oh, what's this then? Packing wasn't the best". Out of the corner of my eye, I was horrified to see a flash of white material being extracted from the parachute pack. This was bad. Resigned, he shrugged and said, "Oh, don't worry, I'm sure it'll be ok," and stuffed the material back in again. The expression on my face must have been a treat until they all burst out laughing and Charlie withdrew his handkerchief from the parachute pack. He had neatly put it in when I wasn't looking.

One day I was to jump with a weapons container as part of my training. A large, empty, metal ammunition box was placed into the straps of the container to make the weight realistic. Several of these were stacked in the hangar. On the morning of the jump my parachute was laid out on the floor, ready for fitting and the weapons container I was to carry had been placed alongside it as I had prepared them the previous day. Mike Wiltshire ordered me to kit up and make my way out to the aircraft. Kitting up was easy, but I could hardly lift the container off the ground! Not wanting to lose face, I lumbered painfully out to the waiting Dakota, receiving uncomplimentary comments as I had kept the crew waiting. Somehow I managed to jump with both my load and a new found respect for those who regularly performed such drills in the field. The jump was followed by a small hike to clear the DZ. A lifetime later, and sweating profusely, I arrived at the RV, deposited my load and found Mike and Iain Bowen having a good laugh. I opened the container; the box had been loaded up with rocks!

Before parachuting commenced each day the aircrew would arrive at PTS for briefing. During briefing, the PJIs would sit around a coffee table with any new, unsuspecting crew. Suddenly John would call out, "Look out, here it comes!" and, tearing his feet off the floor, look frantically under his chair. The PJIs all followed suit, and, without fail, so would the panic-stricken rookies. Then, sighing heavy relief, John and the others would put their feet down, and continue as normal. One minute later, the charge would return, "Look out, here it comes again!" and the performance would be repeated in earnest. It could take four rounds and bellowing laughter before the credulous crews realised that they were not under attack from deadly scorpions or giant cobras but from John's wacky sense of humour. Not to be outdone, Mike told a young Canadian lad that the coir mats were growing a bit long and needed to be trimmed! He sent the unwitting underling to Safety Equipment Section to collect the trimmer, which he assumed was like a lawn mower. They quickly cottoned on and sent him to Motor Transport section. They sent him on to another section and so on. By the time

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he returned - much later - he had been sent all around the camp. It was like that most days!

JUMP PHASE

The day of my first jump arrived and it was to be from the venerable C47 Dakota, itself a thrill as I had only seen it in the movies prior to joining. The Dakota, nicknamed the "Gooney Bird", had a magnificent and well-deserved reputation and was to serve faithfully throughout the bush war. I realised that it was quite different from the C130 from which I had last jumped in UK. The C130 was much bigger and had a higher drop speed. However in both cases all static lines were hooked up to an overhead cable. As we climbed, I ran through the flight drills in my head - well aware of the need to do them well. They ran like a song, they were so well ingrained;

- "Look up, check canopy" – if malfunctioned, operate reserve. If rigging lines are twisted, kick legs in opposite direction until cleared. Even on correct deployment, there were still hazards, and drills for all, particularly concerning collision;
- "All round observation" - if another para close, use opposite lift web to steer away; if collision imminent, spread-eagle, "bounce" off lines and prevent entanglement, both steer away; if clear below, lower weapons container. Going through the drills were a sharp reminder of the possible dangers we faced.

On my first jump in UK after getting my wings, and feeling proud and confident, I exited successfully, only to find myself about to collide with another para. Despite the rigours of training and the constant drilling, you always hope that you will never need to apply them, and I was caught in a panic. I wrenched on my lift web, but I was too slow to steer away. With my confidence ripped out of me, I realised entanglement would be inevitable. In desperation, I turned my head, spread-eagling in order to "bounce" off his lines, but this proved futile. Within seconds we were entangled, with no way of disengaging. To be so trapped, high above the ground, and to be dragged so inexorably towards it, fully aware of our plight, was traumatic to say the least. That day, two factors worked in our favour – I guess it just "wasn't our turn"! To begin with, we were both able to lower our equipment, also our rate of descent was not increased too significantly. As we became more aware of this, we prepared more for a rough landing than inevitable injury. The second point, that we plunged onto soft, marshy ground, was incredible, or fateful, or providential, depending on your viewpoint. Believe me, both went through our minds that day. We both emerged without a scratch. We were okay! It was a valuable lesson learned, and one of many. Such was the nature of the game we played.

Before long, in the Dak, John called out to me to, "Stand up, Hook up. Check equipment!"

Every first time parachutist is grateful for these practical checks – anything to take their minds off the imminent plunge! I was fortunate in having many jumps under my belt but I well remembered the feeling. I stood up and snapped the static line hook onto the overhead cable, making sure the safety pin was correctly secured before doing my checks:

- "Static line hooked up and running clear to the pack";
- "Helmet secure";
- "Capewells secure";

- "Reserve secure on upper d-rings;"
- "Quick Release Box in locked position and safety clip inserted;"
- "Body band secure".

"Tell off for Equipment Check."

I called out "One OK, Port stick OK!"

"Action Stations" were called. As taught, I did the shuffle step down to the door. This is a series of half steps, created to ensure that you arrive at the door with the left foot leading. I stopped one pace back from the door, my left hand placed atop the door frame, my snap hook slid along the cable. I looked through a thousand feet of blue sky at the DZ. It was a long way down if anything went wrong. My heart was pounding as the red light flashed on and John called "Stand in the Door". I could almost taste the adrenalin coursing through my expectant frame. It was exactly the same feeling before every jump I did – the thrill never lessened.

I took a check step forward. Left foot leading, placed on the sill of the door. Left hand placed outside the door frame at hip level, knees bent to enable a good drive out against the slipstream, which I could feel buffeting my front. Eyes fixed on the horizon. As I waited for the green light, I told myself this had to be a good one; all would be watching my performance. It was the moment of truth. As "Boss" De Kock would say, this was the "common denominator"; regardless of rank, driving out on the next step into open sky and whatever awaited demanded a determined courage. The green came on and John called "Green on - Go!"

To exit from the "Dak" you would drive out hard to counteract the battering slipstream, and then quickly bring your legs together and cross your arms across the reserve until the canopy deployed. On the ground, this would have been simple. However, the knowledge that a bad body position in the slipstream could flip you like a pancake and may cause canopy malfunction made this task vital, but anything but simple. As you fell for those first, defining seconds, the slipstream pummelled your body at over 100 miles an hour, forcing your legs upwards until you were almost in a sitting position. As the canopy deployed you would return to the vertical.

MY FIRST DAKOTA JUMP

I felt myself driving out and snapping into the exit position – all real, conscious thought vanishing as the hours of training took over. As my feet rose up in front of me I raised my head to see that most lovely of sights - a canopy blossoming, perfectly shaped; all was safe. Then, a split second of panic as it "breathed" by closing slightly, (why didn't I remember that?) then fully opening! The silence under the canopy is always so striking after the noise of the aircraft. I found myself suspended under a khaki mushroom cloud, dropping slowly in the quiet African sunshine. A wonderful, though short-lived, experience.

Now for the Flight Drills. For my first jump I decided to exaggerate slightly so the instructors could clearly see from the ground that I was doing them correctly.

- "Look up check canopy"
- "All round observation"

"ACTION STATIONS!"

- "Kick out of seat strap"
- "Adopt the Parachuting Position"

The Parachuting Position played an important part in a successful parachute landing; fast, hard landings on operations were only possible through the correct use of well-drilled PLFs (Parachute Landing Falls), which would spread the impact of the landing over the muscled parts of the body. The PLF called for the legs to be held firmly together, feet held parallel to the ground, knees slightly bent, elbows tucked into the side of the head with arms reaching up on the lift webs. The harness strap under the buttocks, the seat strap, was wide on the type of parachute that we used however, and unless it was physically slipped off the buttocks by kicking one's legs, the legs could not hang vertically below the body; rendering a good PLF difficult. Many an initially successful jump fell prey to a hard landing as a result of poor form. After kicking hard and ensuring my seat strap was clear, I tucked my chin firmly onto my chest - the weight of my steel helmet could cause painful whiplash - forced my knees together and steeled myself for what was to be a good landing.

"Assess drift". I looked down to get my bearings and check the direction of drift. The impression is that the ground is slowly rising to meet you, then it comes in an adrenalin-fuelled rush as you are about to land. I selected the lift webs opposite to the direction of my drift. At an elevation of about ten metres, I pulled down on them firmly to retard speed and effect a slower touch down.

On the ground, I was surprised at how soft the landing was with the 35-foot canopy and was chuffed with myself. In training, Paras would, at this moment, look up at the sky and heave a sigh of relief at having thwarted the twin gods of fate and gravity whilst carrying on with their further drills; "Operate Capewell canopy release, (to prevent being dragged), unclip one side of reserve, release body band, remove safety clip and operate quick release box, exit harness". This would all be carried out whilst lying flat on the ground, only then would they stand up, field pack the parachute and then clear the DZ ASAP. When jumping with a weapon this would be readied immediately after they had released the body band. If jumping with a weapons container or bergen rucksack they would pull this in towards themselves immediately after readying their weapon. On operations they would not field pack their parachutes but immediately clear the DZ. The basic drills were straightforward and from 1000ft quite easy but, from 500ft, which was the operational drop height, they had to be carried out very slickly!

I cleared the DZ and I was duly briefed and told to accelerate my drills and keep my knees tight together during the PLF. I had thought they were! Iain Bowen also suggested that I would have had an even better exit if I deliberately raised my feet and looked at them over the reserve as soon as I cleared the door. I tried it after that and he was right. That summed up the PTS for me – exacting standards and sage advice.

My training with John was to prepare me to teach these techniques effectively. I was reminded time and time again that poor instruction on my part could lead to a trainee's injury or even death. It was a responsibility the school was acutely aware of. During my time at the school very many people came for PJI training, some of them fine soldiers and brave parachutists. Many, however, were failed because they could not meet the school's standards of instruction or safety awareness. The school's motto was adopted from the RAF PTS motto "Knowledge dispels fear" and this proved true time and again. It was the PJIs job to impart knowledge and confidence to such an extent that the trainee would not hesitate when the moment of truth came and he stood at the jump

door for the first time.

I was pleased with the jump and was to do many more, progressing to full equipment jumps and larger sticks as I jumped with the staff or SAS on courses. Most exhilarating was the night jump with full equipment. This was doubly frightful as, after exiting and running through flight drills you were forced to wait blindly for the ground to come up from the inky darkness and smite you. Whether you landed on soft ground, a tree or a barbed-wire fence was like Russian roulette – pure chance. The nature of these jumps was both nerve-wracking and addictive. I loved it.

DESPATCHER TRAINING

Once you were considered a competent parachutist, then you were taught despatching techniques. This was a job with heavy responsibility, entailing checking the safety of the men and the integrity of the aircraft, in a world where mistakes could be fatal. These checks ranged from testing kit and allocating sticks to ensuring removal of the jump door, confirming the security of the overhead cable and lights on board and checking the functionality of the intercom, spare reserve and HUPRA (Hung Up Parachutist Release System). It was not taken lightly.

Trainee Paras would be emplaned and seated according to their "stick" or group number. After take off, in preparation for the jump, it was the No. 1 despatcher's job to relay instructions from the pilot to the other two despatchers, who would also ensure that personal weapon containers were correctly fitted for each man; that they were hooked up correctly and that everything was prepared for the jump. For all jumps, despatchers would position themselves on either side of the door; No. 2 on the tail-side, No. 3 directly opposite. The No. 1 was positioned alongside the No. 2 but in such a position that he could ensure that static lines were slid correctly along the cable and clear of the paras arm as he turned into the door. (There had been one incident some time previous to my joining where a young SAS officer accidentally tangled his arm with the static line as he jumped. The result was that the line tightened around his hand as he fell from the aircraft and the shear force tore off some fingers!) The despatchers would physically channel the stick to the door. The No. 3 despatcher ensured they did not cut corners on approach to the door - vital, as this could lead to shoulders, packs or rifle butts hitting the door frame on exit, jeopardising the exit.

When the red light illuminated, No. 2 would command, "Stand in the Door". The first man in the stick would position himself, his heart racing, in the door for exit, and would be held firmly by the other despatchers to prevent him jumping before the Green Light came on, or, much worse, falling out - turbulent run-ins at low altitude were frequent. On green, No. 2 would call, "Green on - Go!" and the stick leader would disappear into the unforgiving slipstream, initiating a steady charge out of the door, directed by No. 2 calling, "and two, and three, and four" until the required number – as many as twenty-four men - had jumped, or as many as possible before the red light signified that any further jumpers would overshoot the DZ. In the event of the red light coming on mid-stick, the despatchers would physically block the door to prevent further jumps. The aircraft would then re-circle with the remainder – not ideal in war for obvious reasons.

In training, the speed of the sticks would initially be slow, and it was the PJI's role to ensure acceleration - to avoid a second run-in but maintain safety - as the paras gained proficiency. The ideal was to dispatch the stick as quickly as possible; despite heightened risk of in-flight collision, this would facilitate close landings and enable mutual fire support. It was very rewarding for a PJI to see a fast, clean stick of elite paras on an operational jump. They would really close up on each other in the

"ACTION STATIONS!"

aircraft and, when the green light came on, virtually run out of the aircraft.

You will hear people say that paras get "thrown" out of the aeroplane. This is a fallacy. Each man has to jump well clear of the aircraft; otherwise his face would "count the rivets" down the side of the fuselage when he jumped. Despatchers would instead pull any refusals clear of the door as quickly as possible, in order to allow the rest of the stick to jump before the DZ was overshot. Pushing a man out could well result in fatality; any despatcher's primary concern is safety, not numbers jumped, and death is too heavy a responsibility to have hanging on your head. Besides, if a man decided to refuse, a charging bull wouldn't get him out of that door. Thankfully, due to the excellent training and the paras' courage and loyalty to each other, this rarely happened. Though we had several refusals from the infamous fan, I can only recall one man refusing to jump from an aircraft through the duration of my time at PTS.

Once the troops were despatched, the static lines and deployment bags which trailed outside the aircraft had to be reined in and removed from the cable. For the jump-run, the pilot would have throttled back the aircraft and put it into a shallow dive to ensure that the protruding tail wheel on the Dak was well clear of the deploying canopies. If a stick of 24 had jumped it could be quite a job to pull the bags in against the force of the slipstream. Knowing this, the pilots would sometimes increase power just prior to collection, and the bags would go whizzing out again. Even despatchers were not safe from the humour which characterised the PTS – they would struggle bitterly to re-secure them. One advantage to being a despatcher, though, was that standard practice after despatching paras on training jumps was to climb to 8 or 10,000 feet for a free fall jump. Great fun.

MUTUAL INSTRUCTION

Once I had completed my despatching phase successfully, it was time to move onto the Mutual Instruction phase. The main role of the PJI is not jumping as such, but instructing and despatching. He has to have a very high competency in both, because of the ever-present risk of an injury or fatality due to poor technique. Initially, John trained me on a one-to-one basis, but he then seconded other PJIs to become my "trainees". This was one of the hardest phases of the training; they would behave like the worst trainees and, knowing every mistake and trick in the book, tried them all out on me. At times I almost despaired, but there were also, typically, many laughs. Eventually, I was able to spot the mistakes and how to rectify them, and I was ready to be let loose on my first course, under the eagle eye of John and the others. On many occasions Boss de Kock or Frank Hales would discreetly join the class and observe my instruction.

Each PJI was allocated a section of trainees. He would run the entire course with them, and was therefore entirely responsible for their training and development. A basic course consisted of 8 jumps before qualification. In the early days, the first week of the course began with ground training, which included a demonstration jump by the staff in full combat kit and culminated in "Flight Experience". Many Paras had never flown before so they were kitted up, boarded onto the Dak and taken up as if for a normal drop. They would "Hook Up," "Stand up" and "Check Equipment" before being brought down to the door where, one by one, they would adopt the "Stand in the Door" position - firmly held by two PJIs. They were then moved back, unhooked and re-seated. When all were done, the aircraft would return to base. The pilots, well aware of their fragile cargo, delighted in throwing the airplane about a bit, especially since the negative G's would throw the green Paras up out of their seats.

Flight Experience was, however, a luxury that time could not afford, and as the war progressed and PTS became ever busier Flight Experience was scrubbed from the programme. Subsequent weeks focused on the "Jump Phase". The first day of the week would commence with training for a real jump which would take place the very next day. On that day, trainees would arrive, kit up, run checks and be ready for take off at 6am. This early start was ideal as the weather, and the novices, were generally calm, relatively speaking.

The pilots, briefed beforehand in the PTS crew room by the DZ Safety Officer, would initially run in at 1,000 feet and drop a drifter. The drifter might be anything; the PTS Mascot, "Freddy Bear", on a pilot chute, a PJI, or a qualified Para doing continuation training. This allowed the pilot to adjust his run in accordingly; trainees were then dropped in small sticks. They would jump without equipment, commonly known as a "clean fatigue". PJIs were positioned on the DZ and would issue instructions - and sometimes offer their frank opinions - to the airborne apprentices through loud hailers. Each trainee was carefully observed and his performance recorded for later critique.

PJIs would devote extra time to the slower performers but this was not always successful. A trainee could find himself being failed and RTU'd or "Returned to Unit" for consistently poor performance - for his own sake. Sometimes even exceptional soldiers were just not cut out for parachuting. After the drop, trainees and staff would double back to the hangar, singing their airborne chants, then down to the mess for breakfast. Following this, it was back to the school for a full critique, then training for the next day's jump. The routine was then much the same for each week, as they progressed from clean fatigue to rifle and webbing, and then to rifle, webbing and weapons container (or CSPEP to give it its correct name - Carrying Straps Personal Equipment Parachutist). Additionally as they progressed, sticks became longer and jump heights lowered.

The final jump was with a full stick of twenty men, fully loaded, and despatched from 500 feet; the penultimate, a night jump. On one occasion we were conducting a night jump using the site of the model aeroplane club near New Sarum as the DZ. It was a good, open area, but was bordered at one end by some very tall blue gum trees. A young RLI troopie drifted off the DZ and landed in the uppermost branches of the tallest of them. He could not get down. Eventually we were forced to call the Municipality Fire Brigade. The fire engine extended its long ladder, but even that fell short of the up-ended troopie. "Spider" Webb - a nickname, but very appropriate as it happened - one of the firemen, scaled the tree by repeatedly throwing a rope over branches and hauling himself up to them. He kept climbing higher and higher until, to great cheers from the crowd below, he reached the somewhat shaken troopie. Spider then secured him and lowered him down before descending himself. Both were fine, and a crate of beers was delivered to the Fire Station the next day, courtesy of Frank Hales. Tragically, the troopie was killed in a contact shortly thereafter, though the image of him, caught up in the tops of the tree, is still alive in our minds.

The first section that I put through the course was a young group just joining the SAS. They had a great attitude and they were excellent trainees. There were no major problems; I could not have asked for a better class. Afterwards, as they paraded for their Wings Presentation, I felt as proud as they were. I knew what they had been through to earn them and had quickly built a great rapport with them. Under the circumstances, bonds could be built very rapidly between a PJI and his trainees; forty years on, I still fondly remember Sgt. Riley, my own instructor at Abingdon.

FREE FALL

In between courses, which were not so often or so large at that stage of the war, my own instruction continued and I learned the techniques of military free fall. I had done several hundred sport jumps prior to this in Civvy Street and the technique was to begin with five static line jumps, three of them whilst going through the motions of pulling the ripcord. If the instructor was happy, he then took you up for your first free fall, a momentous occasion. It was usually just a "hop and pop", pulling the ripcord almost as soon as you were clear of the aircraft, but it was a great thrill. The delay before deployment would then be increased gradually, as you were taught body control. This freed you to do turns, back somersaults, spins and recovery from them, and tracking across the sky. Once you had demonstrated all of these proficiencies, you were deemed to be "qualified".

The Military system was radically different. The first jump would be from 6,000 feet with an incredible twenty-five second delay; falling under control for the duration, and only pulling the ripcord to open the chute at 2,500 feet. In the event of a malfunction, you were to immediately operate both Capewell releases causing you to fall clear of the malfunction, then operate your reserve. In sport parachuting, we commenced with chutes which were "steerable" rather than manoeuvrable until we had completed fifty jumps. Only then could we progress onto the Para Commander chute which was a lot more manoeuvrable. In the military, free-fall training began with the TAP 3 Dominator; though larger than the Para Commander, it was still relatively very manoeuvrable.

This more accelerated method was possible because of the quality of the trainees, who were already static line qualified, and advances in technology which permitted parachutes to have automatic openers – the parachute opened automatically at a certain height, independent of the pulling of the ripcord. Initially, a Sentinel – a device mounted on the reserve - was used, but later the KAP 3 was adopted as it was mounted on the main and was therefore more practical. Sentinels were set before take off and functioned through barometric pressure. They were operated at a set height, normally 1,500 feet AGL (above ground level). If the free-faller was still falling at a high speed as he went through that level the Sentinel would activate, withdrawing the ripcord pins and deploying the chute.

On one occasion, some time after I had qualified, I had despatched some men on a static line jump and was climbing up to 8,000 feet for a free fall with some other instructors. I removed the safety harness used for despatching and picked up my reserve to fit it. I then realised I had forgotten to set the Sentinel. I quickly did so, and then finished kitting up. We duly ran in at 8000ft and the PJI's jumped, with myself at the rear. I went into a steep dive to follow the other instructors down. As I closed on them, at about 4,500 feet, I sensed something was drastically wrong. I looked down to my reserve in time to see that it had opened and the pilot chute and canopy were disappearing through my legs.

As I was falling at about 150mph, the canopy opened with a vicious jerk, throwing me violently into a forward somersault and nastily lashing my head. I immediately felt an agonising, burning pain running down from my neck to my fingertips; my arms went limp and hung lifeless at my side. Thankfully, my canopy was open. 4,000 feet below me, alongside the drop zone, the Radio Sections aerial farm – essentially a field with a mighty array of deadly aerials and interconnecting wires – leered at me. Not an attractive sight if you thought you were going to land in amongst them. It loomed close, seemed to swallow me up, and I was helpless to do anything about it. Then I was

carried clear and came crashing down near the DZ.

Two instructors sprinted over to see what was wrong and got me down to the camp hospital. The pain in my fingertips was severe. The doctor diagnosed a damaged nerve in my neck. I was laid off jumping and it took weeks for the feeling in my fingers to return to normal. It took a lot longer than that for me to forget how close I was to being badly hurt. On top of that I got a mighty blasting from the Boss for being so dumb as to set my Sentinel in the aircraft. It had fired 1,500 feet above the height of the aircraft when I set it and not 1,500 feet AGL. A painful lesson!

The stabiliser was an excellent piece of training apparatus which also assisted with the accelerated free-fall programme. It consisted of a free-fall harness connected to a block and tackle by which the trainee could be pulled clear of the floor. The trainee would strap into the harness, complete with reserve and adopt the "Stand in the door" position. On the Instructors command "Go" he would jump forward and the rest of the class would immediately haul on the rope raising the trainee about 5 metres. As the trainee jumped forward he would simultaneously turn to simulate facing into the slipstream and adopt the "stable" position; back arched, head back, arms and legs spread. In this position he would fall face down and, if symmetrical, would fall without turning. If the arch was reversed, he would fall with his back to the ground – understandably undesirable during deployment! Any asymmetry would cause a turn which, if not corrected, could become an irrecoverable spin; again, not desirable.

The instructor could check for the correct position whilst the trainee was suspended in the harness. On the instructor's command, "2,500 now!" the trainee would operate the ripcord and the harness would release him into an upright position to simulate the canopy opening. If the instructor called, "Malfunction!" he would immediately operate both Capewells which, in reality, would cutaway the malfunctioned canopy. In the stabiliser he fell about one foot before being suspended again whilst operating his "dummy" reserve. The trainee was also able to practice steering, by pulling down on either the right or left toggle to turn the canopy, stalling the canopy to rapidly lose height if desired by pulling down fully on both toggles and flaring the canopy for a softer landing, at which time he was lowered to the ground and the next "victim" kitted up. It was nicknamed the "nut cracker" - prolonged use had that effect!

Occasionally, there was a bit of mischief to be had. As tea time approached and the last trainee was hoisted up in the stabiliser, the instructor would go through all the drills but then wink at the rest of the class. They would tie off the rope and all disappear for tea. The hapless trainee would remain, suspended too high to drop clear, calling for help until someone felt sorry for him. No one would rush to the rescue. Once, this backfired. When Paul Hogan was demonstrating to his class, Dennis Croukamp - a brave and notorious Selous Scout free faller with a keen sense of mischief - had the class pull the same stunt on Paul. He had to be rescued some time later by the staff who heard him shouting for help.

Another very useful piece of apparatus was a typist's swivel chair with the back removed. The trainee would position himself face down on the chair and adopt the stable position. The instructor could correct his position by physically adjusting his limbs until it was correct. It could also be used to simulate turns by adjusting legs or arms as the trainee swivelled on the stool. By adjusting the arms or legs the trainee could learn to turn, spin and correct, back slide, forward slide or track across the sky, all of which he needed to know if he were to be able to form up on others during free fall. It worked surprisingly well.

Something else that helped the rapid progression of free-fall was improved observation.

Trainees were observed from the aircraft by the despatcher and from the ground using very powerful binoculars called telemeters. They could then be carefully critiqued and corrected. Many times a para would be followed in free fall by his instructor too; Derek De Kock and Frank Hales pioneered the use at the school of jumping with a helmet-mounted gun camera. (The gun camera had originally been mounted in an aircraft's wing and would operate whenever the pilot fired his guns. The film could then be reviewed to see his strikes.) Filming the trainee and playing it back for critique proved superb training material, but the cameras then were heavy and cumbersome compared to cameras now.

I often wonder if it gave Derek neck problems in later years - it was very hard on the neck as the canopy cracked open after falling at about 120 mph!

My progress through the free fall phase was rapid and exhilarating. A successful initial jump from 4,500 feet - Frank Hales in tow – soon developed to regular jumps from 8,000 feet or higher, doing all the various manoeuvres required of me. I had not free-falled with equipment before; it was quite an experience, and quite different from static line technique. While standing in the shoulder straps, the bulky Bergen rucksack would be hoisted up behind you and connected, via quick release hooks, to the reserve harness d-rings. Cumbersome and unwieldy in the aircraft, this allowed for greater stability in free-fall. During run-in, you position yourself near the door then, on "Red on," take position in the door-frame, looking toward the engine. The green light flares, the dispatcher strikes you on the leg, calling "Go!" and you drive out into the unfeeling slipstream, turning to face it full on. It is a great feeling to ride the blast momentarily and watch the aircraft as you fall away, gradually dipping until you are hurtling face down towards the earth at over 120 mph. You feel the wind pressing on your limbs and face and the only sound is the rush of the wind.

Once stability has been achieved, you carefully dip your head forward to check your altimeter. Carefully, since any exaggerated movement could cause a reverse arch and a possible flip over. Having established altitude, you pick a spot or "heading" on the horizon and hold that steady, correcting the beginnings of twists and turns by small hand or arm movements.

By now, for trainees, an instructor could be falling opposite, carefully watching adjustments with a big grin of reassurance. This encouragement was vital. Your legs tend to be pushed higher than normal behind you as the rush of air forces the Bergen upwards. This could cause a forward slide so, as you have been taught, you bend your legs until the position is recovered. The Bergen's positioning on your legs could initiate a spin; you had to position one arm so as to prevent this. Stability entailed constant readjustment, and the difficulty was enhanced for the trainee as you bobbed your head up and down, alternating between altimeter and heading checks. From 3,000 feet you kept your eye fixed on the altimeter, watching until it indicated 2,500 feet; deployment!

Initially, deploying was no mean feat; instability could lead to malfunction and a series of well-rehearsed manoeuvres was essential. You would have to draw your left arm in towards your body, forward of the head to prevent the hard opening shock which resulted from a head-down opening. At the same time, eyes focussed on the ripcord as you guided your right hand down to it, and pulled, sweeping the left arm out again to maintain body symmetry. Seeing the mushroom cloud billowing out above your head was always a relief.

Once your canopy has opened, you need to carry out all the drills:

- "Check canopy";
- "All round observation";
- "Note the position of the DZ and turn to "run" towards it";

- “Operate the quick release hooks”.

This latter allowed the Bergen to slide down your legs until the shoulder straps caught on your feet. This was unlike jumping static line with kit, where the kit is fully lowered on a suspension rope before landing. If lowered like this, the Bergen would be dangerous in turns; it would swing out quite wildly, causing the canopy to bank and putting you in a perilous position for impact. After steering towards the DZ and the target, you turned into wind for landing. You then kicked the Bergen off your legs - just before making contact. Though talking about it now it seems like a lot to ask, I was impressed with how well the Bergen jumps went at PTS, and how quickly paras learnt how to free-fall with the Bergen. After my initial Bergen drop, I would do a lot more until it became second nature. Once mastered I was then able to do free fall jumps as often as possible - either following trainees for a critique or practicing relative work jumps with other PJIs, where we would link up during free fall before tracking away from each other for opening. The old adage springs to mind - it was a tough job, but someone had to do it!

At that time we were not doing night time free fall. The SAS were carrying out clandestine insertions into Mozambique to harass the terrorist groups operating from there. On operations so far, it was normal for the SAS "Pathfinder" team, normally four men, to free fall in at last light. They would then locate a suitable DZ for a larger group of men to drop that night by static line. The Pathfinders would make radio contact with the aircraft as it blindly approached, guiding the pilot towards the unmarked DZ. The Pathfinders - not the despatchers - would call "red on" and "green on" to despatch the troops at what they considered to be the appropriate time. Considering drift, poor light and inconsistent weather conditions, it was surprisingly effective and used frequently.

On the 19 January, about a year before I joined, the first external airborne operation was being airlifted into Mozambique. At last light Derek de Kock despatched two four-man teams into the Tete area from 11,000 feet. The drop of the first group went well. Tragedy struck, however, in the second drop. Frank Wilmot's parachute "failed to open". Chris Schollenberg, the team leader, had seen Frank falling past him in a spin, whilst his own canopy successfully deployed. Frank Wilmot's body and parachute were recovered, and an investigation concluded that Frank, while trying to control an accelerating spin, had possibly passed out. It was a heart-rending beginning to free fall operations, and a brutal reminder of just how dangerous this profession could be. Despite the misfortune, however, the pathfinders pursued their task. They successfully talked in a drop of 20 SAS troops, and caused a month of havoc amongst rebels who thought themselves inviolate, so far from Rhodesia.

QUALIFICATION

Eventually, after many static line and free fall jumps, both with and without equipment, by day and by night; many, many lesson tutorials and after running two courses, I was presented with my PJI Brevet. It was September, 1974. It was one of my proudest achievements, and I was soon to realise that it was only the beginning.

THE FIGHT INTENSIFIES

Receiving my brevet was to coincide with greater activity in the war and the creation of the now well-known Fire Force. Initially, only the SAS were being para trained, then Lt. Col. Ron Reid Daly, himself a qualified parachutist with service in the Malayan Scouts SAS, could see the need for his Selous Scouts to be para trained. The Selous Scouts comprised of both White and Black troops. Many of us wondered if African soldiers might refuse on their first jump, not realising that, in 1961, when the school was being established, they had been amongst the first to qualify as Paras. When our first Selous Scouts course did commence, I remember how impressed we were at the school with RSM Mavengere who, despite being well over forty, still insisted on being one of the first Scouts to do the course. The RSM found the ground training physically punishing, but it was only an injury on his fourth jump that forced him to quit. Even then he enrolled on a subsequent course, not only to earn his wings but also subsequently to qualify as a free faller. He was an outstanding example to his men; exactly what he had intended. The Scouts on that first course qualified and impressed us all. After that it was the norm to run courses for both units, and it was not long before we were training both SAS and the Selous Scouts as HALO jumpers.

Training African Soldiers to be HALO jumpers was a first for the school at that time. Again we had our doubts. Again we were proved wrong. Ron Reid Daly knew it was a necessity if he was to infiltrate his mixed teams on operations, and he knew better than us the true quality of his men. The ones that we trained proved their worth time and again. Certainly all the SAS and Selous Scouts HALO men that I worked with were outstanding, as were their achievements. Two of these from the Selous Scouts were Chris Schollenberg and Stephen Mpofu who carried out some incredible, deep, clandestine insertions with excellent results. They teamed up remarkably well. Schollie won the Silver Cross with the SAS before transferring to Scouts where he received the highest award, The Grand Cross of Valour, one of only two, and Stephen the Silver Cross, although it is said he earned a GCV too.

Grahame Wilson, an SAS free faller was the other recipient of the GCV.

As operational drops increased in frequency, we quickly realised that older methods needed to be more accommodating.

Experience was showing that having weapons to hand on landing was essential; in some cases contact was being made on landing. The old Brit methods which PTS had copied of carrying kit and weapons in containers which were lowered and suspended on a five metre rope for landing were revised. For Fire Force operations, where heavy equipment was rendered unnecessary, parachute harnesses were fitted over webbing and ammo pouches and rifles or MAGs were secured to the reserve upper d-ring and the harness body band. A soldier could literally bring his weapon to bear within seconds of landing - and frequently had to. If there was a need to jump with bulky, heavier equipment then a container would still be used, but weapons and webbing were still worn on the troopie. Later on, it became practice for RLI troops to be issued with pistols. These were secured under the pack opening bands on the reserve; troops could use them if caught up in a tree or, more frequently, whilst descending right onto waiting rebels.

On one SAS external operation into a rebel camp in Zambia, Captain Colin Willis was hooked between two trees. As he struggled to release his rifle, he spotted a group of ten rebels running quickly towards him. Grateful for the weapon, he drew his pistol and fired desperately down into the group, slowing their advance. He held them off and saw one rebel fall at his feet before another para

was finally able to open fire and neutralise the threat. Colin was then able to swing himself across to one of the trees, release the harness and drop clear, to his profound relief. Having the pistols sometimes had downsides, though. On a bush trip with Fire Force, I saw a young RLI lad with a neat, round scar on each side of his calf. I asked him if he had been wounded, and he laughed before revealing his story. He had been kitted up, and was waiting for the call to "scramble" when a fly landed on his leg. Playfully, he withdrew his pistol, cocked it and pretended to blow the fly away. Both he and the fly got more than they had bargained for; he had forgotten that he had already chambered a round. Oops!

This method of carrying equipment on the body worked well, as did the operational drop height of 500 feet. These two allowed for an extremely quick reaction in a contact and outstanding drop accuracy; vital for the safety of the troops. Though the low drop height meant that the use of the reserve required very quick reactions in the event of a malfunction, the Saviac MK 1 main parachute proved very reliable – the need to use the reserve was almost negligible. Almost. On another SAS external drop Sgt. Dave O'Mulligan jumped with his stick from 500 feet. While the others floated down above him, Dave found himself swiftly closing with the deadly ground. He operated his reserve but before this could fully deploy he was crashing down into trees. Incredibly, either the malfunctioned canopy or the half-opened reserve caught up in the treetops and suspended him before he could hit the ground. I guess it just wasn't his time, either. A close shave - the only such incident I have heard of.

With the increase in activity, more PJIs were being trained by John and it was not long before Paul Hogan and Pete Marshall joined the fold. This meant that PTS was represented by a global force of Rhodesian, English, Scottish, Irish and Australian staff, soon to be followed by Americans too. Our own Foreign Legion. As it happened, one of the later PJIs, Chris Pessara, was an ex Legionnaire. In another era, Churchill spoke about "The Few" who did so much during the Battle of Britain. Well, we had our "Few" as well! In relation to their numbers, their achievements were outstanding.

"ACTION STATIONS!"



JOHN BOYNTON



IAN BOWEN TEACHING PLF'S ON THE MATS



AND FROM THE HIGH RAMP



**MIKE WILTSHIRE TEACHING FLIGHT DRILLS IN
THE FLIGHT SWINGS**



TRAINEE EXITS FROM THE FAN EXIT TRAINER



CHARLIE BUCHAN CHECKS MAIN PARACHUTES



RALPH MOORE CHECKS RESERVE PARACHUTES



**PARAS ABOUT TO EMPLANE WITH WEAPONS
CONTAINERS**



**PARAS EMPLANE WITH RIFLE AND
WEBBING**

"ACTION STATIONS!"



DAKOTAS ON RUN IN



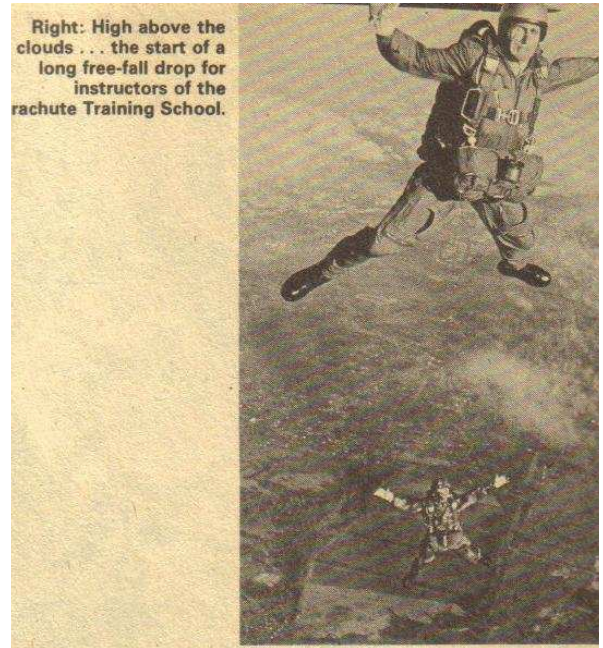
MY FIRST DAKOTA JUMP



PARA WITH WEAPONS CONTAINER



DEREK DE KOCK



**FRANK HALES WITH DEREK BELOW WHO HAS CAMERA ON SIDE OF HELMET.
NOTE SLIPTREAM EFFECT ON FRANK'S FACE**



**AUTHOR IN FREEFALL WITH BERGEN.
EXTRACTED FROM FILM TAKEN BY GUN CAMERA
MOUNTED ON HELMET OF FRANK HALES**



**SAS FREE FALLER WITH BERGEN ON BACK OF
LEGS**

"ACTION STATIONS!"



**RHODESIAN AIR FORCE PARACHUTE JUMPING INSTRUCTORS BREVET.
ONLY 41 PEOPLE QUALIFIED FOR THIS BREVET EVER.**



**AUTHOR LANDING ON 32 RUNWAY WITH UT15
PARA COMMANDER PARACHUTE. FRANK HALES
JUST LANDED IN FRONT.**



**PRESENTATION OF PJI BREVET TO AUTHOR: 19
SEPTEMBER 1974**



STAFF FREE FALL JUMP
L TO R: PETE MARSHALL, JAKE HARPER RONALD, FRANK HALES, PAUL HOGAN, KEVIN MILLIGAN,
RALPH MOORE, JOHN BOYNTON



PAUL HOGAN AND PETE MARSHALL QUALIFY AS PJI'S: 1976.
L-R: Pete Marshall, Charlie Buchan, Kevin Milligan (Author), John Boynton, OC Flying Wing, Derek De
Kock, Frank Hales, Mike Wiltshire, Paul Hogan. Missing: Ralph Moore, Iain Bowen.

PART TWO

Operations and Trials

"ACTION STATIONS!"

OPERATIONS AND TRIALS

After qualification as a PJI, most of my time was taken up instructing or testing new equipment or methods with the other staff.

However in December of 1974 I was detailed to be a despatcher for 24 SAS on an external operation into Mocambique in the Tete province. For some time the SAS had been carrying out clandestine ops, locating and hitting the terrors on their own ground, usually when they least expected it. They were having some very good results.

On the evening of the op, as the SAS arrived at the hangar to kit up, I thought we were being overrun by terrors. A group of dark men wearing ZANLA uniforms and carrying an assortment of communist weapons came hurrying into the hangar. I soon realised it was the SAS, all prepared for external ops. Faces and hands were blackened with camo cream. By appearing to look like terrors, if they were spotted by the enemy whilst patrolling, it would give them the edge for a few seconds before it was realised who they were. In a contact, those first few seconds could make a huge difference. On some operations they wore standard Rhodesian kit and would be carrying FN's and MAGs depending on the situation. They looked very ominous and business like to me as they kitted up. We emplaned, the SAS bringing along their containers which were extremely heavy. Much heavier than we used in training and I was to learn that it was always the same when they went on ops. Their Bergen rucksacks were loaded with ammo, claymore mines, radios, food, water, etc, etc. They would be jumping in with enough to sustain them for some time before withdrawal or resupply. I was to often think that a donkey would have collapsed under some of the heavy loads they carried on these ops. This was often done in temperatures of 40 C too. As can be imagined, water was often a priority in the long African dry season and was to lead to trial methods of dropping water to the men.

We emplaned, and as night fell, took off for the hour long flight to Mocambique. Most of the lads sat quietly or dozed off. Conversation is difficult in the aircraft because of the engine noise through the open door. (We never operated with the door on.). As we approached the drop zone we helped them to fit their containers onto the parachute harness. There is not much room inside the Dak as 24 paras, wearing parachutes, webbing pouches and weapons, fit their equipment whilst the number two and three despatchers move among them helping and checking. The standard load for the Dak would be 24 paras without equipment and 20 with equipment. Because of the exceptionally long runway at New Sarum we were able to get away with 24 fully equipped men depending on fuel carried. Before entering Mocambique the fuselage lights were also dimmed. Approaching the dz the men were stood up, hooked up, told off for equipment check, then brought down to Action Stations. I took my place beside the door ready to despatch. As I looked down the faces of the SAS they looked calm and professional, some even gave me a smile. Outside it was inky black and I said a little prayer to myself that all would go well for them.

Then on came the red.

The stick leader stepped into the door.

"Green on" and as I was calling out "Go and two and three...", they propelled themselves through the door. I had expected the stick to be a bit slow because of the heavy kit and was surprised with their speed and fluency. All 24 were gone rapidly and we hauled in the bags. It was a good drop and I was chuffed to see our training being put into practice so well. It never failed to give me a buzz. The return flight was without incident and we later learnt that everything went well with the jump. (After despatching a group on an op it was always such a relief to finally get news breaking the

suspense, that all went well.)

NIGHT FREE FALL AND FREE FALL EQUIPMENT BOX

Free Fall teams had been dropping in at last light and then talking in the main group to drop by static line at night. This was because it was very difficult for the No. One despatcher to accurately locate the dz at night. It was becoming apparent, however, that this could not continue and it was to become an operational necessity to devise methods of inserting teams on clandestine operations after nightfall. We began trial jumps at PTS. We positioned a flashing strobe light on the dz and then another one a considerable distance upwind. The despatcher could then use that as his line up for run in. The Instrument Techs devised an altimeter panel, complete with a small light directed onto the face of the altimeter. This was switched on by the free faller just before exit. Each jumper would tape a small penlight torch onto the back of his helmet so that he could be seen in free fall by those following. In this way, whilst falling they could formate on the helmet lights. On actual operations, there could be no lights on the dz for the pathfinders of course, so the jump could only be done when there was sufficient moonlight to reveal landmarks to the despatcher. The despatcher would also have an aerial photo of the dz and the surrounding areas to use as his guide for run in.

As we practised, we became more proficient in forming at night and landing in a close group. We learnt lessons and changed methods until we had it right. Sometimes we used cylum sticks on the helmets and we also devised some wrist lights that helped too in forming.

We also had to experiment with free fall dropping a box containing the team's extra equipment to supplement their ordinance, water etc. It was to give us several headaches and did not progress as smoothly as the jump phase. The equipment was placed in a wooden crate and then secured with a harness to which was attached the parachute and a strobe light. The problem was how to have the parachute deploy at the correct height after free fall.

Frank Hales, ever handy with things explosive, came up with the idea of fixing a length of cordtex fuse in such a way that when it burned through the pack closure ties, the pilot chute would spring out and deploy the main canopy. He calculated the burning time of the fuse and cut the length of the fuse according to the number of seconds it would be in free fall.

On green light, the strobe was switched on, the fuse lit and the box pushed out immediately followed by the free fall team. They would formate on the strobe light and at predetermined heights, would pull the ripcord so as to be stacked in positions above the box, the lowest man being open at 2,000ft. The fuse would burn until the box was at 1,500ft then, open the canopy. The team would steer their parachutes to land in the same area as the light on the box. In the event of not seeing the strobe they would formate on the lowest man.

During the initial trials, in daylight, as we followed the box down, we would sometimes see it tumbling in free fall and this could cause the canopy to malfunction. So the next plan was to fit a pilot chute with a static line to the box. Before despatching the box, the static line was hooked up. As the box was despatched, the static line pulled open the pilot chute only, which had the effect of stabilising the box until the fuse burnt down and opened the main canopy. Most of the time it worked but still we had the odd one go wrong which meant a 100kg bomb plummeting to earth! Eventually we were satisfied with the techniques and then we trained the free-fallers in the same methods. Some of them, especially those who were also skydivers like Dennis Croukamp, Wings Wilson or Paul French were to become very proficient at night formation with the box and each other.

"ACTION STATIONS!"

Trials were also under way with rapid reaction type operations where the paras would be on standby ready for call out. We weren't calling it Fire Force at that stage, that came later. We did one practice, early in 1975 with the SAS. 4 Daks were placed on standby and the SAS paras placed their parachutes on the Dak seats all ready for fitting. On the call out signal they grabbed their weapons and moved out to the aircraft. As the aircraft were started up, the men emplaned and immediately after take-off, kitted up on board. The aircraft carried straight on to the dz by which time they were all ready and successfully dropped. It worked well and there were no problems.

Later on when Fire Force was set up, the paras would kit up before take off, then emplane for the flight to the contact area as the Dak could easily catch up with the heliborne force which had scrambled immediately. As the Fire Force commander was in the heliborne force and he was the one who decided when and where to drop the paras, there was no point in the Dak arriving before him!

The Bosses at PTS were also trying to source a suitable Automatic Opening Device.

One day when the staff were doing a free fall jump from 8,000ft after having despatched the course they decided to do some relative work. This is when the free-fallers formate and link up with each other, usually trying to build a formation with everyone linked up, before tracking away from each other to pull. It was the best way of improving free fall skills and required good manoeuvring techniques. From time to time, we would be tasked with doing a show jump. This would be done wearing smoke canisters on our boots, so the people watching the show could follow our manoeuvres from the ground. It was important to be competent in order to give a professional show.

It was also great fun!

On this particular occasion, Ralph Moore went first. I dived down after him and linked with him. Frank Hales came swooping in third but was off line and coming in on my legs. Just as he linked though an AOD he was trying out activated and opened his chute at 6,000ft. He was whipped off my legs and had a long ride down. Back to the drawing board. We were eventually to obtain KAP 3 Czechoslovakian AOD's which fitted to the main parachute. They were very robust, reliable and we used them not only for personnel but also to replace the cordtex fuse on the box. It was much better and they saved at least one life on ops.

Once, when the staff were doing a trial drop with the box, we positioned the box in the door as we flew in at 8,000ft. Mike Wiltshire was positioned behind the box and it was his job to push out the box and immediately dive after it, followed by the rest of us. The green came on, Mike pushed out the box and duly fell over in the door! You would have thought that the following PJIs would help him up but no, we just ran over him in our haste to follow the box and he then scrambled after us. At first he was not amused then, typical Mike, he had a good laugh about it.

Most of our jumps when doing free-fall were from the Dak but there was a period in October when we used a Trojan aircraft for the first few jumps of the free fall course. The Trog was a single-engined reconnaissance aircraft. It was roomy and sturdy, but our particular model suffered from an underpowered engine. It was the butt of many jokes such as, "If it wasn't for the curvature of the earth it wouldn't take off at all."

Anyway it was ok for the first couple of jumps before progressing to the Dak. and it was much more economical. I can only remember using it for the one course and then after that the Trogs were usually out at the FAFs where they were very suitably utilised on recce and forward air control duties.

Trials were also continuing with parachutes. The British X type had been replaced by American T10's but now these were getting a bit tired, they were difficult to replace and we needed a

lot more quickly. The Saviac Mk 1 and 2 were available from a S. African company, so we did some jumps with those and they proved very suitable. The Mk 1 was virtually identical to the T10 anyway and the Mk 2 was the same parachute but with a steerable canopy. It could be useful on certain drops but it was not utilised greatly. The Saviac Mk 1 however became the standard parachute and gave great service.

One more PJI joined the fold, John Early. John was an American, ex-Special Forces, with extensive clandestine experience in Vietnam. He was very professional in his approach and a well experienced free faller. He was a very welcome addition to PTS. John had his personal Ram Air parachute and demonstrated it to us, as we had only read about them prior to this. It's performance was far superior to anything we were using but it took careful handling. It was to be a few years before we were able to purchase Ram Air parachutes for PTS.

SELOUS SCOUTS

The first Basic course including Selous Scouts was held in August and then in September we had the first Free Fall course for African soldiers from the Selous Scouts.

The Free Fall course was quite an eye-opener as we didn't really know what to expect. We had our share of laughs with trainees spinning, or tracking in the wrong direction. I remember following the RSM for a critique whilst he was jumping with kit for the first time. He was on his back and spinning before finally recovering. All credit to them, they persevered, finally got the hang of it and qualified as HALO jumpers.

They played an invaluable role when going on deep recces into Mocambique or Zambia, showing great courage and determination. Some of the things they and the SAS HALO guys achieved, too numerous to detail here, were truly incredible. It takes cold blooded courage to jump from a great height at night, onto foreign soil far from home. On many of these ops, there would be only two men and they had no real way of knowing what lay below either geographically or metaphorically. The same few individuals repeated these ops on numerous occasions. The value of their achievements was far, far greater than their numbers and I will always hold them in the highest regard.

RHODESIAN LIGHT INFANTRY

The powers that be could also foresee the urgent necessity for more paras to fulfill the role of internal operations whilst the SAS and S. Scout paras concentrated on external operations. The RLI, who were already proving their value in the heliborne role of Fire Force, also started sending their men to be para trained. The use of heliborne and para troops on internal operations was not a new concept, as it had been used successfully by the French in Algeria. The RLI were however, to really take it on board and developed it to a fine fighting concept that hurt the terrorists very deeply. The young men who came for para training, some of them fresh from High School, were to achieve astonishing results and set new standards for combat parachute operations. By war's end one RLI NCO had completed 72 combat jumps! On occasion 2 or 3 combat jumps would be made in one day by Fire Force paras.

SPECIAL AIR SERVICE CASUALTIES

The SAS were being kept busy towards the end of the year. I was on duty in the Southern part of the country and one morning we despatched 22 SAS to act as stop groups against a group of approximately 90 terrorists. It was unusual to come up against such a large group and the fighting was fierce but, at day's end, 31 terrs were accounted for.

On the 11 November they were in the thick of it again. We used 3 Daks for a drop into Mocambique to hit a camp at Mavui. As I looked out of the door on run in I could see the Hunters swooping down and striking A.A. positions followed by Canberras on their bombing run. We had 24 paras on each Dak and dropped them in at 500ft. On this one they recovered lots of equipment from the camp and put paid to 28 ZANLA. Yet again, on the 12 December, it was off to Mocambique, this time to hit Magui camp. Once again the airstrikes went in first then we used 4 Daks to envelop the camp. 96 paras were dropped but it was disappointing as most of the terrs managed to evade being totally enveloped. There were 8 kills but as a consolation lots of equipment was captured.

On the 22 December 76, I was on Fire Force duty with the SAS at Buffalo Range in the South of the country. We were called out to a sighting near Bengala Dam. As we flew to Bengala, we were requested to drop the paras into an area where the sighting had been. The choppers went in first and then the commander pointed out the dz for the paras. We flew in at 500ft and rapidly dropped the lads, who went straight into a contact. In the ensuing fight at close quarters 6 ZANLA were killed and one captured but, as one section swept through a position, a hidden terrorist using his RPD fired a sweeping burst from the flank. Three of the SAS went down. Lance Corporal Nel and Trooper Seymour were killed and Trooper "Tautie" King grievously wounded. After the drop we had landed at Bengala airstrip. Tautie was speedily choppered to our position. The Dak had an arrangement whereby a number of stretchers could be suspended down the length of the fuselage. We quickly rigged one up, and carefully placed Tautie into it. The accompanying SAS medic (they were first class) had already given the necessary first aid treatment and the drip was in place. In no time at all we were on our way to Fort Victoria and the nearby hospital. Tautie had taken hits in the leg, elbow, side and through the bridge of the nose, blinding him one eye. I doubted if he would make it as he appeared to be in a bad way but he hung on until we arrived at Fort Victoria. He subsequently made a good recovery.

We then flew back to Bengala with fuel for the choppers and recovered the bodies of Nel and Seymour back to Fire Force base. I had taken Steve Seymour on his basic course. He was from the Channel Islands and had come to Rhodesia seeking adventure. He was great fun and game for anything. Just the day before, I had been sitting at camp chatting with him. Once more it brought home the deadly seriousness of these operations. From Buffalo Range we loaded up a fresh supply of parachutes and returned once more to Bengala by which time the contact was well over and the troops were ready to return to base. It was immediately obvious that spirits were low because of the deaths of the lads who were very popular and well known in such a tight knit unit. The Fire Force commander asked if the guys could do a jump back into camp to give them a boost. We readily agreed. We flew along the side of the runway at Buffalo Range and despatched them from 1500ft to give them a longer ride. Most drifted down on target but, a couple towards the end of the stick, drifted down amongst the huts of the army camp. One of them, Trooper Kleynhans came crashing down through the roof of the Intelligence Officer's hut.

As the startled I.O. jumped up from his desk in amazement, Kleynhans calmly dusted himself off and is reputed to have said, "Oh hello Sir, just thought I'd drop in!"

On the 28th December, I was in one of two Daks tasked with despatching the SAS into a camp not far from Umtali. There was a bit of ground fire on the run in to target and the accompanying Dak took some hits but the drop went well. 13 terrors were killed and once more lots of equipment captured or destroyed. A bridge was also blown. Interestingly, it was on this op that SAS encountered Tanzanian troops assisting ZANLA and the use of bunker systems.

As we were flying out from the drop I heard the clack, clack, clack of rounds passing close, then the unmistakeable clang of metal hitting metal as we took hits in the tail. The pilot realised what was happening and jinked onto a different course. It was my first time to be in a Dak that was hit but, it was not to be my last. The Daks were to come under fire regularly but seldom sustained any damage. There was however one particular pilot, Jerry Lynch who seemed to be a bullet magnet. He also was the pilot flying a Dak out of Mapai, Mocambique full of captured equipment when it was shot down and burst into flames. Jerry managed to get clear but his co pilot Bruce Collocott was killed in the initial burst of fire to hit the aircraft. It was the only occasion a Dak was shot down during the war and it was a sad day for 3 Squadron. Bruce was a real character. Whenever I flew on ops with Jerry I wondered what might happen this time. He was a super guy and first class pilot!

THE TEMPO QUICKENS

From 1977 onwards the pace really quickened. We were regularly inserting SAS and S. Scouts into Mocambique. Free fallers were needed to meet the ongoing demand for clandestine ops and PTS was heavily committed with basic and free fall courses, as well as continuation training and growing operational commitments. The RLI were heavily involved with Fire Force and the demand for trained paras was ever increasing. A Dak was positioned permanently with the Fire Forces and manned by PJI's.

As the tempo of various operations increased over the next two years, more Fire Forces were created which meant more PJI's away at the Forward Air Fields in the different operational areas. Men were recruited and trained as PJI's but it was realised that the situation could be improved by training selected Army personnel to become despatchers. Calls went out to the RLI and we began training RLI paras as despatchers. Thereafter each Fire Force Dak was manned by one PJI and two despatchers. These despatchers gave sterling service.

Like the other PJI's, I was to rotate between training, external ops and Fire Force duties. Over the years there were many incidents and I couldn't possibly relate them all. I have taken extracts from my logbook to give an insight into some of them. I will quote from one week with 1 Commando Fire Force in the Op Hurricane area based at Mtoko.

1 Feb 77

Called out to "Op Thrasher" area for an op in conjunction with 2 Cdo. Dropped 24 paras. Contact. 3 kills. But one RLI killed.

2 Feb 77

Call out near Mtoko. No drop. Terrors got away.

3 Feb 77

"ACTION STATIONS!"

Same as yesterday. 7 Feb 77 Drop at Mrewa. 8 paras. 6 kills. 1 capture.

8 Feb 77

Drop near camp. 8 paras. 2 Canberras used. 5 kills, 1 capture. Low drop 350ft !

(Note - the low drop was in error. Should have been 500ft.)

9 Feb 77

Dropped on two sides of a kopje. 12 paras one side, 8 paras other side. Good drop. 6 kills.

10 Feb 77

Called out to same area. No drop. Only one terr with mortar.

10 Feb 77

I will detail this one...

We were called out to do a drop at St Paul's mission where the terrorists had massacred 7 people. Throughout the war, massacres and atrocities were carried out by the terrorists to subjugate the people in the rural areas. It had the desired effect. As we prepared to run in, the Dak came under heavy fire and we could see lots of tracer coming up. We prepared for the drop. As the men stood up and hooked up, Corporal O'Driscoll's reserve "popped" (the ripcord must have been accidentally dislodged by bumping against another man's equipment. Conditions were very turbulent and the men were being jostled about as they hooked up.) As the canopy spilled out onto the floor it was spotted by the despatcher who promptly smothered it. Fortunately O'Driscoll was well clear of the door. If the canopy had been caught by the wind-rush near the open door it would have dragged him right out of the aircraft. We had no choice but to abort the drop and go round again whilst we kitted up O'Driscoll with the spare reserve which we always carried for just such emergencies.

On the second run in the tracer started up again and as the guys came to action stations most eyes were popping and throats gulping. (Mine too and I wasn't jumping!) When the green came on the group needed no urging and were gone in a flash. The tracers followed them down but miraculously there were no hits to men or aircraft.

The paras quickly regrouped and by nightfall the terrs were surrounded. The RLI set up stop groups. Next morning, they swept through the position expecting a heavy contact but to their surprise and great disappointment, the terrs had slipped through the net.

SOUTH AFRICAN PARACHUTE TRAINING SCHOOL TEMPE BLOEMFONTEIN

Try as we might we just could not keep up with the demand for trained paras. The South Africans were approached and they agreed to assist by training contingents of RLI at their Para School, which was based at Tempe, Bloemfontein, the home of the "Parabats". They also used the Dak but as we were not too sure about their techniques, I was selected to attend the first course as Liaison Officer. I could explain our techniques and requirements and they could show me their methods. On return to Rhodesia we could carry out a short conversion course to suit our techniques. Jack Malloch had laid on his DC7 to fly the first group to Bloemfontein and it was with much excitement that we arrived at Tempe. The Parabats were very welcoming and soon had us established. We were welcomed by Major Bestbier, the Officer Commanding and he assured us of his full support.

The course was soon underway and methods and techniques were very similar to ours but I thought a bit dated. They still used a side cable in the Dak as opposed to two overhead cables which we found much better. It was particularly strange as they used overhead cables in their C130's and C160's. They still trained with weapons packed in CSPEPS as opposed to being worn by the para. (Later that did change.) Apart from that, techniques and equipment were virtually identical as were the methods of instruction. The instructors were a fine bunch, being a mix of Parabats and Recce Commando. They placed great emphasis on physical fitness for their Paras and the RLI were kept on their toes. The instructors respected the fact that many of these young men had already seen some hard action.

After the first week of training the lads were free to go into town for the weekend. I joined a group for a drink in one of the hotels on the Saturday evening. The place was full of RLI, off duty S. African troopies and some local boys all letting off a bit of steam. I do not know what was said but a scuffle developed in one corner between some RLI and locals boys. Within minutes the fight erupted across the room and the hotel like wildfire. It was just like a saloon brawl in the movies. Pandemonium reigned for a while until a squad of MPs arrived and started hauling people off.

The next morning Major Bestbier summoned me to see him along with the the senior RLI man and told us in no uncertain terms that the RLI would be confined to camp for the remainder of the course and were it not for Rhodesia's dire needs he would RTU everyone! It was a very sombre group of RLI that reported for training but they could not be down for long and were soon back into the spirit of things. Thereafter, they behaved and performed impeccably and after 3 weeks the whole course qualified. I managed to do 6 static line jumps and 2 free fall but all from the Dak. I had hoped to squeeze in some jumps from the C130 or C160 but it was not to be. Upon return to Rhodesia, I devised a 4-jump conversion course and thereafter we had regular contingents of RLI and SAS passing through Tempe and PTS. We just could not have coped without their support.

PARA TRAINING FOR A BRITISH LORD

We sometimes had unusual personnel to train and at least two Padres came on course. Padre Billie Blakeway, Chaplain to the RLI, was very keen to earn his wings so he could relate better to his young flock. I believe he was the oldest man to do initial para training at PTS. He was injured on his first course but with determination and as he said "some Divine providence" he qualified on his second course. He was well respected in the RLI.

Billie was not the only "Senior" para. Two ex World War Two Paras, CSM Stan Standish and CSM Jock Hutton would regularly come for continuation training to remain current as parachutists. They were as hard as nails and surprisingly fit. They were legends in their own right. Jock had jumped into Normandy and Stan into Arnhem. When they volunteered their services to jump into the Admin Areas they were welcomed. They did excellent work and were a stunning example to the young men they jumped with.

On one occasion, General Peter Walls, the Army Commander, himself a former SAS man, would arrive for refresher/continuation training. When you attend a Basic Course or refresher training it does not matter your rank, the training and intensity is the same for all. The parachute does

"ACTION STATIONS!"

not discriminate. I took General Walls for training on several occasions and I was always impressed by his professionalism and the way he did not mind being treated as "one of the lads."

I must say though, it was fun being able to say to a General, "Now come on, Sir, keep those knees tight together! Let's try that again." In April of 77 we had a British Lord arrive at PTS for para training, Lord Richard Cecil. Richard was ex-Eton and Sandhurst. As an officer in the Grenadier Guards, he had served three tours in N. Ireland and had been Mentioned in Despatches. When he came to PTS he was working as a free lance journalist, writing articles for various British publications. He wanted stories right from the heart of the action and to his mind that was with the Fire Force. He wanted to be trained so that he could jump in with paras. He was very much a James Bond, larger than life character, being suave, intelligent, well spoken and apparently fearless. He was a pleasure to train and duly went off to Fire Force. I quote here from one of his stories which was headed:

SMITH'S PARATROOPS LEAD PRESSURE ON TERRORIST CAMPS:

"We dropped from 500ft. The helicopters had already gone in first and the fire fight had already started. The first two paratroopers standing in the door of the Dakota as it lurched into position for its first run had a perfect view of the target. There were even fleeting glimpses of terrorists clambering up the hillside to better positions. They had been caught in their base camp, on a circular hill covered with huge boulders and thick scrub. Inside the aircraft, 20 odd paratroopers stood shoulder to shoulder, ready to jump, weapons strapped to their sides. Canary yellow flashes on their black helmets proclaimed "Support Commando. Rhodesian Light Infantry"

Most of them were wearing shorts and tee-shirts, and their legs and arms were smeared with stripes of camouflage cream. Next to me was "Kidd", a boy who looked about 15, but claimed 20 years. Incredibly small and slight, he was carrying a huge machine gun. Belts of ammunition bulged out of every pouch.

JUMP ORDER

"Action Stations!" The scream of the despatcher came faintly to the back men above the roar of the wind and the engines. The first three sticks, shouting "One, two" to the time of their feet bunched up to the door. A despatcher teased one of the paras: "Your 13th jump? You'd better give me that watch now.

A red light over the door:

"Stand in the Door" bellowed the despatcher, and seconds later the green light came on and the men hurtled out, fifteen in eight seconds, "Go, Go, Go!" screamed the despatchers as they guided them out into the slipstream.

Then it was our turn. With one hand on the static line cable to steady us as the Dakota manoeuvred ponderously for its second run, we strained down to the low windows to catch a glimpse of our own dropping zone.

The hill was criss-crossed with tracer as the terrorists fired at the paras dropping helplessly earthwards and their mates on the ground returned the fire. Then we were out, eyes wide open to check the deployment of the canopy. There was barely time to use the reserve at this height. Seven seconds later I just missed a nasty looking stump and rolled comfortably on some soft dirt on the

edge of an African kraal.

DROP FROM BRANCHES

All around me parachutes were draped over the trees and as I ran for cover, the next man in the stick hit his quick release box and dropped to the ground from his harness suspended from the branches.

The Rhodesians started to move forward to sweep the hill. They moved cautiously half crouched with their rifles in the shoulder. The terrorists waited till they were twenty yards away and sure to find them and then opened fire.

The crack of bullets was very close as the paras hit the ground and darted forward, firing to cover each others move. A wounded terrorist crawled forward with his arms up.

I was just coming to join the Rhodesian forces," he pleaded. The stick commander ordered in one of the circling helicopters and two soldiers carried the man, hit in the arm and leg, to a nearby clearing.

The hill was dangerous. The guerrillas were well hidden in the thick brush and protected in the caves formed by the giant boulders. The man on my left was crawling along a ledge when a Russian stick grenade landed five yards from him and he disappeared in a cloud of black smoke and debris.

"He must be dead." whispered the corporal. But the soldier sat up shaking his head. As the others moved in to help him another grenade exploded even closer. A guerrilla was lobbing the bombs from a crevice below the ledge. Before he could throw another, his enraged victim leaped forward to the edge and fired six quick shots and the line moved on.

Many of the soldiers were thinking of the young subaltern killed two days before. Three guerrillas were trapped in a cave and he had tried to clear them out with a single grenade. He was cut down in the entrance.

As the hours passed. the midday sun turned the jumbled rocks into a furnace. the Rhodesian boy - veterans , mostly in their late teens and early twenties, had to call on their reserves of strength. Agility, fitness and quick wits are the keys to survival in this war in the kopjes. Again and again I saw these qualities save lives and turn seemingly certain death into miraculous escape

CLOSE RANGE

The fighting was close range, just short of hand to hand and at one point a sharp eyed corporal saved his officer when he saw the barrel of a Russian assault rifle pop up a yard in front of him. His warning shout made the officer dive flat with his rifle blazing and the stream of automatic fire fanned his cheek as he fell.

The action finished at two in the afternoon, six hours after we jumped, with a well placed grenade in the last cave stronghold. Twelve terrorists lay dead. But there was no respite for the tired paras.

Thirty more guerrillas had been sighted. New parachutes, fresh water and ammunition were flown in to the nearest farm strip and within an hour we were standing in the door of a swaying aircraft ready to jump again.

- Richard Cecil in Operation Repulse Area, S.E. Rhodesia.

"ACTION STATIONS!"

At a later date, Richard was joined by Nick Downie an ITN newsman/cameraman. They were making a film. Nick also did para training at PTS before moving to Fire Force with Richard. They jumped into a contact. As the paras were moving into a position through thick bush, a terrorist opened up from 5 metres. Richard was hit in the chest, stomach and legs and died a few minutes later. It was a tragic end for a brave young man who just wanted to tell it as it was.

NIGHT LANDING

I remember an op that was mounted in Aug 77. I was with the Fire Force that flew from Grand Reef to Chipinga on the border with Mocambique. There we joined up with the RLI Fire Force from Buffalo Range. The combined group was briefed on a raid to be carried out on a camp just over the Mocambican border. It was anticipated that there would be a lot of opposition so Canberras would go in first to bomb the camp, immediately followed by the heliborne troops and the paras.

Everyone kitted up and we were soon underway. The drop went well but reports from the lads later said the dz's were very "hairy". There was considerable ground fire during the drop and although the other Dak sustained hits in the elevator we came through unscathed. We headed back for Chipinga. After the raid, which accounted for lots of valuable equipment being captured, we set off for the return to Grand Reef. It was already night and flares would be placed along the runway at Grand Reef to enable a night landing. Grand Reef is set in a very hilly area of Umtali and as we approached, low cloud set in. We could not see the airstrip or the surrounding hills. We circled the area above the clouds hoping for a break but, there was none and fuel was too low to divert to another strip. The pilot, Mike Russell did his dead reckoning and started down through the clouds. I was the No. One despatcher using the head set and could hear the pilots discussing the situation. It was very tense as we let down into the clouds going ever lower and hoping, no, praying, to see the runway flares when we broke through cloud base. It seemed to take an age then, finally, we were through it and we could see the runway. There was a very big collective sigh of relief as we touched down. "Scary stuff."

On the next day we were called out and dropped two sticks onto a small dz in a valley holding about 30 terrs. The wind was very strong and one para broke his leg. The chopper boys could have used more help but it was too risky for a further para drop. Some heavy fighting ensued. 7 terrs were finally killed but Lt Schraag who survived the jump, was wounded in the shoulder whilst clearing a cave, always a difficult prospect with limited means.

The year continued with Fire Force operations and insertions of SAS and Selous Scouts into Mocambique utilising both HALO and static line and normally with a box too. My logbook shows that I despatched John Early (now with Selous Souts) as part of a pathfinder group and later an aircraft load of static line troops. A week later, virtually the same again but this time with Frank Hales and SAS troops. (Frank was now serving with the SAS.)

Many of the PJI's came from previous service with the Army and itched to be back in the thick of things. At various times, Iain Bowen, Frank Hales and Charlie Buchan joined SAS and John Early, Ralph Moore, Pete Marshall and Pete Waites joined Selous Scouts. Sadly Pete was blown up by a landmine and finished his service in a wheelchair. PTS felt the loss of these instructors very much and carried on recruiting and training PJI's. The transfer of these men to fighting units was

never denied by Derek as he could see they had their hearts set on it. Judging by feedback to PTS it would seem they acquitted themselves well.

OPERATIONS ON "THE RUSSIAN FRONT"

Due to their continuing external operations the SAS had established firm control in the Tete province of Mocambique. The enemy were continually ambushed, mined and harassed on their own ground. So aggressive were the SAS that they pushed ZANLA and FRELIMO further away from the border. The result was that the number of terrorists operating inside Rhodesia operating in the "Hurricane area" dropped substantially.

They were tasked with repeating their success in the Gaza province in the south of Mocambique. This was a very difficult area to operate in. There was a shortage of water, the soil was very sandy making it unsuitable for anti tracking, the ground was generally flat so it was difficult to site good Observation Points. As the Selous Scouts had been operating in the area for sometime causing havoc in the nearby base of Mapai, as well as continually hitting the railway line that was used to ferry enemy to the Rhodesian border, it would be like dropping into a hornet's nest. The enemy who comprised ZANLA, FRELIMO and their Russian and East German advisers were aggressive, supported by the locals and well aware of the Scouts activities. Clandestine insertion would be difficult.

The SAS planned a tactic that would not be expected. They would operate south of Mapai and harass the road system and convoy route from Barragem to Mapai, a key route to bring the enemy quickly from their external camps to the Rhodesian border. However to do so, they had to avoid a very alert enemy and get in undetected, remaining so until their first task was complete. Captain Grahame Wilson, commanding B troop had been tasked with the very difficult mission. He was no stranger however to being appointed in such a way. He carefully assessed his options and came to the conclusion that the most effective and unexpected way would be a HALO insertion. That in itself was not novel but he proposed putting in 24 men, on one pass, into the same area and that certainly was! He put his plan forward to "Robby" Robinson, the SAS Commander who readily agreed that such an audacious plan would not be anticipated and was well worth adopting.

Mission requirements meant that the men would have to carry large quantities of kit to enable a successful first ambush and subsequent actions. They would be required to jump with Rifles, RPD's, 60mm mortars and large quantities of ammunition. They would also need additional kit to sustain them, requiring 3 boxes..

As there just weren't enough individual oxygen sets available for that many on one jump it was decided to set the drop height at 12 000ft agl which was the ceiling for a jump without oxygen. In order to avoid ground fire and minimise noise, fly in would be at 10 000ft climbing to 12000ft on approach to the DZ. This would obviously put strain on the men but there would be a couple of oxygen sets on board for use in the event of an emergency. It was important that the 24 exit as quickly as possible in order to have a tight grouping on the DZ so as to regroup by first light.

Because of the number of men and boxes required for one run in, it was decided to use Jack Malloch's DC7 which belonged to his transport airline. The big 4 engined DC7 could accommodate all without a problem, however it could only be made available for one rehearsal and the actual operation. As a result rehearsals were to be carried out using a Dak. The agreed method to be employed would be for the boxes to be positioned on rollers near the door and pushed out first. A

gym mat would then be immediately dropped over the rollers to allow the men to stand on it as they made their exit. A scheme had been devised for the free fall formation. A red or green light would be affixed to the back of the jumpers helmet depending on his number in the stick. Odd numbers in the stick would have red lights whilst even would have green. On exiting the aircraft they would adopt the stable position on aircraft heading. Odd numbers would turn left and manoeuvre into the red line of lights whilst the even numbers would turn right and join the green line of lights. This would give two parallel streams of lights plunging through the night, one red, the other green. Careful manoeuvring would be called for to avoid a free fall collision. As normal they would pull at predetermined heights so as to be stacked above the boxes. To remain as clandestine as possible, they would be jumping on a moonless night so would have to be very vigilant under canopy to prevent entanglements on approach to the DZ. Paul Hogan had just completed a free fall course for some of the men in B troop and these were to be part of the team to jump. They were surprised to find themselves allocated to a Halo operation so quickly after qualifying but excited at the prospect.

We knew that rehearsals would help and when the men reported to PTS we had them go through the drills for each man. The free fallers practiced their exit from the aircraft in the stable position, turning to face the boxes and then manoeuvring into their allotted line. At pre determined heights, certain men would turn outwards and track away briefly before operating the parachute. Theoretically, this would give a body of men close enough together to be able to land comparatively close to the boxes whilst at the same time having enough safety separation.

Two training jumps were planned. They would be from the Dak. One would be at last light and the other a night jump. Both would be without equipment. The first jump from 8000ft went well but grouping on the ground was too spread. Iain Bowen, now with SAS, and a very experienced PJI was given the job of being last man in the stick He was to push hard to keep the stick moving quickly. The guys could grip the pack of the man in front as they moved to exit. The next jump a couple of hours later went really well with the guys all forming as they should and the grouping on the dz being much tighter. We were all pleased with the way it had gone.

Another rehearsal was laid on for the next evening but this time with full kit and using the DC 7. The men jumped from 8000ft on a dark night. Initially they were surprised by the stronger blast from the DC 7's slipstream and took a little longer to formate but generally it was quite good, as was the grouping on the dz. We were happy with the overall result especially as the op jump would be higher and they would have more time available to formate. The guys went home to barracks full of confidence.

P Hour was set for 0300hrs 11 October 1977. Early in the evening of the 10th October, the mission commander Captain Grahame Wilson arrived at PTS with his men, accompanied by Brian Robinson. We were there to meet them and keen to get things underway. Grahame's exploits were legendary even amongst such an elite group and he moved amongst his troop with an easy professionalism, joking and inspiring. His experience and courage gave confidence to those around him. "Robby" Robinson, as with all the SAS men, had a steely resolve to complete the job well despite the many challenges thrown at them. He encouraged the troop as they prepared their equipment. During rehearsals the bergens were heavy but, as they prepared that evening, we were staggered by the kit they would be jumping with even though they had 3 boxes too.

Main parachutes were fitted with KAP3 AOD's . Some of the more experienced operators voiced that it was a waste of time as they were competent enough to always pull on time but Robby and the staff insisted they were to be used. Once again we went over the exit and formation plan with

the lads and they all knew exactly what was required. They had everything prepared before breaking for a hot meal and then a rest period on the mats in the hangar. I doubt if many rested easily as their minds turned over again and again their forthcoming actions. All too soon it was time for them to kit up and move out to the aircraft. There was the usual banter and teasing as they kitted up.

Once ready, a group of very heavily burdened troops made their way out to the DC7. We had already loaded the boxes and some sections of rollers. They took their places on the benches which were only a make shift solution as the cargo carrying DC7 was not equipped with them and we roared off for Gaza. It was to be their first DC7 jump into operations.

Another first on this mission was the fact that we would be relying on the pilot, Squadron Leader George Alexander to position us correctly for the drop using dead reckoning ie timing and compass bearings. There was no moon and no way for a dispatcher to pick up landmarks accurately. We climbed to 10 000ft and began the long flight to the south east corner of the country. As preplanned, an SAS operator on the ground at Mabalutata, a border base camp, released a flare so that the pilot could accurately get his bearings. We flew on, turning along the border between S Africa and Mocambique. Finally, at the point where the Shingwedzi River crosses into Mocambique, we swung onto an easterly run in heading for the dz, which had been selected because of its remoteness from inhabitants. We climbed to 12 000ft. As always it was very cold at altitude with the cargo door removed in preparation for the jump. Some of the men shivered as we waited and I imagine preferred to think it was from the cold rather than any other reason! I watched the men as we made our way and wished we had a way to keep them warm. They were quiet as it was too noisy for conversation and I knew they must be feeling very uncomfortable in all their kit, perched on the benches. They were of course as stoic as always and just wanted to get on with it. As we entered Mocambican territory the men armed their Kap 3's which we checked. Rollers were set up in their position at the door, with the three boxes in place and hooked up. Frank Hales, who was the No 1 dispatcher positioned himself at the door. He lay down and peered out into the darkness his cheeks contorted by the icy slipstream.

Approximately 5 minutes out from target, one of the men suddenly slumped to the floor. He was suffering from lack of oxygen. (Something which I had been concerned about.) We quickly got an oxygen set to him but he was obviously in no condition to jump. As he was carrying much needed mortar equipment, the mission commander quickly ordered the man next to him, who was also in the mortar team, to take it. By this time it was only minutes away from the drop. Two dispatchers went through the man's Bergen, located the mortar equipment and transferred it into his call sign buddy's Bergen. (He was already heavily loaded with mortar equipment himself.) The command was given to stand up and check equipment just as they finished the transfer. The red light came on, helmet lights were switched on and strobe lights on the box. The men bunched up to the door ready to go. I positioned myself to help guide the heavily laden guys towards the door. The tension was high. Three flashing strobe lights and a maze of red and green helmet lights lit up the inside of the fuselage.

Joubert one of the men to jump that night says "The butterflies in my stomach were going crazy! This was it. There was no turning back now."

The green light above the door came on and we shoved the boxes out, strobes flashing. The Gym mat was rapidly positioned over the rollers as Grahame leapt out, closely followed by the others through the door. A standard exit was difficult because of the rollers and the speed required for a fast stick so, many of the men opted for a dive exit. The slipstream blast from the DC7 is considerably stronger than that of the Dak and that combined with the heavy equipment caused a lot of men to go

unstable on exit some tumbling several times. They lost precious time as they fought for stability, tumbling through the pitch black night, before regaining control and manoeuvring into position.

Joubs was no 15 in the stick and started shuffling towards the door holding onto the chute of the man in front of him but just as he reached the mat he stumbled and fell before the door. Without hesitation, Mike Wiltshire grabbed him, hauled him up and unceremoniously bundled him out of the door to keep the stick moving as quickly as possible.

As Iain Bowen, the last man, dived out, we pushed our heads out to look down and see how the formation was going. Expecting to see three strobe lights closely followed by two lines of lights, it was disappointing to see a mix of lights as guys skated across the sky, battling the unstable exits and heavy loads.

Some found themselves tumbling out of control before finally stabilising and checking out the lights of the others below them. They manoeuvred into position as best they could then at the set height operated their parachutes.

Joubs relates:

"At 2,800ft, as per the jump plan, I turned to the right, hand tracked briefly, sat up and popped my chute. I watched the chute as it deployed above my head, very relieved that it had done so properly. Someone came past me and with a crack his parachute opened below me. I pulled on one toggle and turned to locate one of the strobes. A long way off I saw one of them flashing and used my wrist compass to get a quick bearing on it. My next concern was to try and land near the person whose chute I could now see below me. I pulled down hard on one toggle and spiralled down towards him. The guy below me, who happened to be Tony Lynch (found out later on the ground), let up on his toggles to allow his chute to drive as far as possible downwind in the direction of the boxes and I did likewise. I became aware of the horizon with the moon's rays appearing from beyond it. Below the horizon it was pitch black. There was an eerie stillness with only the soft whistle of air through the chutes rigging lines as I floated down towards the darkness below. At about 100ft Tony turned into the slight breeze and I followed suit. I released my pack from behind my legs so that it now dangled below me attached to a nylon rope fastened to the chute's harness. Only then could I distinguish objects below me. I could see that Tony was heading for a clearing next to a stand of sandalwood trees. Suddenly there was a crack and the breaking of branches as a herd of buffalo went crashing through the bush below and away from us. Thank goodness! At about thirty feet, I stalled the chute and did a textbook landing right next to Tony in the clearing. Sgt Paul Hogan, our instructor would have been proud of that one!"

We were to discover later that Captain Wilson landed close to the boxes, followed by some of his men but others were scattered. The navigation had been good under the circumstances and they were within an acceptable five kms of the planned DZ. Some men were missing initially. Four of them were injured and came in at first light. In Iain Bowen's case who had broken his leg landing on the side of an anthill, he hopped into the RV being half carried by Lt Ken Roberts. Jake Harper - Ronald had crashed down through a dead tree and found himself suspended head first a few feet above the ground, his trousers in tatters and a very sore backside from a dry stick that had impaled his buttocks. He freed himself and struggled into the RV. Stu Pattison had very bruised heels when he jumped down from a tree, but miscalculating just how high he was. Another had sprained his ankle.

One of the last men to jump, however, Sgt Jan Greyling was missing. It transpired that he lost consciousness as he hit the slipstream. The next thing he remembers was drifting down, alone, under an already open canopy. The KAP 3 had saved his life! He landed well away from the others

and was only found by an SAS search team some hours later. He had already decided to "walk out" to the S African border.

It was not a very auspicious start however Grahame had no option but to leave his casualties at a LZ they had located. No casevac was possible as it would compromise the operation. They would have to wait until the trap had been sprung. Grahame and the 19 fit operators pressed on to the road/railway line some 30kms away and carried out a very successful ambush on a convoy loaded with men, arms and ammunition. During the firefight, Dave Collins was severely wounded in the head. Jan Greyling patched him up as best he could but there was not much hope. Vern Conchie, a hard bitten Kiwi, had taken a round in the foot and Ken Roberts was grazed in the head. A casevac was called and took out Dave and the other casualties – it had been 5 days since they had jumped in. Dave was to make a recovery. Ken Roberts remained with the team. Two of the trucks which were outside the killing zone of the ambush were accounted for by a Hunter strike called in by the SAS.

A few days later, we night dropped in a further 15 SAS by static line and 3 boxes of supplies. Unfortunately one box, which contained water and much awaited fresh rations whistled in, very much to the consternation of the lads eagerly awaiting the drop. The team split into two, twelve men under the leadership of Ken Roberts and the remaining twenty under Grahame and continued a series of devastating ambushes. The element of surprise was largely gone so, the SAS just had to be one step ahead all the time, which was to prove to be very difficult. They were continually followed up by Frelimo and in one case with a tracker dog. Grahame's leadership once again came to the fore as he continually out thought and out manouvered the hunters. It was extremely demanding work in the conditions they found themselves in. The sapping heat, the punishing marches, the lack of water. It took grim resolve but that is exactly what they had. After three weeks they were withdrawn for some very welcome R & R but even then it was not over. Grahame had "very kindly" volunteered their services for a fire force operation.

The troop had been withdrawn to their forward base at Mabalauta where they cleaned up and then were busy breaking camp. Captain Wilson had gone ahead to the Selous Scout Fort at Buffalo Range. Whilst there he got wind of a Selous Scout sighting of approx 50 terts in the nearby Sengwe TTL. who were moving into a thickly wooded ravine for concealment and rest. It was a stroke of luck that B troop were in the area. Brian Robinson was to be the Commander in the K car and and four call signs were uplifted by the G cars from Mabalauta with Grahame in charge. Four more call signs then made up a second wave and set off by road to Malapati, which was nearer the scene, to await the return of the choppers. A Hunter and Canberra had already made a strike on the group by the time the Fire Force arrived on the scene so they were fully alerted. The K car immediately engaged terts in a ravine and the Lynx made a strike as the K car came under heavy fire. As the G cars dropped Grahame's call signs, he began a sweep upstream with two call signs, whilst Lt McIntosh swept downstream with the other two. As Grahame's men were sweeping through very heavy undergrowth he found himself diving for cover as Cpl Lucy, on the opposite bank of the ravine, suddenly opened up with a series of staccato bursts from his RPD, the rounds tearing up dust and leaves just a few metres in front of him. Four terts were accounted for in the bursts from Cpl Lucy. His sharp eyes and immediate action had prevented a nasty surprise for Grahame. Within a few metres they came under fire again and in the brisk reaction two more terts were killed. They determinedly carried on with the sweep. Meanwhile Mac and his men were moving the other way. Cpl Rich Swan was covering a call sign with his RPD as they negotiated a deep gully. He was shocked to notice an eye peering at him from under a dense pile of foliage right alongside him. He let rip into the foliage with a deadly burst

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and into other likely spots of concealment. The sweep continued and Colour Sgt Pete Cole, next to Rich, fell forward into a small gully as shots rang out. The terr was accounted for but Pete had taken a round through the elbow. He was patched up and a casevacced by one of the G cars.

Four sticks of RAR paras were dropped by Dak to join the fray with Major Dennison in command. They were dropped further North and then began moving towards the contact area. They killed one terr but as they closed towards the SAS more firing broke out. Another Lynx strike went in which dealt with 3 more terrors. The sweep lines joined up and then carried out a return sweep through the area but, the remaining terrors had flown. Altogether 28 of the 50 terrors had been killed and the rest who had escaped in the dense bush were no doubt legging it back to Mocambique.

Later in the afternoon B troop were pulled out and before long were winging their way back to Salisbury for a very well earned break.

The Halo drop into the Gaza Province had been a typically audacious plan and very challenging. It caught the enemy by surprise and despite all the difficulties succeeded. There were many further actions in the area and Frelimo/Zanla could never rest easy as SAS and Selous Scouts continued their harassment. The Gaza province was an extremely tough area to dominate and the men very aptly nicknamed it the "Russian Front."

Despite all this activity, the most audacious plan of all was about to take place in November which would have a stunning effect on the enemy.

OPERATION DINGO

RAIDS ON CHIMOIO AND TEMBUE CAMPS

PTS occupied half a hangar, the other half belonging to the Radio Section. For a couple of days we sensed that something was in the air because of various secretive activities in the other half of the hangar. We were still surprised however, when, on 22 November, all the PJIs were ordered to report next door for briefing. We were equally amazed at what we saw as we moved into the closely guarded hangar. Benches from the Sports Field had been used to form an amphitheatre effect with the centre of attention being a large, highly detailed scale model of a terrorist camp. Aerial photos, maps and charts were also hung in place. This was also the most people we had ever seen at a single briefing and it seemed that all the top brass were there, from General Walls down. It was not the General however, that led the briefing but Major Brian Robinson and Group Captain Norman Walsh. This was their "show" after months of painstaking work. Scotty McCormack, Intelligence Officer with SAS had also played an absolutely vital role in gathering intelligence and presenting it. We sat spellbound as they unfolded the plan for what was to be the largest and most daring operation yet carried out during the war – Operation Dingo.

Intelligence had been gathering for some time about two huge terrorist camps in Mocambique. One known as New Farm near Chimoio, codenamed Zulu One, which was 90km inside Mocambique. It was virtually opposite Umtali on the Eastern Rhodesian border. The camp was on a bigger scale than ever encountered previously with 13 separate areas and reaching 5km in length. Having learned from previous attacks on other camps, the enemy were well dug in with trenches, bunkers and numerous anti-aircraft positions. Anti-aircraft towers were sited in key positions.

The second camp, Tembue, codenamed Zulu Two, was North East of the huge Caborra Bassa dam, 225km inside the border. It was estimated that there were thousands of ZANLA in the two camps. They felt very secure as they were so deep inside Mocambique. It was impossible to think

that Rhodesia could attack them there.

From these camps, thousands of terrorists arriving from training in China, Ethiopia and Tanzania were to be deployed into the Rhodesian Hurricane and Thrasher operational areas. They posed such a grievous threat that no matter what the risk, the camps had to be destroyed. As they related this, we must have all been having the same thought. How on earth could we achieve that with Rhodesia's very limited number of airborne troops?

The commanders portrayed their plan, which was based on surprise, professionalism of all the operators and air superiority, as the way to overcome the vast odds. I knew from my own experience that if a camp was to be hit effectively then it had to be enveloped as quickly as possible. All four sides must be covered by troops dropped from Dak or helicopter. That way surprise was total and results would give a high kill ratio. Brian Robinson, and Frank Hales, along with Derek De Kock had spent time working out methods of dropping paras to do this and we had done several trials and even one smaller operation using three or four Daks in envelopment drops.

As the briefing continued, I could see that their ideas and our trials were going to be used in deadly earnest. The sheer size and numbers in the camp meant using all our transport aircraft to deliver as many troops as possible. The Daks would not be sufficient and would need to be supplemented by all the available helicopters.

Zulu One and Two, however, were too far for helicopters to reach without refueling. A "pitstop" would have to be made in enemy territory. An area was to be seized by troops and held for the duration of the op. Fuel and ammo would be para dropped into these areas which would allow the heliborne force to leapfrog its way into and out of target and provide a replenishment area throughout the op. They would be known as the Admin Areas.

Utilising all our resources, we would only be able to deliver 200 airborne assault troops in one wave. It was only feasible to mount one wave as the nest would be flown before a second wave could be mounted. Further smaller teams would be dropped into the Admin Areas.

Zulu One would be the first target. 97 SAS and 47 RLI would parachute on two sides, 40 RLI heliborne would take another side, while the helicopter K cars with their 20mm cannon would be accountable for covering the remaining side. (The K cars did not carry troops but were crewed by the pilot, a technician, who was also the gunner, and the Army Fire Force commander. The G cars would carry the troops and drop them into positions detailed by the K car commander then orbit whilst looking for terrorists they could engage with their twin Browning machine guns. The K car would orbit at a higher altitude to give the commander a bird's eye view as the situation unfolded and he would direct his sticks accordingly. He would also engage targets with his 20mm cannon.)

It was known by Intelligence that there was a muster parade each morning at 07.30 which would be an ideal time to strike but there was concern that the approaching armada of aircraft would be heard and all would scatter before the strike could be effected. Surprise was going to be a major factor. It was decided that Jack Malloch's DC8 Jetliner would make a pass high over the camp just as they were formed up. As he overflew them they would disperse but, once passed, they would return thinking it was a false alarm. It was at this precise moment that the real attack would go in.

Three Hunters and four Vampires would deliver the first blow at 07.45, H Hour! At H + 30 secs, 4 Canberras would bomb the camp with bouncing anti personnel "Alpha" bombs. Then 4 more Hunters using rockets and cannons to deal with the anti-aircraft guns just as the 6 Daks began their drop at H + 2 mins. Hopefully the AA gunners would be so preoccupied with the Hunters and Vampires that the Daks would be out of the area before they could be targeted.

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The heliborne troops would then deploy 3 minutes later. Ten K cars strafing the camps whilst ten G cars deployed the 40 RLI men of Stop A. The troops were tasked with:

Killing all terrorists fleeing the camp.

Flushing out all those in hiding in the thick bush.

Advancing into the camp complex.

Strike aircraft were to continue hitting selected targets throughout the operation.

For political reasons, a limit was imposed on the length of time the forces could stay in Mocambique. This was to be no longer than 3 to 4 days. This meant that there must be a slick extraction of all forces and equipment. Then, within 48 hours, the whole exercise repeated at Tembue. From a logistical, manpower and air power point of view this was an enormous problem. The only way to carry it off was by detailed planning and the most professional execution. Frelimo had camps close to both Zulu One and Two. Robby stressed that these were not to be engaged as he did not want them drawn directly into the conflict. The Frelimo forces comprised not only of Mocambican troops but also some units from the Tanzanian Army and Russian Advisors. Some units were armed with anti-aircraft guns as well as Surface to Air Missiles - SAM 7's, mortars, anti-tank guns, Soviet armoured cars, tanks and transport vehicles.

The Daks were to fly direct to Chimoio to drop the paras and then return to Grand Reef the Forward Air Field near Umtali for recovery. The helos were to fly to Lake Alexander, a forward base near the border, refuel, emplane the RLI, then assault Chimoio. Exfiltration would be through the Admin Area, Lake Alexander then Grand Reef.

The Admin Area would be sited 10 km from Chimoio. A heliborne force would deploy from Lake Alexander to man, protect and operate the base to receive the fuel/ammo drops from the DC7 flown by George Alexander and Jack Malloch at H + 15 mins.

Admin Areas for Tembue would be: one inside Rhodesia near the border, one on the "Train" a flat-topped mountain feature halfway to target, and the second 10kms from target. 16 RLI would be parachuted into the last one along with a Fuel/Ammo drop from the DC7.

As we looked and listened, largely in awe and silence, it was obvious to all that the homework for this one had been incredible. The detail unbelievable. The audacity equally unbelievable - to take on such odds! Yet the calibre and belief of the men involved was such that spirits were soaring as each sub unit began their individual briefings. Each man would know exactly his coming role. I was as excited as the other PJIs as we returned to our half of the hangar to begin preparations for the most daring task we had ever been involved in. Each man was quietly determined to give his professional best. We had to succeed or be overwhelmed by the thousands who were being prepared to flood the country. We were elated at the chance to hit them really hard at last.

I must say, it was with eager anticipation and not a little trepidation that we began kitting up the lads in the early hours of the morning on 23 November 77. The RLI paras were drawn from 3 Commando, led by the very capable Major Jerry Strong. An unbelievably modest man of exceptional ability who had won the Sword of Honor whilst at Sandhurst.

The SAS were from A and B troops but all of the paras had been in action on numerous occasions although none had been on anything of this scale. The overall commander would be Robby Robinson, in the Command K car and the ground commander would be Major Mick Graham SAS,

who would jump with Stop 5. Major Jerry Strong would be his 2 IC jumping in with Stop 1.

There would be 6 Stops of 24 men.

Stop 1: 3 CDO Maj J. Strong, 11 Troop Lt Rod Smith, 12 Troop Lt Mark Adams

Stop 2: 3 CDO 13 Troop Lt John Cronin, 14 Troop Lt Gordon Thornton

Stop 3: SAS A Troop Capt Colin Willis

Stop 4: SAS A Troop Capt Bob McKenzie

Stop 5: SAS B Troop Maj Mick Graham, Lt Ken Roberts

Stop 6: SAS B Troop Capt Grahame Wilson

The men would wear standard Rhodesian camouflage uniforms and not put on camo face cream to make identification between friend and foe easier in the fog of battle. Daglo strips were fixed to the inside of their caps which would be worn inside out to make it easier for identification from the air.

The paras were briefed by Robby to exit the harness quickly on landing, make contact with the nearest man, take cover, wait and shoot. They were not to waste time at first in trying to regroup into set formations. The Stop Group commanders would be dropped in the middle of the stop so paras would look inwards for direction. The men on the extreme ends of the drop were equipped with white phosphorous grenades with which to mark the Forward Line of Troops for the Aircraft.

Robby also ordered that before advancing, each man was to note where he had left his parachutes and helmet since they would be recovered and used again at Tembue.

As we moved out to the waiting rows of aircraft lined up on the hard standing, it seemed as if we were going on the Normandy invasion. We had already heard the whine of numerous helicopters lifting off for Lake Alexander, 10 of which would deliver 40 men from 2 CDO RLI as Stop Group A under Major Simon Haarhoff. Their task would be to seize the high ground to the West of the camps. Now as the dawn broached the horizon it was our turn. Stick after stick were boarding the Daks and the DC7 which would be used for the drops of supplies into the Admin Area.

I knew from the briefing that also at this time the Canberras, Hunters, Vampires and Lynxes would all be armed up and preparing to go. There was a real buzz about being part of it, but it was tempered by the awareness of the risks being taken and the losses to be expected. Such defenses and numbers could not be taken lightly even though we ourselves would be mounting 6 Daks, 1 DC7, 42 Helos, 8 Hunters, 6 Vampires, 5 Canberras and 12 Lynx aircraft.

The Dakotas of 3 Squadron led by Bob D'Hotman taxied down to the end of the main runway at Salisbury Airport, adjacent to New Sarum. It was one of the longest in Africa. That was very provident this morning as the aircraft were heavily loaded. They lined up, then Pratt and Whitney engines straining at full throttle, roared down the runway before lumbering into the dawn headed for Zulu One. The early risers in nearby Salisbury must have wondered what on earth was happening as the multitude of aircraft lifted off.

It was planned that the Daks would run into target in line astern. As they approached they would split into two lines of three. The first 3 would drop along one side of the camp and as they completed their drop the next 3 would run in almost at right angles and begin their drop to cover another side. The third side was to be taken by the heliborne troops and the open side covered by K cars with their cannon. Numbers were just not enough to envelop a camp of this size. Most of the

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SAS on my aircraft settled down and closed their eyes. I doubted if any were asleep though as they mulled over what lay ahead. I watched out of the open door as the Daks flew in formation towards the border and was enthralled as we eventually overtook the heliborne armada. I had never seen so many choppers in flight at any one time before. It was a stirring sight.

I could feel the tension mounting in the aircraft as we passed over the border and drew closer to target. I hoped and fervently prayed that the strike aircraft would be on target against the AA defences. 6 laden Daks seemed a pretty easy target even for hand-held RPG 7 rockets which they used regularly against aircraft. I could sense that the guys just wanted to get on with it and I felt the same. Then we were given the order to prepare for action. We could only assume that using the DC8 Jetliner as a decoy had worked. Next would come the much needed air strikes.

The stick commanders had their radios tuned in on frequency and listened to the command aircraft and the strike aircraft as they rolled in. The Hunters plummeted down from 20,000ft blasting the defences. Vampires swooped in with rockets and then both with further runs, cannons blazing. The Canberras swept over the camp at 300ft and released their deadly load of alpha bombs. The alphas were designed by Peter Petter Bowyer an Air Force Projects Officer, to bounce back into the air before exploding, releasing a withering hail of ball bearings. Then it was "Action Stations." The men closed up to the door, eager to get going as always, adrenalin and hearts pumping. There was no stopping them now. As I looked out I could see the palls of smoke from the bombing runs and then a Hunter pulling out of its dive in the distance. Fires were burning in the complex and tracers were streaking into the sky towards the strike aircraft. I could see paras from the Dak in front of us passing below and hear the crackle of small arms fire. Then it was "Green On" and the men were on their way out thrusting into the maelstrom. The despatch was deliberately slowed down to one Para per second to give effective spread along the camp perimeter, or so we hoped. We quickly looked out to see the paras descending into the trees. The bags were left trailing as the Daks dropped to treetop level and cleared the camp at full throttle. Once clear they throttled back as we hauled in the trailing bags. We recovered to Grand Reef and discovered that, miraculously, not one Dak was hit. As had been hoped, the majority of AA fire was directed at the strike aircraft and then at the choppers as they landed their men. We found out later that every aircraft over the target area took hits within the first 5 minutes, including the one with the two commanders on board. Their helicopter limped back to the Admin Area where they commandeered another one whilst theirs was patched up and returned to the fray.

As the paras were drifting down from 500ft they were amazed to see terrorists running underneath them and more coming. They had expected to be in position before the terrors could reach them. It was not to be and the action with those running for cover started immediately. Once they were established they began their sweep forward winking them out of their hiding places. As one SAS group moved forward they came under fire and Trooper Frans Nel of the SAS fell with a fatal wound. Still under fire, his comrades administered emergency aid but he was to succumb to his injury 30 minutes later. Others were also wounded during the fighting.

As one Vampire pulled away from an air strike it was hit by fire from a FRELIMO force. Flt Lt Philip Haigh managed to pilot the stricken aircraft back over the border but was killed in the subsequent crash landing.

However, at day's end, it was an SAS Corporal who climbed a tree and held aloft the Rhodesian flag. Victory had been achieved against all the odds. The drop in the Admin Area from the big DC7 had gone well, though somewhat scattered, and was a crucial part of the victory.

We landed at Grand Reef and awaited the soldier's return. They were in high spirits and whilst taking them back to Sarum there were many stories of their exploits that day. The SAS recovered seven 12.7mm anti-aircraft guns and destroyed a deadly 37mm twin barrel anti-aircraft gun which was too big to be flown out.

The destruction of Zulu One had been a big success but there was no time to savour the victory - Zulu Two was awaiting.

ZULU TWO

We were back at Sarum by the 24th and on the morning of the 26th came the attack on Tembue - Zulu Two. We were concerned that ZANLA may have got wind of the attack on Zulu One and already cleared the camp but with our limited resources we were unable to mount the attack any sooner. Parachutes had been recovered and repacked, damaged aircraft were already repaired and except for one Vampire and one helicopter the fleet was complete. This was to be a more complex operation because of the distance of 225kms to fly inside Mocambique, as well as the fact that the target actually consisted of two main camps. These were so close that they could not be effectively boxed. Because of the distance to be flown three Admin Areas would be required, one in Rhodesia near the border, and two in Mocambique. The fuel situation would be critical.

Once more we were to use paras from A and B Troop, SAS and this time, Support Commando, RLI.

Stop 1: Spt Cdo

Stop 2: Spt Cdo

Stop 3: SAS Capt Colin Willis

Stop 4: SAS Capt Bob McKenzie

Stop 5: SAS Lt Ken Roberts

Stop 6: SAS Capt Grahame Wilson

When the boys arrived at the hangar we could see that they were tired from the intensity of events at Zulu One but buoyed up by their success and eager to repeat events.

Once again there was the thrill of all the aircraft loading up and taxiing out. Take off was uneventful and we settled down for the long flight. I moved up to the cockpit and stood behind the pilots, watching as we flew in formation keeping fairly high before descending extremely low over Caborra Bassa in Mocambique. I then moved back to prepare the troops for action as we drew close. Once ready for action, the Daks split up to commence their run-ins to box the camp. The bombers and strike aircraft were in there doing their deadly work. The green came on and we began the despatch. The camp was already in flames from the vicious strikes that had gone in on target. Directly across from us I could see another Dak with parachutes blossoming below it parallel to our drop. The concern about the camp being vacated was unfounded and once again we were greeted by ground fire and yet once more the Daks came through untouched. We dropped low, leaving the burning camp behind us and headed for Rhodesia. As we looked back we could see the continuing blasts and rippling strikes of the Hunters as they pressed their attacks home.

I was to hear that Captain Bob McKenzie, ex American Airborne, now serving with the SAS, had some hard action. As he swept down a gully, he had a premonition of danger as the hairs rose on

"ACTION STATIONS!"

his neck. A rock bounced down from above. Like greased lightning he pivoted, bringing his automatic weapon to bear whilst looking up.

There above him, positioned in a small cave, were a group of men preparing to ambush him. They had picked the wrong man. His rifle blazed from the hip as he poured withering bursts into them. His shooting was deadly. As his magazine emptied, the bodies of six men came slithering down the slope to his feet. He moved on, changing mags, but his excitement was not over. In yet another gully, he and two of his stick came face to face with a group of ZANLA. It was so sudden and so close that once more instinct and training took over. The three closed up and with their two automatic rifles and RPD machine gun they opened up. The firefight lasted only a few minutes as they fired and changed mags as rapidly as only high adrenaline flow can achieve. By the time support arrived, the three men had by themselves accounted, unbelievably, for 86 enemy.

As the fight progressed into the afternoon it was learned that another camp, containing about 500 ZANLA was sited 30kms away. The Canberras returned and devastated it with their bouncing alphas.

By evening the extraction began. Troops were choppered out to the nearest Admin camp, then the "train" to refuel each time and then headed for home on that dark night. As they did so they ran into a line of storms near the border. Choppers were running low on fuel as they struggled, heavily laden, against the elements trying to find a way through or around. As the first wave finally made it over the border, they put down on any convenient spot around Centenary before they ran out of fuel.

One did run so low on fuel that it had to land on a tiny island on Caborra Bassa. Fortunately, the DC7 and those excellent, unsung heroes from 3 Air Supply were able to drop him fuel accurately and he was able to continue on his way. (3 Air Supply were an Army unit based at New Sarum. They were tasked with the responsibility of resupplying the Army's needs either by air landing, or more usually, parachuting in supplies. They operated independently of Parachute Training School and were not involved in training of paras. They were always in demand and quietly got on and did a magnificent job. They saved the day on many occasions but took it all in their stride. They were involved in all the major operations resupplying urgently needed items and then assisting in ferrying equipment out. 3 of them were aboard the Dak that was shot down at Mapai but they survived the crash. They were led by Major Tom Gentleman and, as everyone said, he was not only a Gentleman by name but also by nature.)

The second wave sneaked over the border but could only make it as far as Chiswite. Many of the troops were to relate later that the trip home was the scariest part of the whole op! Robby Robinson and Norman Walsh landed and headed for the nearest pub and a well deserved impromptu thrash.

Bob McKenzie and his lads though were still in Tembue having been tasked with holding on until uplift the next day. "As always," said Bob, "first in and last out."

We had positioned at Mt Darwin then flew on to Chiswite to recover the men and as we flew home with the battle weary but jubilant paras I felt so proud to be in the company of such men. They were quietly basking in the glow of their outstanding achievements.

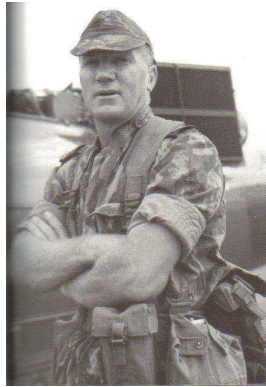
Detailed planning and superb execution by the combined force had dealt the enemy a grievous blow. More than 2,000 were killed and countless more wounded. The camps were in ruins and vast amounts of equipment destroyed or captured. Many documents were brought back that

would reveal valuable information.

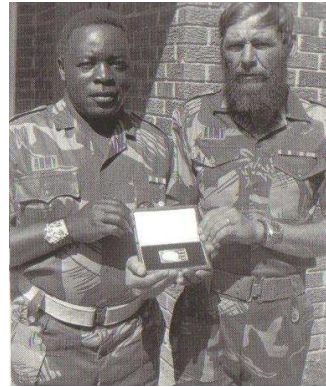
The survivors' morale was broken as they realised that they could be reached and destroyed even deep in Mocambique. There was such unrest in relation to Mugabe's leadership that a coup was mounted against him. It did not succeed.

The cost to Rhodesia was the loss of two men, eight wounded and one Vampire downed. It was nothing short of a miracle. As PJI's we felt really good that our para training had proved so crucial to the success of the operation!

"ACTION STATIONS!"



**RON REID DALY, COMMANDING OFFICER, WITH
SOME OF HIS SELOUS SCOUT H.A.L.O. PARAS**

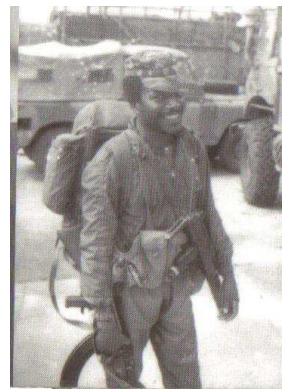


RSM'S MAVENGERE AND PRETORIOUS



Lieutenant Chris Schollenberg, the
SAS's first Silver Cross soldier

CHRIS "SCHULIES" SCHULENBERG



STEVEN MPOFU



Jean Desble (above) and Denis Croukamp (R) carried out a Halo operation into
"the Russian Front" and destroyed a troop train accounting for over 600
terrorists.

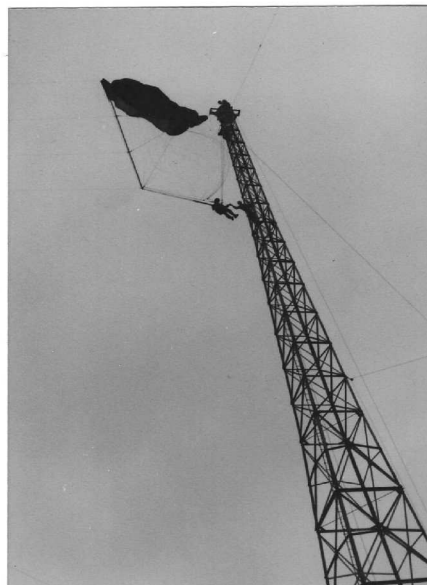


DENIS CROUKAMP

"ACTION STATIONS!"



**SELOUS SCOUT FREEFALL COURSE. STANDING FROM LEFT: NEWTON, R.E. BEARY, TIM CALLOW, PIET VAN DER RIET AND CHARLIE SMALL
KNEELING FROM LEFT: RICH STANNARD, JOHN EARLY (INSTRUCTOR), MARTIN CHIKONDO.**



PARA BEING RESCUED AFTER LANDING IN AERIAL FARM



**DRIFTING DOWN ONTO BUFFALO RANGE FROM 1500 FT AS A CONTINUATION TRAINING JUMP
DURING FIRE FORCE**



"ACTION STATIONS!"



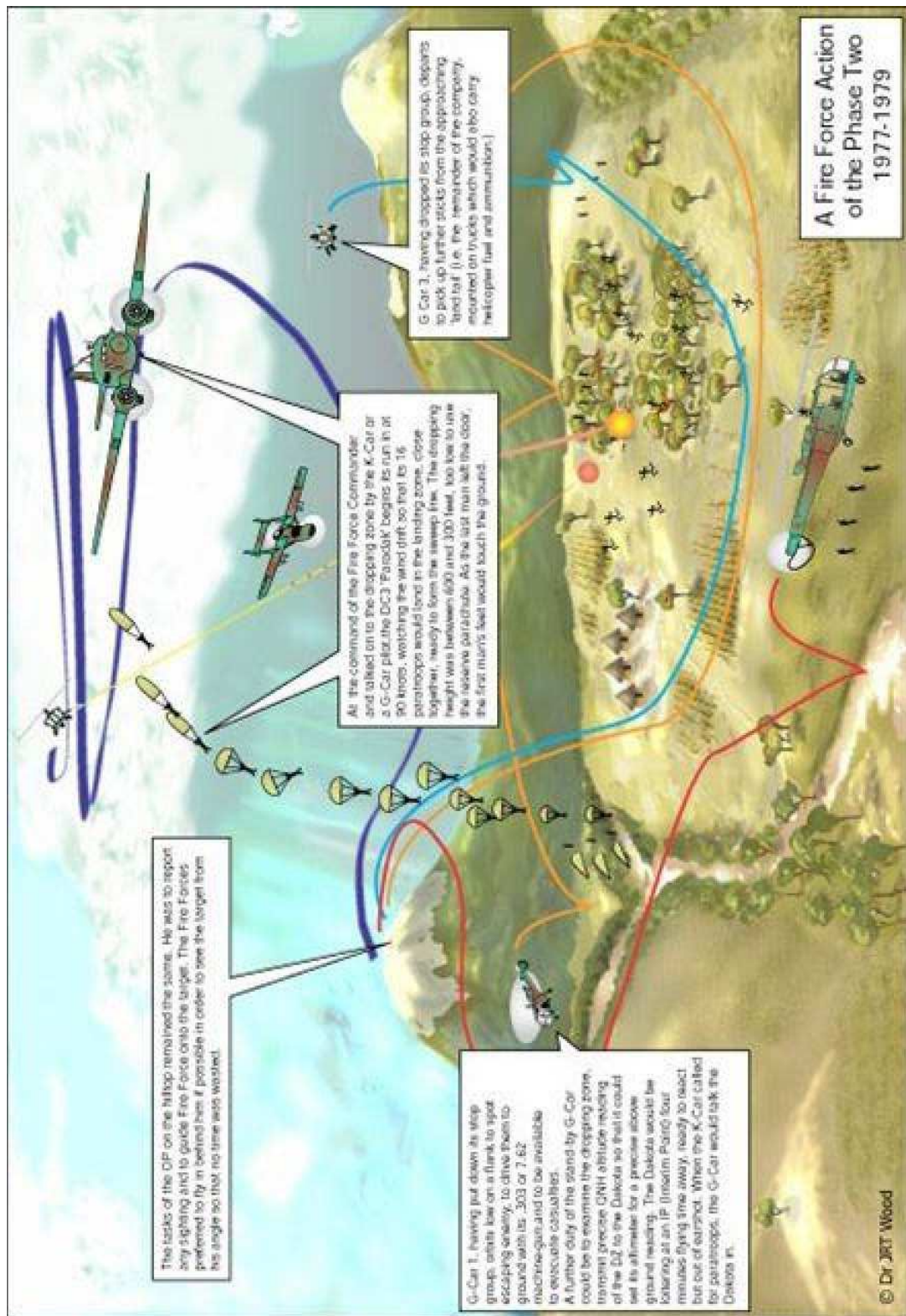
FIRE FORCE PARAS KIT UP. NOTE MAN FRONT LEFT WITH M.A.G. MACHINE GUN



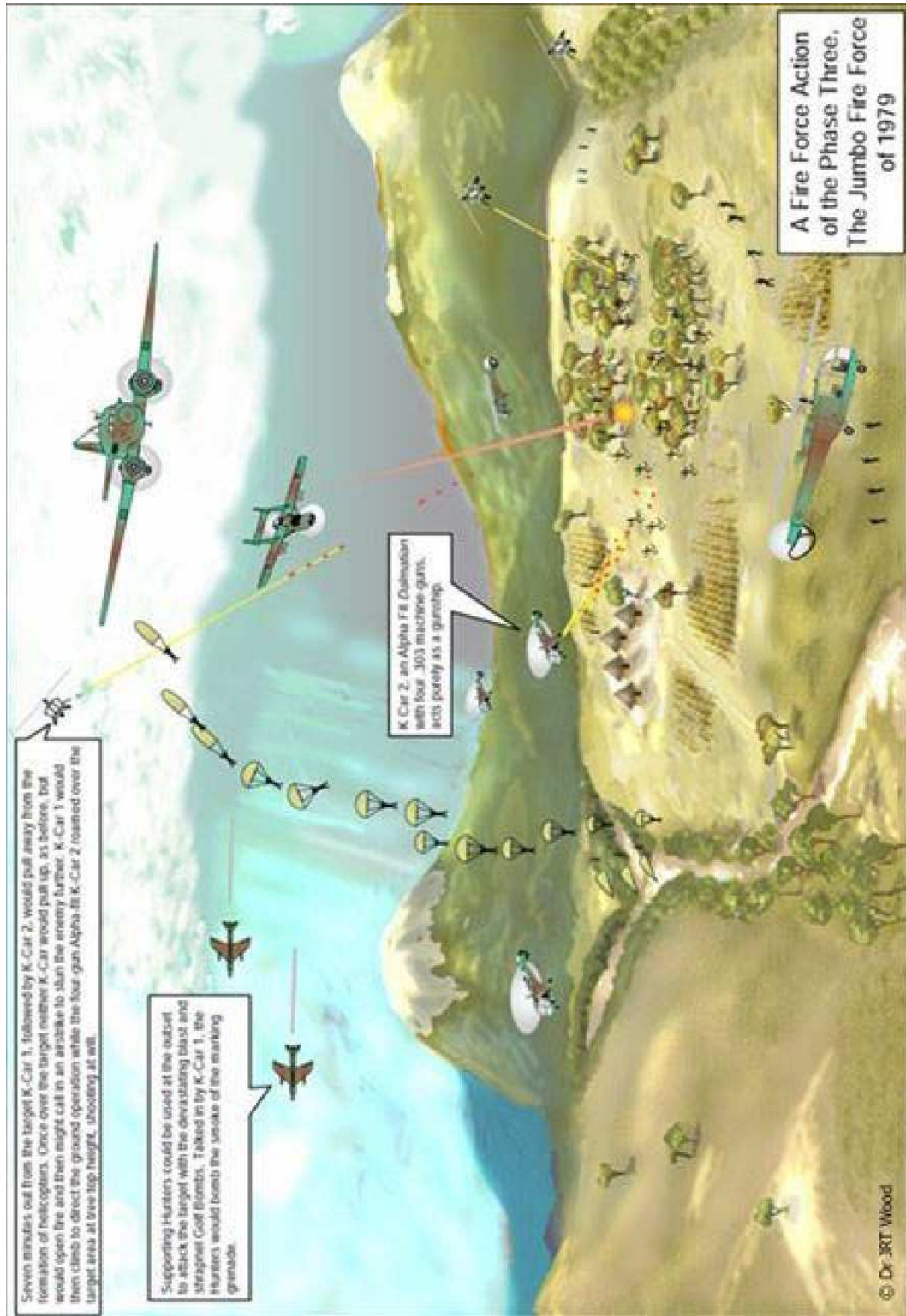
**RLI FIRE FORCE STICK ABOARD AN ALOUETTE 3
G CAR**



G CAR WITH RLI DROPS STICK



"ACTION STATIONS!"





RLI PARA FIRE FORCE



RAR SOLDIER (ARTWORK)



RAR GUNNER (ARTWORK)

"ACTION STATIONS!"

SOME PARTICIPANTS ON MASS H.A.L.O. JUMP INTO RUSSIAN FRONT MOCAMBIQUE



JAN GREYLING



IAIN BOWEN



JAKE HARPER RONALD



KEN ROBERTS



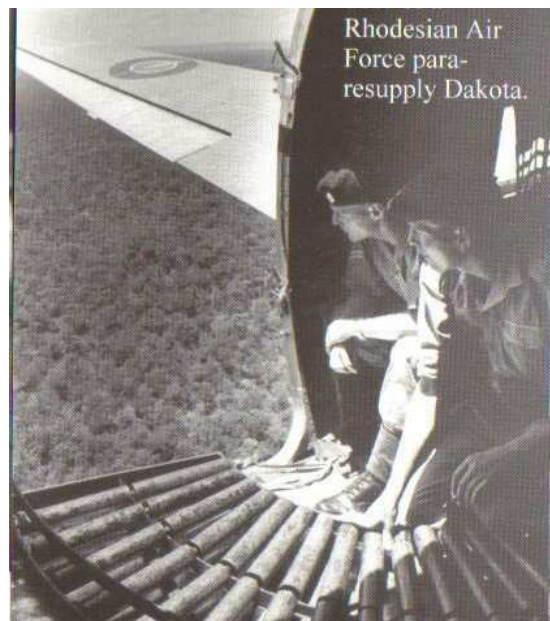
PAUL HOGAN AND FREE FALL COURSE. TONY LYNCH BACK, SECOND FROM RIGHT. "JOUBS" JOUBERT BACK RIGHT. DAVE COLLINS FRONT, SECOND FROM RIGHT



SAS RECOVER CAPTURED COMMUNIST EQUIPMENT AT MAVUI

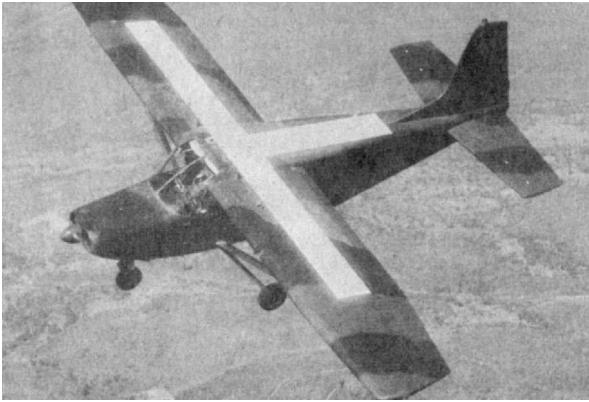


MAJOR BRIAN ROBINSON (WHO COMMANDED THE SAS THROUGH MOST OF THE WAR AND WAS THE LONGEST SERVING O.C.)



3 AIR SUPPLY READY TO DROP FROM DAKOTA. ROLLERS SET UP IN DOOR.

"ACTION STATIONS!"



TROJAN



CANBERRA



VAMPIRE



RHODESIAN HUNTER



DAKOTA FORMATION DROP



LYNX GROUND ATTACK / RECCE

"ACTION STATIONS!"



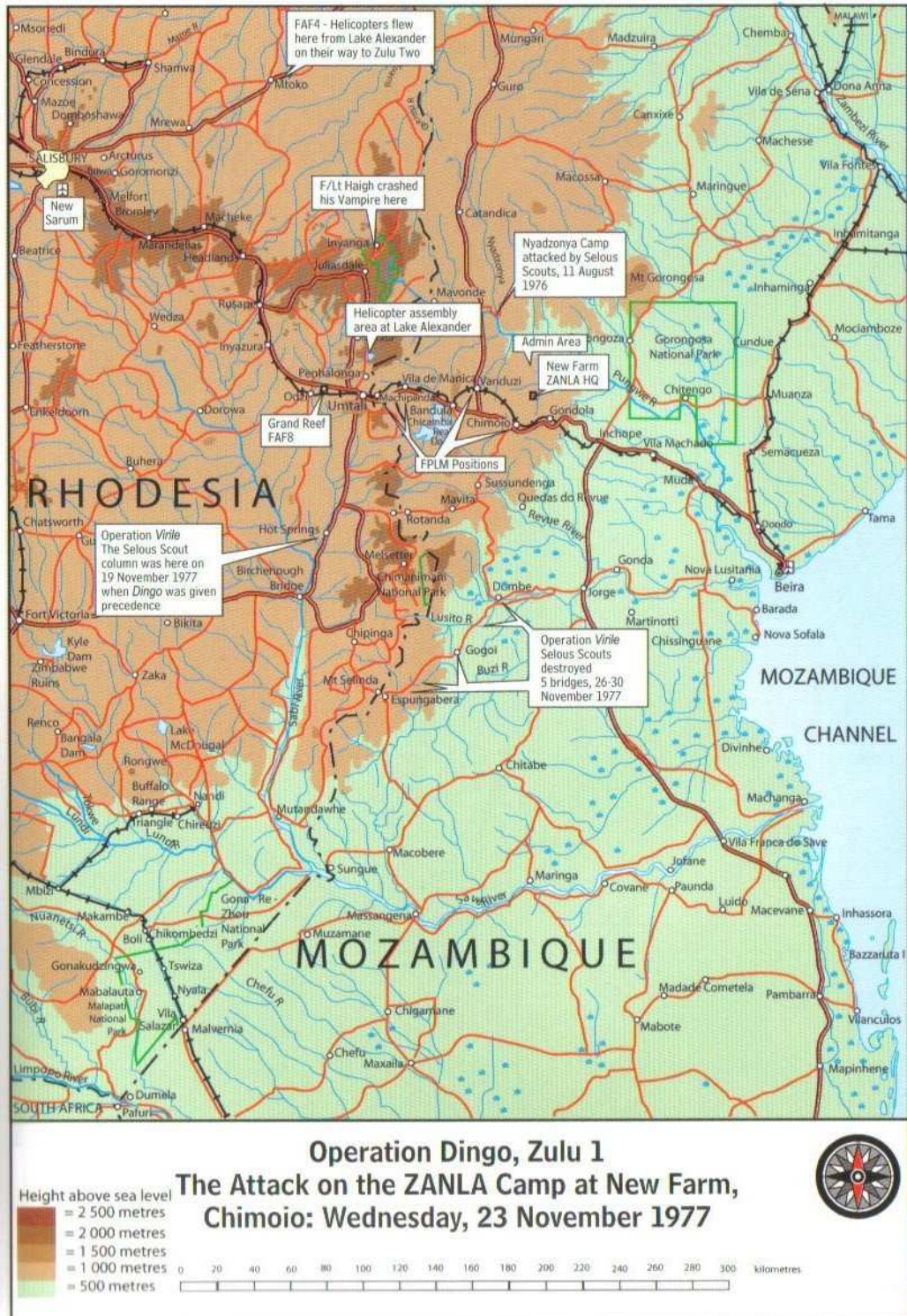
SPECIAL FORCES MEET THE PM: FROM LEFT: JOE DU PLOOY (RLI, LATER LILLED IN ACTION), RICHARD PASSAPORTIS (RLI, LATER SELOUS SCOUTS), DALE COLLETT (SELOUS SCOUTS), STRETCH FRANKLIN (SELOUS SCOUTS), PM IAN SMITH, RON REID-DALY (SELOUS SCOUTS), SCOTTY MCCORMACK (SAS) AND LT. JOHNSON (RLI)



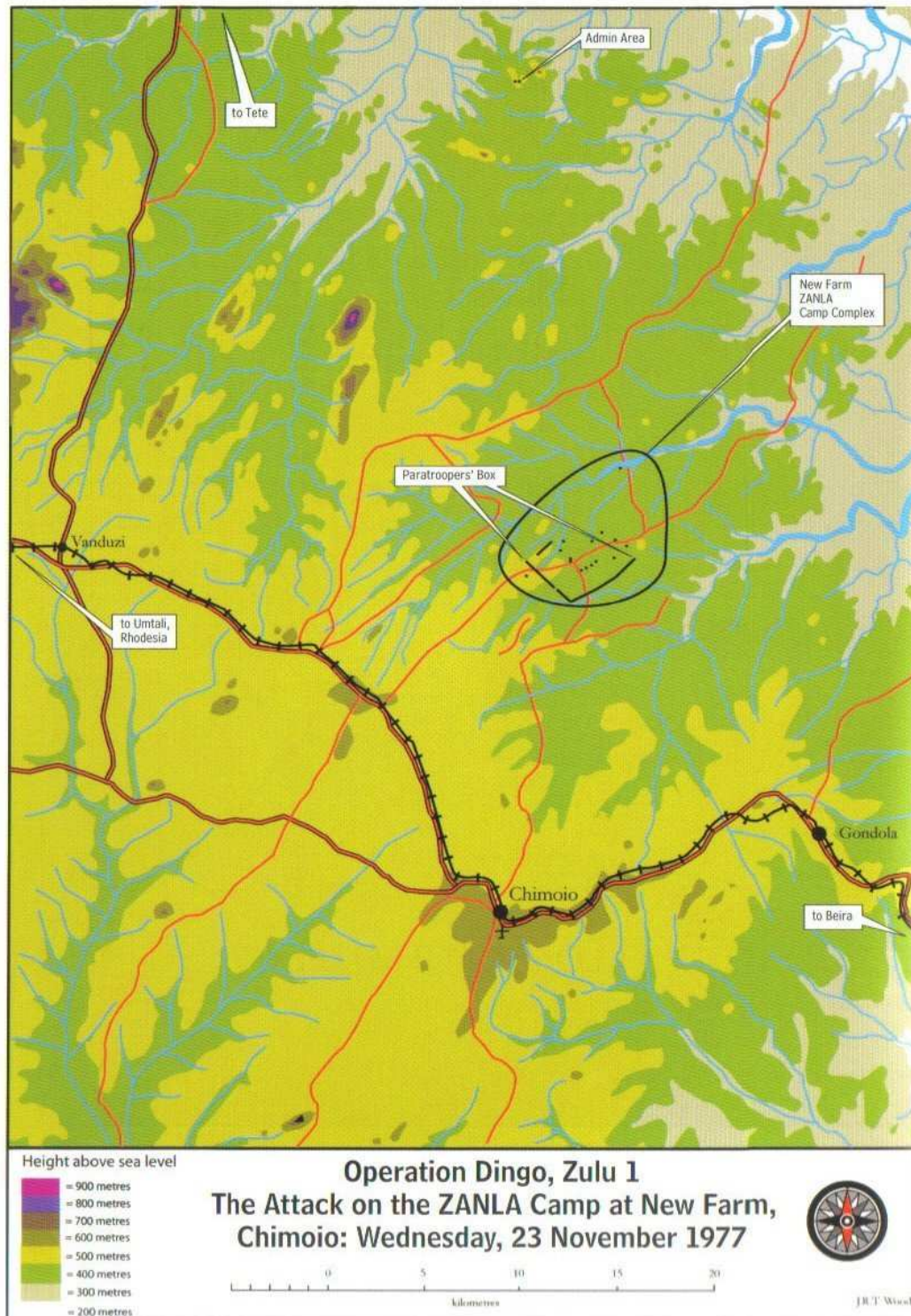
PJI DEMO JUMP SALISBURY SPORTS CLUB 13 JUNE 1976 - JOHN EARLY, KEVIN MILLIGAN, PAUL HOGAN

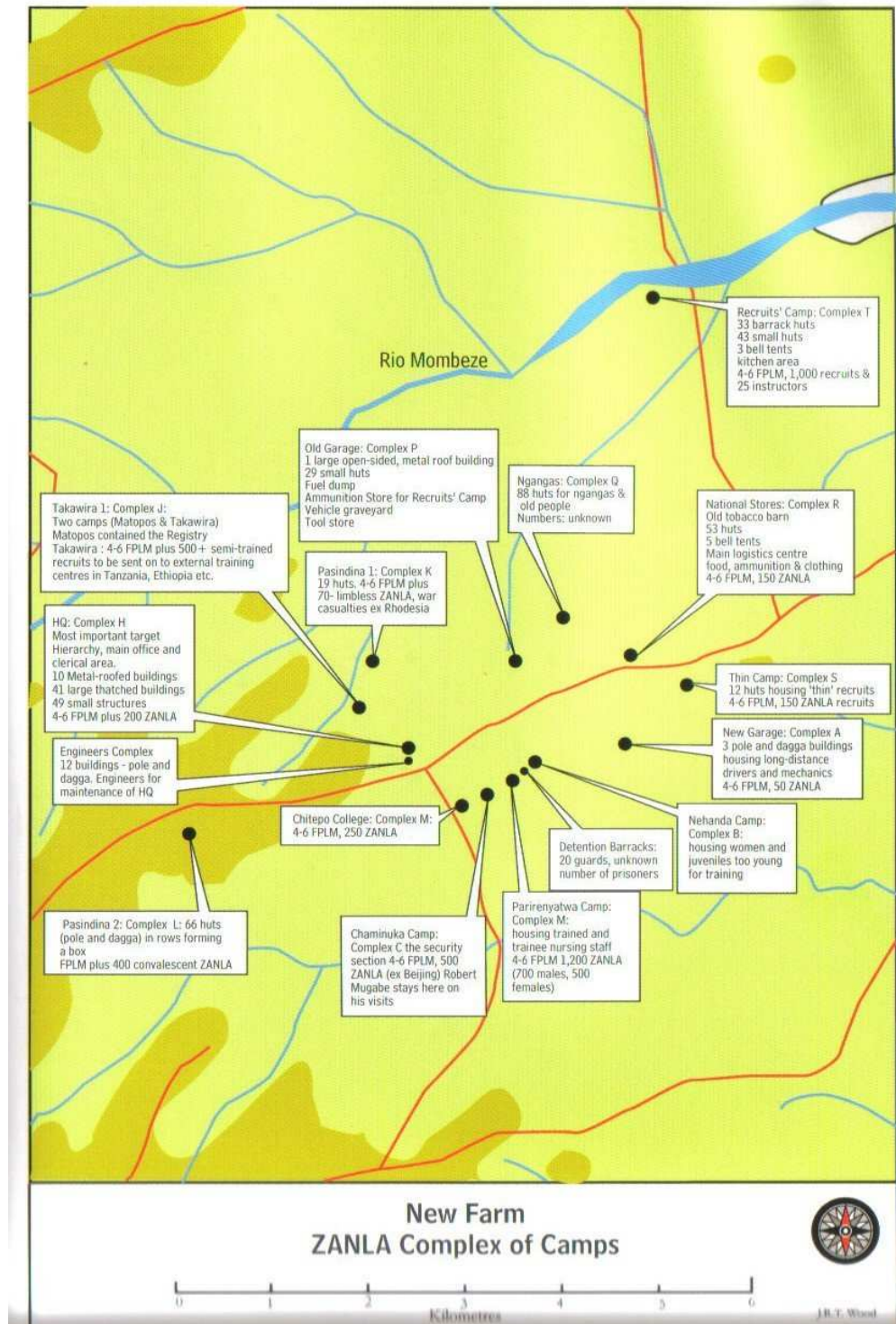


PJIS EXIT WITH SMOKE

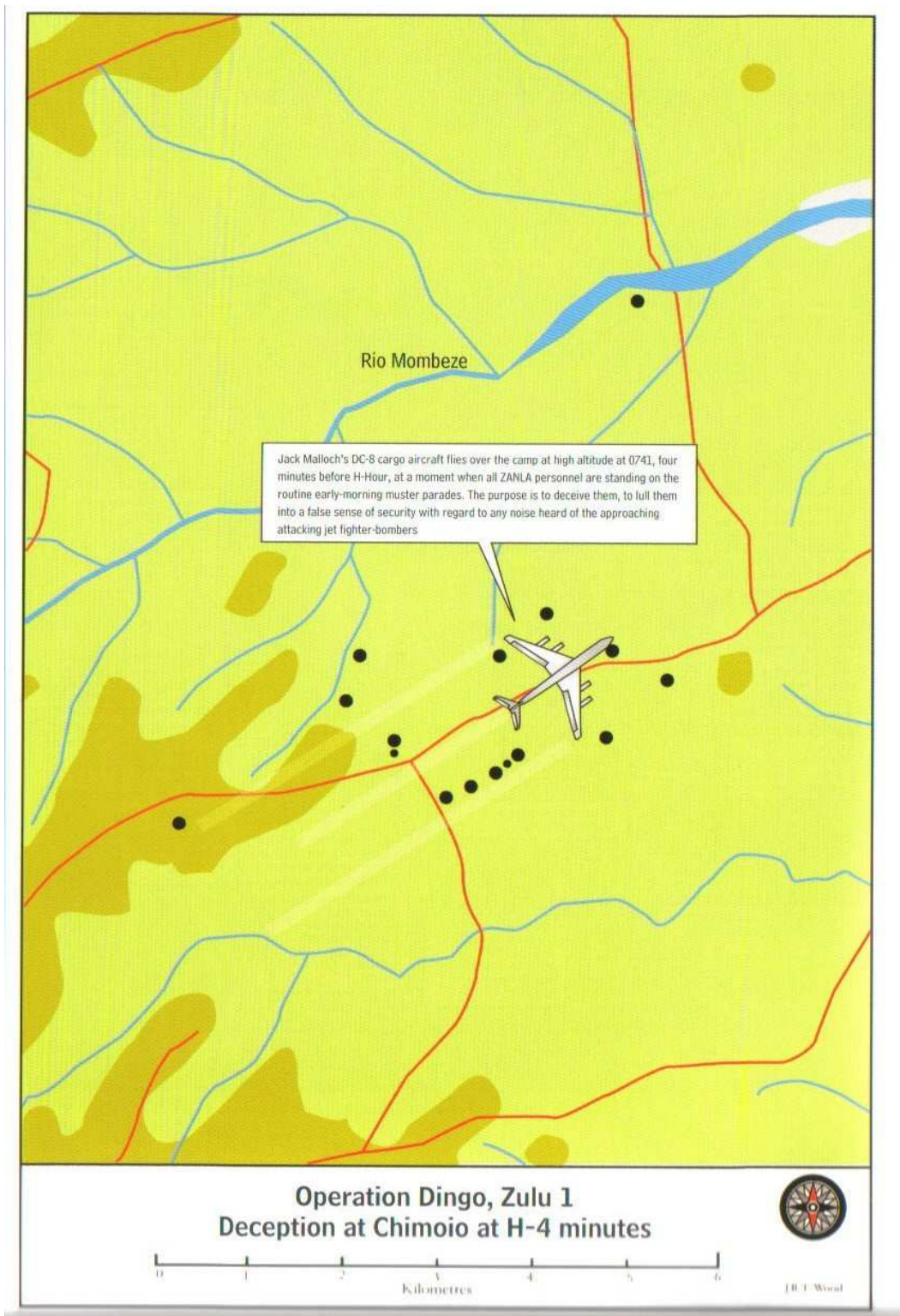


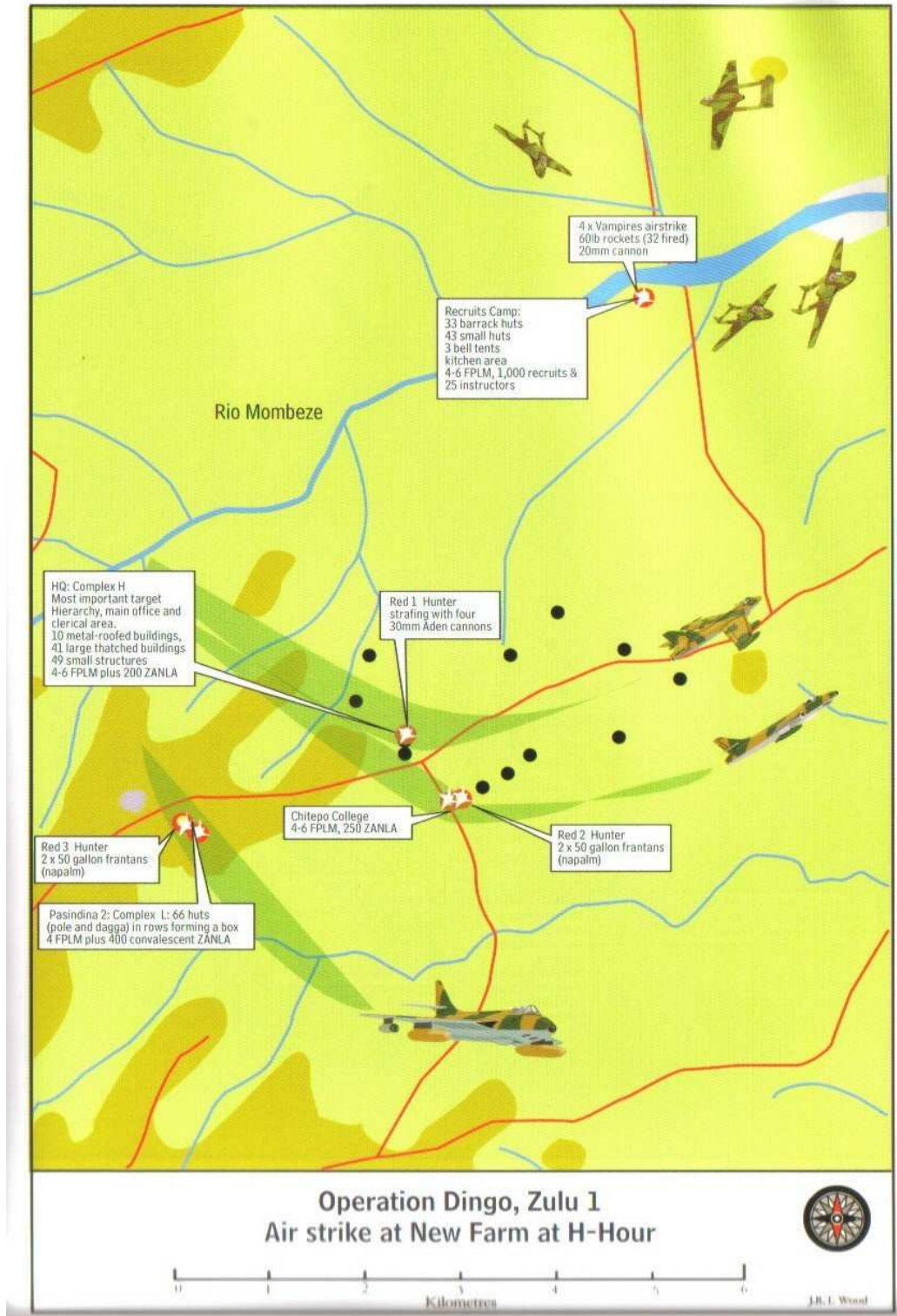
"ACTION STATIONS!"

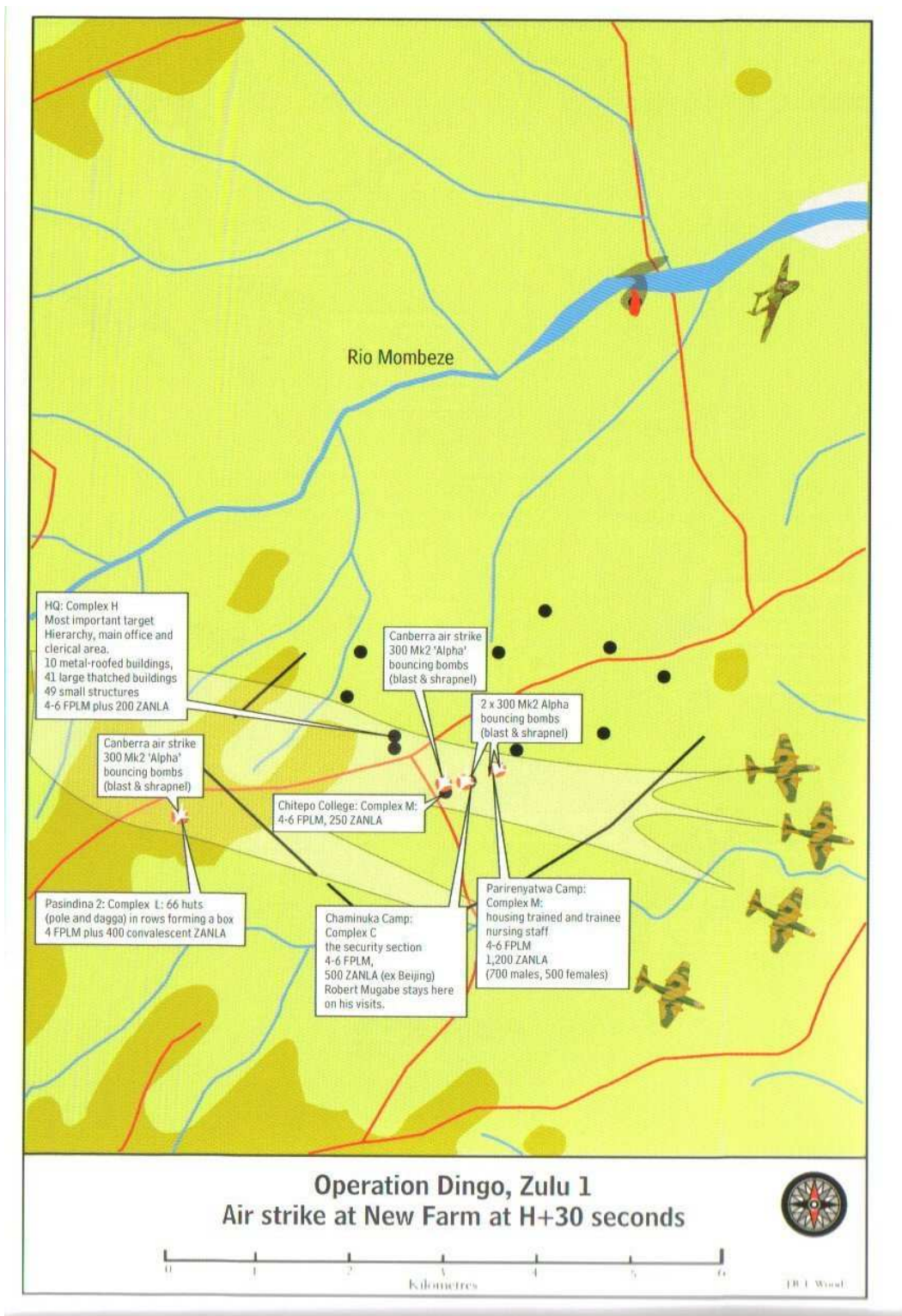


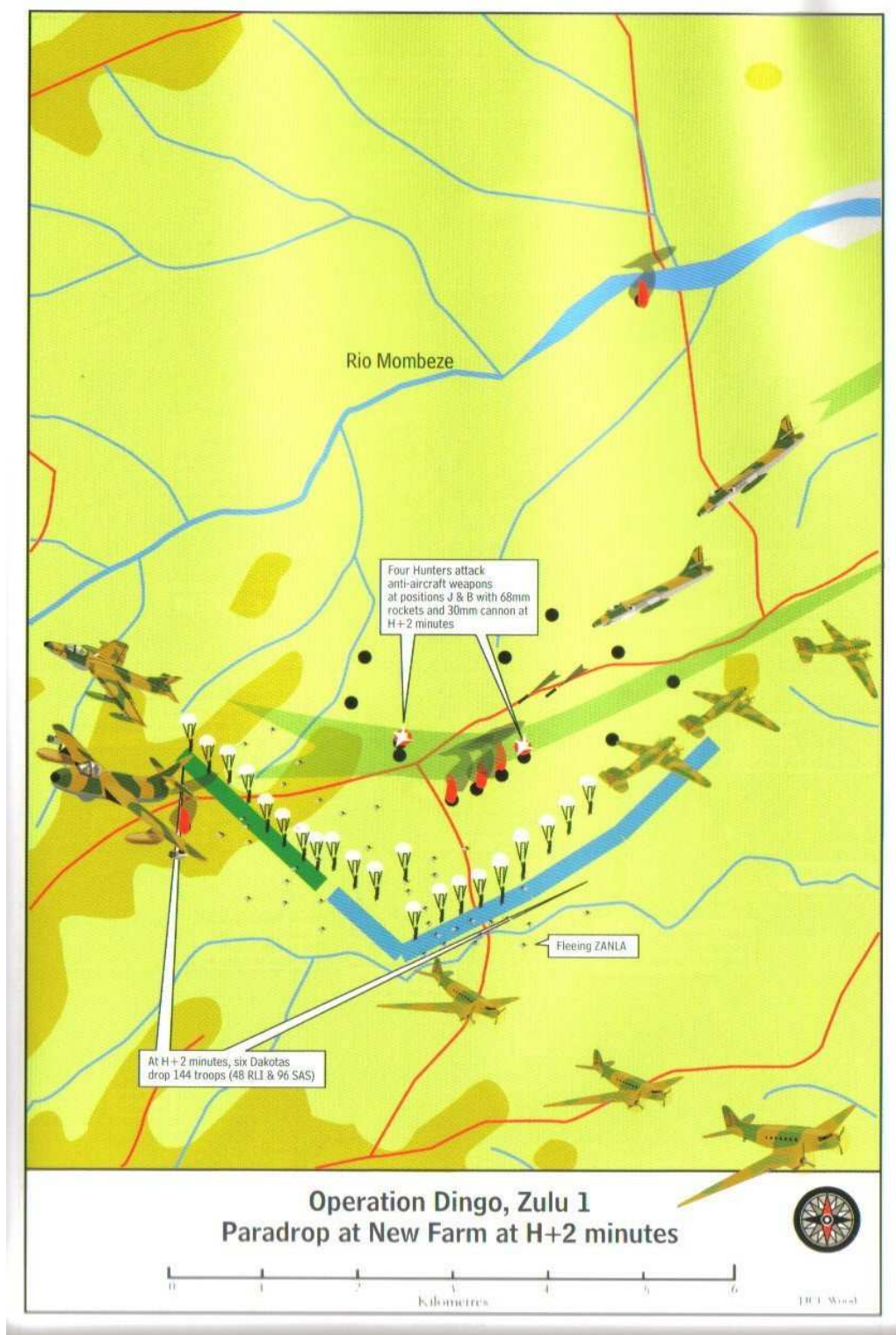


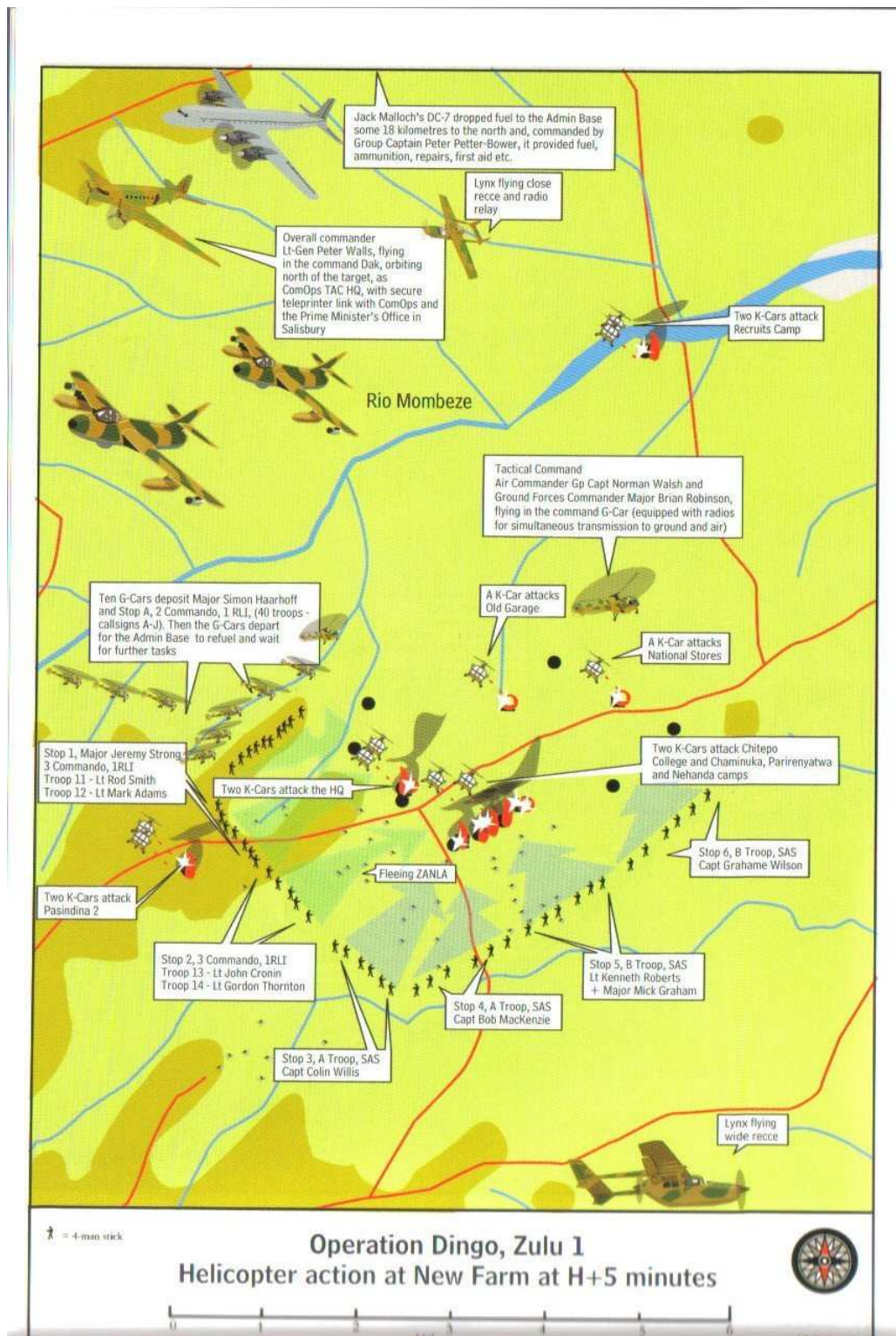
"ACTION STATIONS!"

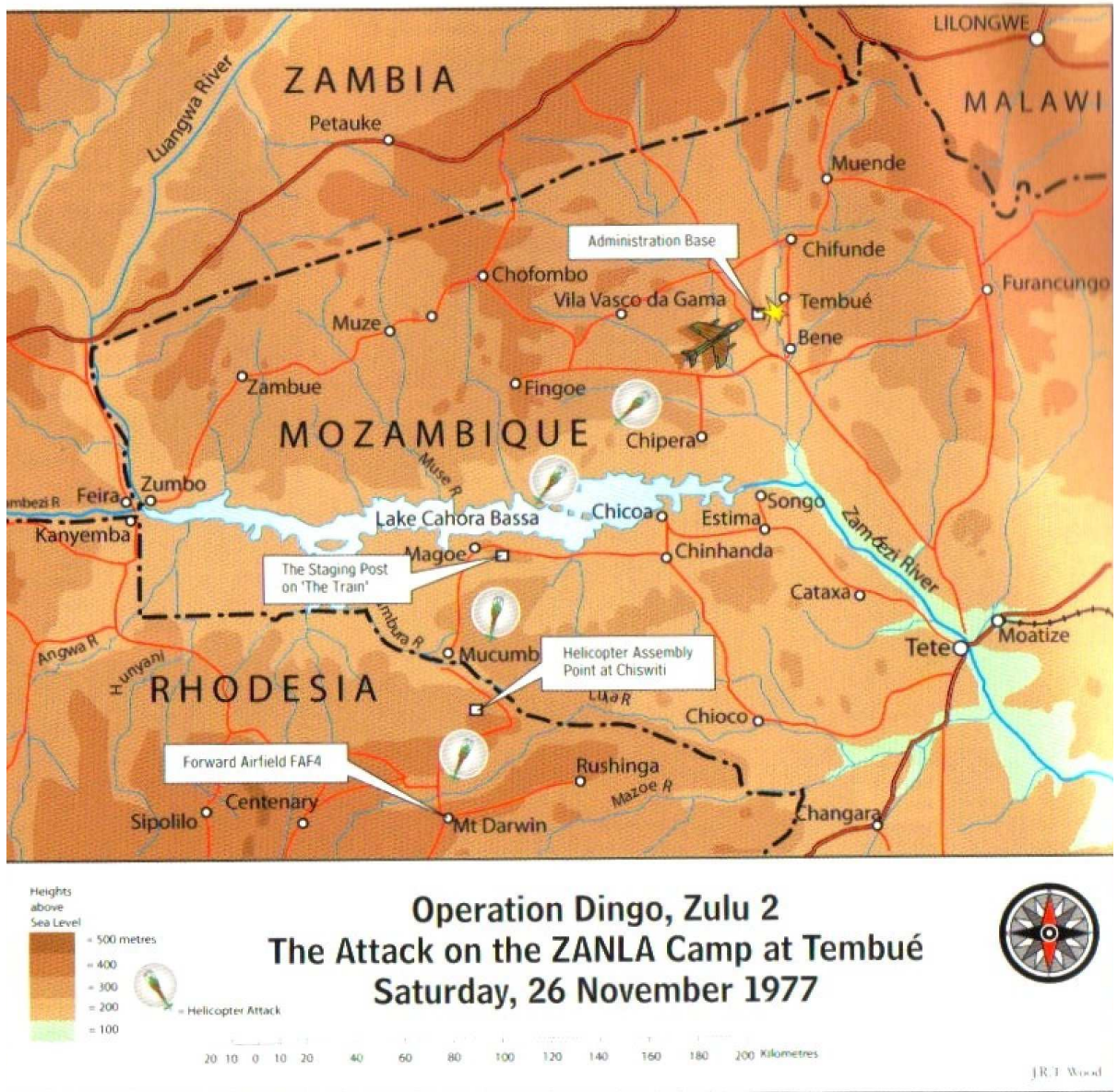


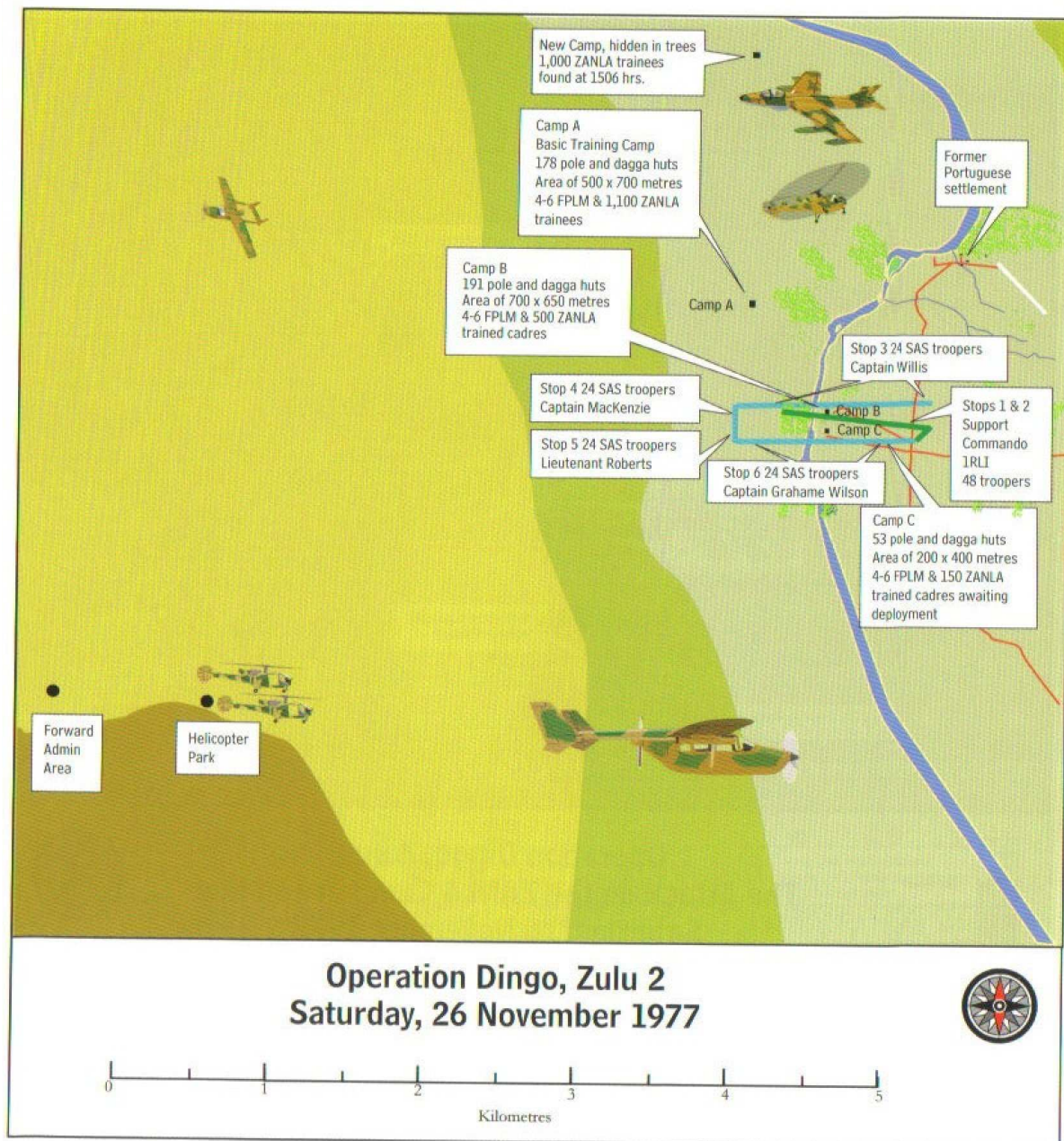














TEST JUMPS FROM DC 7 BEFORE OP. DINGO



**JOCK HUTTON (WITH CAP) PREPARES TO
EMPLANE FOR OP. JUMP INTO ADMIN AREA ON
OP. DINGO**



**MAJOR JERRY STRONG AWARDED THE BRONZE
CROSS OF RHODESIA**

"ACTION STATIONS!"



**INSIDE THE DC 7 ON THE WAY TO ADMIN BASE.
RLI SEATED ON RIGHT.**



**AS BIG IS IT WAS THE DC7 COULD FEEL CROWDED. RLI ON WAY TO ADMIN BASE DROP. NOTE PISTOL UNDER
RESERVE PACK OPENING BANDS ON PARA ON LEFT.**



GOING IN HIGH TO TEMBUE CAMP - ZULU 2...



...AND COMING BACK LOW.

0,02 AM 26 NOV 77
ABOUT TO DROP AT
TEMBUE CAMP,
MOCAMBIQUE.



DAKOTAS ON RUN IN TO DROP ZONE AT TEMBUE. NOTE DAKOTA ON LOWER RIGHT. HUNTER AT UPPER LEFT PULLS UP AFTER STRIKE ON CAMP.

PART THREE

My 1,000th Jump

MY 1,000TH JUMP

Early in 1978, I was with Fire Force at Buffalo Range. I realised that my next jump would be my 1,000th. I had never done an operational jump and was really keen to do one with Fire Force. The idea was to despatch the paras then, whilst the Dak circled around for another run in, myself and the other two despatchers could get ready to jump and despatch ourselves. The 3 Squadron Technician who often flew with the Dak, would be able to pull in our bags. Mike Wiltshire had done it before so I knew it was feasible.

On the 4th January we were called out to a sighting of 50 terrors. This would be an ideal time to jump as the more paras the better against such a large group. The Fire Force Commander said it was ok with him. As the paras kitted up, I fitted my own webbing, Saviac parachute and rifle. I borrowed some cream and cammed up. The other two despatchers, Troopers Tangney and Plogvall did the same as did "Doc" Johnson, one of the troop medics, who agreed to be the fourth man to make up a stick. They were all experienced Fire Force vets. I was the rookie and my mind was running over section battle drills from my Para days long ago as we took off and flew to the sighting. Soon I was too busy to dwell on it as we despatched the sticks onto various dz's around the sighting. When they were all despatched we quickly pulled in the bags and then fitted reserves and hooked up whilst the Dak wheeled around for run in at 500ft. The Fire Force Commander selected our dz near some huts and the aircraft levelled off. My adrenalin was pumping and I was "good to go". As the green came on I shouted "Go" and cleared the static lines of the other three as they jumped, then followed them out.

Check canopy - perfect, quickly through my flight drills and then the ground was rushing up. I was approaching some ploughed ground alongside a large tree and pulled down hard on a lift web to drift clear of the tree. The landing was surprisingly soft but as there was no wind the canopy deflated around me. I was covered in canopy and rigging lines. I threw them clear then quickly unclipped one side of the reserve and body band to free my rifle. As I emerged from the canopy, rifle at the ready, the guys were regrouping at the base of the tree and I ran over to join them.

Our radio crackled into life as the commander ordered us to sweep forward and clear the nearby huts. We moved out into extended line, rifles in the shoulder and advanced towards the huts. I practised on the range regularly with the other PJI's and was confident in my shooting and weapon handling which had always been good. All of my senses were keyed up as we moved forward, eyes scanning the nearby area for movement. It was eerily quiet and we covered each other as we leapfrogged forward to the huts. I felt both an anti-climax and relief as we discovered that the huts had been vacated. As we took up positions of all round defence, the commander finally came through on the radio and ordered us to sweep to the river then across to a position closer to the nearest stick. We moved off cautiously sweeping towards the river line. I was aware from the radio chatter that there had been no contact yet. So where were these 50 guys? Were they hiding in the very thick bush of the river line? Were we walking straight into an ambush? I was sweating and I don't think it was just the intense heat and humidity of that afternoon. An MAG would have been comforting at this time but we only had our trusty FN's. As we approached the thick bush bordering the river, the stick leader Tangney, asked the commander for permission to clear the thick bush with fire before we crossed. It was given and we each double tapped some rounds into the bush. There was no retaliation and we doubled through the shallow river to the other side and moved on. Just then the darkening rain clouds let loose their torrential rain, lashing the bush and ground around us. We were listening into the radio chatter as we moved on and realised there had still been no contacts. One stick was

following up tracks but shortly thereafter the commander called it off as the stick reported tracks washed away in the pouring rain. We were directed back to our dz and we field-packed our parachutes. Shortly after, a 7 Squadron G car came swooping in for our pick up and flight to nearby Zaka airstrip. The Dak had landed there after the drop and was waiting to recover the paras to Buffalo Range. The Dak was sitting there when the torrential rains hit.

We duly boarded the Dak and it taxied to the end of the strip. As it turned to face into wind for take off, one wheel went into sodden ground and bogged down. We tried in vain to get it out by having all the paras heaving, pushing and lifting, whilst Carlos da Silveira, the pilot, opened up the throttles but the venerable lady just wasn't having any of it. Like a stubborn mule she would not budge. We tried digging and putting branches in front of the wheel but all to no avail. Finally two landrovers from the nearby BSAP unit came to the rescue. We tied a rope from the tail wheel to the first landrover and then another rope between the first and second land rover. On the given signal, the paras lifted up on the wing and with the two landrover engines straining, they hauled the Dak out and manoeuvred it around for take off.

The rains had long stopped but the runway had a dip in the centre and by this time a small lake had formed there. Carlos was in a dilemma. To leave the Dak parked overnight whilst the water drained away and risk a possible sneak mortar attack on the aircraft or to attempt a take-off run through the water. He chose the second option. We were all lined up watching as he would only take the Dak empty. He brought those Pratt and Whitney engines up to full throttle, stomped off the brakes and let it roll. It picked up speed, rolling downhill at a good lick until it hit the water. The Dak disappeared in a huge burst of spray, staggered out of the other side like a wet dog, then painfully slowly, picked up speed again. The trees at the far end of the strip looked very close as he finally pulled up the aircraft and scraped over the top. Carlos dipped his wings in salute then went on his way to huge cheers from the stunned onlookers.

We were ferried back to Buffalo Range by the chopper G cars. My 1,000th jump had not given me any action but it had been different!

It was not over though. When I returned to New Sarum, I was called in to see the Boss. Apparently Major Gentleman from 3 Air Supply had seen myself and the despatchers boarding the Dak all ready for action. When he next saw Derek he asked in all innocence, if it was the practice now for the PJI's to jump too. Derek was furious with me and he let me know in no uncertain terms that his "PJI's were too valuable to go around jumping into contacts". My ears were burning when I got out of there and that was to be my one and only op jump! I know, though, that some of the other guys did it but managed to keep it quiet from the Boss.

RHODESIAN AFRICAN RIFLES COMMENCE PARA TRAINING

Even though we were training SAS, Selous Scouts, RLI and sending RLI courses to Tempe, it still was not enough to man all the Fire Forces coupled with increasing internal and external operations. There had been various changes at PTS with PJI's transferring to join the Army, more being recruited and various promotions. Charlie and Mike had been commissioned, John was promoted to School Warrant Officer and I moved up to Flight Sergeant. I was running a UT PJI course. I was following John's principles and was determined not to lower standards no matter how urgent the need for PJI's. I had several on the course and it was very intense.

At this time, Boss De Kock called us all in for a briefing and informed us that the situation

was dire. The Army needed more paras and needed them asap. We were to commence training the RAR. Also we had to be more forgiving and do whatever we could to qualify the trainees. We were not very happy about a possible lowering of standards to get more through but could see that Derek had no choice. The squeeze was on and the situation desperate. The first group of RAR duly arrived for training and my UT PJI's found themselves conducting their first course with quite a challenge. The men were fit and most combat experienced. They were volunteers and some knew what they were in for but others were a bit bewildered initially. We had language problems in some cases and also culture problems but we persevered. However, for all our efforts there were considerable RTU's on their first course. Those that qualified duly went off to Fire Force. Exit technique was usually the weakest area but once under canopy they were fine and on the ground were fine soldiers.

The Top Brass however were alarmed at the high failure rate and obviously had informed Derek that it was just not acceptable as he called us in for another briefing. Despite our protests, in future, RTU's would only be for refusals to jump and not on weak performance.

PARA SCUBA

One of the many skills an SAS operator may have is that of Para Scuba. In other words, drop scuba divers by parachute into the water where they would don air tanks and flippers then be on their way to do a recce or sabotage.

In May I flew to Kariba for a parascuba exercise at Lake Kariba, one of the largest man-made lakes in the world and bordering Rhodesia and Zambia. We were determined to make the most of the flight time to climb to a good height so we could jump in and do some relative work. Mike Wiltshire, Paul Hogan and I jumped into the airstrip at Lake Kariba from 12,000ft and had some great relative work during free fall. We then landed and kitted up 12 SAS for a static line drop and 3 for parascuba. Staff Sgt Paul Fisher and two others kitted up in their wetsuits, flippers taped to their calves and carried air tanks to be mounted under the reserve parachute for the jump. Temperatures at Kariba were usually high and that morning was no exception. The inside of the Dak was like an oven and the parascuba boys were sweating buckets in their wet suits (excuse the pun). As we took off and climbed to 1,000ft it was a little cooler but it was still very hard on them. We dropped a group along the side of the runway then turned out over the lake to drop Paul and his men. They hooked up and came down to action stations. I thought they looked like aliens as they stood there poised to jump in their wetsuits with air tanks hanging on them. They couldn't wait to get out and into the water. We ran in and they had a good jump about 2kms offshore. When they hit the water, they rapidly slipped out of their chutes and fitted the air tanks and flippers, then underwater they swam into their "target", the pier at Carribea Bay Hotel. It went without a hitch. The parachutes were recovered by an SAS zodiac inflatable on the lake. In reality, they would have been abandoned. Apart from the fearsome sauna in the aircraft it had gone well.

That evening a contingent of RLI from a nearby camp arrived and we despatched them on a training night jump onto the airfield. One troopie landed very hard and broke his leg.

The next morning Mike, Paul and I did a relative work jump from 12,000ft whilst the SAS prepared for another jump. We emplaned them as for the day before and repeated the exercise. Again it went very well and then we carried straight onto New Sarum climbing on the way to 12,000ft and jumped back into Sarum. This time we were joined by Ian Douglas, a new PJI who had joined us from Safety Equipment Section and who was a keen skydiver.

It was an unforgettable two days.

50,000th JUMP

On the 30th June 1978, we celebrated the 50,000th jump. All of the PJI's jumped from 8,000 ft wearing smoke. We exited rapidly then bomburst in all directions for a tracking demonstration which always looks very effective. Once under canopy we swooped into the sports field for precision landings. We then adjourned into the club house for a well-deserved party.

OPERATION MASCOT - NEW TEMBUE

A month later it was time to get very serious again.

By March of 1978 there were many changes in the political arena resulting in an agreement being signed between Ian Smith and three internal moderate black leaders. This should have resulted in peace and a new era by steering the country to Black Rule. In the event, the whole thing was condemned by Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo. Instead of there being a reduction in the war, as had been hoped, it was actually to escalate.

Nkomo, assisted by the Russians, had begun to build up his ZIPRA forces in Zambia and Mugabe's ZANLA, assisted by the Chinese, were once again reforming and rapidly increasing in numbers. A close watch was being kept on this and in particular there was worry about New Tembue, a camp adjacent to the one that had been destroyed during Op Dingo. The indications were that it housed 3,000 ZANLA.

On the 10th July, at last light, we dropped two Selous Scout recce teams, including one of the world's leading exponents on this type of reconnaissance, Chris "Schollie" Schollenberg, into an area two days' walk away from the complex. They made their way to points overlooking the camp and reported back. First reports were indicating a presence of just 500 in one camp and about 50 in another. The camp was actually a series of grass "bashas" under the trees. On the 19th July, ZANLA spotted and opened fire on one member of the recce team. He managed to escape unhurt but the op was now compromised. Schullie did not withdraw however but kept watch for another two days and surprisingly reported that the alarm was over and life had returned to normal at the camp. Comops agreed to a strike taking place even though they were surprised to hear that ZANLA were still in the camp.

Early on the morning of the 30th July, Operation Mascot was launched. It was to be a virtual repeat of Op. Dingo Zulu Two but this time we would have 8 Daks available. There was the same eager anticipation to get to grips with the enemy in a big way and the lads were very gung ho as we took off in our armada and headed off, once more skimming over the waters of Caborra Bassa. It seemed as if the previous action had been a dress rehearsal and there was a lot of confidence that the success could be repeated. The drop was preceded by the strike aircraft which plunged onto target with their deadly weapons.

I was despatching the SAS from my aircraft, which was second in line and the drop went without incident or opposition. The ground forces quickly began their tasks of enveloping and then sweeping into the camp, only to find to their great disappointment that the camp was largely empty. When Fire Force had a call out or drop that did not yield results they called it "a lemon". Operation Mascot had been a big lemon.

"ACTION STATIONS!"

It did at least serve to perfect the methods and logistics for future attacks which were not far off. I have heard it rumoured very strongly since the war that there was a British spy in Comops who was passing on info about our planned camp attacks!

BATELEUR PARACHUTE CLUB

I was meeting more and more Air Force personnel who were keen to start parachuting and some had joined the local skydiving club. It seemed like a good time to form an Air Force parachute club which could be enjoyed by any member of the Air Force.

In mid-1978 I approached the powers that be with my proposal and they willingly agreed. We named it Bateleur after the eagle used by the Air Force on its symbols.

From then on we jumped on a Wednesday afternoon, the official time for sports. We hired the civvy skydiving aircraft and jumped at their nearby club. The Air Force was extremely supportive and allowed us to use PTS facilities for training and on occasion, the use of service aircraft, if it could be tied in with official pilot training.

We had great fun over the years and it forged a strong bond amongst the jumpers who included PJI's, pilots and technicians from all the different branches. We would usually round out the Wednesday afternoons by doing the last skydive of the day into the Sports Club grounds. Everyone enjoyed that, although more than once a jumper would just shave in over the club house roof!

ACTION ON THE RUSSIAN FRONT

I had 3 days of continuous externals in August, all into the Russian Front with SAS personnel. All drops were from 500ft at last light. The first was on the 21st when we dropped three groups of 6, each with an equipment box, then 4 groups with a box each on the 22nd and then a final drop of 16 with a box, which included Frank Hales. I never did hear what they got up to but I am sure they caused a lot of mischief as always!

VISCOUNT DISASTER

On Sunday, 3rd September 1978, Derek De Kock was enjoying a relaxing evening at home with his family when his phone rang. He was advised to prepare for a search-and-rescue mission by the SAS. An Air Rhodesia Viscount carrying 58 passengers had gone missing on a return flight from Kariba to Salisbury. Major Garth Barrett, the C.O of the SAS, was busy organising a search and rescue mission with a party of SAS including medics and panniers of medical equipment. He required a Dak to take off at first light with himself and his team. They were to locate the missing aircraft by flying a grid pattern along the flight path, then jumping into the crash site.

Garth who had replaced Robby Robinson, was aware that Nkomo's ZIPRA were armed with SAM 7 Russian handheld missile launchers. They fired heat-seeking missiles designed to lock on to the heat source radiating from an aircraft's engine. Security forces had, on two previous occasions, found indications that SAM 7's had been fired at South African Airways flights, but they missed. ZIPRA accused the Russians of supplying defective weapons. A Russian technician carried out an investigation in Lusaka and came to the conclusion that the missiles had been badly handled because there was nothing wrong with the missiles being supplied. Garth suspected the worst.

Derek rounded up some of us and we prepared all the necessary kit for a first light take off. There had been no news during the night as at 0500 the Dak with the PJI's and SAS set off for their search. After some considerable time searching their grid pattern in the heavily treed area of Urungwe, they finally spotted the wreckage. It was broken up, badly burned out and still smoking. The PJI's readied Garth and his men. They were despatched and landed in a cotton field close to the wreck. They quickly regrouped and swept towards the Viscount until they came upon an appalling site that was never to leave them: a bundle of ten bodies, some elderly, some women, some children. They had obviously survived the crash only to be mown down at close range with automatic rifle fire. The hardened SAS were sickened but then amazed to find three survivors come out of the bush towards them. They had run from the massacre and remained hidden until it was all over.

Five other survivors, including a four year old had also survived the crash but were searching for water when the massacre began. Hearing the shots they fled into the bush. They were found by arriving Security Forces a short while later. (One of them was a friend of mine, Cecil McLaren, a local dentist.)

The story unfolded. The aircraft had been hit by a SAM 7 shortly after take off. A starboard engine was hit causing a fire and leading to the crash landing in formidable country. As the survivors staggered clear they were met by a gang of ZIPRA who assured them they would not harm them as they herded them together. Then laughing as they did so, they cut them down in cold blood. Of the 58, 18 survived the crash of whom 10 were murdered.

The SAS would never forget the grisly sights of that day. Nkomo boasted to the world about his victory.

A couple of months later, after a tip off, the SAS were able to ambush and account for 3 of the terrorists responsible for the murder of the survivors.

Five months after the first disaster a second Viscount was shot down by a SAM 7 in the same area. The SAS and PTS were again called out but this time they were not needed. Everyone perished in the crash. Nkomo became public enemy number one. A price was put on his head but was never to be collected. He evaded several attempts by the Security Forces to wreak revenge. He was just too slippery to catch. I saw him some years later, after the war, in a hotel in Bulawayo and would willingly have taken him out if I thought I could have got away with it!

As a result of the downings, shrouds were devised and fitted to dissipate the heat from the Dak exhausts such that the missile would not lock on. This was not feasible on other aircraft and they had to devise other methods to deal with the threat.

OPERATION GATLING

So far Nkomo had been getting off lightly. Now it was his turn. He needed to have his ZIPRA forces destroyed in the way we had destroyed Mugabe's at Zulu 1 and 2. Intelligence was indicating very strongly that his forces were multiplying at an alarming rate. It was essential to hit them in their camps. Nkomo, like Mugabe had been, was very confident that his men were out of reach, deep in Zambia and so close to Lusaka. Not only that, he had the protection of Zambia with its Migs, Rapier missile anti-aircraft systems and well-equipped army, let alone ZIPRA's own Russian supplied anti-aircraft defences. His defences were impregnable by Rhodesia's small forces - or so he thought.

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Intelligence based largely on aerial reconnaissance and captures indicated three main camps. His main camp, FC, was 15km North of Lusaka, containing 4,000 ZIPRA and was also the seat of ZIPRA's Military High command. It was Nkomo's most important camp.

The second camp, Mkushi, 125km North of Lusaka was thought to contain 1,000. It was surrounded by 8 smaller camps.

The third camp, housing 4,000 enemy, CGT2 ("Communist Guerrilla Training") camp was situated 100km east of Lusaka.

Because of the distances involved there would have to be 3 admin bases. One at Kariba, another at Mana Pools near the Zambian border and the third, deep inside Zambia just 5 minutes flying time from Mkushi camp. There were not enough resources to strike all three simultaneously but it was essential to hit all three as quickly as possible.

It was decided to hit FC camp first and pulverise it by maximum air power alone. The second camp to be hit would be Mkushi. This would be done by airstrike, eliminating the air defences to clear the way for an air assault. However, all the fighter bombers would be used on the first strike against FC, so the para assault could only take place once the fighter bombers had returned, rearmed and arrived at Mkushi.

In the case of CGT 2, that could only be tackled once the Daks and helicopters had dropped at Mkushi then flown to Kariba and Mana Pools respectively to pick up the troops. They would then set off and assault the third camp. Obviously rapid turnarounds and slick timing would be essential for success. It was not the ideal, but it was the only way because of resources. The task of assaulting Mkushi was handed to the SAS. 120 paras and 45 heliborne troops, including a mortar team, which could provide very effective supporting fire to the soldiers. The SAS would have to call on all its regular and TA men for the mission as some would be involved in the assault and others would be needed for essential tasks in the admin areas too.

The elimination of CGT 2 was given to the RLI. They would provide 100 paras and 48 heliborne troops, as well as providing paras, led by the RSM, to secure and run the Admin Base inside Zambia. They would also have to maintain a strong presence within Rhodesia. Therefore an unusual step was taken. At the time of preparing for the operation we were busy at PTS running a basic para course for the RLI. They had completed six jumps and were scheduled to qualify for their wings after the seventh jump the next day. They were in for a large surprise. After the 6th jump they headed back to their barracks at Cranborne as normal but instead, they turned into the SAS barracks at Kabrit. They were then quarantined and informed that their qualifying jump would be into Zambia the next day to secure the Admin Base! I would love to have seen their faces at the briefing. One of the men also tasked with jumping into the Admin area was CSM "Stan" Standish. As a TA soldier he had wangled himself a week's attachment, determined not to miss out.

Early on the morning of the 19th October 1978, Hunters, Canberras, Vampires, Lynx and four K cars headed North for FC camp. Other Hunters orbited Lusaka airport, whilst more orbited Mumba airbase. Any attempt at interference by the Zambian Air Force Migs would be dealt with by the Hunters.

At exactly 0830, the Hunters rained death onto ZIPRA as they assembled for morning parade, immediately followed by the Canberras with their alphas. Vampires, and Lynx aircraft pounded the anti-aircraft positions. To complete the devastation, the K cars then swept the terrorists with their cannon fire. Surprise was so complete that initially it seemed the anti-aircraft positions were not even

manned as the "Blue Jobs" drove their attack home. Things changed. The K cars were tasked to take out a particularly determined gun crew. They ran in to make their strike, preceded by a Vampire and Lynx hitting the target. The Lynx was hit in the fuel tank and cleared out of there. The K cars were met by heavy fire and realised they were outgunned and also made a "tactical withdrawal". One chopper was hit and crashed. A daring recovery was made by Nigel Lamb and his tech Finch Bellringer in one of the other K cars. They dropped into a small clearing near the downed chopper. As soon as they landed, they ran forward and recovered the trapped pilot from the wreck, carried him back to their chopper and headed for medical help at Mana Pools. The tech had been propelled into the bush by the crash and lay with an injured back. As Nigel lifted off another K car dropped in and they recovered the tech, following onto Mana Pools. Both tech and pilot made full recoveries. The chopper was destroyed.

Whilst the initial strikes were being completed, the Canberra commander "Green Leader" informed Lusaka tower that Rhodesia was striking ZIPRA in its base but had no quarrel with Zambia. However any attempt by Zambian aircraft to intervene would result in them being shot down. There was no interference and for the duration of the raid Rhodesia virtually controlled the Zambian airspace over the area. FC was decimated.

Back at PTS our SAS men were ready and we were being relayed a blow by blow account of events at FC camp, then came the order to move out.

It was almost becoming old hat now as we emplaned the paras and headed straight for Mkushi base camp. We flew very low to avoid Zambian radar and conditions were uncomfortably turbulent in the "Vomit Comet", as the RLI had dubbed the Dak. Old hat or not the same anxious thoughts returned as we swept even closer to target. Could we be as lucky this time? So many defences. Surely the Zambians would be prepared to have a go? Hope the Hunter boys are on the ball. How effective were the Rapier missiles we had heard so much about? Then things became too busy to dwell on it as we prepared the paras for action. The SAS as stoic as ever. No matter what happened they could be depended on. 3 Squadron pilots had been briefed to drop the paras in a horseshoe shape around the main camp, with each aircraft dropping on a different bearing. The heliborne troops and K cars would cover the remaining side. Vic Culpan, our pilot, ordered us to bring the men to action stations as he prepared for his run in, forming on the Dak in front and working hard to hold her steady in the buffeting conditions. The green came on and we sent the lads on their way. Three of the sticks were to land too close and were involved in fire-fights as soon as they landed. To complicate matters, a grass fire was sweeping towards them and they had to run clear of the blaze which destroyed their precious parachutes.

As the fire-fights continued, Lance Corporal Jeff Collett fell, mortally wounded. His adversary was quickly taken care of and to their surprise the SAS realised it was a female. It turned out to be a predominantly woman's camp but they were armed, trained and prepared to fight. Bruce Langley, an excellent medic and one of the search and rescue party who had jumped into the Viscount wreckage, was struck down, wounded in the face and shoulder. The SAS Doctor, Jon Thomson, rushed forward and was putting in a drip even as a grass fire swept towards them. Bruce was picked up and hustled clear of the danger.

Actions were taking place all over the complex until the opposition was finally eliminated. The SAS were impressed with the layout of the camp finding it superior to the ZANLA camps that they had assaulted. Scotty McCormack the SAS Intelligence Officer even managed to capture a Russian General's uniform complete with medal but, sadly, no General!

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A Zambian Mig briefly put in an appearance causing some consternation but made no attempt to intervene, much to the regret of the Hunter pilots watching him with itchy trigger fingers. Simultaneous with our drop, the Paras had dropped into the Admin Base. Stan Standish sprang into action and was a veritable dynamo of activity and a superb example to the newly qualified RLI paras who had jumped in with him from the Dakota. Under the Leadership of the RLI RSM they did great work that day making sure the choppers were immediately replenished.

As soon as we had completed our drop, Vic turned the aircraft away from the camp and began our long, low level return flight to Rhodesia, this time to Kariba. Vic, a recent 1 Squadron pilot, must have wished he was up there again with the Hunter boys. We had again managed to come through without damage to the 3 Squadron aircraft. No Rapiers were encountered and anti-aircraft defences were not prepared for our attack. They were too confident.

As we landed at Kariba, the 100 RLI paras were waiting and anxious to know how things had gone. We told them what we knew as we loaded them onto five Daks and immediately set off for CGT 2. No rest for the wicked. We stayed at low level, skimming the trees as we returned to Zambian air space with the heliborne boys mounting from Mana Pools.

The aircraft that had delivered the airstrikes, a Vampire, Lynx and four K cars, went home, then we dropped in our paras and the G cars unloaded their men to envelop the camp. There was not a lot of opposition and as the troops swept through the base they realised that the enemy had heard of the attacks on Mkushi and FC. They had "gapped it". They accounted for 51 terrors but were bitterly disappointed to have been unable to "joust" with the rest, as the troopies would say. (The RLI had their own slang and it was fun listening to them converse.)

Back at Mkushi, the camp was secured by the SAS. Ambushes were set up on tracks leading to the camp and a few skirmishes were had with vehicles approaching the camp during the night. The next day was a very busy day for the SAS as they cleared the camp, gathering and destroying vast quantities of equipment.

Whilst waiting for uplift by the choppers to return them to Rhodesia, a group of 64 Zambian Army, 17 Policemen and several ZIPRA approached the camp in sweeping formation. Following the old maxim "don't shoot till you see the whites of their eyes" the SAS kept their cool, then opened up with a withering fire into the formation. The fire fight raged for 20 minutes. They were no match for the SAS and when it was all over 47 had been killed and two captured.

One of the captures, a ZIPRA logistics officer, provided very valuable intelligence, leading to the bombing of an important logistics base. He also told of an underground prison holding amongst others, some captured security force personnel. A capture in the camp also revealed that there were over 2,000 in the camp at the time of the attack.

Overall, Operation Gatling accounted for over 1,600 killed and many hundreds wounded. It was to shock ZIPRA to the core. They were so unsettled after the attack that for weeks after they tended to shoot at anything and everything that came their way. It was rumoured that they even shot down two Zambian jets! Nkomo had been delivered a resounding blow.

PUNISHMENT JUMPS

Early in December after returning from a Fire Force stint I did a demo jump with CSPEP for a basic para course. I suppose I was becoming too blasé and as my landing was so soft that morning I did a "stand up landing" then after a few moments went into a PLF for the benefit of the course. I

cleared the DZ only to be called over by Derek. He was not amused. It was a poor example to the troops. I was "sentenced" to do my next 10 jumps with CSPEP and no free fall until they were complete!

OPERATION VODKA - PRISON RESCUE

On the day after my last punishment jump, I was to be involved in a very interesting operation. A capture from Op Gatling confirmed that a ZIPRA prison camp was sited at Mboroma, 140km north of the Rhodesian border in a remote area of Zambia. Prisoners held included captured Rhodesian Security Forces, abductees from Rhodesia and some ZIPRA dissenters. It was of prime importance to rescue the Security Force personnel but the dissenters would no doubt provide valuable ZIPRA information.

The codename for the assault and rescue was to be Operation Vodka, and the Selous Scouts were tasked with its successful conclusion. On the 28th November Lt Tim Callow and Sgt Aron were parachuted into a dz, 25km south of the camp. With the greatest of care, so as not to compromise the operation, they moved into a position overlooking the camp. Such was their field craft they were within 200 metres of the camp. They watched the routine of the camp for many days whilst themselves remaining undetected. To have been captured would no doubt lead to horrendous torture and death at the hands of their captors.

They observed between 100 to 120 prisoners within the confines of the fenced camp. At times there were up to 60 guards who were very nervous about a possible air strike. Any aircraft noise caused all work to stop as they anxiously scanned the skies. The Scouts even watched as the gunners operating a 14.7mm anti-aircraft gun fired on a Zambian civilian aircraft as it overflew the camp. The prisoners were made to drill, perform fatigues and even practise community singing of their Chimurenga songs. It was a typical Communist Re-Education programme.

There was some prevarication by the top brass about the go ahead for the strike and the two Scouts were uplifted. Meanwhile the indefatigable Captain Richard "Passy" Passaportis was rigorously preparing his men for the daring rescue by rehearsing their moves again and again. Passy was well known in army circles for his daring and had already earned himself a Bronze Cross whilst serving with the RLI. He was well liked and his men would follow him anywhere. He would lead in a team of 42 officers and men, including a mortar team armed with six 60mm mortars. They could provide invaluable fire power to the outnumbered paras. Each man knew exactly what was required of him on the day.

3 days before Christmas we were finally given the go-ahead. Along with the other despatchers detailed for the op, I loaded parachutes onto our Dak. Accompanied by another Dak, we were to fly to the forward airfield and collect Richard and his men. It was just breaking dawn as we set off with Flt Lt Bill Smith piloting our aircraft. We landed and Richard, anxious to be underway quickly, had his team readied and emplaned.

I was pleased to have in my aircraft Keith Samler, who was a personal friend of mine from the skydiving club. As a Superintendent in Special branch, Keith was attached to the Selous Scouts. He had many skydives under his belt but he was to make history that day. He was to be the one and only British South African Policeman to make an operational jump. Keith took it all in his stride.

We followed what was now our normal routine. As we skimmed at tree top level over the Zambian border we fitted up the men with their equipment and hooked up their static lines to the

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cable whilst they remained seated. Since we started regular external operations and became very aware of the ever present threat of being shot down, we had changed the aircraft drill from "Stand Up, Hook Up" just before run in. By hooking up as soon as we were "in Indian Territory" we could rapidly despatch the men and follow them in the event of taking a fatal hit. As despatchers we were wearing aircrew type escape parachutes and would fit webbing and assault rifle too. We were all far more prepared to take our chances and jump than risk a crash landing. The pilots were the opposite and generally disdained the use of parachutes. The only "Survival Kit" I ever observed 3 Squadron taking on board was whenever I flew with David Barbour and Prof Dick Christie. David owned a large department store in town and Prof taught at the University. Two characters who were game for anything. In earlier times they had flown Spitfires but now, as reservists, they flew the Dak whenever their services were required, which was frequently for all the reservists these days. David and Dick invariably boarded carrying a picnic basket. Their survival kit comprised flasks of tea, coffee, some milk, sugar, biscuits and sambos. I enjoyed flying with them as they always shared their picnic.

As we flew North, Passy eyed the ominous storm clouds and was obviously willing them to stay clear. He had been rehearsing for this day for too long to be stopped now. We had been briefed about the 14.7 and knew that about this time the Hunters would be on their way. As 0830 - P hour - approached we stood the Scouts up and brought them down to action stations. Passy, a tall man, bent his knees low to keep his helmet below the top of the door. Right on time, the Hunters delivered their deadly cargo and we dropped our paras, Keith giving me a grin as he turned into the door and jumped into combat for the first time. I secretly envied him. The two Daks dropped in an L shape about the camp before peeling away and heading for Rhodesia.

The 42 paras landed right on target on the outskirts of the camp and immediately went into their well rehearsed plan, the assault team sweeping into the camp supported by the mortars. The 14.7 was quiet, as was the opposition which melted away into the bush after some sporadic resistance. Eighteen of the guards were killed in the fighting which was soon over.

Unfortunately, of the 120 prisoners, only 32 were located as some were on work detail outside the camp. When the Hunters came in they fled. Another group was away on a food foraging mission. Some prisoners were heard screaming for release from underground detention cells. They were very lucky as the Scouts were about to throw in bunker bombs thinking they were part of an elaborate underground defence system.

The prisoners just could not believe what was happening to them. They went through a whole gamut of intense emotions as the reality of their release from a living hell dawned upon them. Later many of them told of horrific tortures meted out by the guards.

Passy and his men quickly gathered whatever documentation they could before torching the camp. They then headed through the bush for an airstrip adjacent to a mission school some considerable distance away. The recce team had said it was suitable for uplift. By the 23rd December they were all flown into Selous Scout barracks back in Rhodesia where they had an early Christmas party. Ron Reid Daly, a hardened soldier, welcomed them back and as he says himself, "The atmosphere began to get very emotional and it affected everyone there including myself. I had difficulty speaking."

Later, when I met up with some of the Scouts involved that day, they said it was one of the most worthwhile missions they had been on. I felt good to have played my part. It was a Christmas to remember.

PTS CONTINUES TO EXPAND

1979 commenced with a flurry of training as we were running a Basic Parachute Course, a UT PJI course and an Air Force despatchers course simultaneously. We were now using the full hangar. Even though we were making good use of the RLI despatchers at the Fire Force it was decided to train Air Force conscripts as despatchers. They were, in general, young and very enthusiastic. They took well to the para course and then were carefully coached in the despatching role. Paul Hogan was very involved in their training and did an excellent job. The first group qualified on the 23 March '79. PJI strength continued to grow and we had a wealth of experience amongst them such as Billy Simpson from Brit SAS, Roy Tidman, Frank Prendergast, Ken Turner, Andy Stein from the Brit Paras, Rich Griffin from Brit Artillery, Alfie Hynds from Brit Signals, Ralph Gratton from the RAF, as well as local men such as Mike Kemmish and Pete Labuschagne from Rhodesian SAS. They each brought their own unique character to the school. The ethos and the high standards were maintained thanks to a rigorous UT PJI system of training. Charlie Buchan moved to SAS, John Boynton became the School Warrant Officer. I was commissioned and appointed as the Operations Officer making me responsible for liaison between the PTS and Army for parachuting operations. It was essential to make sure that the Fire Forces were adequately manned with despatchers and parachutes and rapid resupply of parachutes. Internal and external operations involving both halo and static line descents had to be carefully planned and executed. It was exciting and at times very hectic with never enough hours in the day. Pressure was really on at the Safety Equipment section to provide packed parachutes for all that was going on. They had increased their staff and were working shifts to keep up with demand. They never let us down. We all had complete confidence in their workmanship. They were magnificent and their great work largely went unsung.

There was a monumental change in mid-1979 when Boss Derek de Kock received a well earned promotion to Wing Commander and a transfer to Air HQ. He certainly had made his mark at PTS and had seen through many major developments. PTS and the name De Kock were synonymous. He was very sad to go but knew it was an inevitable part of the promotion ladder. He was given a great send off and we gave a very warm welcome to his replacement - Frank Hales. Frank had been persuaded to return to PTS as Officer Commanding. Those of us who knew him and had worked with him were thrilled to have him back as the new Boss.

However all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. The Air Force thought it would be a great gesture to have a Mother's Day. All the Air Force wives, children and girlfriends were invited to the Sports Club on the 17 March. They were treated to a display including flypasts, stunning aerobatics and a dog display by the Security Section. PTS opted for an 8-man free fall display from 10,000ft with smoke canisters and flags flying under canopy. We had a great jump and we all landed on the target cross laid out on the sports field, whereon all present then got stuck into a delicious braai and sundowner drinks. It was really appreciated by the wives who had to contend with a lot of stressful times when husbands were on ops and in particular for those whose men did not return.

GROUND FIRE

On the 16th April, I flew into Mocambique with two Selous Scouts going in for a deep recce North of Caborra Bassa. It was unusual as they had requested to be dropped from 1,500ft using Static line Saviac Mk 2 steerable parachutes. The drop was at last light and the sun was sinking as we

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approached Caborra Bassa. Suddenly there was ground fire and we heard the clang of strikes on the aircraft. We took evasive action, then, as there appeared to be no major damage carried onto the DZ. The actual drop went without incident. On landing we discovered two bullet holes. Two weeks before I had been in a Dak that was revved when we were dropping 12 SAS and some boxes on a night drop. We could see the tracer coming up at us quite clearly in the night sky but it passed behind us. It was becoming more difficult to penetrate Mocambique without encountering ground fire. They were very alert and nervy.

60 PARAS ON ONE AIRCRAFT

Although we had used the DC7 previously, on the 4th May, we decided to use Jack's aircraft to give the troops experience from the DC7 and also to give our Air Force despatchers some good despatching practice. We loaded up 60 men from the Basic Course and did ten runs of 6 men. It went very well. It was the most men we had on a single aircraft and gave the lads some excellent practice.

TRIAL JUMPS FROM BELL 205 CHEETAH

Another first was on the 7th May when we started trials with the Bell 205 helicopter, best known as a "slick" or "HUEY" by the Americans in Vietnam, but given the name Cheetah by the Rhodesians. The Air Force had been using them for some months and after some teething maintenance problems they were already providing a great service. 6 of us kitted up in our free fall gear and emplaned with eager anticipation as this was a first for us. It only took 8 minutes to climb to 8,000ft. The doors had been removed from both sides and on run-in we climbed out onto the skids so we could launch very quickly off the skids to give us a nice compact group. It wasn't practical to jump from the aircraft whilst it was hovering so it ran in as usual. It was a strange sensation as we launched away. There was much less slipstream effect to contend with compared to the Dak or DC 7 as the run-in speed was much slower. Reactions to movements were slower but very quickly built up as we reached terminal velocity after several seconds. It was great fun as we rapidly linked up. We did not foresee its use operationally but it was very useful for free fall training. Unfortunately for PTS, there was such a demand for them operationally that we were seldom able to use them for training.

JINX WEEK

Things don't always go well and certainly that was the case in May. On the 12th May I set off with a team of SAS for Mocambique. It was to be a night halo insertion from 15,000ft but we had such dense cloud cover over the DZ that we had to abort. We tried again the next night, Frank Hales and I were again the despatchers. We helped the 6 SAS to kit up then brought them down to the door. Frank was spotting and managed to pick up the run-in okay. The 6 guys dived out following the box. Unfortunately the box was lost. We suspect it opened prematurely, but that was not all.

Cpl Cloete landed in a tall tree. He decided to climb down the tree but made the mistake of removing his helmet before doing so. He slipped and fell a considerable way injuring his head so badly that a casevac chopper had to be called in at first light. The op was compromised.

Two days later we tried again in the same area. I was No 1 despatcher and Chris Frances was

the oxygen NCO. Once more we had 6 SAS for a night Halo insertion from 15,000ft. We took a different route to target and I had selected two I.P.'s (or landmarks) to use as my guide on run in to the DZ. I had a series of aerial photos taped together to use as my map of the run up to the DZ. I was on my knees looking out of the door to pick up the first IP but it was obscured by cloud. David Barbour was flying and we confidently flew on using dead reckoning, i.e. compass bearing and timings. I continued checking the photo and looking out for the 2nd IP, which was a bridge on a dirt road. As usual it was freezing cold at 15,000ft as I continued peering out of the door for minute after minute watching for the IP. I would be relieved to get the boys on their way.

We had a full moon and between the gaps in the cloud I could see the road in the moonlight and then I clearly saw the second IP, the bridge. I directed the Dak onto the dz, which was just a mark on the photo, a short distance from the bridge. The 6 SAS were despatched without problem and we turned confidently for home.

Imagine my surprise the next day to be informed by SAS that I had dropped the team 20kms East of target. I couldn't accept it as I had seen the bridge so clearly. I checked my photo again and all looked good. I then went across to the map room and obtained a map of the area. As I traced our run-in, I could see the bridge, then as I traced the route further to where they said the guys had been dropped, there was a second identical bridge on the same road! I had missed the correct bridge because of the cloud and then had seen the second one thinking it was the correct one. On the photo, the second bridge was not shown, as that was beyond the DZ! It was a bad mistake on my part, resulting in a long night march for the SAS and risk of possible compromise.

On the 23rd May, I was at 8,000ft checking out a group of trainee free fallers prior to run-in when the pilot announced we were out of fuel. We were over New Sarum so the pilot landed us safely by gliding in on two dead engines. The next day we almost had a repeat of the incident but the Dak landed before running out. I believe it turned out to be a faulty instrument.

On the 29th May, we were using the DC 7 for a static line operation rehearsal. We had 20 SAS on board and some very large boxes of equipment. We dropped one load of boxes successfully, then on the second run a box twisted on its way out and jammed halfway out of the door. It took some frantic efforts by us to pull it back inside as we had overflown the DZ. We went round again and this time got it out successfully followed by 20 SAS. Then to cap it all we were using the power winch to haul in the static lines and bags when the nylon strop around the static lines snapped. The winch cable and strop whiplashed up the fuselage and gave me a resounding clout but luckily only a large bruise.

Anyway that seemed to be the end of the run of bad luck.

RAM AIR PARACHUTES

Ever since John Early had introduced us to Ram Air parachutes, we had been trying to obtain some for PTS. The SAS beat us to it, receiving a consignment in June of 7-Cell Strato Clouds. They very kindly allowed us the use of them. We very quickly started using them and thereafter most PJI's jumped using the "Strats". They were a lovely parachute and so manoeuvrable compared to the rounds.

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SPY

On the 7th July, we were all ready to give ZANLA another bloody nose. We dropped 140 SAS using 7 Daks into a large camp in Mocambique. The drop went very well but to everyone's surprise the camps had recently been vacated. They had been tipped off and it came to light after the war that there was undoubtedly a spy within the Top Brass.

PRESIDENT GUMEDE

We had a new President by this time and he paid a visit to New Sarum to see the Blues. It was an ideal time to show off the new parachutes. 5 PJI's including myself and Garth Barrett, the SAS commander who loved skydiving, jumped from a Dak at 10,000ft. We built a 6-man formation before bomb bursting away, then all made good landings into the sports field with our new Strats. President Gumedde was delighted with the display, as were we.

A NEW STRATEGY: OPERATION URIC 2 SEPT 79

Previous to Operation Uric, the strategy had been to avoid drawing into battle the armies of Mocambique or Zambia and to keep the fighting confined where possible against ZANLA and ZIPRA. Also, it was never part of the plan to destroy economic targets in the host countries. As the war progressed the involvement of Zambia and Mocambique was such that the situation was forced to change. Terrorists were infiltrating into the country on a growing scale and in many more operational areas. Rhodesia was in danger of being overrun. In the Gaza province, "The Russian Front", President Samora Machel and his Frelimo commander agreed with Robert Mugabe to the deployment of Frelimo alongside ZANLA into Rhodesia. They also agreed to the complete integration of Frelimo/ZANLA in the Gaza province. Frelimo even took over the command and control of ZANLA and responsibility for their logistics and protection in Gaza. Frelimo in turn had their Russian advisers proffering assistance and weaponry. The situation was looking very grim and the go-ahead was given to effect a new strategy that would really hurt Mocambique and make them think long and hard about giving such assistance to ZANLA. At the same time hitting the enemy so hard militarily that they would be diverted from the Gaza Province which was particularly difficult to fight in and channel them into more effective killing grounds for the numerically inferior Rhodesian Forces.

Operation Uric was to be the beginning of this new strategy and would be the largest offensive so far mounted in the war. The mission was to destroy the vital road and rail links leading from the capital Maputo to the Rhodesian border and to destroy Mapai forward base to force them away from the border areas to below Barragem, which was hundreds of kilometres from the border. By so doing the terrorists would be faced with long marches through very harsh, waterless areas.

The execution was:

The demolition of five tactical bridges - which was the most important phase.

Pre-emptive strikes by the Air Force on selected targets.

A series of continuing ambushes, mining and air strikes.

The successful conclusion of which would result in a drastically reduced flow of terrorists into the country.

Firstly would be the destruction of the bridges followed by the rout of Mapai. The most important demolition was to be at Aldeia da Barragem irrigation canal and the road and rail bridge over the dam feeding the irrigation scheme for the whole area which played a big role in the Mocambican economy. Four other crucial bridges were to be blown. The bridges were so deep inside Mocambique they were only a 100km from the Indian Ocean. There would be pre-emptive strikes on Barragem, Mapai and Maxaila then a heliborne assault on the bridges.

By eliminating the lines of communication with Mapai, bombing it heavily to break morale and continuously harassing the enemy in that location, it would make it vulnerable to capture. It was hoped that the situation would become so untenable for them that they would withdraw and then the remains of the base could be destroyed. Normally it would have taken two battalions of infantry with armoured support to take such a position.

Operation Uric was to involve:

- 360 troops from the SAS, RLI and Engineers
- Maximum Air Force involvement;
- 8 Hunters, 12 Daks, 6 Canberras, 6 Lynx, 28 helicopters including the Bells.

A revelation was the fact that the South African Air Force would clandestinely assist by providing Puma helicopters and pilots as they too were concerned about the strong presence on their border. This of course was Top Secret. Due to many varying high level reasons the "third" plan was rushed into place with H Hour being set for 0700 on the Sunday 2nd Sept 79.

The operation involved virtually the whole of PTS in one way or another and I flew down to Buffalo Range along with the others on the 1 September. I was to operate with a flight of four Dakotas. Two would be loaded with fuel drums to be parachuted into the Admin Base inside Mocambique and two would have 15 RLI paras each. In the event of the heliborne troops running into problems at the bridges we would drop our paras to give them additional support.

When D Day arrived we awoke to be met by the notorious Chiredzi "guti", low dense cloud cover which could last for days. I had encountered it before on Fire Force and knew how long it could last and how much the terrs welcomed it, as they knew we would be grounded. It was a planner's nightmare. There was just no way we could launch the assault in such weather. We would have to sit it out. Under normal circumstances that would not have been a problem but 200 troops had already been clandestinely positioned in the Admin Base which was 200km inside Mocambique. There was no way the blues could support them if Frelimo mounted a concerted attack against them. As of yet they had not been detected but it was only a matter of time as Frelimo continued their patrolling to find the source of activity in the previous days. To make matters worse, the Admin Base had been sited on an island in the middle of a swampy area as this would prevent a Frelimo reaction force from using their Russian armour and getting close to the base. Unfortunately, as the base troops discovered to their dismay, the swamp was bone dry and was no deterrent to armour after all. It was going to be a case of good concealment and good luck to keep them out of trouble until the guti lifted. As we sat and waited back at Buffalo Range the tension increased as day after day passed with no sign of any let up in the weather. The Admin troops knew that Frelimo were active and maintained

their careful watch for patrols or signs of a pending attack on their positions. They were lightly armed and could not have held on for long against an armoured attack. We knew from Intelligence that Frelimo were searching in the area and on the morning of the 5th Sept their luck ran out. A platoon of Frelimo virtually stumbled upon an RLI position. The men had held their fire as long as possible praying to remain undetected, but it was not to be. There was a sharp, hard engagement with Frelimo coming off worse. The RLI sharp shooters exacted a heavy toll and out of 24 enemy, 22 were killed, 1 wounded but one escaped. The cat was now out of the bag. Would there be an armoured follow up?

Thankfully the discovery by Frelimo of the Admin Base coincided with the lifting of the guti. Our prayers were answered and we wasted no time in emplaning our boys onto the Daks and under way for Mocambique. The delays had caused plans to be changed and various timings shortened but in essence the plan was the same.

4 Hunters preceded us, attacking enemy positions defending the bridges taking heavy ground fire but coming through unscathed. They had wiped out two barrack blocks, lots of transport and several anti-aircraft positions. The armada of helicopters went in at tree top level and picked up the assault troops and then carried onto the LZ's at the various bridges. Landing just minutes after the Hunters completed their strikes, 48 SAS rapidly moved forward to capture the bridges and prepare them for demolition. They came under fire from heavy machine guns but quickly overcame the opposition on the bridge. At Barragem they captured two 23mm anti-aircraft guns and using them in a ground role, very quickly put them to good effect. They turned them against the enemy entrenched on the river banks who were harassing them as they set up their demolitions.

An SAS soldier was wounded in the fighting and a helicopter swooped into the area to casevac him. Tragically it overflew an enemy position and was hit by an RPG 7 rocket. It tumbled out of the sky and burst into flames, the technician Alex Wesson was killed but the pilot was saved when an SAS soldier very gallantly ran forward and dragged him clear of the blazing wreck.

In the 4 Dak formation I was with, after a long, low level flight to the admin area, the 2 Daks with fuel dropped their drums, immediately returning to Buffalo Range. Those of us in the other 2 Daks had a long wait ahead of us. We went into a series of wide orbits as the assault on the bridges got under way. We were being given information about the ongoing situation at the bridges and it was finally realised that our paras would not be needed for back up. We headed for the Admin Base and dropped our troops in at 500ft. The Frelimo in the area seemed to have scampered and with so much activity at the bridges they did not interfere with operations at the Admin Base. We returned to Buffalo Range after a long flight, most of it over Mocambique. We followed the battle as best we could from info passed to us from the ops room. We learned that the preparation of the Barragem bridges was very involved and only completed at 1630hrs. During this time other troops had been very active blowing the four other bridges, shooting up vehicles and destroying two power stations. Finally, the bridges at Barragem were blown and the SAS extracted as the light began to fail.

They recovered to the admin area and then prepared themselves for the next phase, the taking of Mapai. Our part in the operation was over and we returned to New Sarum and anxiously awaited the news of events as they unfolded.

Early on Day Two, 190 heliborne troops from SAS and RLI were dropped into their respective LZ's about 1km from Mapai. The Blues in their Hunters roared in causing havoc, but flying through intense ground fire. However, the enemy batted down and prepared to defend their positions. A Puma crashed and exploded, having been brought down by an RPG 7, resulting in the

loss of all on board, 11 Rhodesians and the South African pilot. It was our worst single military disaster. I was very sad to hear that one of those killed was Captain Charlie Small. Charlie was a demolitions expert with Engineers who had transferred to Scouts. I had got to know him quite well when he attended PTS to complete his para course and then more recently a free fall course. He was a very engaging character, never happier than when playing with his beloved explosives. He would be sorely missed by Selous Scouts.

As the sweep lines moved forward to assault Mapai they came under severe fire from the enemy. Many of the SAS veterans said it was the most intense they had encountered. The general layout of the land also made things very difficult for the advance. Numerous airstrikes were called in which were delivered under barrages of ground fire but still the gunners held their positions. The turnaround times for the Hunters was 3 hours which made it difficult to have continuous air support.

The Russian designed Zig Zag trenches were extensive and very effective and over 20 anti-aircraft guns continued blasting way at every airstrike. So intense was the fire that the Canberras could not bomb below 21,000ft. The troops were coming under fire from 122mm rockets, heavy mortars and AA guns being used in the ground role. They were outgunned and outnumbered. Progress was painfully slow and there was grave risk of taking high casualties which we could ill afford.

General Walls flying overhead in the Command Dakota made the agonising decision to withdraw. It was a very difficult decision and is still controversial. A Frelimo man captured later said that had the Rhodesians remained in Mapai for another two days, it could have been taken as Frelimo had little food or water and were exhausted. (Hindsight is a great thing).

Once the decision was made, the troops pulled back to LZ's clear of heavy fire and were choppered out to the admin area. Even then the choppers encountered ground fire throughout with an especially harrowing time as a Frelimo mobile column subjected them to a veritable barrage. It was with great relief when they finally arrived back in Rhodesia. The opposition had shown determination and courage. "The Russian Front" had lived up to its reputation. It was learned later that the Russian advisers pulled out of Mapai and did not return.

The Air Force had for two days carried out a series of successful strikes damaging 14 strongholds as well as telecommunications and radar links often under very heavy ground fire. The mining programme had gone fairly well and was to continue to exact its toll on Frelimo for some time.

It was disappointing to learn that the road bridge at Barragem was not completely destroyed and could still be used by light vehicles but overall there can be no doubt that the enemy had been hit hard and where it really hurt.

OPERATION CHEESE - DESTRUCTION OF CHAMBESHI BRIDGES, ZAMBIA

As early as May 1979, Jack Malloch's DC 7 was to be found regularly parked at the far end of 3 Squadron hard standing, resplendent in its camouflage and dwarfing the Dakotas. We would use it for special operational training and for operations. By this time I had been appointed as Operations Officer and was briefed that there was a requirement to do some training jumps with a free fall team and 20 static line troops with large boxes of equipment from the DC 7.

"ACTION STATIONS!"

The SAS plus some large boxes were duly loaded onto the aircraft and off we went. We had been dropping boxes using static line for some time, but these were larger than normal. The DZ was also unusual as it was sited alongside Darwendale Dam about 35km outside Salisbury. We had planned a free fall drop first but this had to be aborted due to too much air traffic approaching Salisbury Airport, but we were cleared for the static line drop. We ran in low level alongside the dam and despatched the first load of boxes. All went well and then we commenced the second run in.

In preparation for the drop and because we knew the boxes were larger than in the past we had removed both cargo doors to give us as much space as possible. Because the box was so long we were concerned about it twisting and jamming in the door as we despatched it. We had come up with the idea of mounting a wooden ramp in the door that would extend into the slipstream. The box would be positioned on the ramp inside the aircraft and then on the green we could give it a mighty heave to send it down the ramp and on its way. We had everything ready as we ran in and were prepared to give it a good shove. The green came on and we pushed it out down the ramp but it twisted in the slipstream and jammed against the door frame and would go no further. There was moment of panic as we overshot the DZ and struggled to bring it back inside. Finally we managed to wrestle it back into the fuselage. We set it up again as the aircraft made another run in. The green came on and this time, with everyone giving a mighty push, it just cleared the frame and out into the slipstream. We heaved a sigh of relief but it was obvious that it was not the best of plans. We circled again, the ramp was cleared out of the way and we despatched the troops. It was rather windy by this time and there were some brisk landings.

We returned to base very pensive. I did not know what was in the box that it had to be so large (the less one knew about secret operations the better) but our method of despatching it was not very suitable. I thought the SAS might have to pack their loads into smaller boxes.

Some time later we did a training jump for the free fall team which went well, then there was a lull until the 10th September. Then we despatched the team and their equipment box, twice from 15,000ft but using the Dak. On the first jump, the team watched in amazement as the parachute on the box opened in front of them as they passed through 10,000ft. The parachute pack had torn open. On the second jump, the box the SAS planned to use was too large for a clean exit through the door. The free fall team jumped anyway and Frank Hales and I followed them.

I was using a Strato Cloud Ram Air canopy which was packed in a piggy back system with the reserve mounted on the back as well as the main. It was a very compact and comfortable system. It also had a simple method of canopy release called a 3-ring release. It entailed pulling one handle to effect the canopy release and then the reserve handle. At 2,500ft I pulled as normal but as it deployed I immediately found myself being rotated in a tight turn that was building up to a spin. The canopy had malfunctioned and I rapidly went through my new cutaway drills to release the canopy and then pulled my reserve ripcord. The system worked well and I had a good ride down on the steerable reserve.

Generally, things did not seem to be going well in preparation for whatever the SAS were scheming. A little later Frank Hales called me into his office and briefed me that the trials and rehearsals were in preparation for a major operation and it was set for the 12th September. It was of the utmost importance that it succeed.

Operation Uric had been carried out to bring pressure to bear on Mocambique but now it was time to strike at Zambia. The Operation was to be codenamed "Cheese."

Zambia had two major routes for her imports/exports. One to the South through Rhodesia and the other to the North from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, utilising the Tan-Zam rail link. It was crucial to their economy. It was also being heavily used by ZIPRA to transport their war equipment and men to Lusaka from where they would infiltrate into Rhodesia.

It was in Rhodesia's interests to force Kaunda's hand so he would be dependent on the Southern route through Rhodesia where economic pressure could be brought to bear. The SAS had long since discerned that the most effective way to do this was to destroy the massive Chambeshi Rail Bridge and its sister Road Bridge only 100m away. Major Wilson had seen the bridges in a series of photographs at JISPIS (Joint Intelligence Photographic Interpretation Section) in about 1976 and he had been updating the target file ever since. The bridges straddled the Chambeshi River and were sited in the North East of Zambia, south of the Tanzanian border. They were nearly 750 km from Salisbury. The rail bridge was the longest one in Africa.

The distances were daunting to say the least and soldiers had never been dropped in so deep before. They would be totally alone and beyond reach of help, however, so important was the task that the challenges had to be accepted. The destruction of the bridges was also going to cause obvious explosive political repercussions and this had resulted in the operation being put on hold. Finally however, the situation was such that by August 1979 the SAS were given the green light for "Go". The final plan was agreed.

A team of four SAS would do a night Halo jump, move up to the bridges, carry out a recce of the bridges and assess the defences. They would then locate a DZ and call in an assault team complete with boats and explosives. They were to be dropped at low level by night. The party would then move downstream, capture and destroy the bridges before exfiltrating to a LZ for helicopter uplift. This, in itself, would mean hijacking a suitable vehicle, then driving about 200kms through Zambian territory to a point close enough to Rhodesia to be within range of the Bell 205 Cheetah helicopters. And this, whilst being hunted by the Zambian forces who would of course by then be aware of the sabotage. The indomitable Major Grahame Wilson would be the Mission Commander and if anyone could pull it off he and his carefully selected men could. He was to become the only man in the Security Forces to be awarded the Grand Cross of Valour, Silver Cross and Bronze Cross and he had already built up a formidable reputation within a unit renowned for its extraordinary achievements against all the odds. (It was also well known in the Security Forces for its reluctance to give awards in the first place!).

Frank advised me that Grahame had already flown to the area of the bridges in the DC 7 to select a suitable DZ. There was a lot of haze and it had taken two separate flights before a suitable spot could be selected for their insertion. It was located close to a prominent bend in the river which would make a good "Initial Point" in the moonlight. Unfortunately though, it was downstream of the target, meaning a tougher paddle, but Grahame found that acceptable under the circumstances. The DC 7 would be used as it regularly overflew Zambian airspace on cargo runs to countries North of Zambia and would arouse less suspicion.

It was clear to me that this was going to be the most spectacular operation I had been involved with, as well as possibly the most important of the war to date. It was to prove to be the most interesting and challenging too, but I didn't know that at the time.

On the morning of the 12th September, Frank Hales, Mike Duffy and I lifted off in the DC 7. We had on board a box packed to the same sizes as the SAS Halo team would require and the parachute pack had been reinforced. The team were not present as they were finalising all their

equipment for the op. We climbed to 10,000ft and Frank directed the aircraft over the DZ before giving us the thumbs up. We heaved the box clearly out of the door and followed after it. We formed around the box as it plummeted towards the DZ, its pilot chute trailing, preventing it from tumbling. We pulled at our set heights then looked down to see the box under canopy and drifting down to the DZ. It had worked perfectly.

Once it was dark, the SAS team comprising Grahame, Lt Phil Cook, Andrew "Stan" Standish-White and Russell Tiffin arrived with their equipment. We reviewed the situation with Grahame and the pilots and then got underway. Tension was very high when we finally reached the Chambeshi River and Frank anxiously scanned below for the IP but try, as he might, the haze was so bad that he had to abort. The disappointment was palpable on the long flight home. It was so frustrating after all the preparations.

Grahame agreed that the only option was to wait for the next moon period and try again.

Towards the end of September we arranged a series of training jumps for the Halo team, all of them from the Dak as the DC 7 was not available. Paul French, who replaced Russell Tiffin in the team, much to Russell's chagrin, recalls that on the 27th September, the Halo team and Assault Party rolled out of camp to a secret training area near Darwendale Dam and set up camp. Major Wilson then briefed them on the operation. The operatives were hushed as the plan unfolded and the men realised that no one had been on operations so deep before. They did not even have maps and were given photocopies from a Zambian Tourist Board map. They were to be used in the event of escape and evasion being necessary. It was pointed out that there could be no casevac until the end of the op. They would be out on a limb with only their own resources.

The Halo team would do a night jump onto a DZ about 40km from target, complete with two canoes and all the necessary kit. This included ten days' rations, five days water, radios, batteries, weapons and ammo. It was because of the collapsible Klepper canoes that the box they had been training with was large. They would canoe upstream by night to the bridges, carry out a reconnaissance, return to the drop zone and then talk in the assault team.

The assault team of twelve men to be commanded by Captain Bob McKenzie, would parachute in low level complete with one ton of demolitions, plus canoes, one Zodiac inflatable boat with silenced motor and rations. They would then all travel up river to target, secure the two bridges, set and blow their explosive charges. Grahame had various options for exfiltration but Plan A was to hijack a suitable truck at the road bridge and then drive the team to Luangwa Valley South. That would be close enough for the Bells to reach them and get them out. Simple!

Intense rehearsals followed and Paul and Stan constructed a scale model of the bridges based on aerial photos taken recently by the Blues. Many hours were spent canoeing on the dam and placing specially prepared charges on a partially submerged farm house in the dam. This included the use of special explosive nets and shaped pentolite charges which would make the demolition more effective.

The final training jump, a dress rehearsal, was carried out on the night of the 29 September. Frank, Mike and I had the parachutes all ready for them when they arrived at the hangar. There were five free fallers, as one would be reserve in case of injury. They had the equipment box containing 2 canoes, 4 paddles, spare HF radio and batteries, 2 spare VHF radios, ammo, food and water. We prepared the box with parachute, strobe light and Kap 3 automatic opening device, whilst the men kitted up. Once ready we loaded up the DC 7 and then took off for Darwendale in the moonlight.

We kitted up the free fallers with their bergens on the climb to altitude and the loads were heavy. Paul French has commented that he jumped with AK 47, chest webbing, belt order, water bottles, emergency rations, grenades, air to ground comms and small medical kit. In his Bergen he carried HF radio, 2 batteries, di pole antenna, VHF radio and 4 batteries, 5 days water, 10 days rations, light weight sleeping bag, bivvie sheet, lightweight ground sheet, gas cooker, heavy knife, camo cream, toothbrush, set of civvies for escape purposes, maps, codebook, notebook, pencils, torch and matches (On the actual op he would also have a British passport and foreign currency in his pockets). I had grown used to seeing the staggering loads they jumped with but I could not help but be in awe just the same. He himself said it was a realistic load but I recall how Mike and I helped him kit up and move to the door prior to the jump.

We ran in over the dam at 12,000ft as opposed to 15,000ft as we were not using oxygen. Frank was doing the spotting. He gave the signal and we heaved the box out of the door which was immediately followed by the free fallers. Lt Phil Cook had some excitement on opening when he realised he had a malfunction. He carried out his drills superbly and made a safe landing on his reserve. (He made a bit of history as it is the only time that we had a malfunction cutaway and a reserve landing at night.) As soon as they grouped around the box, which had worked well, Major Wilson talked us in. By now we had descended to low level and were running in. A quick flash of the landing lights to orientate Grahame, then he talked us in. Bob McKenzie was standing ready with his assault team. As always the ex American Airborne vet was wearing his distinctive US pattern paratroop helmet. It was always easy to pick him out and I never saw him use anything else. He was a great character, very courageous, and a truly professional soldier. His serenity under fire was legendary and his men showed him the utmost loyalty. As the green came on Mike and I rapidly despatched them. I hoped that Grahame's assessment of the wind drift was correct and the lads would be clear of the water. In the event they were, all except one. Bob found himself splashing down on the water's edge but fortunately it was only knee deep. He was soaked, not very happy, but unharmed. We peeled off and returned to Sarum, glad that it had gone well.

Two days later Frank called me into his office. He explained that he had booked a well deserved leave to S. Africa some time earlier and as much as he would have loved to be on the op, he could not disappoint his wife by postponing it. I would be in charge of Op Cheese from the PTS point of view. Grahame was in the picture. I was proud that he trusted me and terrified at the same time. I don't think I had a decent sleep from that day until the assault party were finally dropped.

On the morning of the 2nd October, I was informed by Grahame that we would be going that night on a recce to Chambeshi to assess the haze and moonlight conditions. We would use a 5 Squadron Canberra. This was definitely a first for us. The Canberras regularly carried out clandestine flights over Zambia and Mocambique taking aerial photographs, but not with paras to eyeball the situation. When Jack did it in his DC 7 he used his Air Cargo story for Lusaka tower. I think in this case, it was say nothing and just do it. The chances of interception by Migs or missiles were deemed very slight. The pilot to take us was the O.C. himself. He briefed us that we would fly at 35,000ft before dropping down to the proposed drop height of 15,000ft over target. We squeezed ourselves into the jet bomber and off we set. We cruised over Zambia at high level then began our descent over the target area. Grahame slid back from the bomb aimer's position and gestured for me to move up. I squeezed up into position with some difficulty as I was wearing my aircrew parachute and then looked down through the perspex dome. We circled and even though it was hazy I could

"ACTION STATIONS!"

discern the Chambeshi River in the moonlight. I slid back into the cockpit and gave Grahame the thumbs up. We quickly returned to 35,000ft and Sarum where we agreed it was all systems go for the next evening, the 3rd October.

On the day of our departure I was going over my aerial photos and preparing myself for the op. It was then that I heard the bad news about an incident that day. A few days prior to this, I had despatched RLI troops into New Chimoio which turned into an extended fight. Pursuant to this, Hunters and Canberras were requested to carry out airstrikes on a Frelimo column that appeared to be readying themselves for a reprisal raid against a security base at Ruda. In the ensuing action both a Canberra and Hunter were downed by severe ground fire. It was a costly blow that rattled the Blues.

I was glad that I would be in a DC 7 at 15,000ft beyond reach of most ground fire and also that our insertion would be very clandestine. There was little time to dwell on it as once it was dark the SAS arrived, as did the pilots. As usual, Squadron Leader George "Punchy" Alexander would be Captain and Flight Lieutenant Jack Malloch the co-pilot. As the owner of the DC 7, Jack could make sure he was on all the important missions with it. He thrived on it. They had been the crew for the training jumps and we were in very good hands. George was the ex O.C. 3 Squadron. A very good, experienced and decorated pilot but rather volatile at times - hence "Punchy". Jack a well built man, oozing a quiet confidence, was a legend in his own right and had carried out many daring exploits in his time. He had flown Spitfires in the Second World War having been shot down and saved by his parachute on one occasion. Nothing phased him out. The men found him considerate and amusing. His big passion at that time was to restore a Spitfire from its plinth as Gate Guardian and fly it once more. (He was to achieve his ambition.) We reviewed the plan then 30 minutes before take-off loaded up the aircraft in readiness. The met. forecast was not too good in relation to ground haze and I went over my photos again as I taped them up on the inside of the fuselage near the door. Mike Duffy, who would once more be the oxygen NCO, was busy fussing over the bottles as the team settled down for the long flight. Grahame, managing to look nonchalant as always, his calmness no doubt reassuring the rest of the lads. We were such a small group in the cavernous fuselage. It was going to be a long cold flight at altitude and Jack, considerate as always, had provided some blankets to be worn until we had to prepare for the drop.

Those four large radial engines fired up in a throaty roar and I once more looked at the long blue exhaust flames from the exhaust stacks. During the day you don't see them but at night, to me - ever aware of heat seeking Sam 7's, they looked like bonfires. We taxied out and at 2330hrs George poured on the power and we rumbled off for target. As per plan we climbed to 18,000ft and followed the normal air lane route over Zambia towards Tanzania. We sat back, oxygen masks on and contemplated the task ahead. Mike made regular checks on us to make sure no one was suffering from anoxia, which was the last thing we would need. At the appointed time, George brought us around and began to descend to drop height, 15,000ft. Mike and I were kept very busy assisting the guys to fit up with their kit and heavily loaded bergens. No easy task but everyone knew the routine well and final checks were carried out. The free fall box was positioned in the door, pilot chute static line hooked up and Kap 3 armed. The men closed up towards the box.

I dropped to my knees and positioned myself at the door, looking down over the door sill and then ahead. It was very hazy once more and I knew George was relying on his instruments and dead reckoning for our positioning. He did not have the sophisticated nav. aids now so common. Nevertheless, I knew he would make a good job in positioning for an accurate run in from the IP.

George informed me we were commencing run-in but try as I might I could not see the river, the bend or anything I could use as my IP for run up to target. George insisted that according to his dead reckoning, we must be over target. I did not doubt him but was equally insistent that I could not see it. For static line drops, the Captain has command of the aircraft for the drop. For free fall, it is the No. 1 despatcher doing the "spotting" who has command, as only he can see accurately whether or not they are directly over the DZ.

When we had obviously overflowed the DZ. I stood up and told Grahame about the problem and suggested a run in at 12,000ft. He agreed and George brought it around hard on a reverse run, the guys bracing hard against the G-force with their heavy kit. I took the photo down and reversed it to make sure I was properly oriented, scanning below through the darkness and haze for a glimpse of anything I might recognise but, no joy. George was becoming very insistent but I could not pick up any landmarks. Like Frank Hales before me, I was not prepared to put the team at even extra risk and was prepared to accept his anger and abort if need be.

We agreed to a final run at 8,000ft. It was make or break. I knew how hard it must be on the lads as they stood weighed down by their kit and nerves stretched to the limits. (I recently asked Stan how he felt as we circled around getting lower on each run in. He said, "I had forgotten all about the circling - I was so poop-scared it was not surprising!") I caught Grahame's eye and he gave me a nod of assurance. (He has told me since "The oxygen was a pain - standing in the door holding the mask as we circled - ready to ditch it - with my back breaking due to a heavy pack.") As we turned and began our final run in, I was very aware that the DC 7 must sound very noisy at 8,000ft. To go any lower would be asking for compromise. We were already pushing our luck.

I frantically peered out for any sign of the river and the crucial bend but to my great disappointment, again, nothing. With a very heavy heart I told George to abort and indicated to Grahame to stand back. I was so angry and frustrated and as George said "It must be there!" only good discipline prevented me from saying something I would regret but I had a final look out of the door.

It was like something out of a movie. At just the right time and the right angle, I saw the moon glinting on the river bend that I was looking for, just as it was on the photo. There was little time for the normal flat turn corrections on run in as I called to George "Come left, come left, harder - steady" then "Go, Go, Go." to Grahame. It wasn't very text book and we all heaved as the strobe light was switched on and forced the box out of the door. Mike and I immediately helped the guys as they waddled to the door as quickly as they could before plunging out into the blast from those big engines. It was 0130 hrs on the 4th October. Op Cheese was finally underway.

Mike and I were ecstatic and so relieved to have seen and despatched them over target. Now came the excruciating wait before they radioed to us as to how the drop had been. We went into a wide orbit, well clear of the area but within Grahame's radio range.

Stan says, "My exit was horrendous."

Paul remembers, because of his heavy kit, just flopping into the slipstream, the brief smell of the engines and then the silence of the free fall. As he turned to face the box he could clearly see the moon glint on the river and the dark shapes of Grahame and Phil below him. He followed them down to pull height and opened the parachute at 2,000ft as he wanted to be close to the box. He searched for the white cross sewn on to the top of the canopy as a marker but he could not pick it up. He could

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see the other 3 canopies though and steered towards the lowest, Major Wilson. He landed amongst some small bushes and trees and quickly armed himself. After pushing his parachute down two large antbear holes he RV'd with the others where he found that all was well but no one had seen the box under canopy. Stan remembers, "Our group was pretty messy - the box just thundered down." Grahame contacted Jack on his radio and informed us that the drop was good. We did not know then that the box was missing. We turned for home. Grahame meanwhile organised a square search. Two of them carried out a search moving in ever increasing squares but it was fruitless. Paul then tapped out a signal to HQ informing them of the situation. Next morning they carefully searched through the bush once more but had no luck. It did not look good. Grahame says that it confirmed their Standard Operating Procedures whereby items of importance were carried on the para and not in the box. They had spare radios but they would have to change their plan to canoe to the bridges and instead proceed on foot. They laid up for the rest of the day and all was quiet. It would seem that their insertion had thankfully gone unnoticed.

That evening they began their long hard walk to the bridges. Time was of the essence but so was stealth. Of course, as we flew back I only knew that the jump had gone well and that they were on target. When we landed we were weary but very relieved. I don't think George was too happy with me but Jack seemed in good humour, as well he should be. The next day when I returned to PTS, I discovered from OC Flying Wing that the box was missing and the recce was proceeding on foot. Consequently, Phase Two would be delayed.

Major Wilson and his men made good progress towards the bridges, finally reaching a wide tributary that joined the Chambeshi River on the night of the 6 October. They were very close now. Paul remained in the Lay Up Position whilst the other 3 stripped off and swam to the bridges. Stan remembers diving down to the pedestals of two of the piers to check how far down they were, what width etc. It was intelligence for the demo boffins back in Rhodesia. It was challenging work in the pitch black with a strong current ripping past. All was quiet as they carried out their recce, noting with satisfaction that it was just as they expected from the photos and the models. The explosives being brought in would be more than sufficient for the task. As anticipated, there was a small police presence to guard the bridges. Very satisfied with the recce they slipped away undetected and rejoined Paul who sent an unscheduled radio transmission confirming the dimensions of the bridges and a static line drop to be carried out early on 8 October. They moved off, returning to the area of their DZ, where they located a suitable DZ for the rest of the team and awaited their arrival.

ASSAULT PARTY FOLLOW UP

On the morning of the 6 October, OC Flying Wing told me to report to Fylde, the secret airfield near Hartley, with one other despatcher. This was in preparation for the assault party follow up who had already pre-positioned there. Fylde was hardly ever mentioned and only then by those in the know in hushed tones. I knew of it but had never been there. It was sited in a very rural area about 40km out of Salisbury. Mike Duffy and I set off. Imagine our amazement upon arrival, to see a large South African Air Force C130 Hercules. I had despatched S. African Recce Commando troops from our Daks into "the Russian Front" in Gaza province, Mocambique on occasions, as recently, they were working hand in hand with the SAS down there, but never expected this!

The C130 was a magnificent transport aircraft and could carry over 60 paras and was also ideal for parachuting cargo off its ramp. It was the answer to our prayers for dropping the bigger

loads. Someone in high places had obviously pulled strings and it was in S. Africa's interests, too, to have Kaunda reigned in, as terrorists operating in their country were also using Zambia as a base. We met up with the crew and equipment. This comprised of the Captain, Major Gardner, an ebullient man, who could not have been more enthusiastic or helpful, co-pilot, navigators, engineers, 2 loadmasters and 2 para despatchers, pallets, 64ft parachutes and resupply equipment. It was going to be used to parachute in the 12 men plus a Zodiac inflatable boat with motor, fuel, 6 canoes (2 of which were replacements for the Halo team), paddles and about a ton of explosives, dets, etc. Now I knew why the boxes had been so big for the trials from the DC 7.

As the majority of the SAS were unfamiliar with the aircraft, the Captain explained the various characteristics, aircraft drills and emergency drills. The para despatchers, Mike and I then took the SAS for some synthetic training to practice the techniques. (I had jumped the C130 several times in UK with the Brit Paras which definitely helped.) The training posed no problems and they rapidly familiarised themselves with the new drills. After discussion with Captain Bob McKenzie, the team commander and Major Gardner, we decided to do two training jumps. One without equipment and then one with full kit.

During this time, two despatchers who had arrived from 3 Air Supply Platoon, Rhodesian Army, and the loadmasters were considering and preparing the best means of palletising all the equipment. Some time later Bob McKenzie was informed that the deployment would not take place that night. This was fortunate as the high winds throughout the day had prevented any training jumps and it would give more time for rigging of the pallets.

The next day at 1500hrs all the pallets were rigged and the troops bergen rucksacks positioned on the pallets to help balance the loads, ensuring a uniform descent rate and so close grouping of the pallets.

An hour later, the huge aircraft took off and ran in at 600ft over the airfield. It had on board a pallet rigged with 3 fuel drums which we wanted to give a trial drop. As it ran in over the drop zone, the load masters despatched the pallet down the ramp and the pallet came over the tailgate, its 64ft parachute rapidly deploying in the slipstream. The winds were quite strong and as the pallet landed a few moments later it hit hard, before being rolled over as the large parachute was caught by the wind before collapsing. We ran over to the load and saw that the drums had received substantial damage. When we discussed it with the loadmasters after they landed, they said that it was not uncommon and it was realised that if the pallet carrying the Zodiac rolled on landing the damage could be quite extensive. The assault group leader decided that in calmer conditions, which was normal during the night, that it would be a justifiable risk.

By 1800hrs the winds were calmer and we emplaned the paras for a familiarisation jump without equipment. We used Rhodesian parachutes which the SAS had collected from New Sarum. We had 14 paras but only 12 would be going on the op. I guess the chance to jump a C130 was too good an opportunity to miss. We would be despatching 7 from each door, port and starboard. The Dak and DC7 only have a door on the port side, so jumping from the starboard door meant adopting a mirror image stance for aircraft and exit drills but the men had no problems with it. The C130 also has a wind deflector on the forward edge of the door which helps to overcome some of the exit problems encountered with higher drop speeds. Not a luxury they had when jumping the DC7 static line.

We ran in at 600ft and the guys were looking very pleased with themselves as they prepared to jump from this lovely para aircraft. Mike and I were positioned, one at each door along with the 2

para despatchers. The green came on and they were on their way in a flash, surprising even the para despatchers. Being a jump without kit and using both doors simultaneously meant that grouping in the air was extremely close with some canopies touching, however, this led to all the troops landing very close together ensuring rapid RV procedures. (Stan Standish-White did his para course at the S. African Para School at Tempe. On his last jump, which was from a C130, he had a midair collision which resulted in the other guy suffering a broken collar bone.) There were no injuries and the SAS were delighted with the C130. Something different for the logbook and a bit of one-upmanship over their buddies.

They were in good humour but obviously apprehensive as they kitted up later for the real thing. There just had not been time for another training jump but it had gone so well that they were full of confidence in themselves, the aircraft and its crew, which were first class. The four pallets with all of their equipment were loaded and final briefings carried out. Major Wilson and his team were eagerly awaiting them 800km away.

At 2330hrs Major Gardner brought his four turbo prop engines up to full power, moved swiftly down the runway and lifted off. Phase Two was underway. The winds were calm and we had a decent moon. The route into the bridges was made at 28,000ft. The aircraft was pressurised so there was no need for oxygen sets. The guys, in their terrorist "greens", faces and hands darkened with cam cream, some with RPD light machine guns, some with AK47's, sat quietly, some dozing, as we flew North.

Sgt Major Paul Fisher, with the demolitions team, thoughtfully removed and cleaned his glasses. Sgt Vossy Vosloo looked relaxed. Little did he know that he was to play a key part in the success of the operation a while later. As we flew on, I began to think about a time a few years before when I was working on a mine on the Zambian Copperbelt. I had formed a skydiving club and we used to fly to different towns in Zambia to do display jumps into Trade Fairs and Agricultural Shows. In fact, once when we were jumping into Ndola Trade Fair, we kept Kenneth Kaunda waiting for ten minutes as we flew to the arena. It was a timing mistake on the part of the organisers and as they realised their error they frantically tried to contact us to bring the timings forward. We could not fly there any quicker and there was not enough time to bring another show into the arena so the President twiddled his thumbs. The jump went very well but not many guys can say they kept a President waiting. A dubious honour. I never could have dreamt then that I would be flying back into Zambia on a mission like this. My reminiscences were interrupted when one of the despatchers came over and informed me that we were to begin our descent to low level. The pilot began a rapid descent and then the aircraft was depressurised as we levelled out. Paul Fisher's glasses misted over and he cleaned them yet again. Bob looked my way and I gave him the thumbs up. He gave me a nod and his big smile as we gave the command to stand up and check equipment. They carried out their drills and the despatchers opened the para doors. We could smell the African night air as we took up our positions in the door. Down below I could vaguely see the dark outline of the bush as we approached the DZ. I remembered being shot at on several occasions such as this and thought if just one stray round were to strike the dets we would all be history. (Stan has told me since that the dets would have been carried by the Paras well clear of the explosives.)

Fortunately all was very quiet on the ground. Grahame had comms with Major Gardner and directed us in. The red came on and the first men on each side took up their stand in the door positions. They did not know what lay ahead but no matter what they were determined to give it their best shot. The green came on and I yelled out for Bob to "Go and 2 and 3 and 4 and 5... until the

stick was gone. We hauled in the static lines and trailing bags as the aircraft pulled away. A short while later, Grahame came up on the radio and informed Major Gardner that the drop had gone well. He requested us to orbit whilst the paras cleared the DZ before we dropped in the pallets. We made a wide orbit and the ramp was lowered. The loadmasters busied themselves with the final preparations as Grahame talked us in at 600ft. The aircraft quickly reacted to his corrections and then steadied on target. As we reached his planned exit point he called for the green light. It came on and the loadmasters sent the four pallets thundering down the rollers and over the tailgate. The parachutes streamed out and as they landed in a tight group on the DZ, Grahame radioed that the drop was spot on. The aircraft climbed away, returning high level to Fylde. I felt as happy as a dog with two tails. Everything had gone incredibly smoothly, after all the tribulations. Now it was up to the SAS. I knew that they would succeed no matter what the odds. These very men had been through it all before when on Operation Uric they had destroyed the bridges at Barragem. We landed at 0300 hrs and bedded down in our vehicle for the remainder of the night. I slept so well only to be awakened by Mike much later. It was already well into the morning and the C130 would be returning to S. Africa. We had of course taken the precaution of bringing our parachutes with us. We said our very grateful thanks to all the crew and then boarded with them. Major Gardner, obliging as always, climbed out to 8,000ft then turned in over Flyde. Mike and I were like two little boys, so excited were we as we launched ourselves off the ramp for a lovely skydive. It was the perfect way to round off our part in the operation.

Of course for Major Wilson and his intrepid bunch it was only just beginning. I was to hear their story later. After the assault party had RV'd with Grahame they gathered in all their kit. A pit was being dug to bury the pallets and parachutes when a bush fire, which had been started by hunters to flush out game, swept their way. After the hunters moved on, there was a scramble to get the explosives and kit clear but, they let it destroy the parachutes and pallets. They then moved down to the river and began their paddle in six very heavily loaded canoes and the Zodiac. The current was stronger than anticipated and the going was heavy. They laid up before first light, hiding their boats under the heavy bush lining the bank. The next night was the most troublesome as they continued upstream towards their goal. The river narrowed and they had to paddle with all their strength to make any headway through the rock strewn rapids. The going was very difficult and progress was slow. The canoeists were giving it their all as they dug their paddles in and pulled with all their strength. It was energy sapping, there was a long way to go through the night and they were wishing that they were in the Zodiac with its silenced 15hp motor. Bob McKenzie and his team of 3 in the boat were however, having their own problems. The Zodiac, heavily laden like the canoes, was extremely low in the water and was responding like a drunken whale as it ploughed on. The craft was being rocked and bounced as it struggled through the rapids until, finally, they found themselves spinning out of control and carried downstream for some distance. They tried again in vain. Bob as a last resort, had to make the very painful decision to jettison some of the special explosive charges. They still would have enough to destroy the main piers of the bridges. On the third attempt they succeeded in breaching the rushing waters.

Then, to compound the situation, just as they were congratulating themselves on making it through the rapids, the motor cut out. They had just switched over to the last fuel tank. The fuel was contaminated with water. They made it to the river bank whilst Grahame and his "cockle-shell heroes" paddled on, oblivious to the drama unfolding behind them. Bob knew the situation was critical. How could they get the charges to the bridges? Sgt Vosloo came to the rescue. In true adept SAS fashion,

he stripped and cleaned the carburettor. He then drained the valuable uncontaminated fuel from the top of the tank. They crossed fingers, tried the starter and the motor sputtered into life. They got underway again. Vossy was the hero of the moment! That seemed to spell the end of their troubles.

By the night of the 10 October they had laid up just a short distance from the bridges. They could hear the traffic passing over. Graham and Bob reviewed the respective tasks with the team. Every man knew what was expected of him. Darkness fell and after waiting for a couple of hours for activity to quieten down, they set off. It was raining and stormy. Just as they approached the bridges there was a brilliant flash of lightning. The whole scene was immediately bathed in bright light, revealing the giant Rail Bridge before them in all its detail. It was a sight they will not forget.

Paul recalls, "Then as we made our final turn on the river, about 300m from the bridges, a huge bolt of lightning lit the sky illuminating the canoes in front and the bridges, with spray on the paddles, seemingly frozen in time."

Luckily, it did not prompt any adverse reaction and they pressed on. Upon reaching the bridges, there was a myriad of tasks to be performed and each call-sign set about it with the perfection that comes from a well rehearsed plan. Charges were set on both bridges. Paul Fisher and his small team placed their semtex (PE4) cutting charges on the steel bridge. Bob and his team set about their well rehearsed, but no less difficult, job of securing the special charges to the bridges. The circuits from the charges were then set up to the two ring mains. Nothing was left to chance and where possible systems duplicated. There were two separate initiation sets. There had been many rehearsals as to the laying of the explosives with who did what, where and in what sequence being carefully worked out. As is normal with Special Forces operatives, any demolitions trained man who could contribute ideas was welcome. The plan was massaged for a long time before it was finalised. Lt Phil Cook and his men, whose task it was to protect the men whilst they set the demolitions and to hijack the getaway vehicle, set about their business. There was short exchange of shots with a policeman who came to investigate before he ran off into the night. A police roadblock sign, which they brought with them was set up. Vehicles were allowed to pass until finally a suitable 20-ton truck loaded with fertiliser was stopped. It was being driven by a white man of Irish descent accompanied by his African co-driver. It would be ideal for the getaway. The roadblock sign was replaced with breakdown triangles so that other vehicles would proceed, but a similar truck pulled up to render help to the "breakdown". Just then a truck which had passed to the South previously, returned to the bridge. He was the brother of the truck driver who had been hijacked. It transpired that it was custom to travel in convoy and render each other support when need be. He refused to leave his brother, as did the other truck driver. Yet another truck was pulling up, another brother. To complicate the situation even further they were accompanied by a ten year old boy and his pal, who was coming along as part of a birthday treat. Was he in for a treat! It was becoming like something from a theatrical farce as by this time Phil had 3 trucks pulled over, three White drivers, two African co drivers and two young boys. Whilst all this was going on the SAS were frantically working against time to set all the charges. Grahame was not amused. All of a sudden he had a whole group of prisoners he had not bargained for. He could not leave them behind to relate who had been responsible and unlike in the movies, he could not dispose of them. They would have to come with but COMOPS were not going to be at all happy. He ordered the fertiliser bags to be dumped from the centre of the truck and then, when all was ready, the SAS, prisoners, boats, canoes and equipment were loaded inside. It was a perfect hideaway with all round protection.

One of the captured brothers climbed up into the cab, as well as Bob McKenzie and Grahame complete with silenced pistol. One can only imagine what the drivers were thinking.

At 1225hrs, the charges were initiated and the truck et al moved rapidly South. The driver was very cooperative as they sped south, past Chambeshi without incident. They stopped 20km from the bridge and 2 men busied themselves cutting telephone wires. Just as they finished their job, there was an almighty flash and a following blast. The SAS knew they had achieved their mission and would have given anything to see the effect of their intense efforts of the preceding days. They were joyous as they sped towards Mpika. It was a likely trouble spot but the driver guided them around the bypass road. As daylight came they turned off the main highway onto a dirt road leading into Luangwa Valley National Park and south towards the Rhodesian border. Grahame ordered a halt. The Blues had despatched a Canberra to the bridges at first light to assess the damage. Paul established comms with HQ who flashed back the code word for 100% success. They now knew that the mission had been a great success. The bridges were destroyed. The demolitions plan had worked beautifully. It only remained to get every one out.

They pressed on but their route took them through a heavily populated area, which had not been anticipated, but fortunately without incident. Things went well until, unexpectedly, they rounded onto a power station dead ahead. They pulled clear but the guards followed up. There was a short skirmish that the SAS came through unscathed. Still they decided to get off the road. By this time the whole country must be on the alert. Their driver was most unhappy as he was also the owner of the truck and he was being forced to make his own route through the bush, over rocks and knocking down trees. The going was very rough and by late afternoon they could go no further. By now though they were within helo range. Comms were established and they were told to prepare for pick up the next morning. An LZ was prepared before they were finally able to fall into an exhausted sleep. Sentries kept watch through an uneventful night. The Zambians were searching in vain.

The next morning they bulldozed the final trees to clear the LZ, much to the heartbreak of the driver.

The Bells had already begun their long, dangerous journey north into Zambia. They flew from Salisbury, refuelling at Mount Darwin then again at Musengezi Mission, then finally towards Luangwa. They had fuel drums on board and thanks to a simple but ingenious system they were able to refuel whilst in flight, jettisoning the drums as they emptied.

As they neared the soldiers, Major Wilson, at the prearranged time, put out a continuous transmission on his VHF radio. The lead pilot homed in on it and the Cheetahs touched down on the LZ. SAS, prisoners and equipment were rapidly loaded up whilst the helicopter techs carried out a final refuel. Within 15 minutes they were airborne and on their way for the long flight home, across Zambia and Cabora Bassa dam. It gave the men time to contemplate their spectacular achievement. At last on the 13 October they touched down on Rhodesian soil.

Grahame and his free fall team had, for 10 days been deeper inside enemy territory than any others had penetrated before or since. They were faced with obstacles from the very onset, but undeterred, in the most professional and dedicated manner they carried out the reconnaissance. Captain Bob McKenzie and his well rehearsed and equally determined team joined them and together they overcame all the challenges to complete their mission with 100% success. Both bridges were destroyed and the full team was recovered to base without loss of life or injury. They returned with all of their very precious equipment which they could ill afford to lose. The Zambian economy was

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grievously hurt and Kenneth Kaunda found himself forced into a situation that suited Rhodesia.

Of all the external operations I took part in, it was certainly the most varied, interesting and challenging. I was very proud to have been a small part of it. The prisoners were of course concerned about their fate right up until the time they emplaned. No doubt they feared the worst from their ferocious looking captors. The little boys were the exception, enjoying every minute of it. They were well cared for in Rhodesia and then finally returned safely to Zambia.

When Frank returned from leave he called me into his office and asked how things had gone.

"On what?" I nonchalantly asked

"Op Cheese!" He retorted.

"Oh, piece of cake."

He just smiled and nodded knowingly.

OPERATION BUMPER

Whilst Op Cheese was underway other members of the SAS were busy preparing for Operation Bumper.

I was briefed by Frank that three Daks would be used to drop SAS paras into Mocambique for an operation to destroy three bridges simultaneously in the Tete province. The bridges carried the rail link from the east coast to the largest coal mine in Mocambique, which was situated at the railhead of Moatize. The three bridges were separated by a distance of 100km. Blowing the bridges would prevent their use by ZANLA and also prevent access by Zambia to the port of Beira. Demolition, however, was going to require some very special charges to cope with the exceptionally thick concrete piers of the Northern bridge. Six 100kg pentolite charges would be required for that bridge alone.

The methodology the SAS would employ to blow the bridges would entail stringing a large nylon demolitions net under the decking of two of the bridges, allowing the operators to clamber inside and then attach their explosives to the top of the abutments. The special charges would be hung on hooks that had to be attached to the piers using Wonder Glue. The same method of attaching the hooks had been used very successfully on Op Cheese.

The SAS were divided into 3 teams, one for each bridge. Lt. Pete Cole would lead the Northern team, Lt. Mike Rich the centre and the very dynamic Lt. Rich Stannard, the Southern team. We would emplane the men at a Forward Airfield at Mtoko which was closer to the border. As a deception we would fly high using the same route as the normal scheduled run to the Malawian capital of Blantyre before dropping to a height of 500ft for the drop at last light. The next morning they would capture and hold the bridges. A formation of Cheetah helicopters would then fly in the explosive charges. The bridges would be blown and the troops exfiltrated by the helicopters.

As with Op Cheese, the drills were rehearsed many times, this time though on a bridge just outside Salisbury. On 10th October '79, I was the No. 1 despatcher in my Dak as we set off for Mtoko. We picked up Pete Cole and the team destined for the Northern bridge. Pete was in very good spirits, as was his team. Now that the day had arrived they were eager to go and put all their hard work into practice. We winged our way through the late afternoon to target being flown by David Barbour and Dick Patton. They made a good team and David had flown many similar operations.

Once again though, our old enemy was to haunt us. As we flew North the haze became worse and worse. Ground visibility was extremely poor and the pilots could not discern their landmarks. David voiced his concern. Eventually it became so bad that it was agreed to abort. We returned to Mtoko but determined to give it another go the next day.

On the 11th we set off again, this time with 2 Daks. One was unavailable but, it wasn't a problem, as there was sufficient space for two teams on one of the Daks which would drop, then carry onto the next bridge and drop again. Once more, Pete Cole was on my aircraft. When I was in the Brit Paras, Pete had been attached to my TA unit from the Regular Paras as a Permanent Staff Instructor for one year. I came to know him well and had a lot of respect for him. He was a very good NCO and professional soldier. He even married a local girl from my town. At the end of his tour he returned to his regular unit. I was sorry to see him go. I was stunned many years later when, as a new PJI, I attended an SAS mess function in Salisbury. There standing across the room was Pete Cole. The parachuting world is a small one.

As we flew into Mocambique, we were pleased to find the visibility was much better. In the distance we could see the lights of Blantyre in the early evening. Pete, who was not jumping, came out from his position behind the pilots and watched over his brood like a Mother Hen as we prepared the troops for action. We descended to drop height and made our run in for the northern bridge. We had an equipment box positioned in the door as the SAS came down to action stations. David made his last minute corrections then steadied for the drop, tail up, flaps lowered and speed back to 95 knots. "Small Bez", the lead man, looked over the box and out of the door at the bush whipping past 500ft below.

The red came on and we made ready to push out the box.

The green came on - "Go!" yelled the despatcher. The box was heaved out and the men quickly followed to the despatcher's cadence. A good stick as usual with the SAS, I thought, as we hauled in the bags. Pete grinned. It had been a good drop. We headed back for Mtoko and heard the news that the drop at each bridge had been a good one. We landed at Mtoko, dropped off Pete and then set course for home.

The next day the three 8 Squadron Cheetah helicopters set off at first light, one to each bridge. They had played such a crucial part in the war since their arrival. Pete Cole was on board one of them accompanying the special explosives. Meanwhile the troops at the bridges were closing in on their targets. At the northern bridge there was some initial resistance by Frelimo holed up in bunkers. It did not last long before they retreated under the SAS fire.

As soon as Pete arrived, they set about their well practised tasks. Captain Colin Willis, the overall commander, asked them to delay blowing the bridge until he arrived overhead a short while later in a Lynx. He wanted to have a grandstand view. The fuses were initiated and as the guys got into cover, it went off with a tremendous bang that shook the countryside for miles around. Debris and steel railway line was hurtled into the air before crashing back to earth. Clouds of dust enveloped the target but Colin could clearly see that the bridge was well and truly blown.

The Cheetahs had also brought in two reserve charges in case they should be required. Pete decided to blow the remains of the abutments and his men moved forward with the charges. All of a sudden the lead man let out a yelp, dropped his charge, turned and fled from whence he came. Pete just could not fathom it until he suddenly realised he was being enveloped by some very angry bees. The men ran for cover from "the enemy" whose nests had been destroyed by the blast but, not before

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they were all continually stung. They tried several times to lay their charges but each time they were beaten back. The bees had won where many before had failed. They had been a very tenacious opponent.

The demolitions at the other 2 bridges had gone like clockwork. Colin Willis ordered the boys to load up and go home, which they eagerly did, triumphant in knowing the bridges were gone and they had succeeded so well in their mission. The score was now 5 bridges in two days. They returned to base but two of the men were admitted to hospital, so severely had they been stung.

THE WAR ENDS

Although I did not know it at the time, Operation Bumper was my last operational drop. The fighting was by no means over then and there was some hard action for the Security Forces and more bridges blown but they did not involve parachute drops. Negotiations and peace talks had been happening for a considerable time and a lot of the operations I had been involved in were to strengthen Rhodesia's hand at the negotiating table. The British of course were extremely involved in the final settlements taking place at "The Lancaster House" peace talks. Like everyone else I hoped for peace, but not one that would mean surrendering our beloved country to a communist dictator, which would be the ruination of the country as I had seen in so many other African countries.

Finally on the 22nd November we were given the word that offensive action would cease. At PTS it was business as usual with training going on as normal. We still did not fully believe that there would be no more fighting and continued to prepare for outbreaks of hostilities, as had happened previously.

FOUR JUMPS BEFORE BREAKFAST

I had a busy morning on the 30 November. I did 3 static line jumps. One as a drifter from 500ft for a Basic Course then two from 1,000ft as part of a stick of parachutists for some trainee despatchers. Straight after that I accompanied the other PJI's up to 9,000ft for a relative work free fall jump. It was then down to the mess for breakfast before reporting back to the school to round off business for the morning. There on the hard standing was a South African C130 on official business. Some enquiries revealed that the pilot was my old buddy from Op Cheese, Major Gardner, and he agreed to lay on a free fall jump on his way back home, which was going to be shortly. We did not need any encouragement and were kitted up and on his aircraft before you could say Jack Flash. We enjoyed a great jump off the ramp from 8,000ft building a nice 5-man making it 5 jumps before lunch. A great day!

On the 21st December a ceasefire agreement was signed by Bishop Abel Muzorewa, Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo. Commonwealth Monitoring Forces arrived to ensure the winding down of hostilities.

Not long afterwards, all of the PTS staff, along with all the other Air Force Sections at New Sarum, were told to gather at the Sports Club grounds. We did and then we were briefed by the Commander that Mugabe could not and would not win the elections. He could not of course say how this would come to pass but we all breathed a sigh of relief and were prepared to do whatever was asked of us to prevent it.

In preparation for the elections, the various elements of ZANLA and ZIPRA began arriving in the country from Zambia and Mocambique and flooding into the Assembly Points. I assumed that if there was going to be trouble that these would become prime targets. The days passed as each party geared up for the election process. I heard rumours of intimidation in the rural areas but felt reassured that there was a plan to ensure that Mugabe would not succeed. The Commonwealth Monitoring Force began to arrive to supervise the forthcoming elections and the British Governor, Lord Soames, took up his official residence. Ostensibly Britain was now in control until the elections.

At PTS we were now also running courses to convert SAS onto Ram Air parachutes which they were really enjoying and in February we took the opportunity to get a few jumps in from an RAF C130 which was in Rhodesia as part of the Commonwealth Monitoring Force. The last one, which included SAS and PJI's was a night jump and I will long remember the sight of the ramp being lowered at 8,000ft on our run in. The bright lights of Salisbury against the inky darkness surrounding it looked quite spectacular as we stood ready to launch ourselves off the ramp. It is quite different from jumping from the door of the Dak or even looking out at the lights as you fly over them. It is something you have to experience to really appreciate. It was a real buzz. It was also different for us, as we were relying not on a despatcher to spot manually as normal but on a device in the aircraft known as CARP (Calculated Air Release Point) which would predict the despatch point based on data inputted by the crew. It worked very well for us and we had a great jump and all landed on target.

With this kind of activity it was easy to forget the deadly seriousness of what was taking place regarding the elections but on 0900 on 4th March we all gathered around radios to hear the results. I was absolutely stunned to hear that Mugabe had won and resoundingly too. It was unbelievable. What had happened to the Master Plan?

How could this have happened? What would happen next? There were so many questions and no answers. Like everyone else, we did not know how to take it. I was completely dismayed and felt extreme disappointment. It would seem that Maggie Thatcher, the British Prime Minister, had sold us down the river and the hierarchy never did put into action any Master Plan. It was "fait accompli" and Mugabe duly came into power. After the initial shock it was a case of riding it out to see what would unfold. The Military Chiefs reassured us that all would be well and not to rush into any hasty panic moves.

"ACTION STATIONS!"



**TROOPER TANGNEY
STICK LEADER ON MY 1,000TH
JUMP**



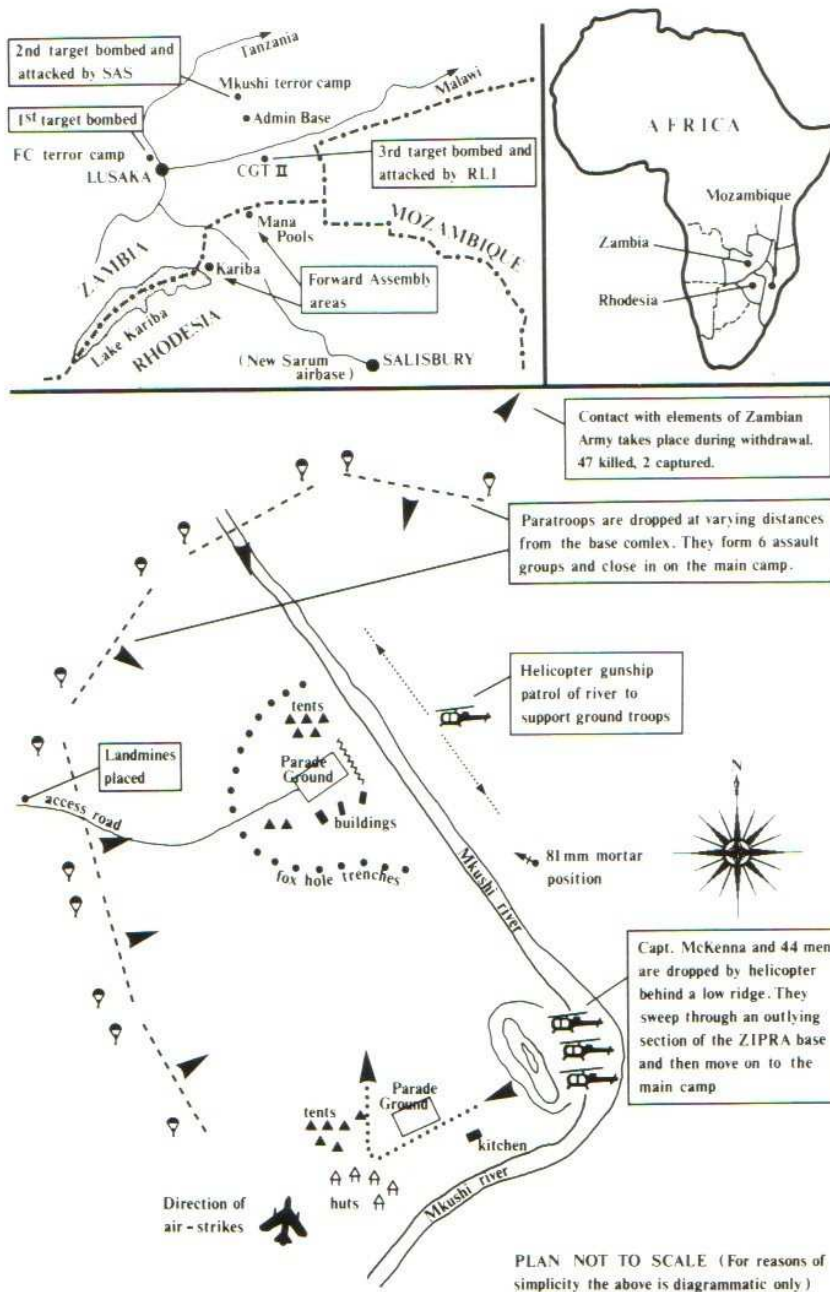
**CAPTAIN SCOTTY MCCORMACK IN THE
RUSSIAN GENERAL'S UNIFORM -
COMPLETE WITH MEDAL - CAPTURED AT
MKUSHI**



**KEITH SAMLER B.S.A.P.
JUMPED INTO ZAMBIA ON "OP
VODKA" TO RESCUE PRISONERS**



**OPERATION GATLING
DAK FORMATION TAKES OFF FROM KARIBA FOR PARA ASSAULT ON C.G.T. 2**



Operation Gatling: Map showing attack on ZIPRA's Mkushi terror camps with inset showing other phases of operation

OPERATION GATLING: MKUSHI CAMP ATTACK MAP

"ACTION STATIONS!"



TEST JUMPS FROM A BELL 205 CHEETAH



JOHN EARLY



RAM AIR PARACHUTE



AIR FORCE DESPATCHERS COURSE: DECEMBER 1979
FRONT: FRANK HALES, PAUL HOGAN



OFFICERS ADMIN COURSE
Author kneeling 3rd from left

"ACTION STATIONS!"

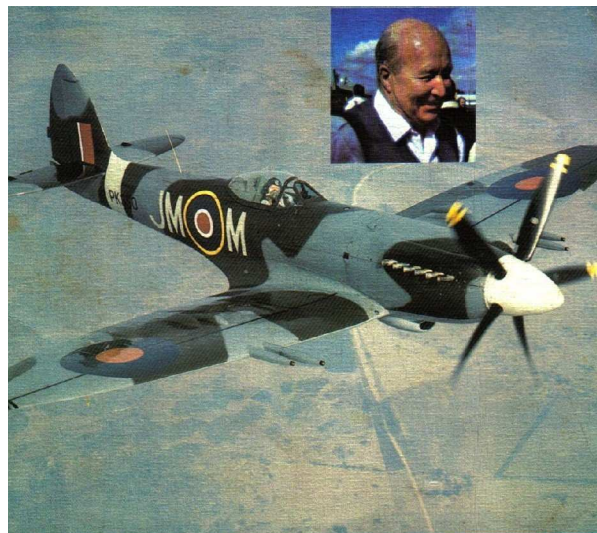
**"OPERATION CHEESE"
DESTRUCTION OF CHAMBESHI BRIDGES**



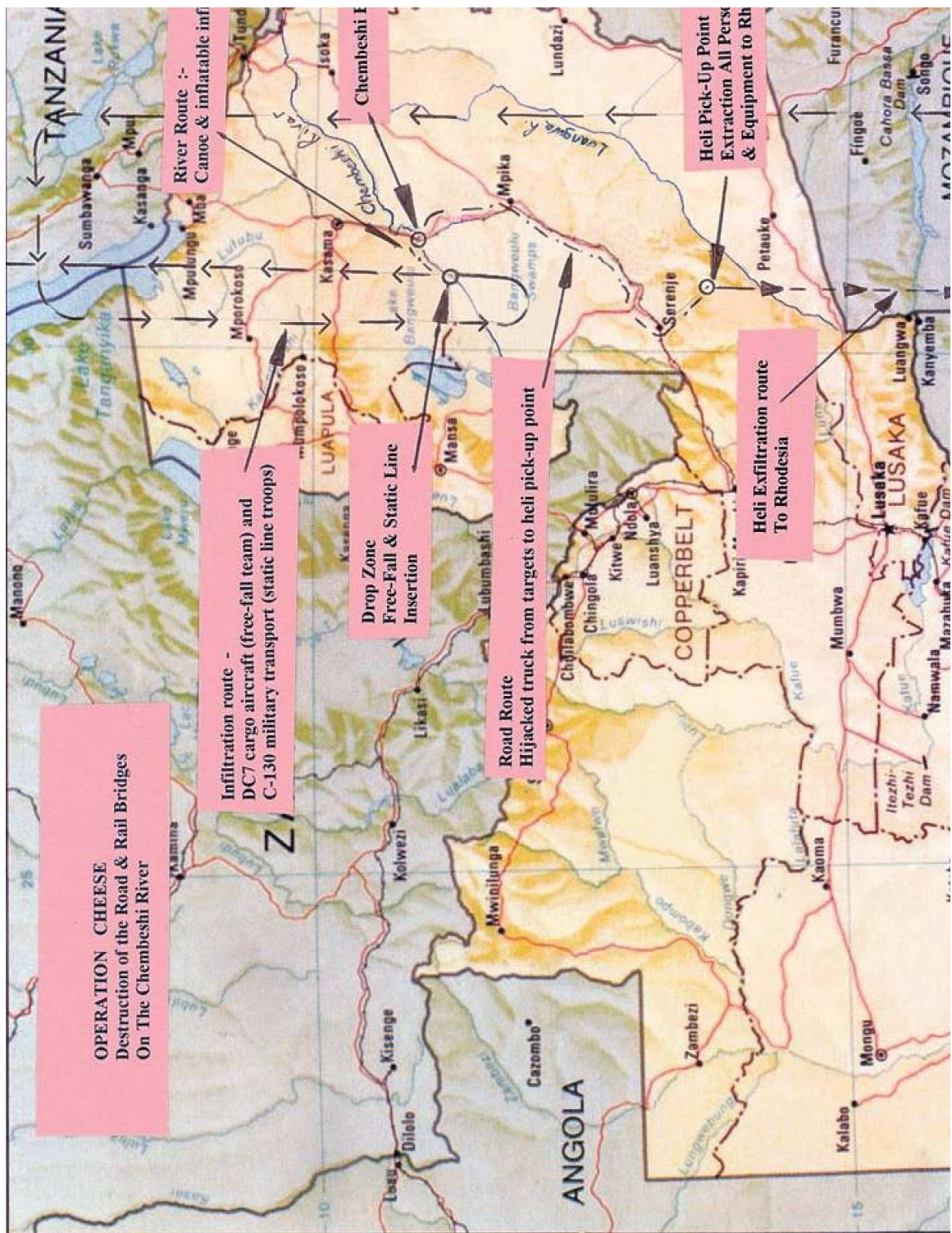
JACK MALLOCH'S DC 7 USED FOR INSERTION OF H.A.L.O. TEAM



**GEORGE ALEXANDER
DC 7 PILOT**



**JACK MALLOCH'S SPITFIRE. INSET: JACK
OWNER/PILOT OF DC 7**



OPERATION CHEESE - H.A.L.O./RECCE TEAM



**GRAHAME WILSON
MISSION COMMANDER**



GRAHAME (LEFT) CHATS TO S.A.S. H.A.L.O. TRAINEES



PHIL BROOKS



PAUL FRENCH

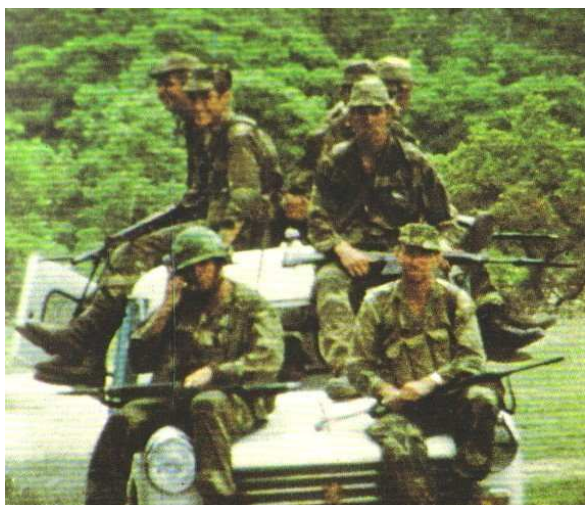


STAN STANDISH-WHITE

**OPERATION CHEESE
ASSAULT GROUP**



**S. AFRICAN C 130 HERCULES DROPS PARAS.
ASSAULT GROUP USED SAME TYPE FOR NIGHT DROP ON OP. CHEESE**



**BOB MCKENZIE WITH US AIRBORNE HELMET
ASSAULT GROUP COMMANDER**



**PAUL FISHER
DEMOLITIONS**



KLEPPER COLLAPSIBLE CANOES (ABOVE)



S.A.S. ZODIAC INFLATABLES (RIGHT)



**SAS RECOVERED BY BELL "CHEETAHS" TO
RHODESIA**



**SAS IN TERRORIST GREENS AND CAMO
AFTER AN OP. IN MOZAMBIQUE**

Zambia in all-out bid to get goods moving

LUSAKA.

ZAMBIA'S hard-pressed road haulage companies have been asked to use every available vehicle to shift nearly 30 000 tonnes of goods stranded on the Zambian Copperbelt and at Dar es Salaam because of the closure of the Tazara railway.

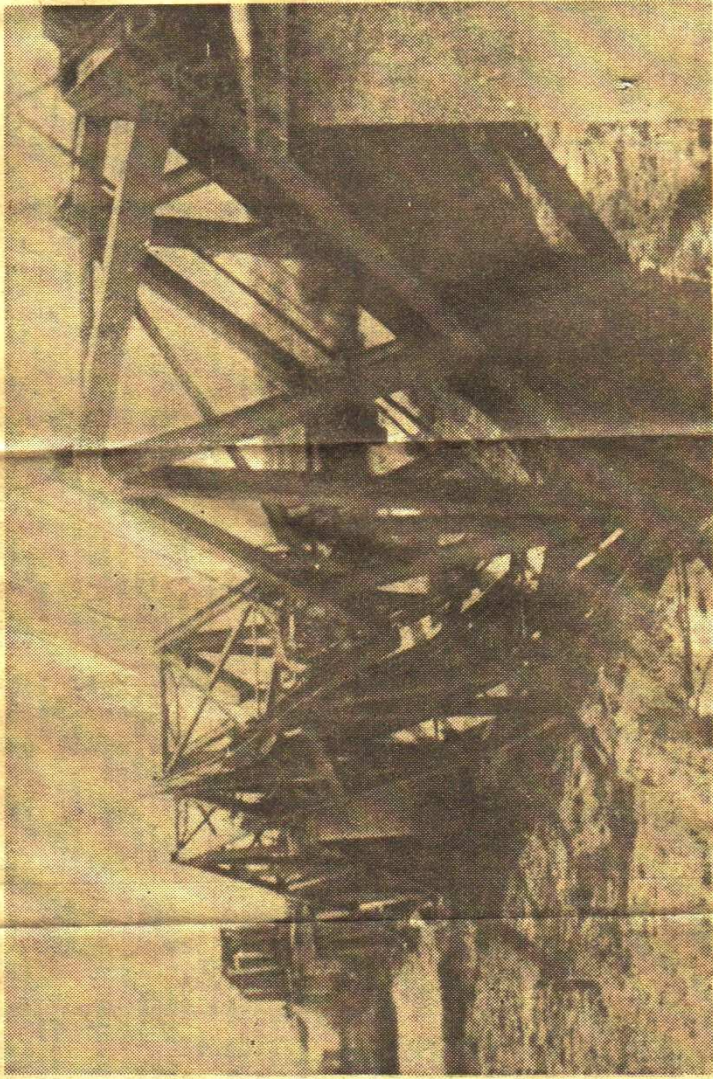
The Works and Supply Minister, Mr. Haawell Mwale, told the official Zambian news agency yesterday that some 10 000 tonnes of copper were stockpiled at the mines while more than 18 000 tonnes of goods bound for Zambia were stuck at Dar es Salaam.

The Minister said road transporters had been asked to join a combined road and rail operation to shift the goods, which include maize needed to make up for a harvest shortfall, *Janis-Reuters* reports.

Tazara, which carries about 40 percent of Zambia's foreign trade, has been closed since October 12, when the road north-east Zambia was blown up.

Engineering sources say it will take about six months to complete repairs to the bridge, which are being supervised by a team of Chinese technicians.

The Zambians have asked the European Economic Community to help pay the estimated six million kwacha cost of repairing the rail bridge and the adjacent road bridge, also badly damaged in the raid.



AS Zambia faces a possible six-month wait for the rail bridge (above) over the Chambeshi River to be repaired, officials are reported to be looking into the possibility of laying temporary track over the road bridge (left and below), which was blown up at the same time as the rail bridge last month.

Although the road bridge was badly damaged in the attack, which Zambia alleges was made by Zimbabwe Rhodesian raiders, officials appear to be confident it can be repaired in time to have the country's lifeline to Dar es Salaam reopened by the new year.

According to estimates the restoration of the rail bridge would probably be even more expensive than the road bridge and may take up to six months.

'Yes' on condition -SWAPO

GENEVA.

THE South West African People's Organisation decided yesterday to accept a plan for a demilitarised zone across the northern frontier as part of an international settlement deal.

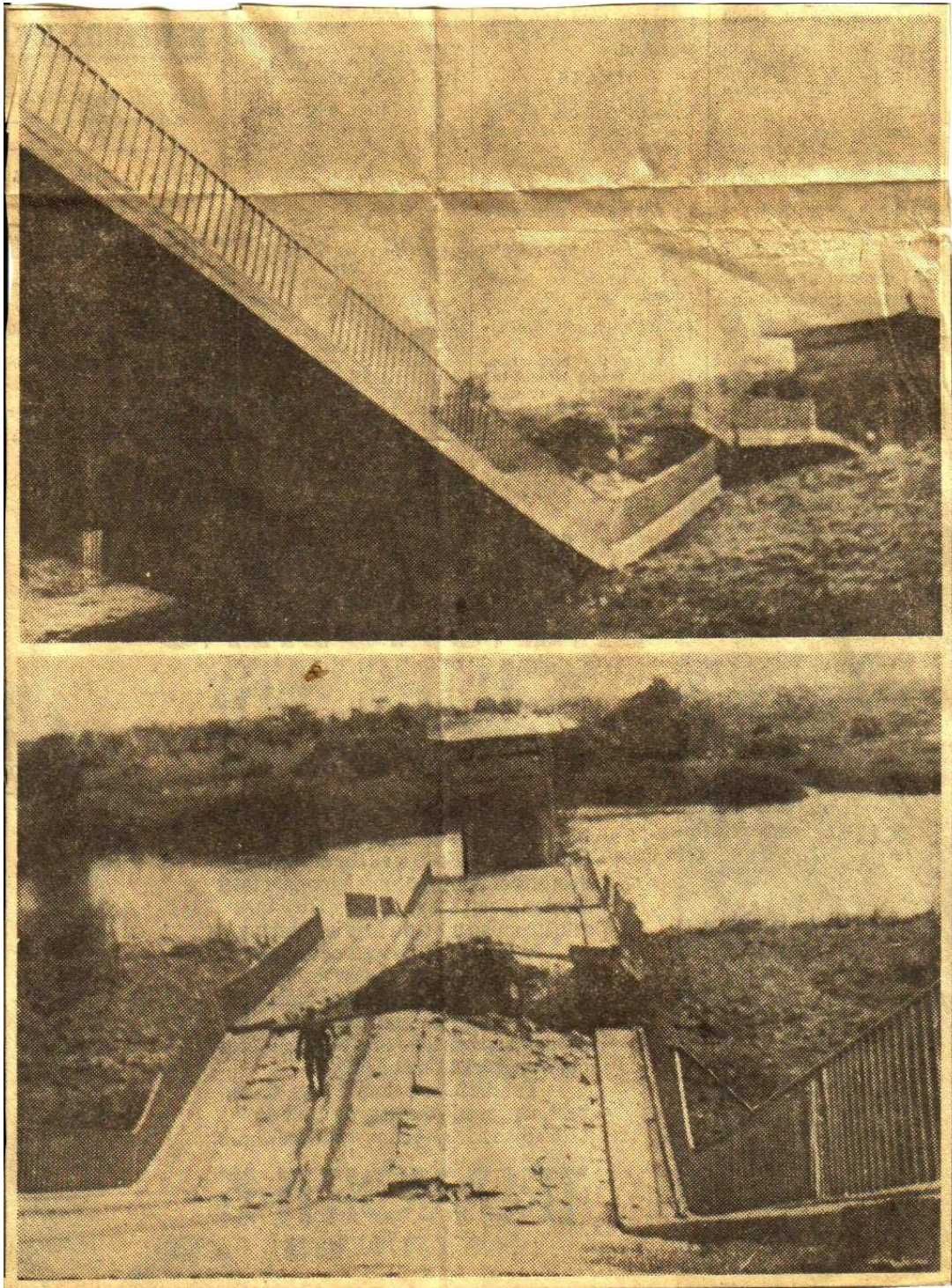
SWAPO's move came as the South African Government began negotiations for the United Nations sponsored talks on South West Africa.

The South African team, headed by the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Brand Fourie, almost immediately went into a two-hour meeting with the U.N. under-secretary-general, Mr. Brian Urquhart.

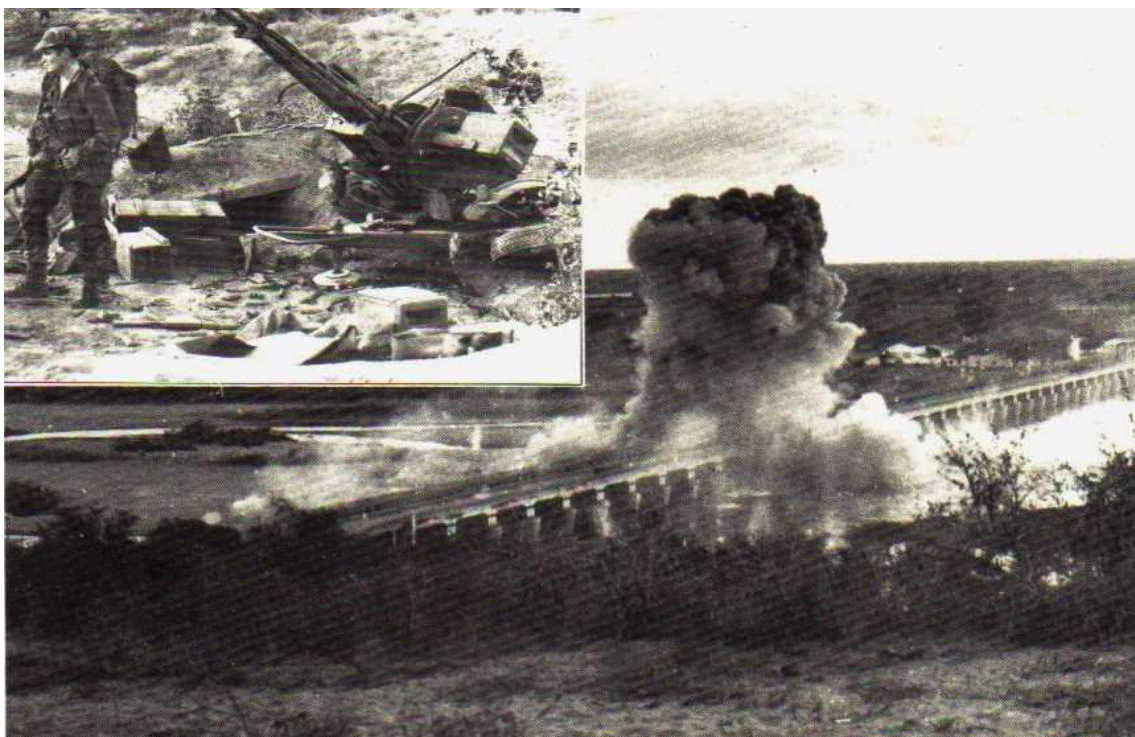
SWAPO's conditional acceptance of the demilitarised zone plan was disclosed by U.N. officials last night, *Inter-Press* reports.

No statement was issued after the diplomatic

"ACTION STATIONS!"



DESTROYED CHAMBESHI ROAD BRIDGE



"OPERATION URIC"
BARRAGEM BRIDGES. INSET: THE SAS CAPTURED A 23MM ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUN, THEN TURNED IT ON THE ENEMY AND USED IT TO PROTECT THE DEMOLITION TEAMS. THE BRIDGES BLOW.



AUTHOR IN FREEFALL



MIKE DUFFY IN FREEFALL



**NO. 1 DESPATCHER, DIRECTS
AIRCRAFT ON H.A.L.O. RUN-IN**

PART FOUR

The Postwar Years

PEACE BREAKS OUT

After Independence, things seemed a bit surreal. What were we to do? I was going through a conundrum of feelings; dismay, anxiety, disbelief, even hope as Mugabe did not seem to be "the monster" I had expected and spoke liberally of reconciliation and the need for people to remain and not flee the country..

We were briefed by the Commander not to act hastily and to carry on as before. There was to be no disbandment of the Air Force and it was now to be known as the Air Force of Zimbabwe. Serving members were given the option to retire from the service if they wished, or to carry on. Some left over the next few months but many, like myself, decided to test the waters and stay on for a while. The conditions of service were made very flexible and it was relatively easy to opt out and leave. At the time it was an easier decision to stick around in the country we loved and pray for the best than to uproot the family and start looking for greener pastures. Certainly S. Africa and the UK did not seem appealing to us so we determined to stick it out and see how things unfolded. Many other Air Force personnel decided to stay on including Frank Hales, which confirmed my decision.

Selous Scouts, after having given years of excellent service and producing some outstanding operators, virtually melted away and they effectively ceased to exist after the election, however, we still had the RLI and the SAS. With all the uncertainty, Frank realised the necessity to keep busy and throughout the early stages of 1980 we continued with Basic Training, Free Fall Training and a UTPJI course. Frank also seized the opportunity to make good use of the 7 and 8 Sqdn helicopters now that they were mostly based at New Sarum.

In April we did our first free fall jumps from the Alouette 3 which went off very well and then in May we started rehearsing for a PTS demo jump into the Bulawayo Trade Fair. We were to use a Bell Helicopter and the plan was to build an 8-man snowflake formation in free fall then bomburst which always looked effective when wearing smoke canisters. The rehearsals were great fun and the resultant demo jump into the stadium at the Trade Fair was successful even though we only managed to build a 6-man.

FINAL JUMP FOR THE RHODESIAN LIGHT INFANTRY

15th June 1980 was to mark a special occasion as it was the last Battalion jump for the RLI.

An exercise had been planned to parachute four Dakota loads of paras onto Nyamumba airfield, Kariba.

I helped the men to kit up in the hangar at PTS and the atmosphere was quite heavy as the guys realised that in all probability this would be the last time they would jump as a unit. Once kitted up they were emplaned. Embarrassingly, one of the Daks had a problem starting up an engine and we proceeded with the other three Daks. We took to the skies and headed for Kariba in tight formation. Fortunately, it wasn't long before the fourth Dak was able to get started and joined the formation.

We flew on and made our run in over the DZ, dropping the guys in a smooth, fast stick, the RLI on the ball as always. Things got a bit more interesting after that. Lt Col Charlie Aust, Commanding Officer at the time recalls;

"The 'Nyamumba Jump' was the last Battalion airborne deployment. It was the initiation of a unit exercise involving the entire Battalion. We had been on "stand by" as the new Government

settled in so to speak. I remember the Dak problem. Having dropped at Nyamumba, we advanced in independent Commando groups to Kariba Gorge then climbed the heights and advanced to the town area. From various RV's there we were ferried across the lake to Wafa Wafa, the Selous Scout Selection Course Base and undertook a large scale exercise. Hunter aircraft "attacked" us as we crossed the lake! Quite exciting! Quite a bit of drama followed as the exercise unfolded, with live air ground attack hitting own troops, a patrol boat blowing up and so on. As I remember it, elements of all four commandos...1, 2, 3 and Support took part. Great memories! Much of the forces as we knew them had closed/disbanded etc. when all this took place."

As it happened, the RLI formally disbanded on the 1 November 1980 but 24 of them still managed to do a final jump at New Sarum on 20th November. It was a historic moment as it was to be the last time for these fine men to take to the skies. I was the No. 2 despatcher and as I despatched them that day I knew it was an event that would never again be repeated. They had achieved so much and made their mark in parachuting history. Their exploits, some seemingly unbelievable, but true nevertheless, will be told over and over again. Never again will we see paratroops used as they were.

AIRCRAFT EVALUATION TRIALS

High Command had decided it was time for the long enduring, ever faithful Dakotas to be replaced with a more modern transport aircraft. Various companies were eager to supply the new aircraft. Of course, as PTS, we were responsible for jump testing the aircraft and making recommendations as to its suitability.

In August 1980, we began evaluation trials on the De Havilland Buffalo, a twin engined turbo prop aircraft, with excellent climb capability, very good short field landing and take off characteristics and a ramp for dropping equipment.

We did some trial jumps with the SAS fully kitted up with CSPEPs doing static line jumps off the ramp. Then the free fall course we were running also made some jumps from it and of course the PJs. We were all very impressed. It seemed to me that it would be a great aircraft to go for and would fulfill our needs admirably.

In November, it was then the turn of British Aerospace to visit with their HS748. This was also a twin engine turbo prop but it did not have a ramp which, to my mind, put it out of the running straight away as I remembered some of the problems we had encountered during the war. Anyway we were more than willing to do some test jumps.

We used it for Static Line jumps with full equipment and encountered no problems but when it came to free fall it was a different story. Because of the close proximity of the tail plane, we were informed that the method of exit was the same as for static line and only once clear of the tail plane to then adopt the free fall position. Equipment was not fitted to free fallers when using this aircraft.

We tried it of course and I found it so different falling away from the aircraft at 11,000ft in a static line exit position but, it was no problem to then go into the free fall face-to-earth position as we were all experienced free fallers. We had fun with the evaluation jumps but all of us were of the opinion that we preferred the Buffalo.

FIRST ZIMBABWE PARACHUTE BATTALION

Not only were new things happening in relation to aircraft but also there were many changes in the Army.

The Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), realising how effective it had been during the war years, wanted to maintain a Parachute Assault capability. Lt Col Lionel Dyke was tasked with forming the First Zimbabwe Parachute Battalion. Major Richard Gash was seconded from the British Parachute Regiment to assist with the setting up of the rigid selection process which was along the same lines as the Brit Para methods.

We received our first group of trainees in October for the Para Bn and 15 qualified for their wings.

FINAL JUMP FOR SAS

On 11th December 1980, there was yet another historic occasion when the SAS made their final jump. It was done in great style and the DZ was at Andre Rabie Barracks, Inkomo.

It was a mass jump with a free fall stick of 37. Major Grahame Wilson, the last Commanding Officer of the unit, was the first man to jump as part of the pathfinder group comprising 5 men. There were a further 32 free fallers.

This was followed by a mass jump of 120 men on static line with all 6 Dakotas dropping simultaneously. It was a fantastic sight and stirred many hearts but it was also very moving, knowing that this was the grand finale.

Two days later, on 13th December, when the SAS flag was lowered at the last official function of the Unit, Grahame Wilson, said;

"We will leave here not only in sorrow but filled with pride, dignity and honour in ourselves and in 1 SAS. We have much to be grateful for.

"I am eternally grateful to those men who served with the Unit before we did; to those among us who have lost loved ones; to those who were wounded; to those friends, and there are many of them, who have stood by us; to those wives and families who stood behind us; to those who have fought with such courage beside us and especially to those who gave their lives for Rhodesia and the Unit.

"We have not let them down and we will not forget them. I know that in the years to come, we can, with the greatest pride say, 'I served with the Rhodesian SAS.'

"May God bless you and thank God we did our duty."

It was a momentous occasion and heartbreaking to see such an outstanding body of men passing into history. For me, to have known and worked closely with such men is an honour I will always hold closely. Their devotion to duty, their audacity and their courage against such odds were outstanding and gained the respect of fighting forces around the world.

Realising the unit was disbanding I asked Grahame Wilson for a testimonial which is shown here. It makes me feel very proud coming from the Commanding Officer of the Rhodesian SAS.

ROYAL AIR FORCE PJI'S ARRIVE

Things "felt" very different now that the Selous Scouts, RLI, SAS and RAR (which had been merged into the ZNA) were no longer in existence although there were still elements of them in the ZNA.

As we had been losing PJI's who decided they could not serve under the new regime, the RAF agreed to help out by seconding a number of PJI's. They would second six PJI's, two at a time for several months each. The first two, Sgts Andy Stalker and Jim Hughes, arrived in January 1981. They were somewhat apprehensive as to what they had let themselves in for but were very rapidly assimilated into the team. Like all the RAF PJI's they were firstly qualified Physical Training Instructors who then became PJI's. We found that they were very good Basic Course instructors but had no experience of operational drops at all. I think it is fair to say that they were quite amazed, perhaps a bit horrified, at our techniques, which included jumping from 500ft, with weapons including MAGs or RPG 7's, radios etc. on the person and with no demarcated DZ's as such.

They had very little free fall experience and Paul Hogan, as dedicated as always, very quickly took them in hand to teach them the finer points of free fall which they really enjoyed.

It was great to have them and they were all a smashing bunch of lads.

CALCULATED RELEASE POINT

We were also doing some more trial jumps using the DME system whereby the data was inputted into the instrument and it would calculate the release point. By this time it was the norm in most Air Forces. In February, we climbed to 8,000ft for a free fall jump and were using the DME but on run in we could see that we were far off track and eyeballed instead. On other jumps it worked reasonably well.

On 20th February, we were visited by Wing Commander Marshall, OC No. 1, PTS, Royal Air Force, who wanted to see for himself how his boys were doing and he was keen to jump from the legendary Dakota. It was a very cloudy day as the Dak climbed to 8,000ft and made its DME run in.

The Wing Commander and 3 PJI's dived out as the green came on, did some relative work and opened their parachutes. They drifted down through the clouds and found themselves over a farm dam and 3km from the DZ. They were able to steer clear of the dam but the Wing Cdr was not too impressed with the long walk back, though he took it all in good spirit. We circled and this time I jumped with some of the guys and when we broke through the cloud we could see that we would have to run our canopies all the way back but we still landed outside the fence on the boundary of the DZ.

A few days later when I jumped DME again it was spot on but, generally, we felt happier using the "Mk 1 eyeball".

I had a bit of excitement on 18th March '81 when I had a complete malfunction of my main canopy whilst doing a free fall jump but once more the reserve worked perfectly and I had a good reserve ride back to the DZ.

Then on 20th March we had so many aircrew types wanting to do a water jump into Lake McIlwaine that we had to lay on two lifts. As always it was great fun.

Bob Warren - Coddington ex SAS/S. Scouts recalls:

"The water jump brings back some memories... You may recall the young pilot who did not want to take the ground training seriously? The build up in the hangar had some of you PTS staff building up some steam which resulted in a plan to sort him out being hatched. As "Brown Jobs", Paul Fisher and I were let in on the scheme and were suitably entertained for the whole jump. The crunch came for the "JP" when he was standing in the door, seconds from the green light and was then shown the tattered end of a static line, earlier taken from PTS. Well the look on the man's face when he thought it was his line and the SCREAM as he left the aircraft, assisted by a good push, had the rest of us in fits of laughter. Later, on dry ground there was one very quiet little puppy, sitting alone trying to drink a beer. Moral of the story, "Don't mess with the PJI's." Something that every "Brown Job" also learnt at some stage of his parachuting career."

AFRICAN PJI'S

We were continuing to lose staff in the Air Force and in March there was a sad occasion when Derek de Kock retired from the Force after 25 years of service, most of them at PTS with which his name would always be associated. It was very sad to see him moving on even though he was no longer with the school by then.

Because of the loss of PJI's, Frank had put the word out to the Army and we received our first intake of Africans to be trained as PJI's. By this time, having passed Officer's Admin Course, I was promoted to Flight Lieutenant and appointed as Training Officer.

I had been involved with Frank and Paul Hogan in the interviews and was fairly confident that we had a good bunch to commence with. They were previously para trained having served with the Rhodesian Forces. The Parachuting Phase of instruction was not a problem but we spent a lot of time in the Despatching Phase until we were one hundred percent certain of their ability. Again the Mutual Instruction phase proved quite lengthy but when it came to the actual "live" instruction phase of teaching they could of course relate very well to the fellow Africans coming on course and the rapport was in some ways better.

Andy and Jim completed their secondment and returned to the UK and were replaced by Sgts Charlie O Neill and Derek Pocknell who seamlessly fitted into the system. (Interestingly, Derek was the holder of the George Medal for having rescued a youngster from a blazing fire.)

1 Para were keeping us busy with Basic Courses and Continuation training as Lionel Dyke was determined that his men be up to scratch.

NIGHT JUMPS FROM BELL 205

In August 1981, we did our first night free fall jumps from the Bell helicopter. The Bell was a great training platform for free fall as a small group of trainees would be able to do several jumps in short succession. The helicopter could quickly climb to altitude, drop the men, land on the DZ, then take them up again as soon as they had fitted new parachutes. We had an improved system of lighting on our altimeters too, called a beta light, fitted around the rim of the altimeter face which we wanted to test. The PJI's really enjoyed the jumps as we took the opportunity to do some night relative work

and the beta lights were perfect. All in all, the trials went very well and Mike Pingo, the pilot, enjoyed himself too.

BUSY DAY

On the 25 September, 3 Sqdn had scheduled a lot of flight training and were very happy to oblige us with some staff free fall training and I managed to squeeze in 6 jumps from 10,000ft, all of them relative work jumps.

AIR FORCE '81

High Command thought it would be a good idea to promote the Force and let the populace see that we were still viable. Each of the Squadron's formulated a plan for the day.

Frank came up with something new for us to try. We would build a 6-man formation in free fall then bomburst, but this time we would use two Islander aircraft flying in formation. 3 PJI's would jump from each aircraft then build the formation.

We did ten practice jumps and had lots of fun with it but never succeeded in building the 6-man until the day of the show which was held on 24th October when we were scheduled to do two jumps. The first one went like magic, with both Islanders in tight formation on the run in and the simultaneous exit from each aircraft was spot on (a couple of seconds difference could cause considerable problems). The free fall was good and the formation built rapidly with red smoke streaming from the canisters attached to our ankles and then a good bomburst, as we max tracked away. This was followed by all of us landing on target in front of the huge crowd who were as thrilled as we were!

UT PJI DROWNS

On 25th November, we had a tragedy in the Bateleur Free Fall Club when young Alec Skeen a UTPJI was drowned. We were parachuting out at the local skydiving club and Alec landed alongside a small farm dam in windy conditions. Unfortunately, before Alec could react he was dragged into the dam and drowned. He was a very popular youngster and showing a lot of potential. We were all very upset by the incident.

CHAMPAGNE BREAKFAST 23 DECEMBER '81

Lionel Dyke decided to round off the year with a flourish and organised a Christmas jump. We emplaned 72 of his men onto three Daks. I was a No. 1 despatcher as we took off and headed for Inkomo where we did a static line drop from 500ft with the Daks in tight vee formation. The No. 2 and 3 despatchers in each aircraft then kitted up as the aircraft came round for second run in, this time at 1,000ft and they jumped static line with steerable parachutes. The Daks then climbed to 8,000ft whilst the No. 1's readied themselves. Once again they ran in, in tight vee formation, and the No. 1's jumped free fall. The Daks landed and the aircrew and PJI's joined Lionel Dyke and 1 Para for a

champagne breakfast. Definitely different. (What a great job I had!)

PARA SCUBA JUMP 21 JANUARY '82

Lionel Dyke had requested a Water Jump into Lake Kariba doing Para Scuba as it was something he wanted to introduce into the unit so we went with a Dak up to Kariba.

I jumped static line as the drifter then was followed on the next run by Lionel, Paul Fisher and Billy Simpson (a former PJI and ex Brit SAS who had transferred to Para Bn) in Para Scuba kit. It went well but they returned to the airfield after swimming ashore then did a second jump, again Para Scuba.

CLOSE CALL

In February, we were joined by the last two of the RAF PJI's on secondment, Alan Wain and Tom Johnson, and on 25th February '82 we were off to Lake Kariba again, this time for an aircrew water jump. Tom, a Jock, was ex Falcons RAF Free Fall Display team. He had a lot of jumps and was good. We despatched the aircrew from 1,000ft into Lake Kariba; all went well. The remaining PJI's then climbed to 10,000ft for a free fall jump.

The jump went well, then we steered our canopies towards the boats and landed alongside. Tom splashed in and released the Capewells. The recovery crew grabbed the canopy. As they did so, they trawled around Jock, who had not bothered to inflate his life jacket; he was used to recovery by Royal Marines who, he said, had you "fished out of the water in a flash". Unseen to all, the submerged rigging lines wrapped themselves tightly around his legs as the crew circled. Tom was trapped. He could not kick and went down. He kicked frantically - one last gasp - tried to shout, failed, and went under again. Frank Hales, wet from his own jump, realised at the eleventh hour what was going on. He dived in, swam down to the Scottish stone and held him up till they poured him into the boat. A very relieved Jock provided the drinks at the braai later.

PROMOTION TO OC PTS: APRIL 1982

In March we had a memorable occasion at PTS as Frank Hales completed his service and left the Force to settle in S. Africa where he would work for a company manufacturing parachutes. He was completing a lifetime of outstanding military service. He loved parachuting and experimenting with aerial photography. Like Derek de Kock he had made a great impact at PTS and his quiet but determined leadership had been an inspiration to us all. I would miss him very much.

On 23rd April 1982, I was promoted to Squadron Leader and formally appointed as OC PTS, a position I had aspired to for a long time. I was very proud and determined to maintain the standards set by Derek and Frank even though the circumstances were now obviously different.

Our trainees had changed and were now solely from 1 Para, although they still required the same training, i.e. Basic, Free Fall, Para Scuba and Continuation.

Staff had changed too and it was purely a PJI force again with no Army or Air Force Despatchers since Fire Force had now ceased. The PJI's themselves were a mix of African and European, but the loss of European aircrew and PJI's was to continue.

END OF RAF SECONDMENTS

In June, Alan Wain and Tom Johnson completed their secondments and returned to No. 1 PTS at RAF Brize Norton. All of the RAF PJI's had given us great service, being very professional in their approach and we had created a good bond with them. I hoped the AFZ might reciprocate by sending me over to Brize Norton, the home of No. 1 PTS, but it was not to be

THORNHILL AIR FORCE BASE BOMBING JUNE 1982

An event that was to cause great upset and resentment took place in June 1982.

A group of saboteurs infiltrated Thornhill Air Base and placed bombs on some Hunter and Hawk aircraft, effectively destroying them and greatly reducing the Fighter capability of the Force. It was a classic Special Forces type operation. Within hours, several Senior Air Force officers were arrested and accused of complicity in the bombing. They were held for a long time and under went severe torture during interrogation before being finally charged and prosecuted. Like everyone of my comrades I was deeply upset by the whole event as I was convinced in my heart that they had no hand in the matter. It caused a resounding blow to the morale of the remaining European officers from which we never really recovered and the number of people leaving increased considerably. It was only the very high "Esprit de Corps" at PTS that convinced me to carry on.

TWENTY ONE YEARS OF PARACHUTING: 29 OCTOBER 1982

Parachute Training School celebrated twenty-one years of parachuting on the 29th October 1982.

Air Lieutenant Mark Outhwaite was the pilot of the Dakota that climbed into the sky that fine, hot, sunny afternoon with the PTS staff. Everyone wanted to be in on the jump. We kitted up the School Mascot, Freddy Bear, in his harness and pilot chute and hurled him out on the first run-in as our drifter, a feat he had performed loyally many times over the years and had been rescued on numerous occasions from some obscure landing sites. This was followed by four new PJIs jumping static line on steerable T10's onto our normal DZ, 32 Grass Runway at New Sarum. They steered themselves onto target and performed immaculate PLFs.

The rest of us climbed to 8,000ft and Sgts Philip Chirindo, Maurice Chiwashira, Elton Kapungu and Ron Chitsike launched themselves out and built a 4-man diamond formation before operating their para commander parachutes and steering themselves into the Sports Club grounds. Mark brought the aircraft round for the final run in and Charles Magama, Ian Douglas, John Mellett, Paul Hogan and I dived out of the Dak, smoke trailing as we did our relative work before tracking away and opening our Ram Air parachutes. We stalled and spiraled our parachutes before swooping in for our landing on target in the sports grounds.

I felt very proud of the newer PJI's as the whole demo had gone off so well and we made our way into the club house for a celebration party. So much had happened in the ensuing 21 years since PTS was formed, with many advances in parachutes and techniques and with so much excitement and drama. The school had forged a reputation it could very justifiably be proud of and had played such an important role in the history of parachuting within the country.

A leading Special Forces Commander has said:

"Special Operations are only as good as the people who get you in and get you out."

PTS certainly played its role in getting them in.

The outstanding results of the Army on internal and external operations could not have been achieved without the Paras and it made me feel very proud to have played my part in that as a PJI at Parachute Training School. Especially to have had the privilege to work with such a terrific bunch of comrades, in the Army, the Air Force and in particular that close knit Band Of Brothers – the PJI's.

THE FINAL YEARS: OCTOBER 1982 TO JUNE 1984

I was to carry on as OC PTS for a further two years.

The training of men for Para Bn continued unabated with Paul Hogan, Ian Douglas, John Mellett and I at the helm and a good nucleus of PJI's such as Elton Kapungu, Maurice Chiwashira, Ron Chitsike, Charlie Magama, Owen Madhiriza and Philip Chirundo. They were very keen to learn and before long they were all free fall trained, doing relative work and jumping Ram Air parachutes. Because we were not involved on operations we were able to devote a lot of time to PJI training and did staff free fall jumps whenever we could, using the Islander, Dak, Bell and Alouette.

In December '82 we received a consignment of 7-cell Ram Air parachutes from Lesotho and these became the standard free fall parachute for the PJI's. I was testing one in January '83 when I had a bad malfunction and had to cutaway from it. Once more the reserve worked well and I had a perfect ride down with no problems.

Having seen the value of the Ram Air canopy and its ability to cover long distances cross country because of its shallow glide angle, it had obvious potential as a new method of clandestine insertion. A Special Forces team of parachutists would be able to exit the aircraft at high altitude, immediately open their parachutes and then glide for many kilometres before landing at their chosen spot. This method was known as HAHO- High Altitude High Opening and was no doubt being tested by other Special Forces. We needed a Ram Air parachute that was capable of gliding long distances, that could carry a parachutist and all his equipment. It must be docile enough for a safe night landing, yet responsive enough to allow close formation flying of a team of men at night.

Pioneer Parachutes, an American company had such a parachute, a 9-cell LR288 and one of their representatives, Mark "Shoobi" Knutson came over with a few of their rigs in February '83 to demonstrate them to us. Shoobi was a brilliant skydiver who stayed with us for two weeks. The LR 288 was just what we needed and we did several HAHO stand off jumps with them. We travelled to Marandellas (now Marondera) Airstrip to be away from Air Traffic and jumped there. We jumped from 10,000ft, several kilometres from the strip, then steered our way back across country. 12km was the furthest we made it. Before take off we would obtain the wind speeds and directions at various altitudes to help us calculate the release point but they weren't always accurate and a dog leg, i.e. a change in wind direction at differing altitudes, really affected the straight line distance we could achieve. We had a couple of long walks or hitchhikes back to the strip. Still, it was great flying cross country.

Shoobi also introduced us to a new concept - canopy relative work (CRW) at which he was very good and he would take the opportunity to hook up with one of the guys whilst under canopy whenever possible. He gave me my first canopy hook up. He directed his canopy just above and in front of mine and then hooked his feet into my rigging lines. The canopies did not collapse but flew as a biplane with the top man doing the steering. Just before landing the top man frees his legs and the two jumpers land separately.

Shoobi duly returned to the States but it was agreed that these were the parachutes to go for and the piggyback harness would accommodate an LR288 as the main parachute and the reserve. If an operator had a malfunction on an operation and had to use his reserve it was essential that he could stay with the rest of the team so he would need the same type of parachute to maintain the same glide angle.

Parachutes were ordered and we eagerly awaited their arrival.

I was always keen to put on a bit of a show and on the 4 March '83, 56 men from Para Bn were to do their final jump at Inkomo. We dropped them in 3 lifts from the Dak, then 11 of us did a free fall jump from 8,000ft. Four men jumped with PC's and pulled at 2,500ft, 5 men on Ram Airs pulled at 3,500ft and John Mellett and I did a 5km HAHO from 7,000ft on LR288's. The wind was so good we could have gone another 3 kms out. Overall it was an impressive display to the dignitaries of the various techniques available to the paras.

Paul Hogan had decided to leave and try his luck in Civvy Street. He had been a tremendous asset at PTS being an excellent instructor and parachutist. He was always willing to go the extra mile and gave everything 100%. Always keen to try new ideas and propose new concepts. It was very sad to see him go and especially for me as we had worked so closely for many years. He had trained many men during that time and they all held him in the highest esteem.

CASA 212

We had carried out trial jumps from the Buffalo and HS748 but it was a consignment of Spanish CASA 212's that we received in March '83. In a way, it was like a mini version of the Buffalo, being a twin turbo prop and it also had a ramp for dropping equipment. It could take a compliment of 20 paras and had good short field performance. Like the Dak, it had a jump door on the port side. It was, however, lower than the Dak door and tall paras had to keep their knees well bent on exit for fear of striking their helmets or rifle butts on exit. (Most armies have folding-butt weapons for their paras.) It had good performance and could climb to 8,000ft in 8 minutes and the ramp was great for relative work type exits. We used it for free fall as often as possible and although they were supposed to replace the Daks, the faithful old birds continued in service for many years.

It was also in March, when carrying on with our Haho trials, that I jumped with John Mellet. We were 12km out from Marandellas and opened at 10,000ft. John had a malfunction and cutaway using a standard reserve (as we had not received our consignment from the States). It was a long ride down for him on his reserve and I circled and landed with him far from the airstrip. He was fine, so we made our way to the nearest road then hitched back to the strip. John later went out in an Alouette to find his cutaway main chute, which he did. It was also at this time that I fitted a static line to a LR288 and jumped it from 3,000ft. The opening was slow and sloppy but otherwise fine so it meant that we could use the rig for Haho without the men needing to be trained as free fallers if need be.

INDEPENDENCE DAY JUMP 18 APRIL 1983

Ron Chitsike, Elton Kapungu, Maurice Chiwashira and I were scheduled to do a demo jump into Rufaro Stadium, Harare, as part of the Independence Day celebrations. We took off in an Islander and started our climb to 8,000ft but were called in earlier than planned by the DZ party. Ron and I were going to launch a 2-man to be pinned by the other two, but the exit went wrong and Ron finished up on his back in a spin so Elton and Maurice held off. We were using smoke and the spinning Ron was giving quite a show.

I am sure the crowd thought it was all part of the plan and as we came flying into the arena on our squares they roared with enthusiasm. We were too bunched up on approach for landing and had to be careful to avoid colliding but pulled it off. The crowd loved it.

On 24th June, we were once again off to Inkomo for a Wings Parade jump. Lionel Dyke, with his Command element, jumped in first from an Islander immediately followed by a 3 Casa vee formation drop of 60 troops from 500ft in full kit. Two of the Casas then climbed to 8,000ft and Ron, Elton, Maurice and I launched a 4-man off the ramp whilst John and Ian jumped from the other one and gave a demonstration of canopy relative work which they were becoming quite good at. Once again it was a good demo.

In September, John, Elton and I did a demo jump from an Alouette into Harare Show which was good fun. I was impressed that our new PJI's were mastering the art of manoeuvring into tight DZ's.

By October we had received the Vulcan rigs equipped with LR288's for main and reserve chutes. We wanted to test the system so Ian volunteered. We fitted a standard reserve on the front of the harness as a back up to the LR288 reserve. John, Ian and I jumped from 6,000ft. Ian deployed the main as normal then carried out a cutaway and deployed the LR288 reserve. It worked perfectly. John followed down the cutaway main parachute to retrieve it and I was to follow down the reserve deployment bag and pilot chute which came free once the reserve had been deployed, but because of strong upper winds they were carried off into Hatfield built up area. The strong upper winds caught us by surprise and John landed near Rhocem Quarry and I landed very near the Harare (Previously Salisbury) radar tower. At least the system worked well and we eventually recovered everything! The Vulcans were so easy to handle that new PJI's were very quickly progressing onto Ram Air canopies and using it with heavy bergens posed no problems.

On the 26/27 November '83, New Sarum held its Inter Station Sports weekend and we scheduled four demo jumps into the sports field from 10,000ft. It was great fun, but on the first jump it was very turbulent to which the Ram Air canopy is quite susceptible. As I came in over the clubhouse roof I encountered turbulence which caused my canopy to side-slip quite drastically and I just missed crashing through the club house roof. Phew! During this time of course we were continuing to train men from Para Bn both static line and free fall and doing Haho trials. We were learning that when doing jumps from high altitude followed by a long cross country flight that it wasn't easy to stay as a group due to the differing rates of descent. I could foresee it might be a problem with night insertions and weights would have to be balanced out in the bergens to give similar rates of descent.

By March '84, we had lost a lot of our trained pilots. The Commander of the Air Force was a pilot seconded from the Pakistani Air Force and many of the pilots on 3 Squadron were now Pakistani's on secondment.

On 16th April '84, I arranged for us to start testing the LR288 for night jumps. We used the Bell and jumped from 8,000ft. We had a good moon over the next few nights and the jumps all went surprisingly well.

In May we received a consignment of 7-cell Cruislite parachutes, which were light, small and very manoeuvrable and they became the standard parachute for the PJI's doing free fall.

FAREWELL TO PARACHUTE TRAINING SCHOOL

June arrived all too soon. Since the beginning of the year I had been reviewing my situation. I had completed ten years of service and had to decide whether to return to Civvy Street or carry on in the Force with a view to doing 20 years altogether. I still loved my job but very few of my compatriots were left. Ian had left and John was making plans to leave and I knew that eventually I would have to move out of PTS to Air HQ if I was promoted. That was not very appealing with the new regime. So, on 1st April '84 I tendered my resignation and was to serve three months notice. I had secured a position as an Engineering Training Officer with African Associated Mines so I would be combining my engineering and training skills.

My last two jumps, both free fall, were on 14th June '84 from an Islander. Elton Kapungu and I jumped together doing sequential relative work which was great fun. It was my 1,013th jump with Parachute Training School, 863 free fall and 150 static line. Combined with my other jumps in UK, Zambia, Civvy Street and Bateleur, it made just over 1860 jumps. I had jumped by day, by night, with and without kit, with oxygen high altitude and static line very low altitude, had tried many new concepts, parachutes and aircraft and tested new techniques. I was sorry not to have been able to go further with the Haho techniques and develop it to its full potential.

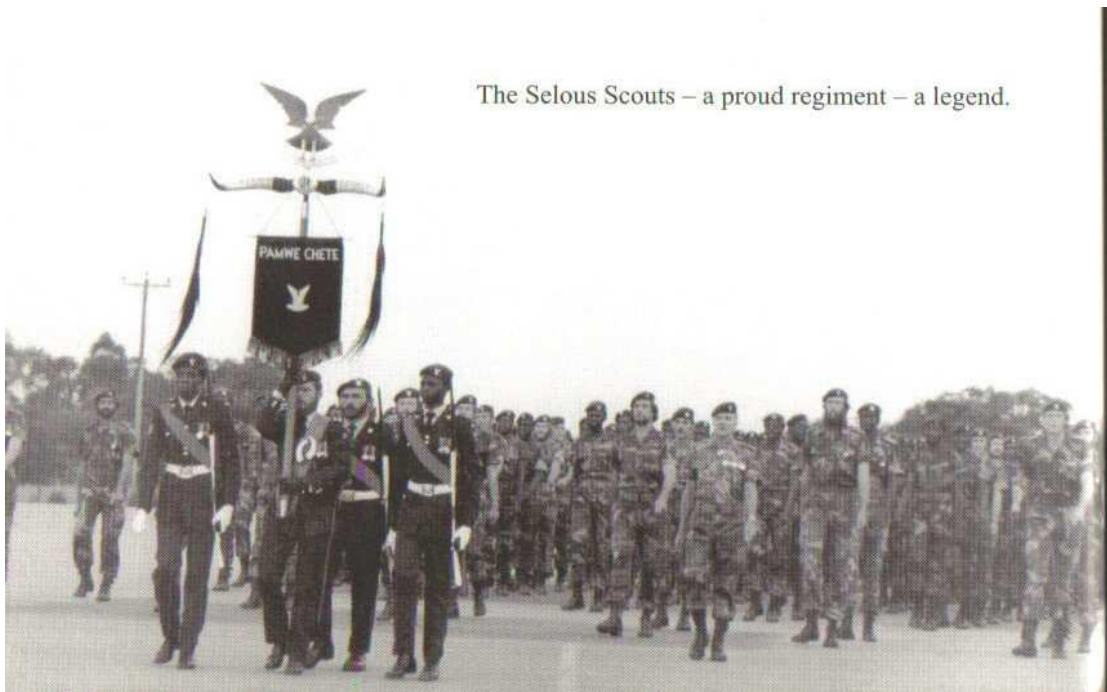
I would also miss the Bateleur Parachute Club which was going very well indeed. I handed over the reigns to Maurice Chiwashira who would become the new OC PTS with Elton Kapungu and Owen Madhiriza as his officers. (Sadly, much later, a Dakota, whilst on parachuting operations in Mozambique, crashed. Elton was killed and Charlie Magama injured and eventually invalided out of the Force.)

I had a wonderful time at PTS and still think of it as the best job I ever had, not only because of the parachuting and the thrilling experiences, but also because I could not have asked to serve with a better bunch of men than my comrades of those ten years.

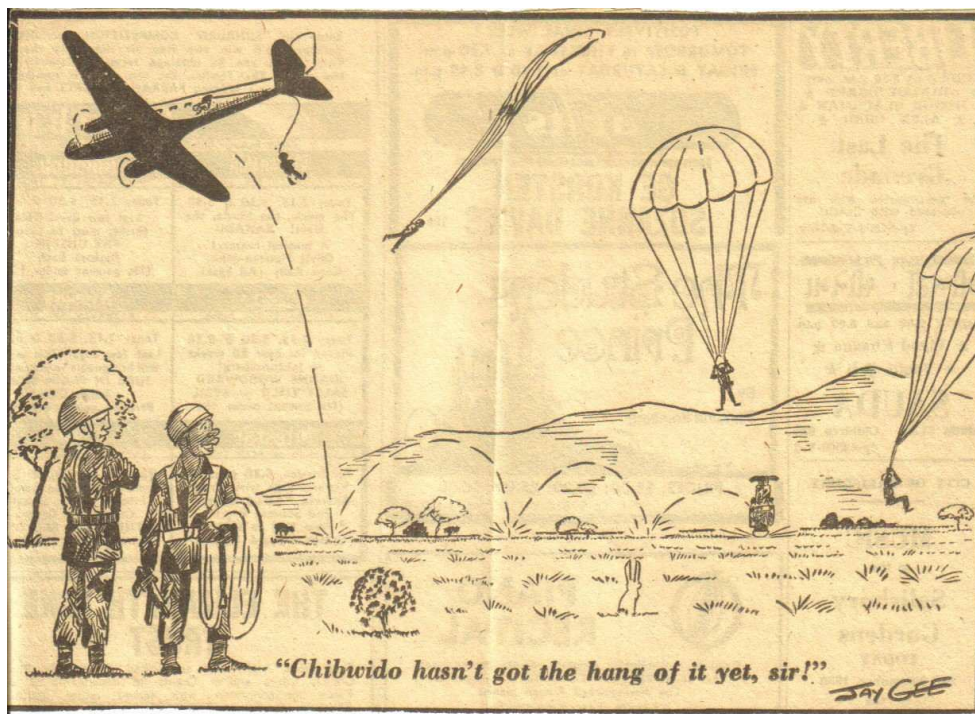
Kevin Milligan
Co Clare
Ireland
Oct 2008



**PTS STAFF MARCH 1980 Back Row: Dick Gledhill, Mike Duffy, Ken Turner, John Bolton-Smith, Ian Douglas, Pete Labuschagne, Pete Farmer, Mike Kemmish, John Mellet, Frank Prendergast.
Front Row: Alfie Hynds, Rich Griffin, Paul Hogan, Kevin Milligan (Author), Frank Hales, John Boynton, Billy Simpson, Carlos Gomez**



SELOUS SCOUT COLOUR PARTY LEAD THE FINAL PARADE



NATIONAL ARMY

15 JUMP FOR THEIR WINGS

A first for 'cream' of parachute battalion

THE first 15 men trained for the 1st Zimbabwe Parachute Battalion received their wings at Inkomo Barracks yesterday.

They represent the first group to pass out of a training course involving men from ZANLA, ZIPRA and the former army, brought together as volunteers under the exacting discipline and training of British military advisers and air force and army instructors.

The training officer for the course, was Major Richard Gash of the British Parachute Regiment, who started the course on September 1 with 100 volunteers.

Major Gash said yesterday he came to Zimbabwe at the start of August to fill the need for people with experience in the formation of a parachute regiment.

FITNESS

The course was divided into two phases—a pre-selection course to test the men's fitness, courage and capability, and the parachute course. The phases lasted three weeks.

Herald Reporter

course we take back his helmet," he said.

The pre-selection course was designed to bring the men to a peak of fitness and toughness and was used to "weed out the fat and leave the cream", he said. The first two weeks of the selection saw that volunteers considered unsuitable or who had medical problems left the course.

The first two weeks of the selection involved assault courses, long distance work and swimming (many of the men were unfamiliar with water, he said), and tests to build up their confidence, particularly in dealing with heights.

For this a "transium" (a scaffolding structure custom-made for initial para-training) had been built.

The test at the end of the first two weeks and from which the first eliminations were made was a



THE Commander of Salisbury District, Brigadier John Thompson, congratulates one of the 15 successful men after presenting him with his parachute wings. With him (left) is the Regimental Sergeant Major attached to the battalion, RSM Derrick Fraser.



'ELITE UNIT' IN NEW ARMY

FIRST ZNA COURSE QUALIFY



FORMER PRIME MINISTER, IAN SMITH, SHARES A JOKE WITH SAS OFFICERS DURING THEIR LAST OFFICIAL DINNER - PETE COLE SECOND FROM LEFT



SAS PARACHUTIST'S WINGS



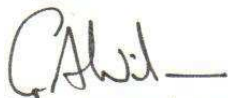
SAS BANNER

24 December 1980

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

AIR LIEUTENANT K. MILLIGAN (6596)

1. This is to certify that I, the undersigned, have known Air Lieutenant K. Milligan for six years.
2. During this time he has been employed as Training/Operations Officer at the Air Force Parachute Training School, and as such has been heavily involved in the Special Air Service training and operations.
3. On the training side Air Lieutenant Milligan has proved himself to be an excellent instructor, having a very high pass rate (98%) of students. This is unusual and is directly attributable to Air Lieutenant Milligan's ability as an Instructor.
4. Whilst planning and conducting operations, Air Lieutenant Milligan's attention to detail and safety and his ability to translate plans into action were very definite assets, and went a long way to ensure the successes the Special Air Service had during operations.
5. On a personal note, I have had a great deal to do with Air Lieutenant Milligan and in all cases have found him to be extremely efficient and reliable.
6. I would recommend Air Lieutenant Milligan to any prospective employer.



(G.A. Wilson) Major, GCV SCR BCR
Commanding Officer.

GAW/PW

TESTIMONIAL FROM GRAHAME WILSON



PJI'S MARCH 1981


Back row: Trevor Williams, Frank Prendergast, Jim Hughes RAF, Roy Johnson, Derek Pocknell GC RAF. Ralph Gratton, Pete Farmer, Ian Douglas.

Front row: Billy Simpson, Alfie Hynds, Charlie O'Neill RAF, Kevin Milligan (Author), Paul Hogan, Andy Stalker RAF.



BASIC COURSE FROM PARA BN, ZNA

Instructors Back row, Trevor Williams. Front row, Jim Hughes RAF, Ralph Gratton, Kevin Milligan Training Officer, Ian Douglas, Andy Stalker RAF.



Air Force Station,
New Sarum,
Private Bag 7722, Causeway,
Zimbabwe.

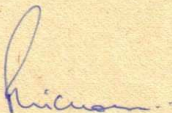
Ref.: NS/C450/2/P1 - Salisbury 52411, Ext. 200
23rd April 1982

APPOINTMENT IN TERMS OF
DEFENCE FORCES (DISCIPLINE) REGULATIONS 1978

In terms of Section 40 of the Defence Forces (Discipline) Regulations 1978 I do hereby appoint you: SQUADRON LEADER K. MILLIGAN (6596)

to be Officer Commanding over all personnel posted or attached to the Parachute Training School with effect from 23rd April 1982.
All the powers and functions prescribed by those Regulations which are appropriate to this appointment accordingly rest in you.

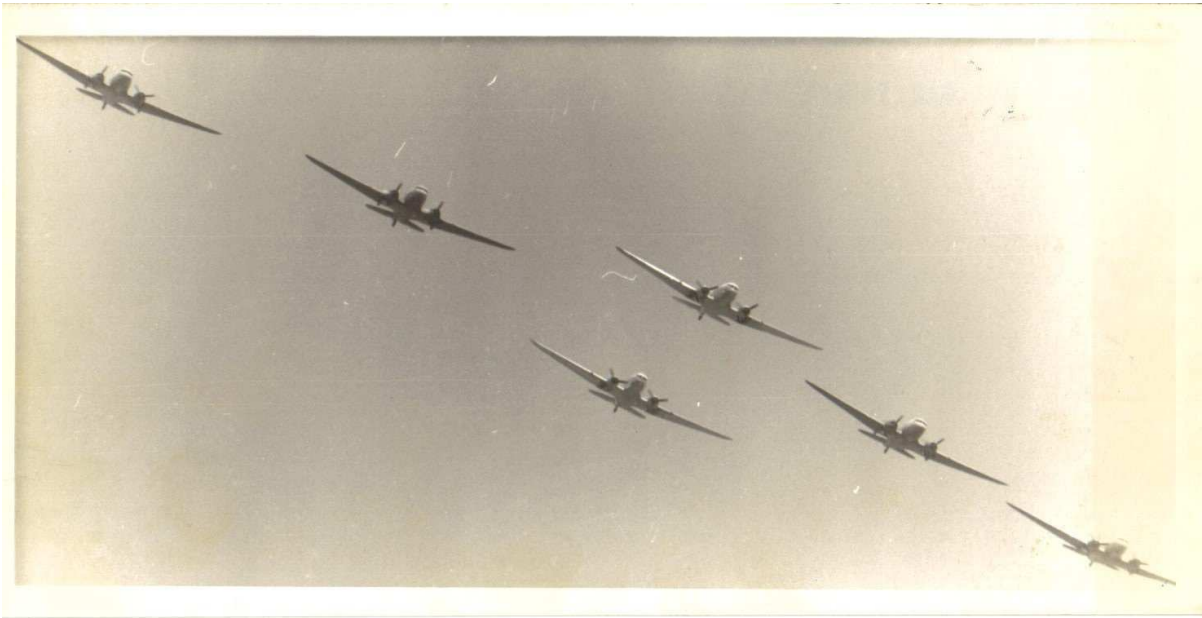
Signed at New Sarum this 23rd day of April 1982


(P.J. Nicholls)
Group Captain
Commanding Officer



O.C. PTS APPOINTMENT LETTER

**SQUADRON LEADER KEVIN
MILLIGAN O.C. PTS**



3 SQUADRON DEMONSTRATE 6 DAK FORMATION TURN FOR AIR FORCE '81



21 YEARS OF PARACHUTING AT PTS



UT PJI COURSE 1/82

L to R: Cpl Mutongoza, Cpl Sibindi, Sgt Chitsike (Inst), F.Sgt Mellet (A/Trg Offr), Sqn Ldr Milligan (OC PTS) (Author), F. Sgt Douglas (A/Ops Offr), Sgt Madhiriza (Inst), Sgt Chivavay. Front: Cpl Moyosvi, Cpl Busumani

FIRST AFRICAN P.J.I.'s



ELTON KAPUNGU, OWEN MADHIRIZA



**PHILIP CHIRUNDU
RON CHITSIKE, CHARLIE MAGAMA, AUTHOR,
MAURICE CHIWASHIRA**



ISLANDER



Casa 212 - Zimbabwean Air Force No 800 - AAD 2006 — Photo © Robert Adams

CASA 212 AFZ



DE HAVILLAND BUFFALO



HAWKER SIDDELY HS748



AIRCREW WATER JUMP LAKE MC ILWAINE

Some people mentioned are: Back Row, 2nd from left Paul Fisher, 3rd from left Major Richard Gash, Standing under aerial Carlos da Silveira, 4th from right Clive Bradnick. Kneeling, 2nd from left Bob Warren Codrington. Front sitting, 2nd from left Stan Standish who jumped at Arnhem



SAS TRAINING JUMP 1960'S

In this jump they are using the X type parachute and weapons container with the weapon attached in a sleeve. This changed to weapons being carried on the person. The X type was more prone to oscillation than the T10 or Saviac parachute and had a higher rate of descent being 28ft in diameter not 35ft.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: PJI's 1960 - 1980

Appendix 2: Aircraft Used

Appendix 3: Equipment and Techniques

APPENDIX 1: PARACHUTE JUMPING INSTRUCTORS **1960 to 1980**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Attachment</u>
RON SMITH	RAF ATTACHED
ROBBIE ROBINSON	RAF ATTACHED
TERRY HAGAN	RAF ATTACHED
BILL MAITLAND	Rh AF ABINGDON 1961
NORMAN SUTTIE	Rh AF ABINGDON
DEREK DE KOCK	Rh AF ABINGDON
TREVOR SMITH	Rh AF ABINGDON
MERCER THOMPSON	Rh AF ABINGDON
TONY HUGHES	Rh AF
BOET SWART	Rh AF
FRANK HALES	Rh AF
DENNIS BUCHAN	Rh AF
RALPH MOORE	Rh AF
JOHN BOYNTON	Rh AF
MIKE WILTSHIRE	Rh AF
IAIN BOWEN	Rh AF
KEVIN MILLIGAN	Rh AF
PAUL HOGAN	Rh AF
PETE MARSHALL	Rh AF
JOHN EARLY	Rh AF
CHRIS PESSARA	Rh AF
ANDY STEIN	RLI
BILLY SIMPSON	Rh AF
ROY TIDMAN	RLI
PETE LABUSCHAGNE	SAS
PETE WAITE	Rh ARTILLERY
FRANK PRENDERGAST	RLI
FREDDIE VAN DER WEER	Rh ARMoured CARS
JOHN MELLETT	GREYS SCOUTS
MIKE DUFFY	SAS
JOHN BOLTON SMITH	RLI
DICK GLEDHILL	RLI
CARLOS GOMEZ	RhAF
MIKE KEMMISH	Rh ARMoured CARS
CHRIS FRANCIS	Rh AF
RALPH GRATTON	Rh AF

"ACTION STATIONS!"

RICH GRIFFIN
PETE FARMER
ALFIE HYNDS
KEN TURNER
IAN DOUGLAS
TREVOR WILLIAMS
NORMAN MAYNE
ROY JOHNSON

RLI
Rh AF
Rh SIGNALS
RLI
Rh AF
RLI
RLI
RLI

APPEDIX 2: AIRCRAFT USED FOR PARACHUTING

Douglas DC - 3C Dakota

The workhorse used for static line and free fall parachuting both training and operations. Normally would accommodate 24 paras clean fatigue or with Rifle and Webbing. 20 Paras with CSPEPS. Because of the long runway at Salisbury airport sometimes 24 paras with full kit were taken on operations.

Free fall drops above 12,000ft ASL (Above Sea Level) required oxygen.

Drops were seldom above 19,000ft ASL because of aircraft limitations and not really necessary.

Douglas DC 7

Only one aircraft was used and it was used for static line and free fall parachuting. Occasionally for tests and training but normally only for operations. Could accommodate 60 paras.

C 130 Hercules SADF

Only used on Operation Cheese. Static line SAS paras did training jump followed by Operational jump with palletised equipment.

C 130 Hercules RAF

Only used on two occasions after hostilities for free fall training.

Britten Norman BN2A Islander

Only used in the training role for both static line and free fall parachuting. Could accommodate 8 paras.

Trojan

Only used for freefall training and not extensively due to slow climb rate and extensive use on other duties.

Could accommodate 4 paras.

Bell 205A Helicopter “Cheetah”

Only used for free fall training and after hostilities. Could accommodate 8 paras but more often used with less.

"ACTION STATIONS!"

Alouette 3 Helicopter

Trial free fall jumps after hostilities
Could accommodate 4 paras

De Havilland Buffalo

Evaluation trials only after hostilities as possible replacement for Dakotas
Static line and free fall

British Aerospace HS 748

As for the Buffalo.

APPENDIX 3 : EQUIPMENT AND TECHNIQUES

STATIC LINE PARACHUTING

Fire Force

Fire Force would normally be made up of:

One Alouette helicopter K car, so named after its 20mm cannon armament, later in the war some would be equipped with four 303 Browning machine guns and would provide the role of mobile command post. On board would be the Fire Force Commander, who could command the action from a bird's eye view and quickly fly from one position to another as required; the K car pilot who would direct the air operations, and the gun would be manned by the helicopter technician/gunner.

Four Alouette helicopter G cars, G for General Duties, each of which would have a stick of troops and a helicopter technician/gunner manning twin 303 Browning machine guns.

One Lynx, ground attack aircraft which could have as armament 63mm SNEB rockets, mini golf bombs, napalm and twin 303 machine guns.

One Paradak, Dakota transport aircraft which could carry anything from 16 to 24 Paras.

Men were normally grouped into sticks of four. The stick leader, MAG gunner and two riflemen. Webbing, holding ammunition, grenades, field dressing and water bottles would be worn under the parachute harness. Weapons, usually three FN 7.62mm rifles and one MAG 7.62mm machine gun, per stick, were attached to the right side of the para by the Harness Body Band fastened in a quick release method and a para cord tie from the butt of the weapon and looped around the reserve d-ring. It was on the right side to keep the butt of the weapon clear of the static line when hooked up to the cable. Occasionally a 9mm pistol would be stowed under the reserve parachute pack opening bands for rapid access. The stick leader would have an A63 radio in a small pack mounted under his reserve. One of the stick would usually have a medical pack in a small pack mounted underneath his reserve. On occasion there could even be two MAGs in a stick for additional fire power.

Parachutes were laid out ready for fitting, normally in a tent but sometimes under the wing of the aircraft depending upon circumstances. When the alarm, usually a klaxon horn was sounded the paras would kit up and be checked by the PJI's or Despatchers and then emplaned whilst the heliborne troops in the G cars and the commander in the K car were already underway. The Para stick leader would have detailed the order of the stick, reminding them to watch for where the rest of the sticks landed. He would brief the stick on regrouping channels and which was the senior stick. Men would have been reminded of their numerous tactics such as, formations, drills for cave clearing, crossing open ground, fire and movement, what to do in the event of radio failure, arcs of responsibility, hand signals, action on contact with the enemy, use of smoke, grenades, target indication. Men would be assigned the searching of bodies and how to secure and hood prisoners for immediate up lift. Chains

"ACTION STATIONS!"

of command within the stick would be established and everyone would be reminded of call signs and radio channels.

The Dakota with its faster speed would catch up to the helicopters on the way to target.

The Fire Force Commander would brief the men before take off or at a refuelling point along the way to target or even in the air as each stick commander in the G cars would have a head set for communications.

The helicopters would fly low level to the target with the K car coming in from behind the Observation Point (O.P.) to have the same panoramic view. The O.P would talk him onto target giving indication with a tracer round or similar. The K car could then quickly locate and mark the target with white smoke pulling up to fire his cannon on the terrorists. The G cars would move straight to the stop positions decided at the briefing and orbit them individually. They would drop their stick only if they could see the enemy otherwise continue to orbit ready for a quick deployment to another position as requested by the commander. An alternative plan would have been agreed and if this was actioned then the G cars would place their men at predetermined stop positions to seal escape routes. The commander could call in his Paradak which would have been orbiting at the Initial Point, four minutes out.

The Fire Force Commander, flying in the K car, would call for a drop as necessary, taking into account hazards such as power lines, deep open water, sloping ground, rocks or dense woods. He must also bear in mind that wind speeds of 15 knots or above greatly increased the risk of casualties. He would determine the number of sticks to be dropped and before dropping would ask the K car pilot or the first available G car pilot to confirm that the landing zone was suitable, bearing in mind exposure to enemy fire whilst descending, cross winds and rough landing zones. The G car might establish, the precise altitude of the DZ by landing then transmitting the QNH setting for the Dakota's altimeter. They would then mark the centre of the drop zone with smoke and talk the Paradak in.

Pilots would have to demonstrate their skill to drop men accurately into what were often very small DZ's. In order to assist with this and also have the advantage of close grouping on the ground and minimum amount of time descending whilst exposed to enemy fire, the drop height was set at 500ft AGL and never lower than 450ft. The main parachute required 250ft in which to fully open but on two occasions operational drops were accidentally made below that and men were injured. The Dakota drop speed would be 95 knots and the stick would be despatched as quickly as possible. More than one DZ may be used to position the paras.

After dropping the paras, the aircraft would remain in orbit if he still had paras to drop. Thereafter he would either return to a nearby airfield to assist in recovery of the paras or return to Fire Force base. The parachute bags would be cleared from the aircraft and parachutes prepared for the next call out.

The paras would have made a very fast exit for close grouping on the DZ, then immediately carried out their flight drills and assumed the parachuting position for landing. Speed was of the essence from such a low drop height. They had to be prepared for landings in bushes or trees if need be and sometimes in brisk winds. Upon landing, troops would immediately operate a Capewell canopy quick release to prevent dragging, free his weapon by pulling on the free end of the body band and unclipping the left hand side of the reserve from its d ring. This enabled the weapon to be brought into play. He would then exit the harness and move off to meet up with other paras using a separate radio channel. Once they had all RV'd they would report "Ready" to the Fire Force commander and

face the contact area whilst also laying out an identification panel. It was the leader of the senior stick of each group who would report in once he had control of all the sticks under his command. At the Commander's instruction they would sweep through the contact area driving the insurgents into open ground to be dealt with by the K car or into the stop groups ambush positions.

The enemy had to be dealt with immediately and never left alive and unattended. Sweep lines were to disarm and frisk all terrorists on the first sweep. It was known for enemy to feign death then escape when the sweep had passed through so it was important that the sweep make sure enemy were dead and frisked before moving on. If they were wounded they must be guarded and it was a golden rule that the first capture be flown out immediately for interrogation and information fed to the Fire Force commander.

The Fire Force commander would make good use of his fire superiority having the helicopters put down flushing or suppressive fire as required but they were always conscious of the need not to expend ammunition needlessly.

In the early days the Fire Force usually outnumbered the terrorists but later in the war this was not always the case. Even so, thanks to superior fire power from the air, sound training, skill at arms and great aggression they were never beaten.

Once the contact was over the area would be swept to gather in all discarded and used equipment, cartridge cases and ammunition to enable intelligence gathering and prevent the enemy recovering anything. Bodies, weapons and equipment could be documented. Careful sweeping was required so that nothing of intelligence value was missed even if the enemy had slipped away and no contact took place. The G cars, or vehicles from the "land tail" would recover the bodies and equipment. Parachutes would have been left on the DZ and recovered later after the contact. Paras would jump with a parachute recovery bag worn under the harness that would be left on the DZ with the harness. On some drops two or more men would be dropped with the sticks, their sole role being to recover the parachutes which were picked up by helicopter after the contact. All equipment was returned to New Sarum Safety Equipment Section for inspection, repack, then back to Fire Force.

S.E.S did a magnificent job and their safety record was second to none. The paras had 100% confidence in their work.

Once everyone was back in base they would be debriefed and prepared for the next call out.

Troops assigned to fire force could find themselves called out two or three times a day. Many call outs produced "lemons" because the intelligence was faulty or the enemy had disappeared into the bush, melded with the locals or the fire force did not spend enough time searching the area of a sighting. With deployments as long as six weeks to ten weeks, the strain would often tell. Three operational jumps in a single day was something no other paratrooper had ever been expected to do. Indeed other paratroops of other nations had endured nothing like it. In 1952 for example the French Colonial Paras in Indo-China proudly boasted of their 50 odd combat parachute jumps. This was more than double the 24 op jumps which the two vaunted French Foreign Legion Para Bns made between March '49 and March '54. Altogether the French were to make over a hundred combat jumps while later in Vietnam the Americans only made one major combat jump and by then were making tactical use of helicopters.

External Operations

If Paras were to jump with equipment then rifles, machine guns and webbing were still worn on the body (sometimes Rocket Propelled Grenade Launchers - RPG's or Small Mortars) but equipment would be packed into a container known as the CSPEP. (Carrying Straps Personal Equipment Parachutist.) The CSPEP was mounted on the front of the legs beneath the reserve. It was attached to the lower d rings on the harness by Quick Release Hooks. A Jettison Device was attached to the harness with a 5m rope leading to the container. After exit, the container would be released from the body by operating the Quick Release Hooks and be suspended from the rope during the descent. In the event of a parachute malfunction the CSPEP could be jettisoned by operating the Quick Release Hooks and then the Jettison Device. (Occasionally a trainee, in error, would operate the jettison device and the CSPEP would come whistling down like a bomb!).

After landing the para would go through his normal drills and in addition pull in the CSPEP towards him whilst still lying on the ground. When it was alongside he would pull on 4 split pins which released the straps and he could then remove the kit and vacate the DZ asap leaving the CSPEP with the parachute harness. On some occasions he could operate both canopy releases, unclip the reserve, ready his weapon and move into cover still wearing the harness to remove it later.

For assault type drops to envelop a camp then the DZ would be preplanned and marked on an aerial photo. If the drop was a follow up to a previous Free Fall drop then the Pathfinders would send out a homing signal on their radio which would be picked up by the Dak's Becker Homing Device. The pilot would use this to fly towards the DZ until the aircraft was visual to the Pathfinders. The Leader would then talk in the aircraft by relaying instructions to the pilot to bring him in on the proposed run in direction and release point. He would call for the red light and green light to be switched on at the appropriate time, taking into account the wind strength and direction at the time of drop. This method proved very effective.

High Altitude Low Opening (HALO)

Webbing would be worn under the harness. The weapon either FN 7.62mm rifle, AK47 Assault rifle or RPD Light machine gun would be attached to the left side of the body, secured in place by the reserve tie down. It was positioned on the left side so as not to interfere with the ripcord handle on the right. HALO paras invariably carried a lot of equipment and this was in their bergen rucksacks which were attached to the reserve d-rings of the parachute harness by Quick Release Hooks. (QRH) The bergen was mounted on the back of the legs. A Jettison Device, which was on one end of a 5 m rope, was secured to the harness in a quick release method. The other end was secured to the bergen. To kit up, the para would fasten the Jettison Device to his harness. He would then step into the shoulder straps, grip the QRH's attached to the bergen and lift the bergen up behind his legs until he could snap the QRH's onto the reserve d-rings. He would then pull up on two tensioning straps until the bergen was secured tightly against the back of his legs and the base of the parachute pack.

Mounted to the parachute pack would be his KAP 3 Automatic Opening Device.

The reserve parachute was mounted on the front of the harness on the reserve d-rings and secured tightly by a tie down with a tensioning device, which also held the weapon against the body.

An altimeter panel was held in place on top of the reserve by the pack opening bands. The altimeter panel was fitted with a small light for night jumping purposes. The para could also have small LED wrist lights to assist in free fall formation and would have a penlight mounted on his helmet. Altimeters and KAP 3's would have been preset at the correct height before take off accounting for the difference in height between New Sarum and the DZ.

If the jump required heavier, bulky equipment, which was often the case, then this would be prepacked into a resupply box. Mounted on the top end of the box would be a resupply parachute, complete with pilot chute and static line, a KAP 3 and a strobe light, shrouded so that it would only flash upwards during the descent. This would often be loaded onto the aircraft by forklift or manhandled from the back of a truck, reversed up to the aircraft door. It would then be moved clear of the door for take off.

Most training jumps were carried out below 12 000ftASL.(Above sea level). Above that height there was a requirement to use oxygen. Oxygen bottles were mounted in cradles secured to the aircraft floor. Running from the bottles to the para were long plastic tubes to which were attached the mask. The oxygen would be switched on above 8000 ft. A PJI would be appointed as the oxygen NCO and monitor that all was OK with the supply and no one was showing signs of distress. The PJIs could move around as they each had a bottle that was mounted in a wooden cradle which was portable though somewhat cumbersome.

The paras would stand up and be checked out just prior to run in which would include arming the Kap 3's and switching on their lights. The box would be positioned in the door if being used with the static line hooked up and the KAP 3 armed and strobe light on..The No 1 despatcher would spot out of the door and direct the aircraft on run in to the release point calling for red light, then green light.

The paras would throw clear their oxygen masks at the same time as the box was being pushed out by the despatchers. They would then either do a dive exit or stable exit and turn to see the box depending on their preference.

The box static line would deploy a pilot chute mounted on top of the main parachute. This would keep the box falling in an upright stable position. The paras would formate on the flashing strobe light mounted on the box and flashing upwards. They would then deploy their parachutes at staggered intervals to give the required stack effect. The KAP 3 would activate the ripcord on the box parachute allowing the pilot chute to then deploy the main parachute. The paras would follow the box down and land as close to it as possible. Upon landing, weapons were immediately brought into play, Bergens fitted and all RV'd at the box. Equipment was removed and distributed or cached with the parachutes, then the paras could proceed on their mission.

Afterwards they would be uplifted by helicopter and as this was often from a different location the equipment left behind might be abandoned.

On some very high jumps a bail out oxygen bottle was attached to the paras reserve lower pack opening bands. Some minutes before run in the para would change from the main oxygen bottle to the bail out bottle which he used until he landed. For most jumps the height was not sufficient to warrant the use of bail out bottles which were in very short supply and they most probably would have been lost if used on operations. (I cannot recall them being used on operations, only in training.)



A moving and very personal account of one Parachute Jumping Instructor's experiences and ops in the turbulent years as Rhodesia became Zimbabwe. It is a rare journey into the exclusive world of the Rhodesian Air Force's Parachute Training School, written candidly and vividly, preserving forever the memories of the great men who led and served through its glorious and bitter last days. It is written with the author's family in mind.

